

CHAPTER 4

DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION

Claim of inspiration

According to 2 Tim 3:16, “all Scripture” is “God-breathed,” or, as is normally translated, is “inspired by God.” The word “inspired” (θεόπνευστος *theopneustos*) is coined from two Greek words, θεός *theos* (God) and πνέω *pneo* (to breathe; cf. πνεῦμα *pneuma*, often “spirit or Spirit,” but can be “breath,” as in 2 Thess 2:8). The term actually can be better understood as “breathed out.” Thus this passage teaches that the Bible is the product of the direct creative breath of God (cf. Gen 2:7; Ps 33:6).

[For an excellent discussion of this passage, see B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ch. 6, “God-Inspired Scripture.”]

Likewise, 2 Pet 1:20-21 states that men “spoke from God” when they were making the prophecies of old. They did this “as they were being borne along (φερόμενοι *pheromenoi*) by the Holy Spirit,” using the same term used of a sailing ship being carried by the wind (Acts 27:15).

We note that this claim is made not for the writers themselves in all their various actions and statements, but for the Scripture. Peter, for example, was not correct in his actions in Antioch regarding table fellowship, and was rebuked by Paul (Gal 2). This claim is not even made for other writings these same authors may have produced. Paul, for example, wrote at least one other letter, not preserved in the canon of the NT (cf. 1 Cor 5:9). As valuable as these writings would be, they are not inspired in the biblical sense.

Holistic nature of inspiration

God inspired Scripture by using all the circumstances surrounding the writing of Scripture to bring the result he desired.

[For extended treatment, see Louis Gaussen, *Theopneustia: The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (1841), reprinted as *God-Breathed: The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Trinity Foundation, 2001).]

Preparation of writers

The authors of Scripture were prepared by God:

- Their birth and circumstances
- Their training, education
- Their character
- Their conversion, sanctification
- Their ministry
- Their circumstances of writing

All the Bible writers can be analyzed this way. Good examples of God's preparation include Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Amos, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, Matthew, Paul, John.

Moving to write

Not only were the authors capable to write, having been prepared in the way God had planned, but they also were moved to write in that particular circumstance. Their personality and concern for the church and the testimony of Christ compelled them to take pen in hand and write whatever God had previously planned should be written.

For example, Moses desperately desired that the Israelites follow Yahweh after his death; so he prepared for them the books of the law. David was taken up with praise to God, and wanted to see God praised by beautiful music in the temple; hence, he produced many of the Psalms. The prophets often were filled with burning desire to declare God's word to their fellow Israelites (cf. Jer 20:9; Ezek 3:4-27). Paul was so concerned for the Galatian church and stirred up by the unholy actions of the Judaizers that he felt compelled to write the book of Galatians. Luke was in a position to render a valuable service to the church by writing his orderly account of the movement of Christianity from its beginning with Jesus in Palestine to its reaching Rome in the preaching of Paul. Luke had the motivation, the occasion, and the ability, and the Lord provided the means; so Luke and Acts were written.

In none of these cases did the Lord overpower the will of the author and force him to write when he would have rather been doing something else. Rather, he used the mind, emotions, and will of each author, so that each author wrote from his own heart out of his own desire.

Guiding the process

Neither did God overpower each writer's own talents and personality. Each writer fully employed his own talent, style, and approach to his book. However, at the same time, God guided each writer to select the material God desired selected, to develop it the way God intended, and to prevent him from making any error as he wrote.

2 Pet 1:21 states that the Bible writers “spoke from God,” and that they were “moved along by the Holy Spirit.” The term for “moved along” (φερόμενοι *pheromenoi*) is used in Acts 27:15 for a ship being “driven along” by a great wind. God supplies the motive and power. This verse also states that “no prophecy ever came by the will of man.” While men desired to write the Bible books, it was God who had determined that they would write, and what that writing should be; thus they “spoke from God.” Yet, as their own testimony declares and their varying styles attest, God led them by using their own minds, speech patterns, ideas, etc.

As the many verses from Scripture attesting to its authority and truthfulness indicate, God preserved the writers free from error as they wrote Scripture. This was a practical necessity, since it would be impossible to authoritatively quote an errant document; and it was a theological necessity, since the Bible, as God's revelation, must reflect his truthfulness.

Resulting definition of inspiration

— (Descended from the traditional Princetonian definition):

“Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which he guided the writers of the books of the Scriptures, so that their words should convey the thought he wished conveyed, should bear a proper relationship to the thought of other inspired books, and should be kept free from errors of fact, doctrine, and judgment.”

Observations from this definition

(Points in this section from lecture by Dr. Allan A. MacRae, Faith Theological Seminary, Philadelphia):

- 1) Inspiration in theology is a technical term.
- 2) Inspiration should be kept distinct from other acts of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Inspiration is only claimed for the writings; the writers were fallible.

- 4) Inspiration should be contrasted to revelation as to extent. (Revelation—parts given through direct revelation; inspiration—all of Bible inspired)
- 5) Inspiration is plenary and verbal. (Refers to all ideas expressed; ideas are based on the actual words used)
- 6) The fact that the Scripture is verbally inspired does not justify taking any sentence apart from its context.
- 7) Inspiration refers to the original manuscripts. (Errors in all copies and translations; present situation forces us to compare Scripture with Scripture, get an over-all view; Van Til's illustration of water on the bridge)
- 8) Inspiration brings unity to the Bible.
- 9) There is a human and a divine element in inspiration.
- 10) Inspiration involves a number of different steps:
 - a) Selection of the writers (only 4 of 13 apostles wrote in the NT)
 - b) Preparation of their lives
 - c) Sometimes direct revelations to the writers
 - d) General guidance in selection of subjects and materials
 - e) The most unique feature of inspiration: a negative feature—keeping errors out of what was written

E.g., OT writers might have thought earth was flat, but that idea not taught in the OT; *1 Clement* to the Corinthians (first Apostolic Father) gives Phoenix illustration as true
- 11) Inspiration does not mean dictation.
 - a) Dictation is nowhere claimed except for certain particular revelations.
 - b) The differences of personal style and approach argue strongly against dictation.
 - c) The resulting material is just as true as if it had been dictated.

- 12) Inspiration applies equally to all parts of the Scripture (all is true; all parts are valuable, though not necessarily equally valuable, for all time)
- 13) Inspiration results in making the entire Bible a revelation from God.
- 14) It is not always necessary to try to prove to an unbeliever that the Bible is infallible; rather, salvation is necessary. Christ's authority is the basis of our acceptance of Scripture.
- 15) (This point mentioned in A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration*) It is not necessary for inspiration that the words used in Scripture be the best possible words to express the ideas being conveyed, only that they be adequate words to convey those ideas.

Inadequate definitions of inspiration

Many critics of the Bible deny any biblical inspiration exists. However, many others teach that the Bible is inspired, but in some limited or extreme sense.

- 1) Ordinary inspiration—similar to great writings; popular meaning of “inspired writing”; similar to “inspiring”; e.g., Shakespeare
- 2) Limited inspiration—parts of Bible inspired, other parts not inspired
- 3) Graded inspiration—parts of Bible more inspired in degree than other parts of Bible
- 4) Dynamic inspiration—thoughts are inspired, but words not particularly inspired (this position similar to Neo-orthodoxy, but not identical)
- 5) Moral inspiration—the religious or salvational parts of Bible inspired; other parts of Bible subject to error (as scientific or historical statements; position of Dan Fuller, *et. al.*)
- 6) Dictated inspiration—God dictated words of Bible; little or no input from human authors