

Inspiration – from “How We Got the Bible”

By: Sid Litke, Th.M – March 18th, 2008

I. Definition

God’s superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error in the words of the original autographs His revelation to man (from Dr. Charles Ryrie).

Theories of Inspiration

- A. **Natural inspiration** – There is no supernatural element. The Bible was written by great men, who often erred.
- B. **Partial inspiration** – The Bible contains God’s words but must be sorted out (“demythologized”) to find them. Other parts are purely human and may be in error.
- C. **Conceptual inspiration** – The thoughts of scripture are inspired but the actual words used are not. There is factual and scientific error.
- D. **Dictation theory of inspiration** – The writers passively recorded God’s words without any participation of their own styles or personalities.
- E. **Verbal, plenary inspiration** – All the actual words of the Bible are inspired and without error (see “verbal, plenary” below). This fits the Bible’s description of inspiration.

II. Inspiration is claimed in the Bible.

- A. General claims of inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21).
- B. The writers claimed to be inspired.
 1. David (2 Samuel 23:2 – “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me”)
 2. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2:1-2 – “Thus says the Lord”)
 3. Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:1,2 – “commandments...by the authority of the Lord Jesus”)
 4. John (Revelation 1:1 – “The revelation of Jesus Christ...to his bondservant John”)
- C. Jesus claimed that the scriptures were inspired (Matthew 5:18; Luke 24:44 – “all fulfilled”).

III. Verbal, plenary inspiration is described in the Bible.

A. Key Texts

1. “God-breathed” writings (2 Timothy 3:16 – “All scripture is inspired by God”).
 - The word “inspired” literally means “God-breathed.”

2. "Spirit-moved" writers (2 Peter 2:20, 21 – "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.")
3. There was a God, Spirit and Man interaction
 - Zechariah 7:12 – "The words which the Lord of Hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets."
 - Acts 4:24, 25 – "God...who by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father, David... did say."

B. The meaning of verbal, plenary inspiration

1. "Verbal" inspiration
 - a. The words themselves are inspired, not just the ideas ("words" – Deuteronomy 18:18; Psalm 19:160; Zechariah 7:12; Matthew 4:4,7,10).
 - b. The precise verb tense is inspired ("I am" – Matthew 22:21,32).
 - c. The individual letters, in a word, are inspired ("seed" or "seeds" – Galatians 3:16).
 - d. The smallest part of a Hebrew letter was inspired (Matthew 5:17,18).
2. "Plenary" inspiration
 - a. All scripture is equally inspired (2 Timothy 3:16) – Genealogical records, historical narratives and salvation verses are equally inspired and true, even though they may not be equally pertinent to our lives.

C. The forms of inspiration

1. God directly revealed parts of scripture to some writers (prophets in particular) who spoke exactly the words God gave them (Moses – Deuteronomy 4:2; Isaiah – Isaiah 59:21; Paul – Galatians 1:12, etc.).
2. God otherwise superintended the writing of men who wrote exactly what God intended. They used their own styles and expressed their thoughts freely knowing what they meant. Yet, through the Holy Spirit, God at the same time determined the content and controlled the accuracy of all they wrote. This is the miraculous mystery of inspiration.

D. The limits of inspiration

1. Inspiration is limited to the writing of scripture; not everything the writer wrote or said (see handout on Canonicity).
2. Inspiration is limited to the original manuscripts and not every later copy or translation.

IV. Other evidences for the inspiration of the Bible

The Bible claims to be inspired, but there is even more than evidence than just these self-claims. Below are listed a number of confirming evidences that support the Bible's claim to truly be God's revelation.

A. Fulfilled Prophecy in the Bible

The Bible contains many prophecies recorded and then later fulfilled. Here are some examples:

1. Israel's regathering after being dispersed (A.D. 70) was predicted by the Bible (Isaiah 11:11 – 750 B.C.; Ezekiel 37:1-14 – 600 B.C.). For almost 2,000 years (since A.D. 70) no nation of Israel existed. Then, on May 15, 1948, Israel became a nation. In 1967 (Six-day War) its area was quadrupled.
2. The Destruction of the city of Tyre was predicted in detail by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 26 – 600 B.C.). In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great completed the destruction begun by others. Each detail Ezekiel predicted was fulfilled.
3. Four great successive world kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) were specifically prophesied and described by Daniel (Daniel 2& 7- 535 B.C.). Each detail was fulfilled as these empires rose and fell.
4. Over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament describe the details of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection. The odds of even a few of these coming true in one person are staggering – much less 300 of them.

B. The Unity of the Bible

The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years by about 40 authors on three continents in two major languages. The writers included an Egyptian-trained scholar (Moses), a general (Joshua), Kings (David, Solomon), a farmer (Amos), a fisherman (Peter), a tax-collector (Matthew), and a rabbi (Paul), but amazingly they present a consistent viewpoint of life and set of facts.

One cannot imagine 40 different writers today, from such different backgrounds, agreeing on any subject. But in all its 66 books, the Bible is self-consistent on such significant issues as: where we come from (special creation by God), why we're here (to serve and glorify God), and where we're going (eternal life or eternal judgment). The principles, the moral viewpoints and the historical details are consistent throughout Scripture. There are no significant discrepancies (See Inerrancy).

C. The Supernatural Dynamic of the Bible

Christianity began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Since then, thousands upon thousands have been converted and their lives radically changed by the Gospel message in the Bible. The many testimonies of Christians to the life-changing effect of scripture is a confirming evidence of the Bible's inspiration.

D. The Distribution and Indestructibility of the Bible

The Bible is far and away the world's "best seller." By 1932 it was computed that

1-3 billion had been published. By the 1960's it is estimated that over 2 billion were published. Currently, a total of 3-4 billion is reasonable. No other book is even close. The Bible in its complete form or portions of it is now available in 2,233 languages, according to the 1999 Scripture Language Report issued by the United Bible Societies (biblesociety.org), representing about 90% of the world's population.

Throughout the centuries, various enemies have tried to destroy the Bible (Diocletian Edict, circa A.D. 300). Voltaire, the French philosopher and skeptic, predicted in the 18th century that the Bible and Christianity would soon be obsolete. In 1828, fifty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society was using his press and his house to publish Bibles.

Jesus had predicted, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31).

E. Archaeology supports the Bible

Numerous archaeological finds have supported the Bible's accuracy. Otherwise unknown places, events and dates have proven to be historically accurate. Nelson Glueck, a leading Jewish archaeologist said, "It can be categorically stated that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference" (Rivers In The Desert, Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy. 1959. p.31). This does not prove inspiration, but it confirms the credibility of writers who also claim that they wrote with God's authority.

F. A Logical Argument for Inspiration

Charles Wesley proposed the following logical argument: "The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.
2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration."

(Robert W, Burtner and Robert Chiles, A Compend of Wesley's Theology, Abingdon Press. 1954. p. 20)

From: <https://bible.org/seriespage/inspiration>

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