



Lecture # 2 Part 1

Definitions of Revelation and Inspiration

The most basic question about the nature of the Bible centers in its claim to be “**inspired**” or to be the “**Word of God.**” Just what is meant by and what is included in that claim is the subject of the first link and, in that sense, the most important link in the chain of communication “**from God to us.**”

INSPIRATION DEFINED

The starting point in the discussion of inspiration is the claim of the Scriptures themselves. It is only proper that the Bible should be permitted to witness about its own nature. Once the claim is understood clearly, the character and credentials should be checked carefully; **but the Scriptures should not be denied the opportunity to testify on their own behalf.**¹ The starting point for such an examination, then, is the claim of inspiration as it is asserted by the Bible, and the procedure will be to study that claim in the light of the phenomena of Scripture.

BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF INSPIRATION

The Biblical Terminology

There is some confusion over the “**doctrine of inspiration**” that is due to the very term itself. In order to clarify this possible confusion **three terms need to be distinguished.**

First, “**inspiration,**” derived from *inspirare* (Latin), means “**to breathe upon or into something.**” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)² this notion is used as early as the time of **Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1386)** and by others thereafter. By extension the term is used of analogous mental phenomena; hence a sudden spontaneous idea is called an “**inspiration.**” Theologically, “**inspiration**” is often used for the condition of being directly under divine influence and it is viewed as the equivalent of the Greek term *theopneustia* (“**God-breathed**”), or its adjective *theopneustos* (“**inspired by God**”) (cf. **2 Timothy 3:16**).

2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

A second important term is “**enthusiasm,**” which is derived from the Greek *enthusiasmos* (*en* + *theos*), to signify the first century A.D. notion of “**being possessed by a god.**” The authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) indicates that the earliest usage of “**enthusiasm**” in English appeared in **1579**. It came into prominence in the post-Reformation era when possession by a divine spirit (*pneuma*) was regarded as necessarily accompanied by the intense stimulation of the emotions.³



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In turn this notion of **immanence** contributed to the rise of modern religious subjectivism. The nearest approach to this typically Greek idea of inspiration as “a complete surrender of the mind and will to the overpowering Holy Spirit” is in [2 Peter 1:21](#).⁴

[2 Peter 1:21 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The third important term dealing with the biblical definition of inspiration is *theopneustia*, “God-breathed” (from *theopheustos*), which is translated “inspired by God” in its only New Testament usage ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)).

[2 Timothy 3:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

The term **does not imply** a particular mode of inspiration, such as some form of divine dictation. Nor does it imply the suspension of the normal cognitive faculties of the human authors. On the other hand, **it does imply** something quite different from poetic inspiration. It is an error to omit the divine element from the term implied by *theopheustos* as is done in rendering the phrase “every inspired Scripture” or “every Scripture inspired” in the *American Standard Version (ASV) of 1901*, and the *New English Bible (NEB) of 1970*.⁵ The New Testament usage clearly does not imply that some canonical Scriptures are inspired while others are not. The sacred Scriptures are all expressive of the mind of God. The sacred Scriptures are the “God-breathed” revelation of God which result in their practical outworking in life ([2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)).

[2 Timothy 3:16-17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

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.