

Luke: An Investigative Reporter

It is believed generally that Luke, “the beloved physician,” wrote *Luke* and *Acts*. It is accepted generally also that those two records were inspired of God and were meant to be included in the canon, the collection of New Covenant writings.

If you believe that those two records are inspired and belong in the canon of Scripture, on what evidence do you base your trust? Let’s examine some of the facts relating to this subject.

Luke did not claim inspiration or that he received his information by revelation. He mentions no help from the Holy Spirit. No other writers of portions of Scripture mention his writings or attribute his work to divine guidance.

Luke claimed the role of an investigative reporter who sought out the facts from human sources. “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (Luke 1:1-4). So begins his gospel record, and he makes no different claim for his record in *Acts*.

If truly God had revealed those facts to Luke or they had been injected into his mind by the Spirit, and then Luke took all the credit for ascertaining the facts, how would you describe him? Dishonest? Disrespectful of God? Disparaging and insulting the Holy Spirit? Luke even addressed his reports to one man making no claim that they were meant for universal readership for all time.

From another perspective, let us suppose that Luke claimed to be writing down a message delivered from God to people for all time. Would that prove that his writing was inspired – “verbally inspired,” or word-for-word inspiration as claims are made? It would not prove it. A few days ago I received an email message of some length from a fellow who claimed that God had given him an “end-time” message to deliver to all mankind. And I did not even read it! I hit the *delete* button without hesitation.

Countless persons through the generations have claimed to have received direct revelations and inspired messages to share. But that did not prove them to be inspired. If indeed they received inspired messages, those messages were as authentic as any portion of New Testament canon. They would belong alongside the writings of Peter, Paul, and Matthew. But claims do not prove inspiration.

It may startle you to realize that few claims of inspiration are made by any whose writings are counted as New Covenant scriptures. The word *inspired* is used only once (2 Tim. 3:16) in most translations of the New Testament writings. In the NIV it is even rendered *God breathed* instead of *inspired*. From the Greek *pneo* and *pneuma* come the closely related Biblical words *blow*, *breathe*, *breath*, *wind*, and *spirit*. The word *scripture* simply means *writing*. *Bible* means *book*. We speak of a *book* and of *The Book*. In similar manner, sometimes Biblical writers refer to *writings* and *The Writings*.

When Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14f) that he had been taught the sacred writing, Paul was referring to the Old Testament writings without defining them or giving a list of “books”. If we accept the rendering of “all writing is inspired by God,” we must conclude that he is meaning the OT Writings for all writings are not inspired. However, the verb *IS* has been supplied by the translators for it is not in the original. Without the verb added (KJV, ASV), he is saying “every writing inspired by God, etc.” without meaning that all writings are inspired, and still without specifying those components which are inspired.

In proclaiming Christ, Paul wrote that he was making known previously misunderstood revelation (1 Cor. 2:6-16), yet he was not referring to his writings or identifying certain epistles. In his message in Chapter

14 (v. 37), he declared that he was writing a command of the Lord, but in Chapter 7, he expressed his opinions which the Lord had not commanded. He commended the Thessalonian disciples for accepting his preaching as the word of the Lord (1Thes. 2:13) but in this statement he was not claiming inspiration for specific letters he had written or would write.

John received the things he wrote in *Revelation* by revelation (Rev. 1:1-3), but he makes no such claim for his gospel and epistles.

Peter spoke of some persons twisting Paul's writings "as they do the other writings/scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16) indicating that he considered Paul's writings equal to those of other writers. Yet he does not identify those writings. We may assume that those men wrote many letters related both to religion and other matters. In this setting (v. 14-15) Peter said "Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him," stopping short of indicating verbal inspiration.

Luke records that on Pentecost the apostles "began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Even if that indicated word-for-word inspiration, there is no indication that they wrote it down by inspiration. Luke claimed to have learned it by research rather than inspiration. Surely, Peter's speech was longer than the few minutes Luke recorded, but evidently he recorded the epitome of the speech which he learned by research.

Am I confusing the matter? I have chosen Luke's writings as an example to show that the claim for each word of the Scriptures being chosen by the Holy Spirit and written down by inspiration (infusion into the mind) is baseless. Luke wrote what he had learned by investigation and at least part of what Paul wrote was an expression of wisdom given to him. He expressed that wisdom in his own words, linguistic style, and understanding of God's will. He expressed his own emotions, not those of the Spirit. It is unlikely that either Luke or Paul had any idea that he was writing "Scripture" which would be put in a holy collection to apply to all succeeding ages.

There are instances where specially worded messages and special revelations were given to men but such claims are made for the entirety of no epistle except for the claim John made for *Revelation*.

Are we denying that the Bible is God's message to us? No. But I prefer to speak of the inspired message rather than an inspired book. Let me suggest some different thinking about *inspiration*. I have known of no one offering this explanation before, so it must be wrong! ☺ However, consider it if you are daring.

As previously stated, *to inspire* means *to breath into*. In the *Genesis* account of creation, God made various animals then climaxed his creativity by the making of man. Sometime after making man, how long afterward no one has an informed idea, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. Man was inspired! He was given life from God. All of us share that original inspiration of life.

Jesus imparted special empowerment to the apostles by breathing upon them (John 20:22).

Now, back to Luke. He investigated and recorded what he learned in two orderly records – *Luke* and *Acts*. In view of the illustrations above, is it out of line to think that God saw these records written by a man in the language and style that fellow-men could understand, stating truths God wants all men of all ages to know, and then God breathed life into the messages? Could they not become even as Jesus' own words when he stated, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). The words of men became the Living Word also!

Yes, I realize such an explanation eliminates the "verbal inspiration" concept so long advocated. It modifies the concept that the Spirit chose each exact word used so as to insure doctrinal correctness. However, had we not been so legalistic in our approach to interpretation, we probably never would have come upon that tedious concept.

With that stated, no doubt the word *inerrancy* (not found in my dictionary) flashes in some minds. The sincerest of fundamentalist believers make much ado about the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Surely, the message of God is contained in them, but how are you to prove their inerrancy? You cannot! Almost every page has footnotes of variations and alternate readings indicating uncertainty of the wording of certain texts.

To evade the force of that truth, it is claimed that our translations may have errors but the original manuscripts had none. Neat, but how do you know that? Have you seen and examined one of the original manuscripts? Granting that the original autographs contained no errors, how will that help us today since we do not have any of the originals!

Are these thoughts unsettling? How can we know? How can we know which “books” belong in the New Testament? How can we know they are God’s message? How can we know the original messages are free from error in our translations? The answer: we cannot know. But we can believe! Faith is based upon evidences that fall short of proof. We cannot prove these points under consideration but there are substantiating evidences to build our confidence.

God, being Spirit, revealed himself through a man – the Son of Man who took human form and lived among men. No man can discern the mind of the infinite God, but he has revealed what we need to understand through men. Some human agents received some direct input from the Spirit, and they also researched, copied from records, and gave eye-witness accounts. We identify and appraise those writings by various means, such as follows.

The claim the writer made for divine guidance.

The acceptance given their writings in their generation.

The internal evidence within each writing.

The influential power the message has had over men.

Trust in the providence of God to preserve his message.

The weeding out of doubted writings in early centuries.

No collection of the New Testament Scriptures was made in the lifetime of the writers. No apostle or inspired person listed the components of canon in the first century (nor thereafter). Acceptance of various writings was debated in the early centuries. By the fourth century the bishops (whom we would not accept as bishops) had defined a list comparable to your present-day text, though some disputable writings are still retained in some texts.

A study of evidences can strengthen faith without giving actual proof. Through the centuries, a detailed study has been beyond the scope of the average person, so he has depended upon what has been handed down based on the conclusions of others before him.

These considerations give us another valuable insight. The church was not produced by the New Testament Scriptures. Although there were circulating letters written by respected persons, the early disciples did not have the compilation of the Scriptures to study for guidance. On Pentecost, Peter and the apostles did not quote from a NT text but declared what they had seen. Jesus had died and was proven to be the Savior by his resurrection and ascension. They proclaimed forgiveness and life through the Person, not a book or code of law. That message of Good News spread through the Roman Empire before the canon was defined. The power of that Gospel still brings mankind to salvation. Now, we have the text whose facts point us to him who continues to be the saving Good News.

I have touched only the fringe of this matter which we have dealt with so defensively generally. If you would like much more candid discussion of inspiration and formation of the canon, you may contact Stanley Paher. His honest writings challenge and inform. Stanley Paher, Nevada Publications, 4135 Badger Circle, Reno, NV 89509. Phone: 775-747-0800; Fax 775-747-2916. (December 2000) []

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WRITINGS. (My use of Capitals is not to shout to you but to indicate Italics which do not process in my e-mail.)

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