

In what Way is the Bible Inspired and Authoritative?

by Todd Fink

With the firm conviction now established that God has revealed Himself through the various writers of Scripture, the prophets, and the apostles regarding His redemptive plan for mankind, the question now regards how this revelation given in the past could be preserved and transmitted to generations in the future in need of this special revelation from God? Both Judaism and Christianity state that God preserved His revelation in the Bible by the Holy Spirit's oversight and power. Since the Bible is the inspired revelation from God and forms the foundation for all authentic understanding of who God and who mankind are, to understand this truth is paramount to both God and man.

Alternative Proposals in the Church

Roman Catholic Scholasticism - Traditional Roman Catholic theology embraced in principle that Scripture was divine in origin, inspiration, and inerrancy. However, even though this belief was held in principle, it was undermined by what has been viewed as a reckless nonliteral interpretation of the Bible by medieval Roman authorities. In addition, there were many papal decretals, laws, and judgments, which placed the Roman church above the Scriptures in practice.

Protestant Liberalism - Liberal Protestants have denied altogether the special revelation of God as inspired, sacred documents. To them, they focus on the frailty of the authors and disbelieve the supernatural ability of God to preserve His word.

Neoorthodox Theology - While Neo-orthodoxy views the Bible as a witness to the word of God, it believes that the view of plenary inspiration grants too much to Scripture and too little to God. It holds that conservative theology has a tendency to view the Bible as a paper pope. It holds that one shouldn't make the mistake of equating the Bible with the Word of God and even attacks the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

Vatican II Catholicism - Their view of Scripture has been influenced by Protestant neo-orthodoxy and limits the truthfulness and authority of the Bible to the teachings that mainly pertain to salvation. They believe that the biblical authors were not divinely programmed penmen and focus on their human weakness in their attempt to testify to their divine encounters. They hold that the Bible is just man's word, has errors and confusion within it, and has no single text that is free from error.

"Liberal" Evangelicals - Some evangelicals limit the truthfulness and authority of the Bible to the teachings that deal with salvation. C.S. Lewis proposed and inspiration with different modes and levels of degrees of inspiration. Others within this camp lean towards different degrees of inspiration as well and that not all of Scripture is equally inspired or trustworthy.

Protestant Fundamentalism – Holds to the view that the Bible was given by divine dictation by God and that the writers functioned as secretaries of the Holy Spirit. Through these human authors God gave the very words, He wanted to communicate and even prepared the writers in advance so they would be the perfect instrument in their human makeup to communicate God’s sovereign word as He desired.

Most Fathers, Reformers, and Evangelicals – Believe that God supernaturally used the human authors of Scripture so that they wrote the exact words God desired but at the same time. God also took into account their human makeup and abilities and used these to communicate the very words He desired mankind to know. The only errors that are admitted as possibilities in the Scripture by this group are copyist errors.

Biblical Teaching

Pentateuch – At Mt. Sinai God commanded Moses to write down all the laws and statutes God gave him. This was known as “Book of the Covenant.” Later on, God called Moses to go up the mountain and receive the two tablets of stone on which was written the law of God by God’s own finger. Several times God commanded Moses to write down the words of the covenant He made with Israel. These writings and the Book of the Law were to be placed by the Ark of the Covenant. The words Moses wrote were not his own words but the words of God.

Historical Books – God continued to speak through His servants, and their writings came to be viewed as divinely authoritative and placed alongside the Ark of the Covenant like the writings of Moses as well. These writers included the likes of Joshua, Samuel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Poetry and Wisdom – Of the many places the Bible claims to be inspired, the poetry literature holds some of the richest allusions to this truth. Psalm 12:6, says that, “the words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times” (Ps. 12:6 ESV). In addition, Psalm 19: 7-14, is a beautiful exposition of the perfection of God’s word and its inspiration and authority. Proverbs 30:5, also talks about how God’s word is true and worthy of our full trust and confidence.

The Prophets – The rest of the Old Testament holds many claims regarding God’s orders to write down and preserve His words. Isaiah was told to record what God had revealed to him on a scroll so that it might be preserved and become a continual witness to all. Jeremiah claimed that the message God gave him came directly from God and that he was to write them down in a book. Many of the other major and minor prophets claim the same as well.

Synoptic Gospels – One of the most convincing proofs that the Old Testament was inspired, preserved, and infallible is due to the fact that Christ referred to every section of the Old Testament and almost every book as God’s word. He even debated using single words rather than just paragraphs or chapters. The synoptic Gospels assume and take for

granted that the Old Testament is authoritative and true. Interestingly, if the amount of copies we have of the Old Testament is fewer than what we have of the New Testament, and Christ alluded to the Old Testament as inspired and true, how much more can we be certain that the New Testament is inspired and preserved as well?

Primitive Christianity/Acts – In the same way the synoptic Gospels refer to the Old Testament as inspired and preserved by God, so the early church and the book of Acts confirms the same. Both Peter and John attest to this truth along with Paul and the rest of the apostles of the early church.

The Pauline Corpus – Paul provides some very strong arguments as well for the inspired, preserved Word of God in his writings. One the most convincing is 2 Tim. 3:16. In this verse, God reveals that “all” Scripture is inspired and God breathed. It is useful for all aspects of the Christian life and church so that the servant of God may be complete and lacking nothing. Romans 3:2, also confirms this truth where the Apostle Paul labors the truth regarding the advantage of being a Jew where he says that, “they have been entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2 ESV).

The Johannine Literature – Several texts within this category teach divine inspiration, authority, and preservation of Scripture. John 5:45-47, teach that the written record of Moses is equal to Scripture and designated as the Father’s “word.” Christ said in John 10:35, that “the Scripture cannot be broken,” and in John 8:31, 32, that, “Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth’. These verses clearly show that Christ viewed the Old Testament as the inspired, infallible word of God. The book of Revelation states as well that the vision given to John was true and that he was to write it down. And lastly, the book of Revelation closes with the warning to not alter in any way the text of the prophecy given.

Other New Testament Writings – In the first chapter of Hebrews alone there are seven references to the Old Testament as the sayings and words of God. Later on, Moses, David, words from the Psalms, and Jeremiah are quoted as the words of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews chapter eleven is a summary in part recounted the great faith and acts of the Old Testament men and women and are taken as truthful and trustworthy accounts. The Apostle Peter makes one of the most powerful claims to inspiration and preservation of Scripture in 2 Pet. 19-21 when he says that, “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:19-21 ESV). Here it is so clearly stated that no prophecy or message from God originated from man but instead, was given by the will of God in accordance with His divine revelation and preservation.

Systematic Formulation

The Inscripturation of “Revelation by Inspired Prophets – Although Christ left no biblical writings of His own, consistently used the Old Testament as the basis for His life

and ministry purposes. Jesus recognized Scripture as the final authority of the Spirit-inspired prophetic writings of the Old Testament. He stated that the Law and Prophets could not be abolished and that all of it must be fulfilled and believed.

The Canon of Prophetic Writings – The way in which the divine authority of Old Testament books were established was whether or not they came through a tested and verified prophet. These prophets were verified through short range prophecies that came true and therefore established them as truthful. These verified prophets would then be verified to speak on God's behalf for prophecies both short and long range in nature and for other messages of judgment and promises God had for His people. Jesus Christ recognized the entire Jewish canon of Scripture as from the Lord. He referred to the three major divisions of the Old Testament (Law of Moses or the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings) as the very word of God that could not be broken and must be fulfilled.

The Text of the Prophet's Inspired Writings

Taking into account that the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are the inspired and authoritative, how can we know that we have the reliable manuscripts that Christ approved? This been done in part by painstaking examination of the "Dead Sea Scrolls" and the Cairo Geniza. They have been shown to be many times greater in validity than for other ancient documents. In fact, the Hebrew Bible that Christ referred to was basically the same one that was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, Israel in 1947. In addition, it has already been mentioned that Christ referred to this same Bible in His teaching and work.

The Inscripturation of Revelation by Apostles – Not only did Christ give His seal of approval on the Old Testament as the inspired word of God, but He also granted to His disciples the unique power of being commissioned for this continuing task as well. Christ said in Matt. 28 that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him and He was, therefore, commissioning His disciples to carry on the work of evangelism and preservation of His word. We see this commission of not only preaching and teaching, but in writing as well. The letters of the Apostles found in the Gospels, those of Paul's writings, Peter, James, John, and others, show that God continued to inspire and preserve His word through His close followers. Paul stated that the Gospel he had received was not something made up by man, but received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11, 12).

Truth and Error in Apostolic Writings – Not only do we have the writings of the Apostles as verified and authorized by Christ, but by their own claims that their writings were authoritative and inspired as well. These are proven by three affirmations: (1) Their teachings are presented as empirically reliable, (2) as existentially viable, and (3) logically non-contradictory.

The Supernaturalness of Apostolic Inspiration – God, took the human authors who had frailties, varied styles of writing, differing vocabularies, cultural backgrounds and more into consideration when He wrote through them. God supernaturally used these human authors to bring about the exact words He desired to be communicated and was not hindered by their weaknesses. A providential, sovereign God can carry this out with the

least of efforts and be glorified in using weak, human instruments in His plan to inspire and preserve His word.

The Canon of Apostolic Writings – The question now arises as to whether or not we have the proper books in the New Testament Canon. Twenty of the twenty-seven books were immediately known by the early church to be from authentic, divine spokesmen, being that of the apostles. Of the seven that remained, they were later fully accepted by the universal church by the third century.

The Text of Apostolic Writings

The question also arises as to whether or not we have today the same wording in the copies of the Scripture as the original manuscripts? And what difference does inerrancy mean if we don't even have the original copies anyway? While we don't have the original manuscripts and therefore haven't seen them, this doesn't mean that others close to the time of their writings didn't. Tertullian, in about 200 A.D., said the originals of the New Testament could still be inspected. This means there would have been countless others who seen them as well and verified their authenticity. If the early church had a large part in verifying the authenticity of the letters and their inclusion into the canon by qualified writers, then this gives incredible trust to the authenticity of these writings. In addition, the different families of manuscripts are in basic agreement. While there are small differences that likely occurred by the countless copying of them that took place, some might argue that God permitted this so that the originals wouldn't have been enshrined and worshiped. These differences, however, as pointed out by J.H. Greenlee, are so slight and small that no meaning is altered.