

Thoughts Concerning Inspiration of the Bible

This is not intended as a thorough study concerning inspiration. Even though this subject is as old as the Bible itself, questions remain to be answered. In defensive mode, many declare that every word of the Bible is dictated by God; hence, it is inerrant. There is lack of evidence to sustain such a claim.

Most all of us have memorized and quoted, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17 KJV). Since "scripture" means "writing," does that mean that all writing is inspired of God?

The context indicates that Paul referred to "the sacred writings" (v.15) but he did not identify them. They had no bound volume as we visualize. We have the Bible, but there is still disagreement as to the authenticity of its components. And no new covenant writing was included in those sacred writings which Timothy had been taught from childhood to equip him for every good work. To assert that it anticipated future writings is absurd for he was taught them from childhood before any NT documents were written.

The word "is" is not in the original text, so it is supplied twice in 3:16 in the KJV and once in the RSV. In a footnote, the RSV gives an alternate rendition of "*Every scripture inspired by God*" implying that every writing is not inspired of God but that every writing which is inspired of God is profitable for teaching, etc. That makes better sense. Still, that points to no list of specific writings for us to include in a book. The sixty-six components that we call books of the Bible ("bible" means "book"; so we create the redundancy, "books of the book") are nowhere listed, enumerated, or indexed by any inspired writer. If your only exposure to this subject has been through Sunday School literature, this may be more disturbing than your having been enlightened about Santa Claus!

The church was produced by the preaching of the gospel. The OT scriptures were used to support the truth of the gospel. Years passed before any NT writings appeared. The saving message of the gospel did not depend on those subsequent writings. In time, some apostles and others began to write messages of both specific and general interest. Few of those writings/letters/epistles/documents, claim inspiration. Some claim revelation of certain points but not for their whole treatise. They were given credence especially in consideration of who wrote them, most of them being by apostles. Peter verified that those who wrote the revealed messages from God were moved by the Holy Spirit but he identified neither the writers nor their messages (2 Peter 1:16-21).

Luke wrote as an investigative reporter making no claim of receiving a revelation or inspiration. He reports how the men and women on Pentecost spoke as the Holy Spirit

gave them utterance, but he does not claim that he himself was guided by the Spirit in writing Peter's speech which he recorded in Act 2. He did claim that the message given on Pentecost was by "verbal" inspiration (to use our quaint term), but he did not claim word-for-word, inerrant inspiration for himself in writing it down many years later. He evidently depended upon records or the memory of others who heard Peter.

By depending upon what others had written or remembered, the door was opened which might allow inaccuracies to be injected. If you question that, just try to harmonize all the details of the accounts in the gospels about who went to the tomb of Jesus, when they arrived, and what transpired. Such differences in details do not invalidate the overall accounts, but they shatter the old claim of word-for-word inspiration and preservation of the messages.

If you still are not convinced, just look at all the footnotes in your text which give alternate readings or tell what other ancient authorities have included or omitted. Open your dictionary of Bible words on most any page and see that several Greek words may be translated into the same English word. For example, twelve different Greek words are translated into the English verb "make," and seven Greek words are translated into the one English verb "provoke." These renditions are made at the discretion of the translators. That means that they translate according to their own interpretation of the passage, and their understanding may be based upon some long held misconception. Even if the writers were given each specific word, it was lost or compromised when it was translated into another language. Further, we have none of the original manuscripts from which to translate.

Would the Holy Spirit inspire a writer to misquote or misapply a passage from the OT? You may be in for a rude awakening if you look up the OT quotations in the NT to check their accuracy, and if you examine the context to see if the original meaning is actually applied accurately. For one example, in Romans 3:9-18, Paul extracts snippets from the contexts of eight passages and makes a universal case for the depravity of man of them. Actually, they were the rantings ("holy cussing!") of David against his enemies, declaring, "None is righteous, no, not one, etc." Check them out. Preachers still quote them to prove our total sinfulness!

The twenty-seven components of your copy of the new covenant writings were by no means all the documents written in the first century. Many writings circulated. No inspired writer or writers identified certain ones as being the authentic list. They were generally accepted according to who wrote them and their accuracy was judged by those who heard Jesus and/or the apostles. Generations passed with no definition of the canon/list. That seems very shaky for us who have been led to think of the epistles as a sort of legal code which demands the dotting of each "i" and the crossing of each "t". We try to study the nuance of each particular word supposedly chosen by the Spirit thinking our life depends upon it and as though discipleship is a groping through a technical maze of truth. We sometimes try to milk inferences from them that were never implied. Thus we presume to become scholars of the gospel as though the apostles proclaimed a gospel requiring scholarship. The message that Jesus was the Son of God

who gave himself as an atonement for our sins, was raised from the dead, and gives us promise of forgiveness and eternal life could be read in those circulating documents.

Generations, and even centuries, passed before the canon was generally agreed upon. If you have concern, you should read detailed accounts of the process by which the present form of our Bible came into existence. This essay challenging simplistic concepts is not intended to downplay the importance of the scriptures, nor have I given the full history of the development of the canon. Do you think I am denying the inspiration of the Bible?

What is your concept of inspiration? The word “theopneustos” – “Theos” meaning God and “pneo” meaning to breathe -- is translated “inspired of God” in its only use in the NT in our text. No explanation is given in the text, so we determine its meaning by the root words. In common English, when we breathe in (inspire), we live; when we only breathe out (expire) we die. So breathing in (inspiring) is associated with life itself. This may well allude back to the creation of Adam. It is recorded that God made Adam (man) of the dust, but the process used and time required are not mentioned. At some time after man was made, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life giving him a living nature he not possessed previously.

A parallel thought may be that God let mortal men record the things which they had learned, facts which he had revealed to them, and material gained by research. Those men wrote in their own style and language expressing their emotions, aims, convictions, and relationships. They sometimes used colloquial expressions that were unscientific like the sun rising, stars falling, heaven up, hell down, four corners of the earth, and bowels of mercy. Because they expressed God’s will in terms that men could understand, he then “breathed” life into their documents. They became words that live and abide through God’s providence. *“For the word of God is living and active.. .”* (Heb. 4:12).

In great mystery beyond our comprehension, God made himself known as a man in the incarnation. In similar manner he made his will known to us in documents written by men – all mortal. We cannot prove all this precisely but we can believe it. Faith is conviction based on evidence that is short of proof. []

If you are willing to let your paradigms concerning inspiration be broadened intelligently, request the July issue of Eschatology Review by my friend, Greg Rasaka, 32080 NE Corral Creek Road, Newberg OR 97132. Self-published, four pages worth your dollar.

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

(Cecil Hook; August 2005)

Talkin’ Texas: Texas towns with “Bible names:” Abilene, Andrews, Anna, Athens, Abram, Corinth, Eden, Lois, Lydia, Joshua, Macedonia, Matthews, Nazareth, Nimrod, Nineveh, Sardis, Smyrna, Titus, Asa, Benjamin, Berea, Bethel, Bethlehem, and Jonah.

