

## THE HOLY SCRIPTURES—VERBALLY INSPIRED

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In logic, there is a principle called the Law of the Excluded Middle. Simply stated, it is this: a thing either must be, or not be, the case. A line is either straight, or it is not. There is no middle position. Applied to the Bible, one therefore might declare: **The Scriptures either are inspired of God, or they are not inspired of God.** If the writings of the Bible are not inspired of God, then they are the mere productions of men, and as such would merit no religious respect; in fact, in view of their exalted claims, they would merit only contempt.

Paul, an apostle of Christ, wrote: “Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible asserts its own inspiration—of this there is no doubt. But **to what extent** does the sacred volume claim inspiration? This is a question that has perplexed many.

### SOME POPULAR BUT FALSE THEORIES

Some have suggested that the Bible is “inspired” only in the sense that other great literary productions are inspired. That is, they all are simply the results of **natural genius**, characteristic of men of unusual ability. Such a notion must be rejected immediately since: (a) it makes liars of the biblical writers who claimed the **Holy Spirit** as the ultimate source of their documents (2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 1:16); and (b) it leaves unexplained the mystery of why modern man, with his accumulated learning, has not been able to produce a comparable volume that has the capacity to make the Bible obsolete.

Others have claimed that only certain portions of the Scriptures are inspired of God. We often hear it said, for example, that those sections of the Bible that deal with faith and morals are inspired, but that other areas, particularly those accounts that contain certain miraculous elements, are merely the productions of good—but superstitious and fallible—men. Again, though, such a concept is not consistent with the declarations of the divine writers. They extended inspiration to every area of the Scriptures, even emphasizing, in many instances, those very sections that modernists dub as non-historical, mythical, etc. See, for example, Matthew 12:39-40; 19:4ff.; Luke 4:27; John 3:14-15.

Too, the allegation has been parroted that the Bible is inspired in “sense, but not in sentence.” By that, it is meant that in some sense the Scriptures are of divine origin, but that the very **words** of the Holy Book are not to be construed as inspired. Such a view is nonsensical. If the words of the sacred narrative are not inspired, pray tell **what is inspired?** Is the binding? The paper? The ink? The truth is, **if the words of the Bible are not inspired of God, then the Bible contains no inspiration at all!**

### VERBAL INSPIRATION

What do we mean when we speak of the “verbal inspiration” of the Holy Scriptures? Frank E. Gaebelain has suggested that a sound view of inspiration holds that “the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted the exercise of their own personalities and literary talents, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to give to man” (1950, p. 9). In his classic work, *Theopneustia—The Plenary Inspiration*

*of the Holy Scriptures*, L. Glaussen, professor of systematic theology, Oratoire, Geneva, defined inspiration as “that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit put forth of old on the authors of holy Scripture, in order to their guidance even in the employment of the words they used, and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission” (n.d., p. 34).

Let us take a closer look at 2 Timothy 3:16. The Greek text says: *pasa graphē theopneustos*—“all scripture [is] God-breathed.” Something within this context is said to be “God-breathed.” What is it? **All scripture.** The term “scripture” [*graphē*] denotes that which is **written**. But it is the **words** of the biblical text that are written; hence, **the very words of the Bible are God-breathed!** No one can appeal to 2 Timothy 3:16 as an evidence of Bible inspiration without, at the same time, introducing the concept of **verbal** inspiration. The truth is, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is abundantly claimed throughout the sacred canon. Consider the following examples.

(1) More than 3,800 times in the Old Testament, the claim is made that the Scriptures are the **word** [or **words**] of God. For instance, “And Jehovah **said** unto Moses, **Write this** for a memorial in a book...” (Exodus 17:14). David declared: “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and **his word** was upon my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2). God instructed the prophet Jeremiah, “Behold, I have put **my words** in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9). The Scriptures are exalted as the Word of God some 175 times in Psalm 119 alone!

(2) Jesus Christ certainly endorsed the concept of verbal inspiration. He affirmed that neither “one jot nor one tittle” would pass away from the law “until all things be accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18). The jot was the smallest Hebrew letter, and the tittle was a tiny projection on certain Hebrew characters. Professor A.B. Bruce has noted: “Jesus expresses here in the strongest manner His conviction that the whole Old Testament is a Divine revelation, and that therefore every minute precept has religious significance...” (1956, 1:104). The Lord frequently made arguments based upon the text of the Old Testament, wherein He stressed very precise grammatical points. His argument for the resurrection from the dead in Matthew 22:32 depends upon the present tense form of a verb—“**I am** [not “was”] the God of Abraham...”

Within the same context, Christ quoted Psalm 110:1, showing that David, speaking in the Spirit, said, “The Lord said unto my Lord...” (Matthew 22:41ff.). Again, the emphasis is on a single word. Jesus (affirming His own deity) asked the Pharisees why David referred to his own descendant, the promised Messiah, as **Lord**. Not recognizing the dual nature of the Messiah (i.e., as man, He was David’s seed; as deity, He was David’s Lord), they were unable to answer. But had Christ not believed in the inspired words of the Old Testament, He hardly could have reasoned as He did (see also John 10:30ff.).

(3) Christ promised His apostles that the words of their gospel declaration would be given them. He told them: “But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what you shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you shall speak” (Matthew 10:19). And, note Luke’s parallel that they were not to “meditate beforehand” how to answer their antagonists (Luke 21:14). That has to involve their very words!

(4) It is quite clear that the penmen of Scripture were conscious of the fact that they were recording the words of God. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:23: "I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you." Again, "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). "When you received from us the word of the message, even **the word of God**, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). When Philip preached in Samaria, those people to whom he spoke had heard "the word of God" (Acts 8:14).

In a remarkable passage, Paul asked: "For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?" He means this: you cannot know what is in my mind until I, by my words, reveal to you what I am thinking. That is the apostle's illustration. Here is his point. "Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God...which things [i.e., the things of God] we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:11-13). There is not a more comprehensive statement of verbal inspiration to be found anywhere in the holy writings. The mind of God has been made known by means of the inspired words of those representatives whom He chose for that noble task.

(5) The biblical writers considered one another's productions to be inspired of God. In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul wrote: "For the **scripture** saith, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.' And, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire.'" In this passage, the apostle combined Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 and classified them both as "scripture." Similarly, Peter refers to Paul's epistles as "scripture" in 2 Peter 3:15-16.

### MECHANICAL DICTATION—A STRAW MAN

Whenever you hear someone accusing advocates of **verbal inspiration** of believing in "mechanical dictation," most likely you are dealing with a theological liberal. The notion of "mechanical dictation" [i.e., that the Bible writers were only dictaphones or typewriters, hence, their cultural and personality factors did not enter into their works] is not taught by many conservative Bible scholars. Certainly, Paul's writings differ in style from those of John, etc. But that does not negate the fact that after God used the individual writers of Scripture, in the final process, only the exact words that **He** wanted in the text appeared there!

### HAS TRANSMISSION DESTROYED INSPIRATION?

"But suppose," someone wonders, "the Bible was verbally inspired initially. Hasn't the transmission of the text across the centuries caused a corruption of the original documents, so that verbal inspiration has been virtually destroyed?" No, not at all. The text of the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—has been preserved in a remarkable fashion. For example, after years of scientific research in connection with the text of the Old Testament, professor Robert Dick Wilson, who was thoroughly acquainted with forty-five languages, stated that "we are **scientifically certain** that we have substantially the same text that was in the possession of Christ and the apostles..." (1929, p. 8, emp. added). Evidence for the textual reliability of the New Testament is no less impressive. Scholars are now in possession of some 5,378 Greek manuscripts (in part or in whole) of the New Testament, and some of these date to the early part of the second century A.D. It has been estimated that textual variations concern only about 1/1000th part of the entire text (see Gregory, 1907, p. 528). Transmission, therefore, has not destroyed verbal inspiration.

### DOES TRANSLATION AFFECT INSPIRATION?

Since the Holy Scriptures originally were penned in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and since have been translated into many languages, some are concerned that the translation process has destroyed the Bible's initial inspiration. But there is no need for concern over this matter so long as **accurate** translation is effected. When a word is translated precisely from one language into another, the same thought or idea is conveyed; thus, the same message is received.

That translation need not affect inspiration is evinced by an appeal to the New Testament itself. In the third/second centuries B.C., the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. This version, which was begun in Alexandria, Egypt, is known as the *Septuagint*. Note this interesting fact: Jesus Christ Himself, and His inspired New Testament writers, frequently **quoted from the *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament Scriptures!** For example, in Matthew 22:32, Christ quoted from the *Septuagint* (Exodus 3:6), and of that passage said: "Have ye not **read** that which was **spoken unto you by God?**" (22:31). The translation from Hebrew to Greek did not alter the fact that the message was the **Word of God!**

It also might be observed in this connection that scholars generally agree that the *Septuagint* is not as reliable a translation as is the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Yet in spite of this, the New Testament frequently quotes it. However, as one author observed: "The writers of the New Testament appear to have been so careful to give the true sense of the Old Testament, that they forsook the *Septuagint* version whenever it did not give that sense..." (Horne, 1841, 1:312). The fact is, when a New Testament writer was quoting from the Greek Old Testament, the Holy Spirit sometimes led him to alter the phraseology slightly to give a more accurate sense. Thus, inspiration still was preserved although a less-than-perfect translation was being used.

### CONCLUSION

The Scriptures are the verbally inspired Word of God. This view has been entertained by reverent students of the Holy Writings for multiplied centuries. Fritz Rienecker noted that the Jewish "rabbinical teaching was that the Spirit of God rested on and in the prophets and spoke through them so that their words did not come from themselves, but from the mouth of God and they spoke and wrote in the Holy Spirit. The early church was in entire agreement with this view" (1980, 2:301).

Let us therefore exalt the Holy Scriptures as the living Word of God (Hebrews 4:12), and acknowledge them as the only authoritative source of religious guidance.

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