

ARTICLE 1

We believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible.

The Bible is the voice of God speaking to humans across the centuries. It is God's message to us. In fact, it is the primary manner in which God speaks to us. The words of the Bible were recorded by individuals who were directly inspired by God the Holy Spirit. These writers were holy people who each had an active, not passive, part in the writing of Scripture. They wrote as the Spirit moved them. The Bible reflects this divine inspiration, and it also reflects the variety of human personalities who contributed to its composition.

1. The Term "Inspiration"

a. The term "inspiration," when used to describe the Bible, means that the Old and New Testaments owe their origin to the creative work of the Holy Spirit.

The word "inspiration" indicates the guarantee and preservation of truth. In comparison, the word "revelation" refers to what God has said and done. "Revelation" is an act that makes truth known. Inspiration preserves the truth revealed through revelation. The view that the Bible is the inspired Word of God expresses the firm conviction that revelation given in Scripture is true and that the Bible cannot be treated as just another human document.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The words "given by inspiration of God" are the translation of the Greek word "*theopneustos*," literally meaning "God-breathed" or "inspired of God." This term "*theopneustos*" indicates how the Scriptures came to be. Scripture is the result of the creative breath of the Spirit of God. "Divine breath" in the Old Testament often means the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. We read in the Book of Job, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4).

Scripture references: 2 Timothy 3:16; Job 33:4; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13

b. Scripture is a product of the creative work of the Holy Spirit.

(1) Although people wrote the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit determined the content and character.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Scripture is that it owes its origin to the inspiration, or creative activity of the Holy Spirit. When used to describe the Bible, the word "inspiration" has deeper meaning than it does when used in other ways. Biblical inspiration is spiritual in nature and makes the Bible different from all other books. It may be said that the reading of Scripture is "inspirational" or that Shakespeare was "inspired" to write his literary works. The type of inspiration that Shakespeare may have received or that we may receive when writing, creating, or even reading Scripture is quite different than biblical inspiration. The Bible has a superior quality that sets it apart from other literature and creative works. It cannot be viewed as the work of literary geniuses. It is God-breathed and has a divine quality that makes it fully reliable for faith and practice.

(2) During Jesus' life, Jesus and His followers accepted the Old Testament as the inspired authoritative Word of God, and later the early Christian church accepted both the Old and New Testaments as God's Word.

As Jesus taught His disciples and other followers, He referred to and treated the Old Testament writings as holy writings from God.

In the early days of Christianity, churches committed to orthodoxy received the New Testament as the inspired Scripture because the Books had been written by the apostles and those who were closely associated with them. Examples of Christians who were closely associated with the apostles were Mark and Luke. There was also other Christian literature in existence, but the church, using careful judgment, limited the New Testament to the twenty-seven books in our Bible today. They chose books that give an inspired account and interpretation of the great acts of God in the history of Israel and in the ministry of Jesus. When we compare the origin of the Bible with scriptures of other religions, we accept that the Bible is true and that it was produced under divine inspiration. Today the Holy Spirit continues to confirm the truth of the Bible to the hearts and minds of all believers and gives them the assurance that all Scripture is inspired by God.

Scripture references: Luke 1:70; 1 Peter 1:10-12; see also Daniel 12:8-13

2. The Witness of Scripture

In the Bible there are statements that clearly affirm Scripture to be the inspired Word of God. Just as a witness in a court of law is allowed to engage in self-testimony, the claims of the Bible are admissible evidence for divine inspiration.

a. God Inspired the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament it is clear that God spoke through His servants. Before the Advent of Christ, God spoke at various times and in different ways through the prophets to His people (Hebrews 1:1). For example, on a number of occasions, Moses reminded the people of Israel that his message was given by divine authority. David also claimed divine inspiration when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). Frequently prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah prefaced their message with such words as "Thus says the Lord," "The word of the Lord came to me, saying," or "The Lord said to me."

(1) Christ Himself affirmed the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God.

He asked, "Why do you...transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3). By implication, Jesus suggested that the commandment (the Old Testament) was the Word of God. Transgression of the commandment made the Jews guilty of undermining the authority of God.

(2) The apostles also affirmed the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God.

According to Paul, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Peter asserted that the ancient prophets "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The prophets were men to whom the Word of God came. God said to Jeremiah, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth"(1:9); and to Ezekiel, "You shall speak My words to them" (2:7).

Scripture references: 2 Samuel 23:2; Hebrews 1:1; Matthew 15:3; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21

b. God inspired the New Testament.

Throughout the New Testament, the life and ministry of Jesus are understood as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The New Testament testifies to Christ, the one who came in the flesh as the Word of God (John 1:1, 14-18). It records the imperishable truth, which Jesus brought and taught during His life on this earth. Christ Himself declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). This truth, which Jesus stated, is the basis for our believing that the New Testament is the Word of God. In his writings, the apostle Peter is consistent with this view that Scripture is from God when he identifies Paul's letters as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). No doubt, Peter knew that Paul's writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

(1) Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth.

In John 16:14, Christ said, "He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." In this statement, Jesus Christ was indicating that after He departed for heaven, the Holy Spirit would reveal to the disciples the significance of what Jesus had said and done. The Spirit's work, therefore, is to provide to believers an understanding of God's plan of salvation and to enlighten their hearts and minds to the teachings of Scripture (v. 13).

(2) Later Paul confirmed that the Holy Spirit reveals truth.

Paul stated that in addition to the Spirit's having revealed the deep truths of God to him, the Holy Spirit also had provided the language necessary to communicate this divine truth. "These things we...speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-13). In this passage, Paul speaks of his words as Spirit-taught and claims that Christ was speaking in him (2 Corinthians 13:3).

Scripture references: John 16:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13; 2 Corinthians 13:3

3. The Ideas and Words of Scripture

a. God inspired both the ideas and the words of Scripture.

Scripture makes no distinction between the inspiration of the sacred writers' ideas and the inspiration of their words. The words required to express the ideas were directly inspired by the Spirit. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21; see also 2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek word for "moved" (*pheromenoi*) means "carried along" or "borne along." Throughout the Old and New Testaments the origin of Scripture is the Holy Spirit. Due to the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, the writers' choice of words expressed the truth that God intended to convey. This inspired use of words is what we mean by "verbal" or "plenary" inspiration of Scripture.

Scripture references: 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16

b. The Holy Spirit used the various abilities of the writers and their particular styles of writing to produce the Bible.

Some have assumed that the term "verbal inspiration" means that the biblical writers were passive instruments without individuality. However, the Holy Spirit did not inspire Scripture in this controlling manner. The writers of Scripture were not like typewriters or computer keyboards that are completely passive when used. They wrote, but God guided them in their writing so that their words were the message of the Holy Spirit (see Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; Hebrews 3:7; 10:15).

Scripture references: Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; Hebrews 3:7; 10:15

c. The relation of the divine and the human in the writing of Scripture is a profound mystery.

Although there are many details of biblical inspiration that remain a spiritual mystery, we do know, however, that biblical inspiration includes the Spirit's dealing directly with the writers and the writers' responding to Him obediently and faithfully. In doing so, these followers of God recorded the truth in just the right way.

Scripture references: 1 Corinthians 2:12-14; 2 Peter 1:21

4. Understanding God's Message in Scripture

Because the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it can be trusted as being the Word of God. However, to fully understand the truths of God's Word, one must consider the literary style, consider the intentions of the prophets and apostles who recorded them, and rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and understanding. Many of our misunderstandings regarding the Bible are due to our failure to interpret the Scriptures in this manner.

a. To understand the Bible, we need to interpret poetic and symbolic language figuratively, not literally.

Psalms—For example, in Psalm 17:8 because of the Psalmist's desire for divine protection, he prayed that God would hide him under the shadow of His wings. If we were to interpret the word "wings" literally, we might conclude that God has physical wings. However, since God is Spirit, the phrase "shadow of Your wings" is meant to be symbolic (John 4:24). Using a symbolic method of interpretation, one could then conclude that God is like a loving mother bird who shelters her young under her wings. God loves, cares for us, and protects us.

The Lord's Supper—Consider Jesus' words when He instituted the Lord's Supper. He took the bread, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body," and then the cup and said, "This is My blood" (Matthew 26:26-28). When He said this, Jesus was not holding His body and blood in His own hands. The bread symbolized the body of Christ that was broken for us, and the cup symbolized the blood that He poured out on the Cross.

Some truths can only be stated in a figurative way, but it is easy for us who are of a literal mindset to forget that Scripture at times employs figurative language.

Scripture references: Psalm 17:8; John 4:24; Matthew 26:26-28

b. To understand the Bible, we need to consider the intentions of the prophets and apostles.

We must begin with the words of the biblical text to gain a sense of its meaning. As we are reading, an understanding of the author's purpose for writing will assist us in comprehending what God is saying to us. One of our concerns needs to be: "Why did the author write as he did?" Being able to determine the circumstances of both the author and the readers enables us to grasp better the significance of a biblical text. Thus, when studying the Bible we need to examine

the text in context in order to determine how it applies to our lives and to the life of the church. Such an approach will help us guard against embracing erroneous interpretation of Scripture and will help us to take seriously the teaching of God's Word.

Scripture references: Acts 15:14-18; compare Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:29; compare Leviticus 17-18; 2 Peter 3:15-16

c. To understand the Bible, we need to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(1) As we carefully and faithfully interpret Scripture within its historical and literary context, we need to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the supreme authority for shedding light upon and interpreting the Scripture. Through the Spirit's illuminating work in our hearts and minds, we can understand and put into action the truths spoken by the prophets and apostles. Paul describes the Word of God as "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17).

(2) The Holy Scripture is the instrument of the Holy Spirit.

Through the Spirit's powerful ministry, He works in our hearts and minds through the written Word and makes meaningful the truth of God's Good News. The Holy Spirit may bring divine truth to us in song, in testimony, in sermon, or through spiritual gifts, but all such means take us back to the written Word of God. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word and makes it powerful and real in our lives.

Scripture references: Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17; 1 Corinthians 12:9-10

Discussion

The Term "Inspiration"

- 1) How is the Bible different than other literary works or human documents?
- 2) How is the Bible's inspiration different than when the Holy Spirit inspires us to create or write?

The Witness of Scripture

- 3) Give some examples of how Jesus and other people in the Bible affirmed that the Old Testament is the inspired Word of God.
- 4) Give some examples of how Jesus and other people in the Bible affirmed that the New Testament is the inspired Word of God.

The Ideas and Words of Scripture

- 5) What is the basis for our believing that the writings in the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God?
- 6) Explain the meaning of the phrase "verbal inspiration of Scripture."
- 7) Does "verbal inspiration" mean that the writers had no individuality? Explain.

Understanding God's Message in Scripture

8) What are some factors we must consider in understanding Scripture? Give examples.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for inspiring and giving us our guide for life—the Bible, Your Holy Word.

As we read Your Word, Heavenly Father, may the Scriptures make us wise. May they bring us to commit our total being to Christ Jesus, enable us to open our eyes to more of the wonderful dimensions of Your love, and help us to understand more clearly Your divine teachings.

May Your Word be the sword of the Holy Spirit, which cuts away evil from our hearts, molding us in the likeness of Your Son, so that each decision we make is Your will.

Help us to build our lives on Your inspired Word. May we always hold on to the blessed hope You give us in Jesus Christ and Your promise for a life full of joy with You forever.

Amen.

Resources for Additional Study

Arrington, French L. *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective*, Vol. 1. Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway, 1992; pp. 23-84.

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Lewis, John M. *Revelation, Inspiration, Scripture*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1985.

Marshall, I. Howard. *Biblical Inspiration*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Packer, J. I. *God Has Spoken*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.