

The Scriptures

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According to 2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The word "Scripture" is from the Greek word *graphe* and is used in the New Testament fifty-one times to identify that ancient collection of writings known as the Old Testament. These writings are, according to Paul, inspired of God. The expression "is given by inspiration of God" is from the single Greek word *theopneustos*, a compound of "God" and "to breath," hence the meaning, "God breathed." But what does God breathe in the inspiration of Scripture? Does God breathe forth the actual words he wants written down, or is it the ideas he breathes forth? Is it both, or is it neither?

Perhaps 2 Peter 1:21 will help in answering this question. Here we read that, "no prophecy ever came by the will of men: but men spoke from God being moved by the Holy Spirit." From what we see here it is apparent that God inspires **men** moving them by his Spirit. The concept of inspiration can be seen repeatedly throughout the Scriptures.

In Exodus 4:12 God said to Moses, "Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." In Num 12:6-8 God says concerning the inspiration of a prophet and the inspiration of Moses:

Then He said, "If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD."

From these verses (and others) it can be seen that the Scriptures teach that God communicates with men by means of the inspiration of a human spokesman, most usually known as a "prophet." Just how this process of inspiration works must be seen from the overall teaching of Scripture. In fact, the whole body of writings called Scripture serves as the most obvious source from which to draw our concept of inspiration. From these writings we may determine the following.

Men Spoke From God

In the inspiration of Scripture, God empowered special men with his Spirit and these men spoke being moved by his Spirit. This is precisely what Jesus told his apostles would happen to them, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14:26). The movement of the Spirit of God upon these recipients of inspiration would give them insights they could not otherwise attain (he shall teach you all things), and give them faithful and accurate recall of events they had already experienced (he shall bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you).

The recipients of the inspirational activity of God were people, not inanimate objects such as paper (or papyrus) and ink. This was how Peter understood his inspiration of God, as he writes in 2 Peter 1:21, "men spoke from God being moved by the Holy Spirit." The word for "moved" is *pheromen*, a present, passive, participle of *phero* meaning, "to be under a moving influence; it is used as a nautical term for the movement of a sailing ship being advanced by the wind filling the sails of a ship. The Spirit of God was the influence moving the one inspired of God, but the human writer was the one communicating the inspired message as much as the sails of the ship were instrumental in the movement of the ship. However, given the difference in vocabulary, writing style, and personal references found within the different documents it was clearly a living being that was influenced by the Spirit of God, not an inanimate object. God did not turn the authors of Scripture into recorders of dictation in the inspirational process, even though the one inspired did often use a

scribe to write down his words as did Jeremiah with Baruch 9 jer 36:4-7, 32 and Paul with Tertius (Rom 16:22). God breathes his Spirit as an inspirational power, he does not breath words or sentences unless there is a specific message he wants spoken or written in specific words to some specific person or group, as in a prophetic utterance. When this occurs it is always clear for the context of the dictated message that this is the case.

It is the recipient of the Spirit in the inspiration of Scripture that is directly inspired, and because he is inspired, his literary productions (letters, gospels, etc.) are also inspired. This process is very similar to the supernatural empowerment given to Bezalel in the building of the tabernacle and its furniture. In Exodus 31:1-5 we are told:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.

The Human Element in the Writing of Scripture

This explains why there is such a presence of the human element in Scripture. This may be seen especially in the difference in Paul's writing style and vocabulary and that of John; or the Greek of Matthew and Luke as compared with that of Mark. Paul's Greek vocabulary, grammar, and writing style are very advanced as compared with the vocabulary, grammar, and writing style of John. Paul writes as one schooled in the Greek language, even though most of his letters were very likely dictated to a scribe. John's Greek appears to be a second language. This is not the case with the Greek of Luke who is an educated Greek. Mark is a Palestinian whose Greek is very readable, yet, very simple. Matthew's Greek is that of one schooled in the Greek language, but his vocabulary is that of a scribe who appears to be familiar with the Greek of the Septuagint, but is more at home in Hebrew or Aramaic, a fact which is evident by

the number of Semitisms (i.e., Hebrew words transferred over into Greek) in the text of the Gospel of Matthew.

Although the writing styles and vocabularies of these various writers are all different, their writings are all inspired of God by virtue of the fact that the writer himself was inspired of God, being moved by the Holy Spirit. The words the writer chooses, as well as the completed document he has authored, are inspired in that the writer has written under the influence or by the empowerment of God's Spirit. This is why we may speak of the specific compositions or "books" of Scripture as authored by men (e.g., Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul, Matthew, Luke, John, Peter), and at the same time, call these writings the word of God.

Scripture as the Word of God

In the Old Testament alone such expressions as "God spoke, saying," "the Lord testified, saying," "thus says the Lord" and similar expressions, are found in over 2,500 occurrences. God has inspired special individuals in a variety of ways. Some received their revelation from God in visions and interpretations of visions, as was the case with Ezekiel, Daniel, and John in the book of Revelation. In some instances God gave the exact words to the writer as was the case in the visions Peter received in Acts 10, Paul in Acts 27, and, as Jesus said would happen, in Matt 10:16-20.

In 1 Cor 12:8 two different types of inspiration are mentioned: the word of knowledge (the impartation of information or instruction) and the word of wisdom (insight with reference to the application of knowledge as is exemplified by Paul in 1 Cor 7 and Rom 12-15). In some instances we see a message given in just so many words, in some instances by visions and dreams, and in other instances we see the inspirational process exemplified in the form of mental illumination or wisdom. It is a mistake to try to make inspired literature fit only one type or model of inspiration. God works in a variety of ways to make his will known to man, but he always works through the inspiration of the human personality in the giving of a revelation.

Inspiration Of The Hebrew Scriptures

The Oracles of God and the Sacred Writings

The collection of writings called the Old Testament is referred to variously in the New Testament. To Jesus, the Old Hebrew Scriptures were **the word of God**. In Mark 7:13 he says of the scribes, "you nullify the word of God by the tradition that you have handed down." They are most usually called **the Scriptures**, "You diligently study the Scriptures," says Jesus, "because you think that in them you will find eternal life and these are they that testify of me," (John 5:39). In Rom 1:2 Paul calls them, **the Holy Scriptures**, "the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." In 2 Tim 3:16 he states that, "all Scripture is inspired of God." In 2 Tim 3:15 he calls them **the sacred writings**, and in Rom 3:2 he identifies them as **the oracles of God**, "What advantage then has the Jew? or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way: first of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

The Scriptures of Jesus

This Old Testament collection was clearly recognized by Jesus and the early first century Christians as inspired Scripture. Jesus was devoted to the sacred writings of the Hebrew people, and accepted them in their entirety: the Law, the prophets and the writings. Further, he interpreted his own identity as the Messiah from these Hebrew Scriptures. In Luke 24:44-45 he taught his disciples concerning the true identity of the Messiah from these writings:

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so that they might understand the Scriptures.

Jesus was filled with knowledge of the Scriptures, knowledge so great that it surpassed that of the Hebrew scholars of his day (cf. Matt 4:1-11; 4:17-19; 12:1-8; Mark 12:26, 35). He repeatedly defeated them in religious debate (Matt 22:15-46) even accusing them of not

even knowing God because their ignorance and perversion of Scripture was so great. "You are in error," Jesus replied, "because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." (Matt 22:29.) One ignorant of Scripture is ignorant of the power of God; Jesus' whole life was characterized by his devotion to the Scriptures and a passion for the knowledge of God he found in them.

From Moses to Ezra: the Hebrew Scriptures

According to Jewish tradition, the collection of writings known as the Hebrew Scriptures dated from the time of Moses in their origins and had existed as a collected body of sacred writings from the time of Ezra the scribe. According to Nehemiah 8 (cf. Ezra 7:10) these writings had been brought to the homeland of the Jews from the land of Babylon (Persia) in the early part of the fifth century (400-350 BC). These writings had been preserved by a guild of scribes known as the *Sopherim*, later called the *Massorettes*. The very Scriptures used today in Judaism are the Hebrew Scriptures preserved by these scribes as the Massoretic text (*i.e.*, *the Biblia Hebraica*).

The Inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures

First Came the Epistles

The New Testament Scriptures developed as apostolic figures such as Paul, Peter, John, Jude and Matthew, and individuals associated with the apostles (Luke, Mark, James, and the writer of Hebrews) wrote to address questions, controversies, and crises within the early church. This can be determined from the content of these letters. In 1 Cor 1:11, Paul states that the purpose of his letter was to address certain problems existing within the Corinthian church: "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you." And in 7:1 we read: "Now for the matters you wrote about." In 2 Cor 13:10 he writes:

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority - the authority the

Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

These were personal letters, some from the hand of the apostle himself, "See what large letters I use," says Paul, "as I write to you with my own hand" (Gal 6:11). In 2 Thess 3:17, he writes, "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters; this is how I write." On occasion Paul used a secretary or scribe to take down his dictation, as is evident from the comment in Romans 16. This letter opens with the words, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . ." (Rom 1:1), yet it closes with the words, "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord." (Rom 16:22). Tertius was, no doubt, the person who wrote down the dictation of Paul. In fact, the dictation style of Paul is apparent within the text of his letters. There are places where he jumps in subject and abruptly ends his thought, and others where he appears to be opening a new course of thought as though he had taken a break from his dictation, then picked it up later. Here we have another example of the presence of the human element in the writing of Scripture.

These letters to churches were often exchanged so that other churches would have the benefit of the apostolic teaching contained within each letter. In Col 4:16 Paul instructed the Colossian church, "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea."

They originally took the form of scrolls written on papyrus material with carbon ink and stylus pen, as is evident from the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament writings. We have a glimpse of how these letters were written in 3 John 13 where John says, "I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink." Older documents, such as the Old Testament Scriptures, were written on parchment (i.e., *membranas* - leather). This is possibly what Paul was requesting Timothy to bring to him in 2 Tim 4:13, "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments." Perhaps Paul was asking for Timothy to bring his leather scrolls (parchments) of various books of the Greek

OT Scriptures (i.e., the Septuagint he quotes from in his letters) among other writings that may fall under the Greek word *biblia* (i.e., scrolls).

The Gospels: from Stories to Texts

Later writings called "Gospels" were developed as the stories of Jesus spread through oral forms of teaching, preaching, and storytelling within the early church were committed to writing. The opening lines of Luke's Gospel composition confirm this:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

So also in the opening of his second composition, Acts of Apostles:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).

The Apostle John, in the conclusion of his Gospel, gives the following purpose for putting into writing his recollections of the life and teachings of Jesus:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

In the last lines of his composition John gives further indication that the church had begun to collect in writing the stories of Jesus.

Jesus did many other things as well;" writes John, "if every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (John 21:25)

The Other Scriptures!

These letters and Gospel compositions came to be considered "Scripture," as were the Old Testament writings. This is evident from the comments of the Apostle Peter concerning Paul's writings:

*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do **the other Scriptures**, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16).*

The expression "other Scriptures" clearly implies that he considered Paul's letters to be Scripture as much as the writings of Moses, David, Isaiah, etc. were considered Scripture. This is a very significant statement by Peter, especially in his use of the term Scripture. In the Greek text this is the word *graphe*, a word that appears to have been a technical term used within first century Hellenistic Judaism for the inspired writings. It is found in the New Testament in over fifty occurrences. In each occurrence, with exception of 2 Peter 3:16, it is used of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were considered to be inspired by God.

The term used for writings other than Scripture was the Greek word *gramma* (i.e., writing). Peter calls Paul's writings "letters" (Greek, *epistolais*), but what is significant is that he also calls them *graphe* (i.e., Scripture), indicating that by the time Peter wrote, the writings of the apostles of Christ were already recognized as inspired and authoritative.

Not only were these writings considered Scripture along side the Old Testament, these writings came to be known as the writings of the new covenant just as the Scriptures of the Jews were known as

the writings of the old covenant. In fact, these writings, which came to be known as "The New Testament," replaced the writings known as "The Old Testament" as the rule of faith and practice in the religion of Christianity. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews makes this clear:

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs (i.e., the Jews) as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant (Old Testament), no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one of none effect and what is aged and grown old will soon disappear. (Heb 8:6-13.)

Conclusion

There were various ways the writers of Scripture were inspired of God. All communication from God is revelation from God. Some communication came through visions (Acts 10:1-7, 9-17; Acts 27:21-25). Some came by explicit dictation of the Spirit of God (Num 12:6-8; Matt 10:16-20; Acts 2:1-13). Some came by the supernatural empowerment of the writers intellect or understanding (1 Cor 12:8) to the end that the human element in the writing is clearly present in the

composition: the personal expression of greeting, concern, anxiety, frustration or anger, use of sources as the Greek Septuagint in their quotations, oral tradition within the community of believers, and the distinctive style and vocabulary of each writer. All Scripture believed to be inspired of God is the product of a chosen individual who was moved upon by the Spirit of God, with the result that what is written is the message God wished communicated to his creation.

Inspiration is the supernatural influence of God upon the intellectual activity of a person resulting in that person's insights and understanding concerning the matters about which he writes. The apostle Paul received visions, dreamed dreams, and beheld Jesus face to face at the time of his conversion, but the role of inspiration in his letters may be seen in the insight and understanding he has concerning the issues he addresses. The words of his letters are his words, written by himself or dictated to a scribe, but they are his words. They are drawn from his unique vocabulary, but they are adequate to the task of conveying his thoughts in human language concerning matters God wished to be made known to men. Paul's *koine* Greek is as unique to him as John's Greek is to him. One writes out of his learning and experiences and the other writes out of different learning and experiences. In teaching New Testament Greek classes I always introduced the student to the Greek text by way of the letters of John, then his Gospel. As his ability advanced, he was introduced to the letters of Paul. The reason for this is that Paul's Greek is more difficult to translate than John's. Does this mean that Paul was more inspired than John? It does not! It only means that Greek was likely a first language for Paul where it was not for John. John was not a trained scholar, as was Paul. John likely spoke Aramaic as his primary language in Galilee, with Greek being a second language necessary for trade with the Gentiles of Galilee. John was a fisherman; his vocabulary and style of writing would be consistent with his lifestyle. God used Paul to write and speak as Paul and he used John to write and speak as John.

Paul's letter to the Romans is considered one of the most eloquent documents of the New Testament canon; it is the Gospel According to Paul. But the Gospel written by John is one of the most

beautiful and profound of all the Gospels. The fact that Paul's Greek and writing abilities were superior to John's makes little difference in the value of the composition they produced. Both were written under the influence of the Spirit of God, and both communicated the message of God. It was God who used Paul and John as his voice to speak to the people to whom they wrote of the story that could redeem them. It is that message that has the power of God unto salvation; and that message is from God by way of the insights and understanding given to Paul and John as they penned their compositions in the first century, being moved by the Spirit of God.

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Questions for Discussion

1. What does the word "Scripture" mean to you? What about "Bible" or "the Word of God?" (Use word association.)
2. What does the word "inspiration" or the expression "given by inspiration of God" mean to you?
3. If the Greek expression for "given by inspiration of God," used in 2 Tim 3:16, means "God breathed," what does this mean to you? What is actually "breathed" by God? His Spirit, the words he wants penned, the message he wished heard, or his influence on the understanding of the recipient of inspiration from God?
4. What do we learn about inspiration from John 14:26?
5. There are instances in the New Testament where the actual words to be penned were given to the NT writer (e.g., 1 Cor 2:10-13; Acts 27:23-24; Rev 1:10-11, 19; 2:1ff). Does this mean that all the words of the NT were actually given to the writers via plenary or verbal inspiration?
6. What are the "other Scriptures" mentioned in 2 Peter 3:15-16 and what does this imply about Paul's writings?

7. What is the significance of such claims as are found in 1 Cor 14:37; Eph 3:1-5; and 1 Thess 2:13?
8. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus and his apostles esteemed the Old Testament as the inspired word of God?
9. How does one explain the difference in vocabulary and writing style in the various books of the Bible, if the Holy Spirit is the actual "author" of all of the writings of the Bible?
10. What is the greatest proof of inspiration of the Bible to you?