

Our God-Breathed Bible

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1343

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson we examine the subject of inspiration and we begin by considering the meaning of the term. The English word Inspire is derived from the Latin inspirare, which means "to breathe in." Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" or, as it is translated in the New American Standard Version, "All Scripture is inspired by God." The term, inspiration, does not reflect the exact sense of theopneustos, which is the term in our passage. Theopneustos means "God-breathed"; the Scriptures are breathed out by God, not breathed in. So we may say that the Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted written got written. In other words, the Scriptures are the product of divine breath assuring us that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the very words of God.

A. What Is Inspired of God?

Are hymns the product of God's breath? Are books that claim to be a direct communication from God, truly inspired? What about the teaching of some in the Charismatic movement are tongues and prophecies the very words of God?

In addition, some think there are degrees of inspiration. Those who hold this view believe many writings are inspired but that the authors of Scripture had the greatest level of inspiration. Something is either inspired or it is not. I disagree--either God breathed out the words or He did not. So, to speak in terms of degree misses the meaning of inspiration completely. Inspiration conveys an absolute meaning that excludes concepts of degree. Because the canon of Scripture is closed; no books, no visions, no poems, and no sermons are inspired in the biblical sense.

How do we know that the canon of Scripture is closed? Why do we believe we cannot add to the sixty-six books of the Bible?

One reason is the warning in Revelation 22:18: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." The phrase "this book," while it refers specifically to Revelation, carries the sense of that verse beyond the twenty-two chapters of this book. Since Revelation is the last book of the Bible, if we are to add to Scripture we must add to Revelation--and that is exactly what John says is forbidden.

B. Who Is Inspired by God?

Since God forbids us to add to His Word, how was it determined what books were to be included in the Bible? One test was authorship--were the Old Testament books written by acknowledged prophets or spokesmen of God? Similarly, all the books in the New Testament were written either by the Apostles or their close associates.

Confusion often results from using inspiration in a general sense. For instance we say, "His preaching was inspired." But that does not mean someone heralded the words of God as did Paul. Preaching is simply proclamation based on an inspired text. So it is not proper to refer to preaching as inspired in the biblical sense.

The Bible Plus

Some today are promoting what I believe to be heresy by teaching there continue to be visions and voices given from heaven. Such experiences are considered to be inspired of God and equal in

every sense to the Bible. Such belief is essentially no different from the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholicism holds to the inspiration of the Bible but it includes tradition as equally authoritative. In Protestant and Catholic circles we find teaching that extends inspiration and revelation beyond the sixty-six canonical books.

LESSON

I. THE DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION

Revelation is God's disclosure of Himself and His will. Inspiration is the means God used to communicate special revelation. Inspiration is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is a work whereby the Holy Spirit communicates divine revelation by working on the hearts of the authors of both the Old and New Testaments.

A. What Inspiration Is Not

1. A high level of human achievement

Some believe the Bible to be as inspired as Homer's *Odyssey*, Mohammed's *Koran*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They believe that like those men, the writers of Scripture simply had a high level of genius. Yet they conclude that what they wrote contains errors and cannot be taken as truth. So according to this view the Bible was not written by God but by men only.

However, would smart men write a book that condemned them? Would smart men write a book that places salvation beyond their own ability? Could even smart men create a personality such as Jesus Christ who was the perfect manifestation of purity, love, and righteousness? It is the tendency of man to exalt himself, not write books to damn himself. If the Bible is the product of human genius, what would prevent anyone from adding to it? Second Peter 1:21 explains that Scripture "came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

2. Limited to the thoughts of the Writer

Many seminaries and churches teach that God gave thoughts and not specific words to the writers of Scripture. This would mean, for example, that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 the only thing God gave to Paul was some general thoughts on the subject of love. The words of the text we owe to Paul. This view is sometimes referred to as thought or concept inspiration.

Now this position denies not only verbal inspiration, but inerrancy as well. Of course that makes exegesis futile. There would be no reason to do a word-by-word exposition if you're convinced that the words are merely human and not divine. Contrast that view with Scripture:

a) 1 Corinthians 2:13--Paul said, "We speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Paul claimed it was the words, not just the thoughts that are inspired. b) John 17:8--Jesus said to the Father, "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me." In the Old Testament phrases such as "thus saith the Lord," "the word of the Lord came," and "God said" are repeated over 3800 times. Clearly God communicates by words. c) Galatians 1:11-12--Paul said, "I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul got the gospel from God, not men. d) Exodus 4:12--God said to Moses, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say." Forty years later Moses said to Israel, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I commanded you, neither shall ye diminish anything from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). Words spoken by God are not to be taken away from or added to. e) 1 Peter 1:10-11--Peter wrote that "the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify." This verse is a power argument against thought inspiration. The Holy Spirit gave the prophets a message about the Messiah, which they recorded. Then they sought to understand the meaning of their own proclamations. So there were times when the prophets received and recorded words that they did not fully understand. So it was words not thoughts that they pondered on, which again is evidence

that inspiration is verbal.f) Matthew 24:35--Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." It is the words in the Bible that God has given. Pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions are important.g) 1 Corinthians 14:37--Paul said, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." A spiritual man will recognize that Paul's writings are the very words of God. So, inspiration is not extended to thoughts only. The very words of the Bible are given by inspiration of God.

3. An act of God on the reader

Some teach that only the portions of Scripture that speak to you are the Word of God: I call this "existential inspiration." Such men claim the Bible is not the Word of God, but that it only becomes the Word of God or contains the Word of God. They say if we are to identify what portion is truly a message from God, we must demythologize the Bible. So they deny that Christianity is a historically based religion. Thus they conclude that the incarnation, miracles, the ascension, and resurrection may or may not have occurred in history.

If the historical facts are rejected, the Bible will not make any sense. From beginning to end Scripture presents historical claims. In fact, spiritual truth is always connected to events established in history. The Bible is free of error in all matters that it addresses.

Theodore Engelder said that some men refuse to believe the miracle that God insured for us an infallible Bible, but are ready to believe the even greater miracle that God enables us to see the infallible Word of God in the fallible word of man (Scripture Cannot Be Broken [St. Louis: Concordia, 1944], cf. pp. 292-97).

Soren Kierkegaard said, "Only the truth which edifies is truth for you" (Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion [Princeton: Princeton University, 1949], p. 42). Whether we can or will recognize it; the entire Bible is true. Inspiration is not subjective. Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

4. Mechanical dictation

The writers of Scripture were not passive, as though God pushed a button and they recorded His words. Some claim evangelicals hold to the dictation theory of inspiration, which sees the writers acting as secretaries or stenographers. However, the reflection of each author's personality of each author in his writing denies that possibility. Although God could have recorded His Word that way, He chose to include the style, vocabulary, emotions, and personality of the author as a means to communicate His message to mankind.

How is it possible that the Bible is the Word of God and the word of men? God sovereignly formed the personality of each author by controlling his heredity, environment, and life to make him into the man God wanted him to be. The words were man's, but from the divine perspective their whole lives had been so framed by God, that even their personalities became a tool for God to communicate His words. David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). Peter testified that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Although the Bible is the Word of God, we see such moving displays of human personality as the weeping of Jeremiah.

B. What Inspiration Is

1. It is God-breathed

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (Gk., theopneustos, "God-breathed").

Scripture proceeded from the mouth of God. In a sense both special and natural revelation are the product of God's spoken word. Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth". God breathed the universe and the Bible into existence. Thus when Scripture speaks God speaks. For example in Exodus 9:16 God says to Pharaoh, "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, to show in thee my power." But Romans

9:17 says, "The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee." Paul attributes to Scripture what was spoken by God. God and Scripture are used interchangeably. As Paul says in Romans 3:2, the Scriptures are the "oracles of God."

a) Jeremiah--In chapter 1 he wrote, "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (vv. 4-5). Then Jeremiah records God as saying, "Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (vv. 7, 9). In chapter 5 God says to Jeremiah, "I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them" (v. 14). Jeremiah responds to God in chapter 15, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them" (v. 16). Later, in the same chapter, God gave this promise to him, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth" (v. 19). b) Ezekiel--God said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them" (Ezek. 3:10-11). God gave Ezekiel the exact words to say. c) Paul--Ananias said to Paul, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15). d) John--In Revelation chapter 1 John wrote, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (vv. 10-11, 19). So the men who wrote the Old and New Testaments were commissioned by God to write His words. Paul's words to Felix reinforce the fact that we can trust the Bible as the Word of God: "This I confess unto thee that, after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:14).

2. It includes all Scripture

The Greek term *pasa* can be translated "all" or "every." However, when Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16 the New Testament canon was not closed. Therefore some believe "all" can refer only to the Old Testament. But that interpretation places a time restriction upon "all" that is not warranted by the text. All Scripture is inspired of God whether it precedes or follows Paul's second epistle to Timothy. Jesus said "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). That includes Scripture that had been written, was being written, and would be written.

3. It points only to Scripture

The Greek word translated "Scripture" (*graphe*) means "writing." However not all writing is God-breathed. Paul said to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15). Only holy writing is God-breathed.

Another thing that is not God-breathed is the writers themselves. Paul said Scripture is God-breathed. He did not say that the writers were God-breathed and neither should we. If the man were inspired then anything he wrote must be considered to be God-breathed. And that is not the case.

The Pick-and-Choose Bible

Some would like to remove certain verses from the Bible based on what they call "the spirit of Jesus." They say that whatever is in accordance with the spirit of Jesus should be included, and whatever does not should be taken out. For example, they would say the biblical injunction for capital punishment does not fit the spirit of Jesus because He was loving and gentle. Such people understand only one aspect of Jesus' nature. They do not understand He is also just and involved in judgment. They disregard anything that does not conform to their personal views.

Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least

commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:18-19). He also said, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17). Even if the entire universe folds up, God's Word will remain because it is His Word (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

CONCLUSION

Inspiration is God communicating to us through writers who used their own thoughts and words. Yet, He arranged their lives, thoughts, and vocabularies in such a manner that His revelation was recorded precisely. In theological terms this is verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. Plenary means every word is inspired; verbal means every word is inspired.

A. Scripture Is Inerrant

The original autographs are free from error. As scribes copied the Bible through generations they intentionally or unintentionally made minor changes to the text. These variations are slight and none affect doctrine. We may confidently say that the Bible we have today has been so well preserved, it is essentially God's Word. God breathed out the Bible and He upholds it by His power. Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is pure."

B. Scripture Is Complete

What some claim to be visions and new revelations are not a part of God's program today. The canon is closed. Therefore the Bible is all we need and so the canon is closed. Although the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination continues, His ministry of inspiration has ceased.

C. Scripture Is Authoritative

Isaiah said, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken" (1:2). Because the Bible is the Word of God we must obey its message.

D. Scripture Is Sufficient

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17--"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." Scripture is sufficient to guide us in every good work.

2. Roman 15:4--Paul said, "Whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

3. James 1:22, 25--"Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth in it, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." The Word is perfect and doers of the Word are blessed.

E. Scripture Is Effective

1. Hebrews 4:12--"The word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." That the Bible gives an accurate description of ourselves is a testimony that it is the Word of God.

2. Isaiah 55:11--God said regarding His word, "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." The Bible has the power to do what it claims it will do.

3. 1 Thessalonians 1:5--Paul said, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit."

Let us stand faithfully and confidently on the inspired Word of God. Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye, therefore, hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47). Many people fall under that warning. A saved person can be distinguished from an unsaved person by whether he listens to the Word of God. Do you listen to God's Word?

Focusing on the Facts

1. How does breathed-in and breathed-out differ and what implication does it have on the doctrine of

inspiration?

2. Why is it unacceptable to say that the Bible is different from other writings only in its degree of inspiration?

3. Is God continuing to communicate through inspired writers today? Explain.

4. How does the theory of conception inspiration violate the biblical doctrine of inspiration?

5. Why do we say that inspiration is verbal?

6. Those who teach existential inspiration believe that the Bible needs to be demythologized. What does that mean and why are we reject such a view?

7. Is the mechanical dictation theory sustained by Scripture?

8. Explain what the term "all" in 2 Timothy 3:16 encompasses.

9. In 2 Timothy 3:16 what does Paul say is inspired and why is that important?

10. How do some people use "the spirit of Jesus" to limit the authority of Scripture?

11. Define the term "plenary".

12. What is illumination and how does it differ from inspiration?

Pondering the Principles

1. We live in a pluralistic society that resists any claim of exclusiveness. People ask for instance, "Why is Christ is the only means of salvation" and "Why is the Bible the Word of God and not the Koran, or the Book of Mormon?" If asked, could you give a reasonable defense of the inspiration of Scripture?

2. Much confusion results when theological terms are used inaccurately or interchanged inappropriately. How would you define revelation, inspiration, and illumination? Make sure you can distinguish those terms and explain how they relate to one another.

3. Commit 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to memory. These verses tell us what is inspired, why it is inspired, and how inspiration impacts our lives. God did not vouchsafe His Word to us just so we could boast of the Bible's accuracy--the Scriptures are God's dynamic that transform our lives. God not only seeks our obedience, but also He has told us in His Word how to please Him. Read Joshua 1:8 and set aside time to meditate upon God's Word.

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