

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Background

The Bible is totally trustworthy because God himself is its ultimate Author and Authority. That is why we call it 'the Word of God'. God has revealed that he exists as Creator of the universe (and men can work this out from the very fact that the universe exists and requires a cause outside itself), but mankind is finite and fallen and so is unable to have a perfect and personal knowledge of God without his further revelation of himself in his written Word and supremely in his living Word, the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. God has used human writers as his means of revelation in Scripture. He has used those he raised up and stirred to write the Scriptures. God the Holy Spirit overshadowed, directed and 'carried along' (2 Peter 1:21) the human writers of Scripture (we might think of the wind in the sails of a ship) so that what they originally wrote was preserved from all error. This divine activity in and through the human writers is what we call 'inspiration' – though 2 Timothy 3:16 is more accurately translated: *All Scripture is breathed out by God*. Thus, the sixty-six books of the Bible (not including the Apocrypha) are authored and authenticated by God and are to be the supreme authority in our thinking, teaching and living. All biblical study and scholarship should reverently submit to that authority as it seeks to understand and expound the teaching of Scripture.

The Bible claims clearly to be God's Word to man

Again and again we read, "Thus says the Lord", or, "The word of the Lord that came to . . ." this prophet or that.

Exodus 4:15; 24:4, 7; 32:16; Deuteronomy 31:24–26; Psalm 68:11; Isaiah 1:2; 28:14,16; Jeremiah 5:14 (and many others); Ezekiel 2:7, 3:3; Zechariah 7:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:16–21

This revealing of God's Word through human agents (or prophets) continues right up to the end of the Bible – to God's final revelation, now given by God's incarnate Word (John 1:1) Jesus, who is God's Son. He addresses his Church.

Revelation 1:1, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 21: 5; 22:16

The human authors testify to certain occasions when a direct command from God was given to them to write, and Paul insists that his message, both spoken and written, came direct from God.

Moses – Exodus 17:14

Isaiah – Isaiah 8:1; 30:8

Jeremiah – Jeremiah 30:1–2; 36:1–32

Habakkuk – Habakkuk 2:2

John – Revelation 1:1–3, 19; 21:5

Paul – Romans 16:25–26; 1 Corinthians 2:7–15; 11:23; 14:37; Galatians 1:11–12; Ephesians 3:3–4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:15; 1 Timothy 4:1

Christ's words witness to the divine authorship of the Old Testament. He also claimed the full authority of his Father for all his own utterances.

Matthew 4:4; 5:18; 19:4, 7; 22:31–32, 43–45; 26:54; Luke 4:21; 24:25, 27, 44–45; John 5:46–47; 8:47; 12:48; 16:12–13; 17:8; 10:35

The Bible speaks as having divine authority, and people may be convicted of sin as they read it. The Bible is capable of revealing the meaning intended by God in every age and in every circumstance in which a person may find himself, provided that person is willing to be taught by the Holy Spirit. God has commanded the Bible to be read and taught.

Joshua 1:8; 2 Kings 23:2, 24; Psalm 1:1–2; 119:105; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 2:14–15; Ephesians 6:17; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:15–16; 4:2; James 1:21–22

There is a solemn warning to those who add to, or take away from, the words of the Bible.

Deuteronomy 4:2; Mark 7:13; Revelation 22:18–19

Notes

"The implications of inspiration were not questioned until relatively recently. Until the second half of the nineteenth century on no subject had the Church been more united" (T C Hammond & David F Wright, *In Understanding Be Men*).

Some appeal to the 'three-legged stool' of Scripture + Reason + Tradition, but Scripture is paramount over human reason and church tradition because it is 'God-breathed' [Gk. *Theopneustos*; 2 Timothy 3:16].

The following points must be remembered when studying the question of the inspiration of the Bible:

- a) It is the original writings that were inspired. Translation and transmission are not equally free from error.
- b) The record itself is inspired, even though it sometimes includes mention of things which oppose him. For instance, there were some who said of Jesus: "*He has a demon, and is insane*" (John 10:20). This was not the truth, but the record of it is inspired.
- c) There are different kinds of composition in Scripture, such as history, poetry and parable, each of which must be understood in the light of the plain meaning in context.
- d) 2 Peter 1:20 makes an important point when it says that, '... no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.' We are neither to be subjective in our interpretation (ignoring the clear meaning), nor must we take one verse in isolation from the rest of the passage – and indeed the particular book and the Bible as a whole. The Psalmist tells us:

*All your words are true;
all your righteous laws are eternal*
(Psalm 119:160, NIV)