

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God

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Christadelphians believe that God inspired men to write His Word, but how did this take place? This article surveys Old and New Testaments to show that God used differing means at different times to convey the Bible books to men. It shows that the Lord Jesus Christ endorsed as the Word of God many of the scriptures that were available to him in his ministry.

WHERE ELSE could we begin a consideration of the inspiration of the Bible but 2 Timothy 3:16? The phrase “inspired by God”¹ translates a single Greek word sometimes rendered more literally as ‘God-breathed’, and by means of this word, occurring only here, Paul is able to remind us of Old Testament passages describing the Almighty employing His Spirit (or breath, the ideas being very closely connected) for creative purposes. Thus, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6). Immediately we spot the link. We see too in the parallelism of the psalm God’s creative Word being breathed out by Him, taking us back to Creation, when “the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

In learning that the Scriptures are ‘God-breathed’, we are being invited to consider what God is *creating* by His Spirit in 2 Timothy 3. Paul goes on to tell us that it is the child of God, who is becoming part of the new creation in Christ, because these Scriptures are given “that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (v. 17). As God’s Spirit worked at Creation to produce what was “very good” (Gen. 1:31), designed to accomplish just what God required of it—fit for purpose, we might say today—so His Spirit works in His written Word to produce the same result in men and women. First the natural, then the spiritual.

So the implications of belief in inspiration are profound. According to the Bible this status gives us the opportunity of being part of God’s spiritual handiwork, fashioned by His Spirit as Adam was formed literally, with all the demands

that that will make on us if we too are to be fit for purpose. No wonder that the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith begins with this Foundation Clause: “That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and

His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them . . .” Christadelphians stand or fall by this belief.

What the BASF does not presume to define, however, is precisely how the process of inspiration occurred. Scripture sometimes gives us glimpses, in the dreams, visions and angelic appearances by which God revealed to the prophets the things He wished them to know. There is a very clear instance in the last book of Scripture, which introduces itself as a “Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bond-servants . . . he [Jesus] sent and communicated it by his angel to his bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw” (Rev. 1:1,2). It is easy to identify those involved in the production of Scripture here, with John (the final link in the chain) receiving a vision of an angel who conveyed to him Christ’s last message.

Understandably, what was received by inspiration required to be put into written form. At times the prophets describe this explicitly, as when “Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him” (Jer. 36:4). There are other indications that writing down God’s words formed an important part in the production of Scripture. Moses “took the testimony and put it into the ark” (Ex. 40:20) while Israel was still camped at Sinai; but on the borders of the Promised Land thirty-eight years later he added a transcription of what

1. All quotations from the NASB unless otherwise stated.

had been revealed to him subsequently, telling the Levites to "Take this book of the law [consisting of at least the book of Deuteronomy] and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there . . ." (Deut. 31:26). Even as far back as Genesis, there was a "book [NIV, written account] of the generations of Adam" (Gen. 5:1), evidently penned before the time of Noah (cf. 6:9, where the next such section of Genesis begins). So God has caused His Word to be written down for the benefit of His people from earliest times.

If 2 Timothy 3:16 is the first place we would go to learn about inspiration, 2 Peter 1:21 is probably the next. "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will," it tells us, "but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God". The word "moved" sometimes has the meaning of being carried along involuntarily (like the ship in which Paul was travelling being "driven" by the wind, Acts 27:17), and there are Biblical examples of men falling under inspiration such that they seem not to be in command of the situation. King Saul prophesied before Samuel so dramatically that he "stripped off his clothes . . . and lay down naked all that day and all that night" (1 Sam. 19:24), clearly not in control of himself. Balaam too, generously bribed by the Moabites and fully intent on cursing Israel, seems as surprised as King Balak when words of blessing actually came out of his mouth. "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?" he asks. "Must I not be careful to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?" (Num. 23:8,12). There may have been a similar sense of compulsion for other, sometimes reluctant prophets (for example, Jer. 20:9; Ezek. 3:14).

Plainly, then, God could compel men to speak His Word if necessary. Such cases are exceptional, however, and the principle that "the spirits [Spirit gifts] of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32) presumably indicates that the prophets were usually more willing participants in the process. Being "moved by the Holy Spirit", therefore, did not always require God's spokesmen to become mere puppets for what He had to say. Whilst the Holy Spirit did sometimes empower men and women to do things they were completely incapable of, on another level Spirit gifts may rather have enhanced the recipient's existing abilities in some way. To take an example from the "gifts of administration" (1 Cor. 12:28, NIV) which assisted the smooth running of the first-century ecclesias, it is unlikely that one given grace to show mercy (Rom. 12:6,8) was an entirely unmerciful person

to begin with. We rightly fight shy of the idea that the Holy Spirit conveyed any moral advantage, so we cannot imagine a naturally mean-spirited brother being miraculously changed by the direct intervention of God. Scripture teaches that such alterations in our character are brought about by other means.

This point may expand our understanding of inspiration, because our belief that the Bible is inspired does not mean that every word spoken in Scripture was chosen by God. A moment's thought makes this plain: the words that Job's friends spoke were not inspired (they were wrong), and nor were those of the serpent in Eden (it actually slandered God's words). To be precise, then, we believe that the Bible is *an inspired record of things that were said and done*. The context, and guidance from the rest of Scripture, will determine whether or not specific words were from the Almighty or of the mind of the flesh.

The important point to note is that the process of inspiration allowed a role for the prophet. God's words were not always supernaturally provided 'ready-made', "written by the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18) like Moses' two tables of stone on Mount Sinai; He used men to pen them. Thus, although we believe that John and Paul were both inspired by God, because they were apostles, we can easily distinguish their written styles. God's Spirit did not render the person or the personality of the writer redundant.

We may have reached the limits of our comprehension as to exactly how God used David's circumstances to produce certain Scriptures, and we should tread reverently when exploring the workings of the Divine mind. But without in any way detracting from the principle that these psalms were 'God-breathed', it seems safe to conclude that, somehow, God and David both played a part in these psalms being written. The Lord Jesus says of Psalm 110:1 that "*David himself* [spoke] in the book of Psalms" (Lk. 20:42) and in the parallel passages that the words came from "David in the Spirit" (Mt. 22:43) or "David himself . . . in the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 12:36); so the combined testimony is that Psalm 110 was written by God's Spirit and yet by David too. Likewise, in what Scripture describes as "*the last words of David*", David testifies, "*the Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue*" (2 Sam. 23:1,2). David spoke, yet God's Spirit spoke.

And the experience was not only David's. Matthew 15:4 tells us that God spoke the words of Exodus 20:12, but according to Mark 7:10 Moses

spoke them. Here we can be sure that in some way we see inspiration at work, yet our minds struggle to unravel the conundrum fully. Truly, as Brother Robert Roberts wrote of the ways in which the Holy Spirit operated, “God works widely, largely, wisely, and develops finer results than would follow the narrow ways ascribed to Him by popular theology”.²

What we can see, at least in these examples, is Scripture being produced by the interaction of the mind and experiences of spiritual men and the Spirit of God, with the latter certainly overseeing the former. Paul perhaps refers to something similar when he tells the Romans that “The Spirit [itself] testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

We may need to distinguish here between ‘spirit’ and ‘Holy Spirit’, lest we draw unsound conclusions; but, in language which again reminds us of creation (v. 11), Paul writes of this acquiescence of our own spirit (which we might call the mind of the Lord Jesus) with God’s spirit, making us truly alive to Him. Paul has already said in Romans 7 that this spirit in us—a spiritual mind in tune with God’s mind, notwithstanding the inability of our bodies to keep up sometimes—is critical to the forgiveness of our sins. There is much exhortation in this appreciation of how close the accord needs to be between our own spirit and the spirit of God.

So, does the involvement of the prophets in the process of the inspiration of the Scriptures in any way reduce their status as the Word of God? By

no means. As we have seen, they receive their endorsement at the highest possible level—by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ—and a reading of the Gospels reveals conclusive evidence for the authority of the Old Testament in his teaching. The table below sets out some of this evidence.

This impressive list is to say nothing of the Lord’s countless allusions to other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, demonstrating the esteem in which he held “all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 22:40, NIV). No wonder that on the Emmaus road he could explain to his disciples “the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:27). A similar analysis of Acts would establish that the words of the apostles ultimately had the same Divine origin, as they spoke forth “the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets” (Acts 3:18).

“God . . . spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and *in many ways*” (Heb. 1:1). While we are often not privy to the intricacies of these “ways” by which His Word was communicated to the “holy men of God”, nevertheless the teaching of His risen Son and of those sent to preach the gospel of salvation leaves us in no doubt that the Scriptures we hold dear have come from God, something we can say of no other book in the world. Truly we have in our hands “sacred writings which are able to give [us] the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

2. *Christadelphian*, Apr. 1870, p. 124.

Old Testament book	New Testament reference	Teaching
Genesis	Matthew 19:4-6	God spoke the words of Genesis 2:24
Exodus	Matthew 15:4	Exodus 20:12; 21:17 were spoken by God
Numbers	John 3:14	Events of Numbers 21 endorsed
Deuteronomy	Luke 4:4,8,12	Deuteronomy 6, 8 “written”
2 Samuel	Matthew 12:3,4	Old Testament record of David endorsed
1 Kings	Luke 4:25	Old Testament record of Elijah endorsed
2 Chronicles	Luke 11:51	2 Chronicles 24:21 endorsed
Psalms	Matthew 21:42	Psalms 118 described as “Scripture”
Isaiah	Matthew 13:14	Isaiah spoke “prophecy”
Daniel	Matthew 24:15	Daniel 9:27 “spoken of through Daniel the prophet”
Hosea	Matthew 12:7	Endorses teaching of Hosea 6:6
Jonah	Matthew 12:40	Old Testament record of Jonah endorsed
Zechariah	Matthew 26:31	Zechariah 13:7 confirmed as prophecy
Malachi	Matthew 17:11	Malachi 4:5 endorsed

Further reading

R. Roberts, *Is the Bible the Work of Inspiration?*
Available online: <http://www.christadelphian.uk.com/Booklets/Is%20the%20Bible%20the%20Work%20of%20Inspiration.pdf>.

E. Whittaker and R. Carr, '*Spirit*' in the New Testament, Testimony Magazine publications.
E. Whittaker, *For the Study and Defence of the Holy Scripture*, Testimony Magazine publications.