



### Lecture # 4 Part 3

## WHAT IS INSPIRED, THE AUTOGRAPHS<sup>23</sup> OR THE COPIES?

If every word of the Bible is inspired, does every copy, translation, or version of the Scriptures necessarily have to be inspired too? There are some who think so. But, here again, **two extremes must be avoided**. “*Every translation is inspired in the same sense as the original.*” This extreme position was held by the Jewish philosopher **Philo** in the first century of the present era. He said of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, that the translators “under inspiration, wrote, not each several scribe something different, but the same word for word, as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter.”

**Dewey M. Beegle** reflects a similar view when he writes, “There is no evidence to show that the apostles denied the inspiration of the LXX .... The correct inference, therefore, is that in spite of some mistakes, all reasonably accurate translations of Scripture are inspired.”<sup>24</sup> This position, as can be seen, necessitates the recognition of errors (**errancy**) in inspiration, because some errors of copyists have obviously crept into the Scriptures.<sup>25</sup>

If this be so, one is forced to the absurd conclusion that there are divinely inspired errors in the Bible. “*Only the autographs are inspired, not the translations.*” If only the errorless autographs were God-breathed, and the translators were not preserved from error, how can there be certainty about any passage of Scripture? Perhaps the very passage that comes under question is a mistaken transcription or copy. The scholarly procedure of textual criticism (see section # 26) treats this problem by showing the accuracy of the copies of the originals.

To borrow this conclusion in advance, the copies are known to be accurate and sufficient in all matters except minor details. The resultant situation, then, exists that although only the autographs are inspired, it may be said nevertheless that all good copies or translations are *adequate*.

Some have objected to what they consider a retreat to “**inerrant autographs**” from errant copies, as if the doctrine of inspiration were created to protect the inerrancy of the Bible. To argue, as does **Ernest R. Sandeen**,<sup>26</sup> that the belief in inerrant originals emerges from the apologetic purposes of the Princeton tradition of **Charles Hodge** and **B.B. Warfield** to defend the Bible against charges of error, are misdirected.

The distinction *between inerrant autographs* and *errant copies* can be found in much earlier writers, including **John Calvin (1509–64)** and even **Augustine (A.D. 354–430)**. They chide that no one in modern times has ever seen these “**infallible originals.**” Although no one in modern times has ever seen an infallible original, it is also true that no one has ever seen a fallible one. In light of this situation, it is well to note that the pursuit of the original renderings is at least an objective science (textual criticism) rather than a subjective guess at recovering the actual text of the inerrant autographs.



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Just why God did not see fit to preserve the autographs is unknown, although man's tendency to worship religious relics is certainly a possible determining factor ([2 Kings 18:4](#)).

#### **2 Kings 18:4 (NASB)**

**<sup>4</sup>He removed the high places and broke down the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.**

Others have noted that God could have avoided the worship of the originals by simply preserving a perfect copy.<sup>27</sup> But He has not seen fit to do even this. It seems more likely that God did not preserve the originals so no one could tamper with them. It is practically impossible for anyone to make changes in thousands of existing copies. The net result, however, has proved to be profitable insofar as it has occasioned the very worthwhile study of textual criticism.

Another valuable side effect of not preserving all the copies from error is that it serves as a warning to biblical scholars not to esteem paleographic, numeric, or other trivia over the essential message of the Scriptures.<sup>28</sup> ***“Only the autographs were actually inspired, good copies are accurate.”***

In seeking to avoid the two extremes of either an unattainable original or a fallible one, it must be asserted that a good copy or translation of the autographs is ***for all practical purposes the inspired Word of God***. It may not completely satisfy the scholar who, for technical purposes of theological precision, wants both the correct text and the exact term in the original language, but it certainly does suit the preacher and layman who desire to know **“what says the Lord”** in matters of faith and practice.

Even when the accuracy of a reading in the original *text* cannot be known with 100 percent accuracy, **it is possible to be 100 percent certain of the truth preserved in the texts that survive**. It is only in minor details that any uncertainty about the textual rendering exists, and no major doctrine rests on any one minor detail. A good translation will not fail to capture the overall teaching of the original.

In this sense, then, a good translation will have doctrinal authority, although actual inspiration is reserved for the autographs.