

Inspiration of Scripture

Introduction

The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His plan to man. While the Bible is a book it is more than a book. It sets itself apart from all other books in the same way Jesus' feeding the 5,000 is set apart from an ordinary meal.

Inspiration is the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit's superintending work in transmitting truth through revelation. The Scriptures are God's greatest blessing to the human race, apart from his Son, the "Word made flesh" (John 1.14). Through the Scriptures we are able to understand something of how the heaven and the earth came into being, who God is, how we came into being, how sin and evil originated, God's solution to the problem of sin and evil, and how God will sum up all things in Christ. The Bible is the only book that provides answers to man's greatest questions: 1) Who am I? 2) Why am I here? 3) Where am I going after I die?

Necessity of Revelation

Revelation is necessary for two basic reasons. The first is that God is inaccessible to the creature. He is, in His essence, incomprehensible. According to the Scriptures,

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen (1 Timothy 6.15-16).

The second reason is that because of sin, we have a broken relationship with God. We enter the world spiritually dead (Ephesians 2.1). Apart from a new birth (John 3.7-8) through relying upon Christ as our Savior from sin, i.e., believing

the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4), we remain separated from God and cannot know or understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2.14).

Even though sin has separated us from God, according to the Scriptures, God has built into every human being the capacity to perceive Him. One way is through nature and the other is through conscience. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul wrote,

¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1.19-20).

Theologians call our ability to perceive God through nature and conscience as *general revelation*. But we need more than general revelation to understand the true nature of God and His plan for us. We need *special revelation*. God has provided this through the Scriptures and through God the Son becoming one of us. No one is excused from not knowing God or of His salvation. God has manifested Himself and it to all (John 1.9; Romans 1.19-20; Colossians 1.23; Titus 2.11).

The Scriptures and the Son

The Scriptures are called the Word of God. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is also called the Word of God (Revelation 19.13). God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ is the author of the Scriptures even though human beings wrote the words down on paper. Peter wrote,

¹⁰ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹ seeking to know what person or time the Spirit

of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow (1 Peter 1.10-11).

John wrote, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19.10). John revealed that Jesus is the Word of God in both his first advent and his second advents. In his gospel he wrote,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1.14).

In Revelation, John identified Christ in his second advent:

And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God (Revelation 19.13).

Jesus and the Scriptures are both divine and human. Jesus is the God-Man, wholly God and wholly man. While on earth He was God but His deity was largely veiled. Paul wrote,

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2.5-7).

When anyone looked at Jesus they saw a man. He did not glow or have a halo around Him. He looked like an ordinary human being. In the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus glorified. In His mighty resurrection He manifested his divinity. In the same way, the Scriptures appear as ordinary writings, no different from any other. But they are more—as Jesus Himself was more than man. As Jesus, the Living Word, is

both divine and human, the Scriptures, the Written Word, are divine and human. Human beings were the agents of God's Word. But behind the human agents is God Himself. The Word is God-breathed, with the same breath God gave life to Adam in Genesis 2.7. His breath is life itself.

The Scriptures Inspired

The Scriptures, throughout both testaments, claim inspiration. The classic biblical text for the doctrine of inspiration, 2 Timothy 3.16-17 reads,

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Greek word translated "inspired" is θεόπνευστος. Our word "inspiration" comes from the Latin "inspirare" which means "to breath into." This is *not* what the Greek word means. The Greek word θεόπνευστος is formed by combining θεός "God" and πνέω "to breath or blow." Literally, it means "God-breathed" or "God-blown." One cannot help but think of Jesus' words in John 3.8 where πνέω is used. There, Jesus said,

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

A similar passage is John 6.63. Here, Jesus said the following:

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

When a person speaks, he *expires* air. He doesn't breath in, he breaths *out*. Jesus meant that the words He spoke were "spirit"

in the sense that the very air that He expired when he spoke was the Holy Spirit and that this “air” or “spirit” was life itself. The Living Word, the Word made Flesh, speaks, breaths out, expires, the Word of God.

θεόπνευστος is a *hapax legomenon*—that which is spoken once. It occurs only here in the New Testament and is not found in classical literature. Paul coined the word to describe the divine nature of God’s written word. A better translation is “All Scripture is *expired* by God”. The word translated “inspiration” in the Scriptures is better understood as “out-breathed” or “expired” by God rather than “in-breathed” or “inspired” by God. Thus, 2 Timothy 3.16-17 should read:

All (or every) Scripture is God-breathed (or expired by God) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness in order that the man of God may be complete, having been furnished for every good work.

In Stephen’s rendition of Jewish history before the Sanhedrin he said concerning Moses,

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you (Acts 7.38).

The expression “living oracles” (λόγια ζῶντα) conveys the sense “living words or utterances.” Notice too that the angel spoke to Moses. Hebrews 4.12 states, “the word of God is alive.” The word for “alive” is ζωή and should be translated “living” or “alive.” This word ζωή (from which we get words such as zoology) carries the sense of the vitality or capacity of life. It is the same word Jesus used in John 6.63 by which He conveyed the concept that the words He speaks are spirit and life—which we saw above. Jesus said, “Ἐγώ εἰμι . . . ἡ ζωή” “I am the life” (John 14.6). The word ζωή is

distinguished from another Greek word for life—βίος (from which we get words such as biology). The word βίος carries the sense of the manner, means, or duration of life as opposed to vitality or capacity of life.

In Genesis 2.7, the Scripture records,

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The breath of God (πνεῦμα) is *life itself*. The Scriptures are the breath or the life of God in written form. Jesus taught this with his quotation of Deuteronomy 8.3 in response to Satanic temptation in Matthew 4.4,

It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'.

As mankind's original life came from the breath of God, spiritual life begins by believing the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) and is maintained by the out-breathing of God in the form of the Scriptures. The Word of God proceeds out of the mouth of God. It is the very breath of God.¹

The writer to the Hebrews also testified to the aliveness of the Scriptures, writing:

For the word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even unto the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4.12).

Peter confirmed the above sense and revealed something of the mechanics of inspiration in the following passage:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is

of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1.21).

The Scriptures did not come into being from human will. They came as a result of God's will. Men were the vehicles for God's declarations. Men were "moved" (φέρω means "to bear" or "to carry") by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "bore" men along and they recorded God's words. Jesus constantly appealed to the Scriptures to validate His points. Most of the time He used the formula, "It is written" as we saw above. He declared the Scriptures could not be broken (John 10.35) and said that it was easier for the universe to cease to exist than for one stroke of the letter of Scripture to fail (Luke 16.17). Many Old Testament statements describe the Scriptures coming into being. Exactly how this happened is mysterious because it was a divine interaction between God and man. What is clear from the Scriptures is that God Himself controlled their creation. The Old Testament has over 2,000 expressions such as "the LORD said", "the word of the LORD came saying" etc.

The Mosaic Law governed Jewish society beginning with Moses. While Moses was the agent of the Law, God was its author according to Scripture. In fact, the Scriptures declare that God Himself wrote on the tablets of stone.

Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction'' (Exodus 24.12).

When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God (Exodus 31.18).

¹⁵ *Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the*

two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. ¹⁶ The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. (Exodus 32.15-16).

¹¹ You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. ¹² Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. ¹³ So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it (Deuteronomy 4.11-14).

These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me (Deuteronomy 5.22).

David was the author of Scriptures, most the Psalms. What did David say about his works?

Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel, ² "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue. ³ "The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God, who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God, (2 Samuel 23.1-3)

Other declarations of servants of God in which the word of the LORD “came” unto them are the following:

So Balaam said to Balak, ‘Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak’ (Numbers 22.38).

Balaam told Balak that it was God Himself who put His words into his mouth. In the following Scriptures we see how the word of the Lord “came” to men:

¹⁰ *Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying,* ¹¹ *“I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the Lord all night (1 Samuel 15.10-11).*

¹¹ *Now the word of the Lord came to Solomon saying,* ¹² *“Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in My statutes and execute My ordinances and keep all My commandments by walking in them, then I will carry out My word with you which I spoke to David your father (1 Kings 6.11-12).*

²² *But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying,* ²³ *“Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin and to the rest of the people, saying,* ²⁴ *‘Thus says the Lord, “You must not go up and fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me.”’” So they listened to the word of the Lord, and returned and went their way according to the word of the Lord (1 Kings 12.22-24).*

³ *It came about the same night that the word of God came to*

Nathan, saying, ⁴ “Go and tell David My servant, ‘Thus says the Lord, “You shall not build a house for Me to dwell in; (1 Chronicles 17.3-4).

¹ Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, ² “And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land (Ezekiel 7.1-2).

God told Jeremiah that He had known him before He formed him in the womb and that in the womb He consecrated and appointed him to be a prophet. When Jeremiah protested that he did not know how to speak as a prophet, God touched his mouth and told him He would be the one who would put His words into his mouth.

⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” ⁶ Then I said, “Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.” ⁷ But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord. ⁹ Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth (Jeremiah 1.4-9).

We feel Jeremiah’s humanity when he complained to God about his message. We also see something of the mechanics of his preaching. He wished to be silent but God’s word was like an uncontrollable fire burning in his bones.

⁷ O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. ⁸ For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. ⁹ But if I say, "I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name," then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it (Jeremiah 20.7-9).

What God had told Jeremiah in response to his protest that he did not know how to speak is similar to what Christ told His disciples regarding what to say when they were arrested:

¹⁹ But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Matthew 10.19-20).

Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2.13).

Jesus and the Scriptures

The strongest testimony of the inviolability, inspiration, trustworthiness, and truthfulness of the Scriptures comes from Jesus Himself. He constantly appealed to the Scriptures to validate of his ministry and mission. He and they are one. No stronger testimony of the inspiration of the Scriptures is possible than Jesus' words,

¹⁷ *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”* ¹⁸ *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5.17-18).*

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away (Matthew 24.35).

Jesus was referring to the Hebrew letter “yod” (י) with the Greek word ἰῶτα (iota) and the word κεραία, the projection or horn part of a Hebrew letter, i.e., the smallest points of penmanship in the Hebrew alphabet. What Jesus was saying was that not only were the *words* of Scripture inspired but the *tiniest letters or parts of letters* of the Scriptures were inspired! In an even more arresting statement, He declared that the existing physical universe will cease to exist, but the Scriptures will not! Indeed, it was by the word of God that the universe came into being. The Psalmist wrote:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host (Psalm 33.6).

Likewise, in his confrontation with the Jews in John 10, Jesus declared, “the Scripture cannot be broken.” This is as clear a statement as can be made regarding the inerrancy and inviolability of Scripture. Furthermore, it is clear that what Jesus meant when he began his speech in this passage, “Has it not been written in your Law . . .” was that what He meant by “Law” had a larger scope than the first five books of the Old Testament because He quotes from the Psalms. Jesus used the “Law” as a metonymy for all the Scriptures.

When the Sadducees presented Jesus with the situation of the seven brothers and one woman and asked Him whose wife she would be in the resurrection (because they did not believe in

the resurrection), Jesus replied, citing the authority of the Scriptures, and specifically pointed to a direct quote from God:

²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22.29-32).

When Jesus began His ministry, He was tempted by Satan with three temptations in the desert. To each temptation, He responded by saying "it is written" (Matthew 4.1-11; Luke 4.1-13). Jesus appealed to the Scriptures. For Him, the written word was authoritative and inerrant.

Jesus was keenly attuned to the inseparable link between his ministry and the fulfillment of the Scriptures that prophesied of Him. At His arrest, Jesus declared,

Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as against a robber? Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has happened that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Mark 14.49).

Many attacks have been made upon the Word of God. Those who attack the Scriptures attack God Himself. The first attack in human history came in the garden of Eden, when the serpent, Satan, said to the woman Eve, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" Satan's manipulative conversation confused Eve. Was God telling the truth or withholding a great blessing? Satan deceived her and she believed Satan's lie. When we believe the attacks on the

Scriptures we are following in the path of Eve. Satan's strategic objective is to confuse mankind regarding God's intentions and make us doubt the Word of God. Jesus declared that those who oppose Him and His Word have the Devil for their father. He said:

⁴³ Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8.43-44).

Who is your father? These Jews had Satan for their father because they refused to believe the Word of God. Satan is a liar. Do not be deceived by those who teach the Scriptures are errant. Whom will you trust? That is the question.

It is important to recognize that several significant biblical events that have come under the most vigorous attacks from critics are events Jesus taught and attested to in His earthly ministry. Some of these are the following:

1. The creation of Adam and Eve

And He answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, For THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH' (Matthew 19.4-5).

2. Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch

And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them' (Matthew 8.4).

But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead' (Luke 16.31).

For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; (Mark 7.10).

He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way' (Matthew 19.8).

Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled' (Luke 24.44).

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words (John 5.45-47)?

Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law (John 7.19)?

3. The Flood

For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24.37-39).

4. The existence and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you (Matthew 11.23-24).

5. Jonah and the great fish

For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and tree nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12.40).

6. Daniel a prophet

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; (Matthew 24.15-16)

7. The existence of Satan and demons

Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! For it is written, YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY' (Matthew 4.10).

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; (Luke 22.31)

And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!' For He had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And He was asking him, 'What is your name?' And he said to Him, 'My name is Legion; for we are many' (Mark 5.6-9).

Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;' (Matthew 25.41)

But He knew their thoughts, and said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11.17-20).

8. The existence of a literal hell

And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10.28).

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it (Matthew 16.18).

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell (Matthew 23.33)?

And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame' (Luke 16.23-24).

Conclusion

Several theories of inspiration exist which try to explain its mechanics. Ultimately, however, the mechanics remain

mysterious. Is this a problem? Many mysteries exist in nature. Who understands the creation of the universe? What is life? How does the mind work? How does it interact with the body? How do birds fly unerringly thousands of miles? What is the nature of light? These are mysteries. Jesus referred to such mysteries in the natural world when He said:

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3.8).

We do not know where the wind comes from much less how the Holy Spirit operates. The clear declaration of the Bible is that every Scripture is God-breathed and that God's Word is life itself. Those who abandon this doctrine become uncertain travelers on a road without hope with only darkness ahead.

¹See "Inspiration" by B. B. Warfield in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, 1982, p. 840. Warfield analyzes the word θεόπνευστος and corrects its mistranslations.

©1998 Don Samdahl. Anyone is free to reproduce this material and distribute it, but it may not be sold.

Updated, November 05, 2004