

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE And WHY WE BELIEVE IT IS GOD'S WORD

by

W. H. Griffith Thomas

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CHAPTER NINE

INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

THE basis of our acceptance of the Bible is the belief that it embodies a divine revelation. But at once the question arises as to how the authority of this revelation is expressed. This brings us to the problem of Inspiration.

At the outset two things should be said:

- (1) If we accept the Authority of Scripture we really need not trouble about any particular theory of Inspiration, but
- (2) If we seek to know as fully as we can what Inspiration means we should confine ourselves strictly to facts, since Inspiration when properly understood is not a theory, but a fact.

It is something we accept, whether we can explain it or not.

1. The Source of the Bible - We believe that the Bible comes from a divine Source. The Old Testament prophets claimed to be the recipients of divine revelation.

- **"The word of the Lord came";**
- **"The Lord spake";**
- **"The word of God";**
- **"God said";**
- **"The Lord commanded."**

Phrases like these are found nearly seven hundred times in the Pentateuch alone, and they are scattered throughout the Scriptures no less than three thousand times altogether.

There is one verse, which, whatever else it means, certainly makes this plain: II Samuel 23:2, **"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was on my tongue."**

In harmony with this, we have a claim in the New Testament of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In some passages there is no reference to the human writer of the Scripture, but only to the divine Author.

In Hebrews 3:7, we read, "**The Holy Spirit saith.**" This refers to Psalm 95, which was, of course, written by a man, David or some one else, and yet there is no reference at all to a human author. This use shows that the writer is concerned, not with what the Psalmist said, but with the Holy Spirit's utterances, and this means that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture.

The attitude of the New Testament to the Old Testament shows the same truth.

Over fifty times in the New Testament, is the Old Testament spoken of as of divine origin and authority, and always with the deference due to this fact (Romans 3:2; Matthew 22:29; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:25-27, 44-46).

2. The Instruments of the Bible - The Holy Spirit used men as the instruments of divine revelation.

There are a number of passages where the divine and the human are mentioned; where the distinction is drawn very clearly between the divine Author and the human instrument.

Thus:

- In Matthew 1:22, we have "**Spoken of the Lord by the prophet,** "
- In Acts 1:16, "**The Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David,**"
- In II Peter 1:21, "**Holy men of old spake as they were moved [carried along] by the Holy Ghost.**"

So that as the instruments of the Spirit's work, the men were first the speakers, and then the writers of divine revelation. And yet "*instrument*" does not mean passivity, as "*pens*," but rather, the thought is expressed by the word in the case of penmen. Inspiration is a concursus of the divine and human.

3. The Media of the Bible - I do not know any other term than this that will better express my idea. I mean the words of the men (II Peter 1:21). The men themselves are not alive now, and if we are to be in touch with their revelation, it must be through their words; and if we are to be sure of the revelation from GOD, then for us today we must be sure of what the men wrote, as they are not here to speak for themselves.

Let us notice II Timothy 3:16: "**All Scripture is inspired [God-breathed].**"

GOD, somehow or other, breathed into these writings, and therefore we are concerned with words.

Now look at I Corinthians 2:13. Dr. Forsyth says the chapter is classic for the apostolic view of inspiration.

Mark this: "**Words which the Holy Ghost teacheth.**"

Could anything be more definite and clear than this? Not the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but the words which "**the Holy Ghost teacheth.**" And so there is an intimate, a necessary connection, between thoughts and words. Whether it be for our own thinking, or for intercourse between man and man, thoughts must be expressed in words. So when we speak of the media of the Bible, we are concerned with words.

But some one says: Does not this mean "*verbal inspiration*"? Well, we can call it verbal inspiration if we like, or we can call it *plenary inspiration*, if we prefer, so long as we do not call it dictation. When a man dictates a letter to his secretary, he does not inspire her. It is mechanical dictation, and he expects her to reproduce exactly what he tells her. But in Scripture we do not have mechanical dictation, but inspiration; and whether we call it verbal or plenary, the phrase is not intended to say how GOD does it, but how far it has gone.

It means that inspiration extends to the form as well as to the substance, that it reaches to the words as well as to the thoughts, in order that we may be sure of the thoughts; for how are we to know GOD's thoughts if we do not know his words? GOD used the natural characteristics of the writers, and through them conveyed his truth.

But does it not say: "**The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life?**"

It does; but in that phrase Paul is not concerned with the letter of inspiration as opposed to the spirit. That is an entirely false idea of the passage.

Again some one says : "We want the inspiration of the thoughts, not of the words."

Now, what do we really mean by inspiration or authority in the thoughts? Surely this must be expressed in the words, and the objections raised to the inspiration of words are just as valid against the inspiration of thoughts.

Surely inspiration cannot mean an uninspired account of inspired thoughts. How did Moses remember GOD's revelation found in Exodus 25 to 30, or Isaiah remember that which is found in chapters 8 to 12, or Hosea remember the contents of chapters 4 to 11? As these are evidently continuous revelations, are we to rely on the writers' memory only, and on no other faculty? As Dr. Kuyper has truly said: "You can as easily have music without notes or mathematics without figures as thoughts without words."

Let us notice I Corinthians 14:37, "**If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.**"

Here we see both the human instrument and the divine authority.

This is how Dr. A. T. Pierson has put the matter:

"There are, with regard to this question of verbal inspiration, or the oversight of the very words of Scripture, five important significant passages in the Word of GOD: Hebrews 12:27; Galatians 4:9; John 8:58; John 10:34-36; Galatians 3:16. If these passages are examined it will be seen that in the first instance the argument turns on one phrase, '**yet once more.**' In the second, on the passive voice rather than the active voice of the verb. In the third, on the present rather than on the past tense. In the fourth, on the inviolability of a single word; and in the fifth, on the retention of the singular number of a noun, rather than the plural. Taking the five passages together, they teach us that, to alter or omit a phrase, change the voice or mood or tense of a verb, change a single word or even the number of a noun, is to break the Scriptures; and if this does not come close to verbal inspiration, then I am no judge."

The use of the Bible today is a wonderful confirmation of this view.

We regard it as our authoritative court of appeal, and we rest upon its words as our warrant, and the fact that we employ a concordance, be it Greek, or Hebrew, or English, is another testimony to this belief. It points to the value, the meaning, the force, and the extent of words.

This was the view of the Apostolic Church.

Bishop Westcott says that the doctrine of inspiration as held in the Apostolic churches was that it was supernatural in source, unerring in truthfulness, and that it comprised words as well as subject-matter. This, according to the Bishop, is the view of the earliest churches, and certainly it has also been that of a great many churches since the Apostolic days.

We notice, too, the precise form of the appeal of the New Testament to the Old: "**It is written.**" It is not "it is thought," or "it is suggested," but, "**it is written.**"

And the Lord Himself said, in John 10:35, "**The Scripture cannot be broken.**"

So we are on perfectly safe ground when we ask attention to the words of Scripture as the media of the men who spake by the Holy Ghost.

As Dr. J. H. Brookes used to say, about Exodus 4:10-12, it is not "I will be with thy mind and teach thee what thou shalt think," but "**I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say,**" because while it does not so much matter what Moses thought, it does matter what he actually said.

4. The Substance of the Bible - What is the outcome of this Source, these instruments and media - Truth.

This is the substance of the Bible.

First of all, Truth in its reality.

The greatest authority we have, the Lord JESUS, once said, "**Thy Word is truth.**" Truth in its reality is found in this book.

As Dr. Denney remarks:

"When a man submits his mind to the Spirit which is in the Bible, it never misleads him about the way of salvation, it brings him invariably to that knowledge of GOD which is eternal life. The most vital truth about it is covered by the terms inspiration and infallibility, and in virtue of this truth it is indispensable and authoritative to the mind of every age."

Secondly, Truth in its uniqueness.

We can test the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Bible very simply.

Take the writings of A. D. 50 to 100. Then take the writings from A. D. 100 to 150. Compare them, and, as it has been well said, between the New Testament writings of A. D. 50 to 100, and the most post-apostolic writings of A. D. 100 to 150, there is a chasm, "sheer, deep, and abysmal."

The finest writings of the second century cannot compare with the writings of the first century.

When the Christian faith was settling itself in the world, the Holy Spirit was working in a unique manner. He was at work as the Spirit of inspiration.

But from A. D. 100 to 150 we do not have inspiration; but illumination.

From that time forward, and ever since, there has been constant illumination, but no new revelation.

John Robinson, of Leyden, said: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word."

True, but it is from His Word.

We have not reached the end of it yet, but there it is, ready for the Holy Spirit to illuminate its pages. What does all this involve but the fact of a divine, unique inspiration?

QUESTIONS

1. What is the basis of our acceptance of the Bible?
2. Is any particular theory of inspiration important if the authority of the Bible be accepted? What is inspiration?
3. What is the source of the Bible?
4. Who were the instruments of divine revelation? What thought is conveyed in the use of the word instrument?
5. What are the media of the Bible? Explain this usage of the word. How are we brought into touch with the revelation of the writers of Scripture?
6. To what does inspiration relate? State and refute some objections to this view.
7. State Dr. Pierson's comments on this view of inspiration.
8. What does Bishop Westcott affirm concerning the view of inspiration held. by the Apostolic Church?
9. What is the outcome of this source, these instruments and these media?
10. In what ways is truth exhibited in the Bible!

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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