

Inspiration

The Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). This statement used to be sufficient to communicate that the Bible was from God, without error and authoritative for life. Now many people claim to believe in the inspiration of the Bible without meaning the same thing as what the Bible means by inspiration. So many qualifiers must be added, such as "verbal" to say that inspiration extends to the words of the Bible, "plenary" to say that all the parts of the Bible are inspired, "infallible" and then "inerrant" to say the Bible is accurate, and finally "unlimited" to say that the total nature of the Bible is completely accurate. The doctrine of inspiration has indeed fallen upon hard times!

Inspiration defined

A simple understanding of biblical inspiration is that God moved men to write His message in the Bible. This is taught throughout the Scripture implicitly and on occasion, explicitly. Inspiration is found in key verses in the Old Testament Law, Historical books, Prophetic books, Gospels, Acts and the Epistles:

Deuteronomy 18:18	Matthew 22:43
2 Samuel 23:2	Acts 4:24-25
2 Chronicles 34:14	2 Timothy 3:16-17
Isaiah 59:21	Hebrews 4:7
Zechariah 7:12	2 Peter 1:20-21

However, this simple definition will not defend against all the attacks on the inspiration of the Bible. A more detailed definition would be,

"Inspiration is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit who, through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors, invested the very words of the sixty-six books of the Bible, in their original writings, alone and in their entirety, as the very word of God without error in all they teach, explicitly or implicitly, and is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for faith and practice of all believers."

This definition includes the co-authorship of the Scripture as the Holy Spirit moved men to write through their uniqueness. It does not mean that the Holy Spirit dictated the words to man since their styles certainly are evident and their authorship is testified to in many cases.

This definition clarifies inspiration as occurring in the original text. This does not mean every attempted reproduction of the original text is inspired. The initial writings were the only writings that are inspired by God and inspiration carries over only to the extent that the original writings are reproduced exactly. Inspiration by God demands an error free product that requires adherence.

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The result of inspiration

Because the Bible is inspired by God, it contains certain qualities:

The Bible is *holy* (2 Timothy 3:15). The word "holy" means "set apart" and the Bible is set apart from all other works as inspired by God. It is in this sense that it is "sacred." No other written material is inspired by God.

The Bible is *eternal* (Matthew 5:17-18; 1 Peter 1:25). The Word of God will not pass away. God has determined to protect His Word and we can have great confidence that what has been delivered to us is complete (Jude 1:3).

The Bible is *authoritative* (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus communicated the authority of the Bible by referencing it as such during His temptations in the wilderness. The Scripture quotes or alludes itself repeatedly as an authoritative source. As such, it then can be claimed to be the standard for life, faith and the practice of faith for every person.

The Bible accomplishes its *purpose* (Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11). It is powerful and therefore able to accomplish God's desire for it in the lives of people. The Scripture is more than words on a page. Unlike any other writing, the words of Scripture are able to perform the work their intended result (1 Thessalonians 2:13) because the co-author, the Holy Spirit, is at work in the lives of the readers. The Word of God cannot be broken (John 10:35) and accomplishes its purpose infallibly.

The Bible is *inerrant* (John 17:17). The Bible is completely true because God has co-authored it and God Himself is the truth (John 14:6).

An appreciation of these qualities is necessary to ensure obedience to God's Word since it represents God's will completely. It is impossible to neglect the Bible when we truly accept it as the very Word of God. It becomes our delight when we partake of it (Jeremiah 15:16).

The extent of inspiration

The writings themselves are inspired, not merely the men (2 Timothy 3:16). The Holy Spirit moved (not inspired) men (2 Peter 1:20-21) to write the inspired text.

The inspiration of the Bible extends to all of it:

- The words themselves are inspired, not simply the concepts or ideas (Matthew 4:4; Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 18:18; Jeremiah 26:2; 1 Corinthians 2:13).
- The tenses of the verbs are inspired (Matthew 22:31-32).
- The letters of the words are inspired (Galatians 3:16).
- Even the smallest part of the letters are inspired (Matthew 5:17-18).

Inspiration extends to everything the Bible teaches to be true, expressly or implicitly. This includes every topic upon which it touches, whether spiritual or physical in nature. In addition, all Scripture is equally inspired. While there may be degrees of importance of truth, there is no variation of the inspiration, it is all equally true.

Why we believe the Bible is inspired by God

Anyone can claim they speak from God. But is the claim true? Our belief that the Bible is inspired by God is based upon the following argument:

- The New Testament documents are reliable.
- The New Testament teaches that Jesus claimed to be God.
- The New Testament's description of the miracles of Jesus confirm that Jesus was God.
- Since God cannot lie, therefore Jesus cannot lie.
- Jesus taught the Bible is the Word of God.
- Therefore, God, who cannot lie, says the Bible is the Word of God.

We will defend each of these premises in order:

1. The New Testament documents are reliable.

The reason the New Testament may be fairly considered to be reliable centers around the writers and the copies. Both must be reliable or else the product of the New Testament that we have today is unreliable.

The writers should be accepted as reliable witnesses. They, for the most part, were firsthand witnesses of the events described. The authors were competent to evaluate what they had seen and heard given the nature of the events and their production of written documentation. Those writers that were not firsthand witnesses (for example, Mark and Luke) were close associates of firsthand witnesses and completed and circulated their work at a time when the first hand witnesses were alive to either confirm or dispute it.

Furthermore, their firsthand testimony was undisputed by any other firsthand witness. And there were many eyewitnesses who affirmed their contentions. The abundance of testimony regarding Jesus supports the reliability of testimony. Some of these eyewitnesses were hostile, which further confirms the validity of the New Testament. Even the opponents did not dispute the facts, only the conclusions to be drawn from the facts. Finally, archaeology has supported the competency of the New Testament authors by showing the truthfulness of their statements concerning other events. By any objective standard, the New Testament writers were reliable.

Not only were the writers reliable, the copies of their work is equally reliable. Most historical documents from that era that exist today from 2,000 years ago have survived in only a very small number of very late copies. For the sake of comparison, among the best are, Tacitus' *Annals*, Livy's *Roman History* and Pliny the Younger's *History*. Each of these exist in less than two dozen manuscript copies and date from around 1,000 years after the time of the original writing.

On the other hand, the New Testament survives in over 5,300 manuscripts, dating as early as within 100 years of the original writing. The entire New Testament is found in copies which date as early as 325 AD. The New Testament copies are far and beyond more numerous, more recent and have less discrepancies than any other historical writing over 1,000 years old.

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2. The New Testament teaches that Jesus claimed to be God.

This claim will be more fully covered under the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Briefly, Jesus accepted title of God (John 20:28), claimed to do what only God can do (Mark 2:5-7), claimed attributes which only God has (John 8:58; Matthew 16:21; 28:19-20), claimed to be "I am" (John 8:58), identified Himself with God (John 10:30; 17:5) and accepted worship (John 5:23; John 9:38; Matthew 28:9).

The New Testament epistles confirm that Jesus was God (Romans 9:5; Colossians 1:15-18, Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20). The Old Testament also confirms this (Isaiah 9:6).

3. The New Testament's description of the miracles of Jesus confirm that Jesus was God.

When Jesus spoke, he did so with more than words. His miracles included countless physical healings, miracles of nature, casting out demons and raising the dead. Many of his miracles had never been done before (cf. John 9:32) and many were not recorded for us (cf. John 20:30; 21:35). They serve the task of testifying that Jesus came from God and should be listened to. What Jesus said carried authority (Mark 1:22). Jesus' claim to be God was supported by His miracles. Likewise, the teaching of others that taught that Jesus was God was also supported by their miracles.

4. Since God cannot lie, therefore Jesus cannot lie.

The statement that God cannot lie is directly stated in Titus 1:2. Jesus described God's Word as truth (John 17:17). This is even a general truth held by many non-Christians. The significance of this truth is if God created us, then what He says must be valued above any other information. The Creator has authority over His creation and this applies in the area of truth and falsehood as well.

5. Jesus taught the Bible is the Word of God.

Two dozen times in the Gospels, Jesus uses the words "it is written" to emphasize the authority of the Scripture. In Matthew 19:5-6, Jesus references the Genesis 2:24 description of bringing Adam and Eve together into one flesh as what God has joined together. What the Scripture describes is what God does.

Jesus specifically affirmed the Old Testament in the following ways:

- The authority of the Old Testament (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 22:43-45).
- The reliability of the Old Testament (Matthew 26:54).
- The sufficiency of the Old Testament (Luke 16:31).
- The longevity of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-18).
- The unity of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44).
- The clarity of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27).
- The historical accuracy of the Old Testament (Matthew 12:40).
- The inerrancy of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:29; John 3:12; 17:17).

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6. Therefore, God, who cannot lie, says the Bible is the Word of God.

Jesus also promised the New Testament writers would be directed by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13). They would be guided in what they said about Jesus (Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12), both in remembering it (John 14:26) and in communicating it truthfully (John 16:13).

John 16:13 says that the Spirit of truth (cf. John 15:26) would guide them into all truth. All truth necessary for faith and practice (2 Peter 1:3) was communicated by what the apostles taught and what the apostles taught is found today in the New Testament. These writers compared themselves with the Old Testament prophets (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3) and were the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

The New Testament as a whole was considered prophetic, that is, men who were moved to write by the Holy Spirit wrote it (2 Peter 1:20-21). Peter refers to Paul's writings as "Scripture" (2 Peter 3:16) and 1 Timothy 5:18 quoted Luke 10:7 along with Deuteronomy 25:4 as "the Scripture says." Since 2 Timothy 3:16 says "all Scripture is inspired by God," then the New Testament is inspired by God.

Furthermore, there are numerous specific claims of authority for a wide application of its teachings. Paul's teachings are "prescribed" (1 Timothy 4:11) "with all authority" (Titus 2:15; cf. Galatians 1:1-2). Like Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Peter saw himself as communicating authoritatively (2 Peter 3:2). Their writings were authoritative beyond the original audience (Colossians 4:16; cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16).

Defective views concerning the inspiration of the Bible

One erroneous view of inspiration is that Jesus did not affirm inspiration but merely accommodated His teaching to the misunderstanding of the people of His day. However, Jesus did not accommodate Himself to false beliefs. To knowingly accommodate Himself to the misunderstanding of people and allowing them to consider Him to be affirming what He knew to be wrong would mean Jesus was deceptive.

Furthermore, Jesus spent a good deal of His ministry opposing false believers, not accepting them. The Pharisees are sharply opposed in Matthew 23. In Matthew 5:21-49, Jesus corrects common misunderstandings of the Old Testament. He put the errors of the Sadducees directly against the Scripture. He condemned teaching from man as invalidating the word of God (Matthew 15:1-9). He is the self-described "truth" (John 14:6) who does not lower Himself to error.

A second false view is that Jesus was human, He was limited in knowledge and therefore ignorant about some topics. For example, He is described as growing in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and not knowing the time of His return to earth (Matthew 24:36). This eliminates the problem of knowingly misleading people.

However, the Son of Man had all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). When he spoke, it was "truly, truly" (25 times in the Gospel of John). Jesus was limited on earth in certain ways as He laid aside all the attributes of His Deity in order to become man (Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus was limited only on what He did not know while on earth and what He did not say, not on what He did know and what He did say. He had complete authority on everything He communicated.

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Conclusion

If Christ is God, then the Bible is the inspired Word of God. If the Bible is not the inspired Word of God, then Christ is not God, because God cannot be wrong. The Deity of Christ and the authority of the Bible are directly related.