

# False Theories Versus the Truth on Inspiration

Dub McClish

## Introduction

Few subjects are more significant and far-reaching than the subject of the inspiration of the Bible. Rejection of the inspiration of the Bible equals rejection of the Bible because it claims to be peculiarly inspired of God. Rejection of the Bible is tantamount to rejection of God and His Son. Rejection of the Bible is therefore also a rejection of the religion of Christ. If the Bible is not God's inspired Word, we can know but little about the nature of God and nothing about how to live in such a way as to please Him. Indeed, we cannot even know that He desires us to live in a certain way, nor that there are rewards and punishments awaiting all men, depending on how they live. There is no spiritual or religious authority if the Bible is not God's inspired Word.

**Those who would rob men of their faith in the Bible as God's faithful, infallible, and inerrant Word rob them of everything of essential value!**

The title of this treatise implies the following:

1. The Bible claims to be inspired (such claims constitute the truth concerning inspiration).
2. Certain skeptical and unbelieving theologians reject the Bible's claim of inspiration and they have invented various theories which essentially deny that the Bible is inspired of God.
3. There is a real antagonism between what the Bible says about its origin and what faithless theologians say on the subject (it is not merely a matter of "semantics").

The threat of these theological theorists is greater than that of the unmitigated atheists. The modernistic theologians can be answered and must be challenged. They long ago captured most Protestant seminaries and schools and have for several decades been spewing out their vomit of unbelief upon the land, destroying what vestige of faith in the Word of God that yet resided in the sectarian masses. As we shall later demonstrate, skepticism has also infiltrated the body of Christ.

Those faithless theologians who substitute their naturalistic theories of "inspiration" for actual inspiration remind us somewhat of another stripe of faithless theologian—the "theistic" evolutionist. The theistic evolutionist does not want to be labeled an atheist, but he favors the unproved and unprovable theories of infidel scientists on origins over the statements of the Bible. He thus tries to merge the two by saying God produced everything by means of evolution over vast eons of time. The result is the denial of both evolution and belief in God (and in the

Bible) in their full implications. Likewise, certain theologians (most of whom are also evolutionists of one stripe or another, incidentally) cannot bear the accusation that they deny the Bible's inspiration, but they must have the praise of the skeptics among their peers who subscribe to radical Biblical criticism. They therefore compromise by claiming to believe in "inspiration," but by the time they get through explaining it, it is not a fourth cousin twice removed to what the Bible teaches on the subject.

Our study will first define *inspiration* as used in the Bible, then we will notice some of the false theories of inspiration, the implication of true inspiration, followed by a brief notice of some of the Biblical evidence for inspiration.

### **Definition of *Inspiration***

The word *inspiration* appears only twice in the KJV Bible—in Job 32:8 and in 2 Timothy 3:16. Job 32:8 reads: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."<sup>1</sup> Second Timothy 3:16 is more familiar: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." In Job 32:8, *inspiration* is the rendering of the Hebrew word *neshamah*, meaning to breathe, and, accordingly, the ASV reads, "...the breath of the Almighty...." In 2 Timothy 3:16, *inspiration of God* becomes *inspired of God* in the ASV, the only occurrence of this term in any form in this version. The Greek word behind *inspiration* in 2 Timothy 3:16 is the compound word *theopneustos*, meaning God-breathed or breathed out by God. From this passage the doctrine of the origin of the Bible is named, "the doctrine of inspiration."

Kenneth Kantzer remarks as follows on the significance of this word: "By this word ['inspiration'], therefore, Paul is asserting that the written documents, called Holy Scripture, are a divine product."<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Warfield wrote concerning the meaning of *inspire* and *inspiration*:

Underlying all their use, however, is the constant implication of an influence from without, producing in its object movements and effects beyond its native, or at least its ordinary powers.... The Biblical books are called inspired as the Divinely determined products of inspired men; the Biblical writers are called inspired as breathed into by the Holy Spirit, so that the product of their activities transcends human powers and becomes Divinely authoritative. Inspiration is, therefore, usually defined as a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness.<sup>3</sup>

J. I. Packer notes a further implication of the use of *inspiration* by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16:

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, what is inspired is precisely the biblical writings. Inspiration is a work of God terminating, not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to themselves to find a way of saying it), but in the actual written product. It is Scripture — *graphie*, the written text — that is God-breathed.<sup>4</sup>

We may summarize the meaning of *inspiration* as it relates to the Bible as that teaching that God is the actual source and author of the Bible throughout all of its parts, having made use of various men in various ages to write the message He wished to communicate to man. By this means, although fallible men were used as the instruments of writing, they were preserved from error in every respect in everything they wrote. Therefore, the Bible is the inerrant (it **does not** err or stray from the Truth), infallible (it is **impossible** for it to err or stray from the Truth) Word of God. If the Bible was given by God and if “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18), then the Bible is trustworthy and True in every respect. A necessary corollary to the trustworthiness of Scripture because it is from God is the **authority** of Scripture because it is from Him Who has all authority. Evidence for the Bible’s claim of inspiration will be presented later, but this statement of the Biblical doctrine will give us a beginning point for discussion of some of the theories that seek to supplant it.

### **False Theories Of “Inspiration”**

Several theories have been propounded by those who deny what the Bible teaches about its own inspiration. All of these have as their necessary design the lowering of our view of Scripture. No such alternate views of how the Bible came to be would ever have been proffered had all men accepted the meaning of *inspiration* the Bible itself sets forth. Various expositors classify these several theories of inspiration differently, and therefore, the number of actual theories identified varies. Warfield subsumes them all under two, one of which he calls “Rationalistic” and the other “Mystical.”<sup>5</sup> *McClintock and Strong* likewise lists two principal views (besides what they term the “orthodox” or “dynamical” view: (1) “Mystical” (apparently meaning about the same as Warfield by this term), and (2) “Latitudinarian” (identified with Warfield’s “Rationalistic”).<sup>6</sup> However, in the same context, *McClintock and Strong* mentions two other variant views which they do not label. We will now list the respective theories we have discovered and briefly discuss their principal errors.

#### ***The “General Inspiration” Theory***

This theory uses *inspiration* and *inspired* in reference to the Bible and its writers in the same way that men speak of the “inspiration” of great authors such as Shakespeare or Homer.

A preacher may do an outstanding job in a particular sermon, and someone may say, "He was really inspired today." By this use of the term is meant that the one thus "inspired" has demonstrated an exceptional ability of some sort. While it is true that the Biblical writers demonstrated exceptional ability in their writing, the Bible's own claim goes far beyond this. They were not merely "inspired" by a poet's muse, by a multi-hued sunset, by some great man or woman, nor by any other naturalistic element. The Bible was given "by inspiration of **God**" (2 Tim. 3:16, emph. DM). The writers of the Scriptures were "moved [borne along] by the Holy Spirit" rather than by their own imaginations or "private interpretations" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

### *The "Bible-Contains-the-Word-of-God" Theory*

This theory may at first sound innocent, for indeed, no Bible-believer would deny that the Bible contains the Word of God. However, the aim of those who promote this theory is to deny that the Bible *is* God's Word. In saying that it **contains** God's Word, they leave room for it also to contain myths, fables, legends, and various human errors. Of course, the liberal theologians are the only ones qualified to "demythologize" the Sacred Text, whereby all the human element is separated from the Divine! This theory cannot be harmonized with Paul's declaration that "**All** scripture is given by inspiration of God." (2 Tim. 3:16, emph. DM). If **all** the Bible is **given** by God, then all of it **is** the Word of God.

The Bible is not merely a bucket or box that has **some** of the Word of God in it all mingled with errors, myths, and such like. Who but fallible, biased, subjective men will decide which contents of the Bible are inspired and which are not if this theory is allowed? Would not the drunkard be sorely tempted to disallow the proscriptions against drunkenness? Would not the fornicator be tempted to edit the prohibitions against fornication as "uninspired?" Advocates of "faith-only" salvation might also thereby get rid of those pesky passages that make baptism a condition of salvation.

### *The "Theme-and-General-Thoughts-Are-Inspired" Theory*

As with the "contains" theory discussed above, no Bible-believer would deny that the general thoughts and concepts of the Bible are inspired. However, also, as with the "contains" view, this view does not go far enough to satisfy the claim of Scripture for its origin. It is not merely inspired in its general direction or in its broad subject matter, but as 2 Timothy 3:16 plainly declares, it is **wholly** inspired – **all** of it was given by God. As with the theistic theories of evolution, men would never have thought of this theory of inspiration had they been content to accept what the Bible teaches (and everywhere demonstrates) concerning its source. It is a

source of disappointment that the generally reliable, conservative, and scholarly *McClintock and Strong* advances this view with considerable vigor as the teaching of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Warfield correctly classifies this view as a part of the “rationalistic” approach to inspiration.<sup>8</sup>

### *The “Personal Inspiration” Theory*

In this view, the Bible writers were enlightened in various degrees, purified morally, and brought into an intimate and immediate communion with God by the Holy Spirit. This new life “on a higher spiritual plane” was then expressed in the things they wrote, and these writings (the Bible) served as God’s revelation of His will to man. The emphasis in this view is upon the moral and religious quality of the writers rather than upon the words they wrote.<sup>9</sup> While agreeing that the men who wrote the Bible were men who sought to live morally pure lives and who had a close relationship with God, this is hardly sufficient to explain the Scriptures. If this were all that was required to produce inspired Scripture, then men of such qualities would have continued to produce authorized additions to the Bible since the close of the first century. The emphasis in Scripture is not on the **men** who wrote the Bible, but upon the **words which they wrote**: “All scripture [i.e., what is written] is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Tim. 3:16).

### *The “Partial Inspiration” Theory*

This theory is similar to the “contains” theory discussed above, but instead of making allowances for errors in the Bible in the form of myths, legends and the like, it allows for errors in matters of science, geography, history and other such “non-religious” subjects. In this view, only the “religious” teachings of the Bible in the areas of doctrine and practice can be attributed to inspiration. Warfield classifies this as another one of the offshoots of the “rationalistic” theory.<sup>10</sup>

This theory obviously ignores or denies the stubborn claim of 2 Timothy 3:16 that **all** Scripture, including its statements on every subject, are from God. (Actually, all views of inspiration that deny plenary or verbal inspiration have in common some claim of mere partial inspiration.)

Men have invented numerous variations of these false theories, but these are the most pronounced. It is quite possible that these counterfeit views of inspiration have done far more damage than all the open and obvious assaults against the inspired Word could or will ever do. They come from theologians who purport to be scholars as well as men of religion. An

uninformed and gullible public has been easily deceived and has had its faith stolen away by them. All suggestions concerning inspiration that deny, ignore, or in any way contradict what the Bible itself teaches must be rejected and exposed as the damnable doctrines they are.

### **The Truth About Inspiration**

Two words come to the forefront when the truth about inspiration is discussed: *plenary* and *verbal*. We will now give some attention to these words.

#### ***Plenary***

*Plenary* is derived from a Latin word which means “full.” To speak of “plenary inspiration” is to indicate that the Scriptures are inspired throughout, in every part, fully, completely. This includes every kind of subject matter (historical, geographical, scientific, ethical, “religious,” etc.) found in the Bible. This claim necessarily implies that there are no contradictions or errors in the Bible. The plenary claim means that God’s guidance of the inspired men extended to the minutest parts, even to the very words they wrote in the original books.

#### ***Verbal***

*Verbal* obviously refers to words. To say that the Scriptures are verbally inspired is to say that the **words themselves**, as they were originally written, are the words the Holy Spirit chose and directed the Bible writers to record. In effect, to contend for verbal inspiration implies plenary inspiration and vice versa.

#### ***Liberalism’s Rejection of These Terms and Their Implications***

All the false theories previously discussed arose out of the various schools of radical and skeptical Biblical criticism and were invented to nullify and circumvent the Bible doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration. The advent of modern Biblical criticism is traceable to the European theologians, Michaelis and Semler in the middle part of the eighteenth century. Its influence did not become widespread until about a century later through the influence of F.C. Baur, Karl H. Graf, and Julius Wellhausen.<sup>11</sup> These skeptics began calling in question almost every previously accepted assurance concerning every part of the Bible as to textual purity, authorship, dating, historicity, and authenticity. The most radical critics gave up even a pretense of belief in any degree of inspiration.

While not all the theologians went that far, the destructive critics most certainly had a telling effect. By the close of the nineteenth century much of the theological scholarship (as the world views it) had been captured by the liberal tenets of Biblical criticism. (Benjamin B. Warfield's monumental book, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, was motivated by this assault upon the Bible. J.W. McGarvey waged war on those same theological termites in his still-valuable book, *Biblical Criticism*.) Obviously, one cannot doubt the authenticity of Scripture and at the same time believe in its inspiration in any full sense at all. The counterfeit theories of inspiration discussed above were put forth by the critics and their disciples in an effort to hold on to some semblance of the doctrine. Again, disappointingly, *McClintock and Strong* goes out of its way in an attempt to overthrow the use of "plenary" and "verbal" in reference to inspiration.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, the rejection of plenary/verbal inspiration has been relatively recent. In a 1957 book, R. Laird Harris commented on the recency of this rejection as follows:

The Bible has withstood many attacks through the centuries from enemies of all sorts. But in the last century it has been called upon to withstand repeated attacks in the house of its friends. The Bible is now freely doubted by the preachers in the pulpits and the teachers in the seminary classrooms of our land.... For centuries the Church had believed what lies upon the face of the Biblical evidence, that the various books of the Bible were written by the authors whose names they bear and were contemporary with the events they narrate, just as they claim to be. The unity of the various books was not questioned, except, perhaps, by an occasional ancient and extreme heretic like Celsus. These views were not seriously challenged until the late eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century quite opposite views came to the fore .... It is safe to say that there is no doctrine, except those of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, which has been so widely held through the ages of Church history as that of verbal inspiration.<sup>13</sup>

Warfield devotes an entire chapter (24 pp.) to "The Church Doctrine of Inspiration," in which he gives irrefragable documentation of the contention of Harris quoted above. A brief summary statement will suffice to show the animation with which he sets forth his evidence (notwithstanding his denominational terminology):

This church-doctrine of inspiration differs from the theories that would fain supplant it, in that it is not the invention nor the property of an individual, but the settled faith of the universal church of God; in that it is not the growth of yesterday, but the assured persuasion of the people of God from the first planting of the church until today; in that it is not a protean shape, varying its affirmations to fit every new change in the ever-shifting thought of men, but from the beginning has been the church's constant and abiding conviction as to the divinity of the Scriptures committed to her keeping. It is certainly a most impressive fact,— this well-defined, aboriginal, stable doctrine of the church as to the nature and trustworthiness of the Scriptures of God, which confronts with its gentle but steady persistence of affirmation all the theories of inspiration which the restless energy of unbelieving and half-believing speculation has been able to invent in this agitated nineteenth

century of ours.... Nor do we need to do more than remind ourselves that this attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures has been characteristic of the people of God from the very foundation of the church.... The earliest writers know no other doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the most persistent and overwhelming evidence proving that Bible believers universally held to a plenary/verbal concept of inspiration until the advent of modern skeptical criticism, some still brazenly deny this to be so fact. Harris refers to this. After commenting on how universal the doctrine of verbal inspiration has been through all the centuries of church history until the past century, he says: "This, however, is by no means the common conception of the situation. Occasionally an effort is made to picture this doctrine as a recent growth...."<sup>15</sup> In their attack on plenary/verbal inspiration, *McClintock and Strong* made the following extreme (and equally erroneous) statement:

The theory of verbal inspiration is comparatively recent in the history of theology. There is no such theory stated in the Scriptures.... The passages adduced in its favor have no pertinence.... It was in the 17th century that the notion of verbal inspiration, which had before only floated about from one individual to another, took the shape of a definite theory, and received proper ecclesiastical sanction.<sup>16</sup>

The only purpose the opponents of plenary/verbal inspiration could have (so far as we can ascertain) in affirming a recent advent of the doctrine is to try to claim that their own flawed theories of inspiration were held by the ancients and that they are therefore "in the mainstream of Christian thought" in holding those views. One simply must ignore or deny the shouting voice of church history to hold such a view. While the length of time a particular doctrine has been believed does not guarantee its truthfulness, both the antiquity and the universality with which men down through the centuries have believed in the plenary/verbal inspiration of the Scriptures most surely should cause one to be slow to abandon it except for overwhelming evidence to the contrary – which evidence does not exist.

Besides rejection of plenary/verbal inspiration by destructive criticism on the claim that it is neither taught in Scripture nor anywhere else until recently, some have rejected it on the grounds that it requires a process of "mechanical dictation" whereby God used the writers as no more than "stenographers." Critics argue that the writing talents and styles of the various authors are clearly distinct from each other, which they allege could not be so were their very words dictated by God. However, the "mechanical dictation" charge is a straw man invented by the faithless critics in an attempt to discredit what the Bible actually teaches about its own origin. Harris remarks on this calumny as follows:

Some caricature the doctrine [of verbal inspiration] by saying that they cannot believe so rigid and mechanical a "dictation theory." Now, rigid the doctrine may be, but it is not



mechanical, unless it be held that the Spirit of God has no ways to work except mechanical ways.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, Warfield answered this charge: “It ought to be unnecessary to protest again against the habit of representing the advocates of ‘verbal inspiration’ as teaching that the mode of inspiration was by dictation.”<sup>18</sup> Now, if the Scriptures set forth “dictation” as the consistent or exclusive mode of plenary/verbal inspiration, then we would have no hesitancy in accepting, advocating, and defending it. (There are, in fact, some places in the Sacred text where it appears that God did directly dictate the words to be written at a given moment [e.g., Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18, et al.].) However, for the most part we are not told **the way** God provided the words of Scripture, but that **He did provide them** is most plainly taught, as we shall later demonstrate.

It is obvious that the inspired writers were able to use their own vocabularies and writing styles, but why should this be thought to conflict with plenary/verbal inspiration? Indeed, it does not, any more than plenary/verbal inspiration demands “mechanical dictation.” Warfield again comments:

The Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will.... By a special, supernatural, extraordinary influence of the Holy Ghost, the sacred writers have been guided in their writing in such a way, as while their humanity was not superseded, it was yet so dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, the inspired men themselves understood that they wrote in different styles, all the while claiming guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. Steve Gibson, though no longer abiding in the Truth, made the following significant observations concerning this fact:

The Bible does not teach that the minds of its writers were suspended or entirely passive (“it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us” [Acts 15:28]; “after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God” [I Cor. 7:40—a statement using irony]; “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” [I Cor. 14:32])). Far from being a recent discovery, the Bible acknowledges such stylistic phenomena in the same breath as it claims inspiration. Peter recognized Paul’s style as more difficult than his own yet classed both as Spirit-controlled writers of Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16; cf. 1:20–21) ....

As sailboats appear to drive themselves, so do inspired men, but in each case there is an unseen propulsion (men “carried along” [2 Pet. 1:21]) .... It is helpful to illustrate inspiration by means of a wagon driver guiding horses by reins. The instincts and inclinations of the animals are not extinguished, but employed by the driver’s guiding hand to take him just where he wants to go. So it is with the Holy Spirit who controlled the style and thought-

patterns of inspired men to give God's very Word (I Cor. 2:13; I The. 2:13). If God could borrow the words and constructions Hebrew and Greek, could He not also employ the manners and style of their speakers?<sup>20</sup>

We have demonstrated that the **rejection** (rather than the **advocacy**) of plenary/verbal inspiration is a relatively recent phenomenon, arising as a result of modern destructive Biblical criticism. We have also seen that the objection to plenary/verbal inspiration on the grounds that it requires belief in "mechanical dictation" from God is no more than a straw man concocted by unbelieving theologians to excuse their humanistic false theories of "inspiration." We come now to consider some of the Biblical claims and evidence concerning inspiration.

### **Biblical Evidence of Inspiration**

We can do little more than survey a small part of the vast amount of evidence that could be considered. By even a mere sampling of this plenitude of evidence, however, the unbiased reader will have no difficulty perceiving what the Bible claims about its own origin.

#### ***Primary Passages***

We have already given some attention to *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16, so our comments here will but briefly supplement that material. The passage simply says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." As earlier noted, the phrase, *inspiration of God*, is from *theopneustos*, but let us turn our attention to other key words in the passage. It is not "part of," "some of," "much of," or "most of" Scripture that is inspired of God, but "**all**." This word refers to every part, the whole, or entirety of that which constitutes "Scripture." The other key word in the passage is "Scripture," (almost exclusively from *graphe* throughout the New Testament). This word appears some fifty times, with about half of the occurrences in the Gospel accounts and half in Acts through Revelation. Warfield wrote concerning term:

In every case it bears that technical sense in which it designates the Scriptures by way of eminence, the Scriptures of the OT.... We need to note in modification of the broad statement, therefore, only that it is apparent from 2 Peter 3:16 (cf. I Tim. 5:18) that the NT writers were well aware that the category "Scripture," in the high sense, included also the writings they were producing, as along with the books of the OT constituting the complete "Scripture" or authoritative Word of God.<sup>21</sup>

*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* observes the following applications of *graphe* in the New Testament:

1. Of the Holy Scriptures, or the collection of individual books—the Old Testament Canon (e. g., Mat. 21:42; 22:29; et al.)
2. Of individual passages of Old Testament Scripture (Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21; et al.)

3. Of the totality of the Old Testament, with emphasis upon the unity of Scripture (Gal. 3:8, 22; 2 Pet. 1:20; et al.)<sup>22</sup>

It is clear then that the “Scriptures,” all of which Paul said were inspired by God, were the Old Testament books.

However, let it be carefully noted that while the primary application of Paul’s immortal statement concerning inspiration was to the Old Testament, by extension, his statement applies to all other books that should likewise come to constitute “Scripture.” It has already been indicated (see Warfield above) that the New Testament writers were conscious that their writings also constituted Scripture and therefore, were also inspired (2 Pet. 3:16; I Tim. 5:18). The very promise that Christ gave the apostles in the upper room necessarily implied that what the apostles taught, whether by tongue or pen, would be inspired, given by the Holy Spirit and would thus constitute “Scripture” (John 16:13; cf. Mat. 10:19–20; 18:18; et al.).

Another passage which sets forth the doctrine of inspiration with unmistakable clarity is 2 Peter 1:20–21: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.” Note several features of this statement:

1. *Prophecy of scripture* is a phrase referring to the entire body of Scripture (just as *all scripture* does in 2 Tim. 3:16). Prophecy sometimes includes the predictive element, but its most essential meaning is of one person’s speaking for another (cf. Exo. 4:15–16). To refer to the “prophecy of scripture” is to declare that it is a message whose messengers have spoken it not from and for themselves, but from and for another.
2. No part of Scripture came from within man nor from man’s private, unaided imagination, reasonings, or “interpretations.” This further emphasizes the very meaning of *prophecy* as just noted.
3. All the Scriptures, rather than coming from men, came from God, who spoke through men.
4. These men who produced Scripture were “moved” (*phero*, carried or borne along) by the Holy Spirit to produce the Scriptures. In this word we have the explanation of the source of the “prophecy of scripture” (primarily referring to the Old Testament) and how fallible men could produce an infallible book.

With *McClintock and Strong* we heartily agree concerning the application of both key passages: “These passages relate specially to the Old Testament, but there is at least equal reason to predicate divine inspiration of the New Testament.”<sup>23</sup> A more definitive and simple explanation of inspiration could not be desired than that which is set forth in these two

passages. To those who have trusted the Bible through the centuries these have been quite sufficient. However, the evidence abounds far beyond these straightforward claims.

### ***Old Testament Claims***

What Paul and Peter declared concerning the source of the Scriptures in the passages just discussed is everywhere claimed in the Old Testament by its authors, who constantly claimed that their message was from God. God communicated with Moses “mouth to mouth,... not in dark speeches” (Num. 12:8). God told Isaiah: “And I have put my words in thy mouth...” (Isa. 51:16). Jeremiah explained the source of his message: “The Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:9). Likewise, Ezekiel declared: “And he [the Lord] said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them” (Eze. 3:4). These claims are representative of all the 39 Old Testament documents. It has been calculated that the expression, *thus saith the Lord*, or a like expression occurs 3,808 times in the Old Testament. How truly the majestic opening statement of Hebrews summarizes what the Old Testament says of its own origin: “God ... at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1).

### ***How Jesus and the New Testament Authors Viewed the Old Testament***

What our Lord believed and taught about inspiration is crucial. If he expressed doubt concerning the Old Testament Scriptures or if he openly taught that they were a collection of uninspired documents which had evolved to their present state, and included myths, fables, historical errors, and such like, we would be forced to sit up and take notice. In fact, if this were the case, we could not believe in Him without likewise rejecting the Old Testament claim of inspiration. Further, if He had known the Old Testament to be fraudulent concerning its claims of authorship, authenticity and inspiration, but accommodated Himself to the “superstition” of His day which held the books to be from God, He would Himself have been dishonest and a deceiver of others. Such a man would not be fit to be Son of God or Savior. However, if He, as the sinless Son of God – Truth personified (John 14:6) – always treated the Old Testament canon in all of its parts with reverence and respect, ever ascribing them to His Father, and always upholding their authority as the Word of God, then we cannot believe in Him without the fullest belief in the inspiration and veracity of those Scriptures.

What did He teach concerning the Scriptures? We may summarize by saying that every word He spoke in reference to them was one calculated to credit them to God and to attribute to them the authority of God. In the temptations of the Lord and on numerous other occasions He quoted Scripture, with the significant introductory phrase, *It is written...* (Mat. 4:4, 7, 10; Mark 7:6; Luke 19:46; et al.). Warfield commented on this formula as follows:

The implication [is] that what is thus said or written is of Divine and final authority.... The simple adduction in this solemn and decisive manner of a written authority, carries with it the implication that the appeal is made to the indefectible authority of the Scriptures of God, which in all their parts and in every one of their declarations are clothed with the authority of God Himself.<sup>24</sup>

Another significant statement of Christ concerning the Old Testament is found in the early part of the Sermon on the Mount:

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 5:17–19).

Note that He identified the entire Old Testament by the customary title, *law and prophets*. Then, concerning them, He said His purpose was not to destroy, but to fulfill them. This statement at the same time shows His love, respect, and even protective attitude toward them, and His acknowledgement that they contained predictive statements concerning Himself and His coming into the world. Further, He expressed His unmitigated confidence in every portion of them, not only in every single word or letter, but even down to the **parts** of the individual letters in the words (for so *jot* and *tittle* signify). Further still, He proclaimed the absolute authority of the Old Testament (until such a time as He would fulfill it) by pronouncing a curse upon anyone who should presume to break even the “least” of its commandments or teach others to do so and a corresponding blessing upon those who would do and teach its precepts. Behind this remarkable statement of confidence in and respect for the “law and the prophets” is the implicit thesis that those books were (and are) from God and must be hallowed as His Word.

The statement of Jesus in John 10:34–36 cannot be omitted even from a brief survey of His attitude toward the Old Testament:

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), say ye of him, whom

the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

The whole appeal of Jesus in answering the calumny of the Jews (who were accusing Him of blasphemy and were threatening to stone Him) was to Scripture. First, He called the Scripture “law,” although the passage to which He pointed them is in the Psalms (82:6). In doing this, he attributed, by implication, legal authority to Scripture in its entirety. Nor is this the only place in which He did so (see John 15:25). Thus, just as Peter characterized all of Scripture as “prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:20), the Lord characterized it all as “law” (cf. I Cor. 14:21; Rom. 3:19).

Second, the Lord in this statement made the categorical affirmation, “The scripture cannot be broken.” This is the reason He appealed to the law in his argument with the Jews. What the law said could not be annulled, overturned, broken; its authority could not be withstood. This being so, the statement from the Psalm that was cited must be accepted by them as absolutely authoritative.

Third, notice that the statement to which the Lord appealed in the Psalm is one of (I intend no irreverence for any word of Scripture) remoteness and insignificance, relatively speaking. This being so, it indicates with great force that Jesus’ confidence in the Scriptures carried down to their most casual statements and parts as all being infallibly given by God.

We must not pass from this summary without giving at least brief attention to some of the last words Jesus spoke to the apostles before His Ascension:

And he said unto them, These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:44–47).

Note the following:

1. That which He designated “the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms” (v. 44) He likewise identified as “the scriptures” (v. 45), referring to the entire corpus of the Old Testament.
2. The *things...which are written* (v. 44) and *it is written* (v. 46) (as earlier noticed) are references to that which God has said and which was to be accepted as unquestionably reliable and authoritative. Where were these things written? In “the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms” and in “the scriptures,” which He had just mentioned.

3. He said that **all** things would be fulfilled which the Scriptures spoke concerning Himself (v. 44). His confidence in the Old Testament could not be so perfect did He not attribute all of it to God.

Space allows us only to mention in passing that all the New Testament writers followed the Lord perfectly in their evaluation of the Old Testament as from God. Just as Jesus insisted that the Scriptures must be fulfilled, so did the writers of the Gospel accounts and of Acts (e. g., Mat. 25:56; Mark. 15:28; Luke 3:4; John 12:38; Acts 1:16).

Paul's letters are so filled with quotations from the Old Testament on the basis that it was revealed and inspired by God that we need not even cite examples. Additionally, there is his unabashed declaration of the inspiration of Scripture which we have already discussed (2 Tim. 3:16). Likewise, Peter frequently quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures, in addition to making the comprehensive claim as to their source (2 Pet. 1:20–21), also previously discussed at some length. Neither James nor Jude neglected to refer frequently to the Old Testament records with the fullest confidence in their statements. It may be said without fear of successful contradiction that the Lord and all the New Testament writers without exception treat the Old Testament as the Very Word of God, even to its most minute portions of alphabetic markings and to its most remote and casual statements. This treatment is precisely what is meant by plenary/verbal inspiration.

### *The Inspiration of the New Testament*

Does the New Testament acknowledge and claim God as its source, as does the Old Testament? It does so in most certain and absolute terms. Two passages that have only been mentioned now deserve fuller attention.

First, consider Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 5:18:

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.  
And, The laborer is worthy of his hire."

Notice that both of these proverbial statements are called "Scripture." Interesting, however, is the fact that only the first of them is found in the Old Testament (Deu. 25:4). The second was spoken by Jesus (Mat. 10:10; Luke 10:7). Clearly, Paul called the words of Jesus **which had been written down in two New Testament books**, "Scripture." William Hendriksen is correct: "The two sayings are clearly co-ordinate. If the first is "scripture," so is the second. Thus, a word spoken by Jesus [and recorded in two New Testament books, DM] is here placed on a par with a saying from the Old Testament canon."<sup>25</sup>

The second passage is 2 Pet. 3:15–16:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Peter referred to the letters of Paul as difficult to understand in places. He said that certain ones even twisted some of his statements, as they did “the other scriptures.” It is manifest that Peter here designated the epistles of Paul “Scripture” on a par with all the Old Testament. Note that he also stated that Paul wrote not out of his own human wisdom, but “according to the wisdom given to him.”

The New Testament writers were conscious that their writings were not merely their own opinions, but the words and commands God gave them to deliver. Were this not so we would not have any authoritative commands, only polite suggestions, in the epistles. Yet not a one of the epistles (excepting Philemon) is free of authoritative orders. Paul was not only conscious of the authority of his letters, but of the source of that authority – He was speaking for God, the Word of God. He makes the definitive claim that the words which he spoke (whether by tongue or pen) were not from man: “Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13). Not only is this a claim of inspiration, but of “word” (verbal) inspiration, else words mean nothing at all. He again stated to the Corinthians the authority behind his words: “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Paul makes the same sort of claim in 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe.

Note, the message Paul preached (and wrote) was not the “word of men,” but “in truth, the word of God.” No wonder he was not hesitant to write as follows in his second letter to them: “Now we **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after **the tradition which they received of us**” (2 The. 3:6, emph. DM). First, he issued a firm command, but on the authority of Christ, not his own (three other times in the same chapter he referred to commands he had given them: vv. 4, 10, 12). Additionally, the standard of behavior set before



them was none other than “the traditions” they had received of Paul, that is, the message he had taught them by pen and tongue. This same consciousness of authority and of Divine inspiration is clearly behind Peter’s statement: “That ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2). Peter here put the words of the apostles on equal footing, not only with the prophets of old, but with the words of the Lord.

When Jude exhorted the brethren to “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), he touched on at least three points relating to inspiration:

1. “The faith” (the whole body of New Testament teaching, the Gospel) was not thought up or invented by mere men. Rather, it was “**delivered** to the saints.”
2. “The faith” was “once **for all** delivered to the saints.” This means that once the body of literature denominated “the faith” was completed there would be no more. Like the Old Testament, “the faith” (the New Testament) would be confined only to those documents thus “delivered.”
3. “The faith” was to be defended and protected with great energy. This was so because of its priceless worth due both to its origin and its contents, not being **produced by** the saints, but being **delivered to** the saints by the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

With one final passage we will conclude this brief survey of the indications of New Testament inspiration. Almost the closing words of the New Testament (and of the Bible) are a resounding testimony to the inspiration of the entire Bible:

I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18–19).

It is obvious that these warnings primarily apply to the book of Revelation itself, which warnings constitute a powerful and positive declaration that this book is not the message of a man, but of God. In this and this alone is the explanation of such stringent warnings not to tamper with a single word (yes, “**verbal**” inspiration is most surely implied). It is called a book of “prophecy” twice, in the same sense that the Old Testament is composed of books of prophecy – books of men who wrote/spoke for God with the message of God.

However, this sober dual warning by implication is appropriately applies to all the Bible. All of its books, like the book of Revelation, are prophecy, given by God. They all, in one way or another, promise plagues (eventuating in eternal torment) and exclusion from the

paradise of heaven to those who would dare tamper with a single word of the inspired text so as to change its teaching. Like the Revelation, the actual words of all the Bible were given by God and must be preserved unchanged throughout.

## Conclusion

Warfield sums up the ungodly work of the false theorists well:

Wherever five “advanced thinkers” assemble, at least six theories as to inspiration are likely to be ventilated. They differ in every conceivable point, or in every conceivable point save one. They agree that inspiration is less pervasive and less determinative than has heretofore been thought, or than is still thought in less enlightened circles. They agree that there is less of the truth of God and more of the error of man in the Bible than Christians have been wont to believe. They agree accordingly that the teaching of the Bible may be, in this, that, or the other, — here, there, or elsewhere, — safely neglected or openly repudiated. So soon as we turn to the constructive side, however, and ask wherein the inspiration of the Bible consists; how far it guarantees the trustworthiness of the Bible’s teaching; in what of its elements is the Bible a divinely safeguarded guide to truth: the concurrence ends and hopeless dissension sets in. They agree only in the common destructive attitude towards some higher view of the inspiration of the Bible, of the presence of which each once seems supremely conscious.<sup>26</sup>

We have for some time had among us our own class of “advanced thinkers” and their numbers are growing. A Herald of Truth television sermon delivered by brother Harold Hazelip contained the following assessment of the Bible:

“We are assuming that it [the Bible] is the inspired word of God, though this certainly is also an area in which we should be open to whatever facts are pertinent. Any observer of religion is aware that our problem is a legitimate one.”<sup>27</sup>

As early as 1975 brother Leroy Garrett referred to “jars and conflicts” that were “abundant in scripture” and depicted the Bible as a book that was not “some sort of heavenly document that escapes man’s imperfect handiwork.” However, he assures us, “there are no errors or mistakes that really matter.”<sup>28</sup>

John T. Willis, long time professor in the religion department of Abilene Christian University, affirms that “the Bible **contains** the word of God, but not ordinarily or absolutely as it is ordinarily read.”<sup>29</sup> In another swipe at inspiration, he declared: “The Bible claims to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). There is **no way to prove or disprove this claim** absolutely [emph. DM], although arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue.”<sup>30</sup> Let it not be lost on the reader that this man molded the convictions of unsuspecting Christian young people by the hundreds each year for many years. He is not the only such professor in the Bible

departments of Christian universities. In numerous “sophisticated” congregations, if the preacher preached a strong sermon advocating the plenary/verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, he would either be laughed out of the pulpit or figuratively “tarred and feathered,” if not both in that order. The loss of faith in Biblical inspiration promises to pose an increasing problem among the saints.

Through the centuries skeptics of every stripe have waged a relentless battle in their effort to undermine the inspiration of the Bible. Until fairly recent times all such men made no pretense at believing in God or even in being religious. As we have shown, the more recent attacks have arisen from the Biblical critics. These have been more dangerous because they have come from supposedly religious men, yea, even from teachers of religion. Their numerous false theories of inspiration, for all their effort, have not weakened, destroyed, or otherwise changed a single piece of evidence upon which the doctrine that the Bible is the plenary, verbally inspired Word of God has stood and does stand. Although they have robbed many men and women of their faith, it is not because their case is so strong and the Bible is vulnerable to their ungodly attacks, but because the faith of men and women has been so weak. We must never give up the priceless Truth of inspiration, for, having surrendered that, we will have surrendered all.

### Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
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3. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1948), p. 131.
4. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Inspiration,” by J. I. Packer.
5. Warfield, p 112–113.
6. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1871; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969), 4:613–14.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 614–15.
8. *Ibid.*, Warfield.
9. *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, 1937 ed., s.v. “Inspiration,” by Alfred E. Garvie.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
11. *Ibid.*, *Dictionary*, Hastings, s.v. “Criticism,” by W. F. Adeney.
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13. R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1957), pp. 22–23, 72.
14. *Ibid.*, Warfield, pp. 106–108.
15. *Ibid.*, Harris, p. 72.
16. *Ibid.*, McClintock and Strong.
17. *Ibid.*, Harris, p. 20.

18. Ibid., Warfield, p. 173, fn. 9.
19. Ibid., pp. 173, 422.
20. Steve Gibson, *Studies in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1988), pp. 318–19.
21. Ibid., Warfield, pp. 231–32.
22. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, s.v., “*Graphe*,” by Gottlob Schrenk.
23. Ibid, McClintock and Strong, 4:612.
24. Ibid., Warfield, pp. 239–40.
25. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary – Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 181.
26. Ibid., Warfield, p. 105.
27. Harold Hazelip, Herald of Truth TV sermon no. 986 (“The Search for Truth”), as quoted in “Highland Report,” *Contending for the Faith*, ed. Ira Y. Rice, Jr., 4 (Nov. 1973), p. 7.
28. Leroy Garrett, *Restoration Review* (Oct. 1, 1975), pp. 150–51.
29. John T. Willis, “Men Spoke from God (3),” *Firm Foundation* (Dec. 16, 1980), p. 807.
30. Idem, *The World and Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. John T. Willis (Austin, TX: Sweet Pub., Co., 1979), p. 11.

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