



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

### HOW MUCH OF THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED?

Another question to be asked concerns the degree of inspiration. **Are all sections of the Bible equally inspired, or are some parts of Scripture more inspired than others?**

The question itself confuses the issue and fails to distinguish between the nature of truth and the importance of that truth. Certainly the biblical truth that Christ died for our sins is more important than the truth that the pool of Bethesda had five porticoes ([John 5:2](#)).

**John 5:2 (NASB)**

**<sup>2</sup>Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes.**

However, both statements are equally the truth. **Truth does not come in degrees. A statement is either true or false.** Just because a given passage, at certain times and under stated circumstances, is more “**inspiring**” to a particular person does not thereby mean that it is more inspired than other passages. Inspiration merely vouches for the truth of the record, no matter how valuable that particular record may be to the individual’s edification or even to the overall picture of redemption.

**The record is either true or false; inspired or not inspired; of God or not of God.** If the various passages are true, they are equally true, and not more or less true. Although it may not be the “**whole**” truth from the vantage point of the full and ultimate revelation, it is nonetheless a true record of that which God wanted to reveal at that particular time in His progressive revelation of the whole truth. **Certainly all statements of truth must be understood in their context. For “a text out of its context is a pretext.” Everything should be understood as the author meant it.** But what is meant does not come in degrees of truth, even though different truths may vary in degrees of importance.

### HOW DOES INSPIRATION OPERATE?

A final question concerns the means, or process, of inspiration. **What means did God’s causality employ to produce scriptural authority without interfering with the personality, freedom, and individuality of the prophetic agents? Or, how did God produce an infallible book through fallible men?** A frank and forthright answer, yet one often very reluctantly given by biblical scholars, is “**We don’t know.**” It must be asserted *that* God inspired the Scriptures even if we cannot ascertain exactly *how* He did it.

Just because man does not know how God created the world from nothing does not mean it is unreasonable to believe that He did so (cf. [Hebrews 11:3](#)).



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

### Hebrews 11:3 (NASB)

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Likewise, ignorance of the means used by the Holy Spirit to produce an infant in the virgin's womb does not mean that the biblical teaching about the virgin birth of Christ ([Luke 1:26–38](#)) must be rejected.

### Luke 1:26-38 (NASB)

<sup>26</sup> Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,

<sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

<sup>28</sup> And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup> But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

<sup>31</sup> "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

<sup>32</sup> "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

<sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup> "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

<sup>37</sup> "For nothing will be impossible with God."

<sup>38</sup> And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

### *Some attempted explanation*

Several solutions have been suggested for this problem, all of which have their own inherent difficulties.

1. One suggestion is that God dictated the words to the prophets, who acted as recording secretaries (see section # 10). Although this may explain how every word was inspired, it would not explain how or why so many distinctly individual traits of the various human writers are so apparent in the Scriptures or why the biblical writers themselves claimed to have used human sources for some of their information (see



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

section # 3). Mechanical word-for-word dictation may account for some of Scripture (e.g., the Ten Commandments or some prophecies), but it certainly does not account for *all* of it.

2. Another view is that God produced much of the truth of Scripture by His providential control over natural processes and that He could have produced it all in this manner.

**Kenneth Kantzer** writes,

No theist who believes in God's providential control of the universe can possibly use this objection [viz., that "divine inspiration must necessarily negate the freedom and humanity of the Biblical writers"] against the inspiration of the Bible. The God of [Romans 8:28](#), who works all things together for good, including the sinful acts of wicked men, could certainly have worked through the will and personality of His prophets to secure the divine Word which He wished to convey through them.<sup>29</sup>

**Romans 8:28 (NASB)**

<sup>28</sup> **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**

Although it may not be disputed that God could have secured the truth of the inspired record through providence, it must not be supposed that He operated in that manner exclusively. The truth of the matter is that it is not always known how Providence works. As **Kantzer** admits, "The mechanics of inspiration are left unexplained."<sup>30</sup>

### *The nature of the problem*

The problem of the means of inspiration falls within the category of a theological "mystery." Two sides of the overall picture are given to man in the Bible, and it is asserted that they are both true. No one can show that they are contradictory, nor can anyone show exactly how they are complementary. They are not contrary to reason, but they are beyond finite reasoning. The reason both sides of inspiration are given is that man may have the "whole" truth, and not just one "part" or side of it. It is like a two-sided coin which an infinite God may comprehend completely at once, but which a finite man must apprehend partially, one side at a time. If it be admitted that the words of the Bible are truly God's, yet distinctly man's, there would seem to be no way of denying that the process is a mystery without eventuating in one of the two extremities.

### *Two extremes to avoid*

If the human nature of the Bible is emphasized on the one hand, the divine may be compromised on the other. If the divine is emphasized, the human is in danger of being relegated to the hypothetical. In one case the divine nature is taken seriously and the human is viewed only incidentally.



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

In the other extreme, the human is so prominent that the divine is obscured. The difficulty is not with the revelation of both sides of the truth, it is with their reconciliation. **In that connection it is well to remember that man's inability to understand a mystery does not render ineffective God's ability to accomplish one.**

Thus, it would seem that, by the activity of the Holy Spirit and through the instrumentality of the prophets, the infallibility of the Scriptures was effected ([John 10:35](#)), even though this is admittedly a great mystery.

[John 10:35 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)"

### *A close parallel*

The inspiration of the Bible is not the only mystery in Scripture. The incarnation of Christ affords an excellent illustration of the divine and human sides of Scripture. Both the Savior and the Scriptures have heavenly and earthly natures. And both are united in a common medium of expression, one personal and the other propositional. **Christ is a [theanthropic Person \(being both divine and human\)](#), and the Bible is a [theanthropic Book \(being both divine and human\)](#).**

In both the human side is perfect, as is the divine. Just as it is unorthodox to try to explain away the divine nature of Christ in order to *understand* His human nature (as did the Arians),<sup>31</sup> or to sacrifice His true human nature in order to *explain* His divine nature (as did the Docetics),<sup>32</sup> so it is wrong to deny that the words of Scripture are *both* divine and human in their nature. The mistake is in trying to explain the inexplicable and in trying to fathom the unfathomable.

In the whole question of the [modus operandi \(mode of operation\)](#) of inspiration, a balance must be sought between the two extremes of **divine dictation** and **human fallibility**. Such a balance must guarantee the final product (the words of the Bible) and still guard the freedom and humanity of the authors. Just as one's salvation is both divinely determined ([Romans 8:29](#)) and yet is freely chosen ([John 1:12](#)), so God working through the free expression of the human authors of Scripture produced the exact words He had infallibly predetermined.<sup>33</sup>

[Romans 8:29 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*

[John 1:12 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even to those who believe in His name,*



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Inspiration encompasses the mysterious process by which divine causality on the prophetic agency resulted in scriptural authority, the Bible. Revelation is the *fact* of divine communication, inspiration is the *means* by which that communication is brought to the written record, and interpretation is the *understanding* of that communication.

The total process of inspiration includes both the writer and the writing, although the product of inspiration is the authoritative writing and not the man. It is only the autographs (**original writings**) that are actually inspired, although accurate copies or translations are doctrinally authoritative, inasmuch as they correctly reproduce the original. There are no degrees of inspiration; the entire Bible is equally inspired, that is, equally authoritative and true. **The means or process of inspiration is a mystery of the providence of God, but the result of this process is a verbal (the words), plenary (extending to all parts equally), inerrant (errorless), and authoritative record.**

### NOTES

1. It is sometimes thought that this is *petitio principii*, or arguing in a circle. Actually it is not, because we first ask only what the Bible claims about itself and then whether or not it is true. The latter is properly a question of apologetics and not of biblical introduction; nevertheless, it will be treated briefly in section # 11.
2. James Augustus Henry Strong et al., eds., *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, known generally as the *Oxford Dictionary*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, or the *New English Dictionary*. Also see *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*.
3. See H.D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study, 1700–1960*, 1:63–64; 2:70.
4. Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v., “Spirit,” 3:689–709. Also see Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:453–455.
5. See discussion in section # 31.
6. This discussion follows William E. Nix, “Inerrancy: Theological Watershed Issue of the Hour?” Winnipeg Theological Seminary Lectureship Series, Otterbourne, Manitoba, January 1980.
7. James I. Packer, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God, p. 82; J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*, esp. pp. 45–124. Also see I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, pp. 40–43.
8. Packer, “Fundamentalism”, p. 80.
9. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 154–60.
10. Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*, pp. 29–3, 74–75, 99–100, 122–23, and elsewhere. Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, uncritically accepts this notion, stating, “The Bible is more than prophecy, and although direct divine speech is part of the record, there are many other kinds of communication as well, some of them more indirect and ambiguous” (p. 63), and indicating that “Paul J. Achtemeier has called attention to the inadequacy of the prophetic model for representing the biblical category of inspiration in its fullness” (p. 234 n. 8).



## Lecture # 5 Part 1

11. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2: *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One*, pp. 13–15.
12. Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, 2d ed., pp. 22–25.
13. See Colin Brown et al., “Revelation,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3:309–340. Also see Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:556–592.
14. *Revelation* is often used of written (or spoken) words. See **Rom. 16:25**; **1 Cor. 14:6, 26**; **Eph. 3:3**.
15. See John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, and the discussion of his position in Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation*, pp. 68–89.
16. The Greek term came into English by way of New Latin *hermeneutica* from the masculine noun *hermeneutikos* (interpretation). For a treatment of the theological issues involved in the interpretation of the Bible, see Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*.
17. Illumination as described in Scripture (**1 Cor. 2:14–16**; **Eph. 1:18**) does not refer so much to the *understanding* of the *meaning* of a passage but to the *application* of the *significance* of its truth to one’s life. See the helpful statement on hermeneutics in Radmacher and Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, pp. 881–904.
18. James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 162.
19. Robert Preus, *Inspiration of Scripture*, p. 22.
20. Benjamin B. Warfield, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Inspiration.”
21. Marshall, p. 38.
22. Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.37, F. H. Colson, trans.
23. An autograph is usually an original, or author’s, manuscript. It may have been written by either the author himself (**2 Cor. 13:10**; **Gal. 6:11**) or a secretary (**1 Pet. 5:12**).
24. Dewey M. Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, pp. 38–40.
25. For example, **2 Kings 8:26** gives 22 as the age of Ahaziah, whereas **2 Chron. 22:2** gives 42. The latter cannot be correct, or he would have been older than his father. Nevertheless, the best available *copies* of the originals render **2 Chron. 22:2** as “42 years.” According to **2 Chron. 9:25**, Solomon had 4,000 horses, but **1 Kings 4:26** says 40,000; some copyists must have made a mistake in the Kings passage. See discussion in chap. 26; William E. Nix, “1 Chronicles,” and “2 Chronicles,” in W.A. Criswell, ed., *The Criswell Study Bible*; J. Barton Payne, “The Validity of Numbers in Chronicles,” *Bulletin of the Near East Archaeological Society*, new series II (1978):5–58.
26. Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930*.
27. See Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy*, pp. 72–73.
28. Cf. John W. Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, pp. 30–40.





**Lecture # 5 Part 1**

29. Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Word for This Century*, p. 46.

30. Ibid.

31. Their error led to a call for the Council of Nicea (I), A.D.325, where Arianism was condemned.

32. Their argument was that Christ did not actually die on the cross, but that He only “appeared” to die or “seemed” (Gk., *dokein*) to die on the cross.

33. See N.L. Geisler, “**Inerrancy and Free Will**,” pp. 349–53.