

Reliability of the Bible

by Harold S. Martin

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Many theologians and church leaders no longer accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God. They have difficulty believing that “If it is taught in the Bible, then it ought to be observed.” They have doubts about the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Some of us deplore the doctrinal departures that have taken place within the Church of the Brethren during the past few decades – the softening on baptism, the elimination of the eldership, the laying aside of the scriptural headveiling, and the like. But at the heart of all these departures is a false view of the authority of the Bible. The trustworthiness of the Bible is the ***foundation*** upon which the entire edifice of Christian truth is standing. And if this foundation falters, the whole Christian faith goes with it. We believe the Bible is inspired of God.

1. THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION

The Word “inspiration” (when used in connection with the origin of the Scriptures) means that the Holy Spirit caused the writers of the Scripture to accurately record what God wanted them to write. We read in **2 Timothy 3:16** that “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.**” The word “inspiration” means literally “God-breathed.” All Scripture is given by the breath of God. The sacred odor of heaven permeates the Scriptures. The men who wrote the Bible did not write merely from their own intellect; they wrote as God breathed His message into their minds and souls.

2 Peter 1:21 is another passage that speaks about the Bible’s origin. We read that “**Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.**” The word “moved” means literally “carried along.” Men of God, as they wrote, were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The same word (in the original Greek) is used of a ship that is carried along by the force of the wind. **Acts 27:17** tells about the shipwreck on the Mediterranean. The storm became so bad that the sailors could do nothing and “so were driven.” The word

“driven” (in **Acts 27:17**) is the same as the word “moved” (in **2 Peter 1:21**). Just as the ship was driven along by the wind, so the Holy Spirit came upon the writers of Scripture, and blew them wherever He desired.

Note however that “inspiration” is not the same as “dictation.” God did not *dictate* to the writers of the Bible word for word. Some passages were dictated by God (for example, the Ten Commandments). These were written with the finger of God and recorded word for word in the Book of Exodus. But the *normal procedure* in inspiration was not dictation. The Holy Spirit controlled the thoughts and judgments and words of the writers, yet at the same time, the writer expressed these thoughts in terms reflecting his own style of writing and his own personality. Mark’s style of writing, for example, is altogether different from that of Luke’s. Each writer had freedom to use his own vocabulary and yet when he had finished his writing, he had written the very words that God wanted recorded. The Holy Spirit had complete command of the operation. You say, “But that’s impossible; it’s supernatural.” True—it is supernatural. The Bible is a supernatural book. It produces supernatural results. One who denies the supernatural, may as well forget all about Christianity.

Note also that inspiration does not suggest that God approves all the Bible’s statements. God does not approve all the remarks of the devil (nor of Job’s friends), for example, in the Book of Job. The inspiration of the Bible guarantees that all these remarks are accurately recorded, but God says to Eliphaz in **Job 42:7**, “My wrath is kindled against thee ... for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right.” The words of the three “friends” in the Book of Job — what we read there — is exactly what they said, but God doesn’t necessarily *approve* of what they said. This is one reason why we need to study the Scriptures carefully, and be diligent about rightly dividing the word of truth.

Inspiration is verbal. The Holy Spirit accurately guarded the words. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2:13** that he writes the things God has given him “not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” Every word of the Bible (in its original form) has been guarded by the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration is plenary. This word comes from the Latin word “*plenus*” which means “full.” All Scripture is inspired, not merely part of it. That includes the Book of Jonah and also the Book of Genesis. That includes the parts you can’t understand as well as the parts you can understand. *All* Scripture is inspired of God. The *whole Bible* originated with God. True—it is not all equally rich in spiritual content, but every part of the Bible is equally reliable and trustworthy. **Nehemiah 7** (with all its names

and numbers) is just as much inspired as a favorite passage such as [John 14](#). The original documents of the Bible were God-breathed.

Inspiration is final. God's written word comes to a close with the Book of Revelation. His *complete* will for man is given in the Scriptures. All that the guilty sinner ever needs to know and all that the obedient saint can ever anticipate, is stored away in this Divine Library. Rev. 22:18 pronounces a solemn curse upon all who would dare to add to the words of Scripture. The Holy Spirit will illuminate and give a fuller apprehension of the truth, but God's truth itself is complete and final.

2. THE EVIDENCES OF INSPIRATION

One of the evidences for the inspiration of the Bible is ***the miracle of survival***. The Bible has been the most persecuted book in all history. It has been burned and ridiculed and attacked in many ways, yet today it stands as strong as ever. Some printed material literally explodes with hatred for the Bible. One pamphlet says the Bible is filled with contradictions, absurdities, cannibalism, impossibilities, insane sex ideas, injustice to women, etc. The writer goes on to say that if bad books are ever burned, the largest bonfire should consist of Bibles. But why all this hatred for a Book that's led thousands of people to live a better life! No one hates ***Andersen's Fairy Tales***. No one starts bonfires with ***Aesop's Fables***. Why all the hatred for the Bible! Men hate this Book because it tells them what they are; it condemns sin; it makes demands upon their lives. Someone said to an infidel one time, "Why are you always criticizing the Bible; why don't you let the Bible alone?" He answered, "Because it doesn't let me alone." Men hate the Bible, and as a result it has been the victim of one attack after another down through the centuries, but today it stands as strong as ever. Men have preached the Bible's funeral ten thousand times, but they've never been able to get it buried! If the Bible had been a fraudulent book, it would have disintegrated long ago. Isaiah says, "The Word of our God shall stand forever."

Another evidence for the Bible's inspiration is ***the proof of prophecy***. Many events in the life of Jesus, for example, were foretold in accurate detail long before they occurred. His virgin birth was foretold by Isaiah; the town of His birth was foretold by Micah; the flight into Egypt was mentioned by Hosea; His resurrection was foretold by David. The twenty-second Psalm alone contains more than thirty exact descriptions of Jesus on the Cross, and even though the Psalmist was writing one thousand years before the events actually took place, his descriptions are so exact that it seems like he was standing right at the foot of the Cross when he wrote.

Perhaps one of ***the most impressive fulfillments*** of prophecy is that concerning the city of Tyre, written in **Ezekiel 26**. While the city was at the height of prosperity, Ezekiel prophesied that it would be ravished by many nations, that its walls would be broken down, and that eventually the city would be flattened out like the top of a huge rock. Ezekiel said the ruins would become a place for fishermen to spread their nets, and he concludes, **“And thou shalt be built no more, for I have spoken it saith the Lord God.”** Now all this has literally taken place. The ancient city of Tyre was located along the Mediterranean coast. Part of the city was built on an island off shore. When the city was destroyed, rocks and debris from demolished buildings were pushed into the sea (between the part of the city on the island and the part on the coast), and fishermen have used this spot for generations for the spreading of their nets. Any book which gives such accurate prophecies concerning future events, must have as its author, the One who knows the future – and the only One who knows that is God.

The crowning evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is the ***testimony of Jesus***. Jesus declared in **John 10:34**, **“The scripture cannot be broken.”** He put His seal on the Old Testament when He quoted **Exodus 3:6** (as recorded in **Matthew 22:31**) – and said, **“Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?”** Jesus says the writings of Moses were spoken by God. During His earthly ministry, Jesus quoted from all parts of the Old Testament. He spoke of man’s creation, the institution of marriage, the days of Noah, the destruction of Sodom, God’s appearing to Moses in the burning bush, manna from heaven, lifting up the brazen serpent, the life of David, the glory of Solomon, the history of Abraham, and the sign of Jonah. And in all this record we have of Jesus’ words, there is not even the slightest intimation that the Scriptures might be untrustworthy at any point. He never contradicted nor disagreed with anything in the Old Testament.

Concerning the New Testament, Jesus said, **“But the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).** The question is often asked, **“What guarantee have we that in the reports of the Gospel writers, we have an accurate account of the words of Jesus? How do we know that the Gospels are true! Might not the writers have forgotten what Jesus said and misreported his words?”** And the answer is that they might forget. They were human beings. But Jesus himself tells us that they would not be left to their own fallible memories, but that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that He had said to them. And so, in the Gospels, we have not the Apostles’ recollection of what Jesus said, but the Holy Spirit’s recollection, and He never forgets.

To Jesus Christ, the Scriptures were the infallible Word of God. Not one statement could possibly be broken. Are we going to part company with Jesus? Are we going to

say Jesus was mistaken? The miracle of survival, the proof of prophecy, and the testimony of Jesus – these are all evidences that the Bible is a unique Book.

3. THE CONSEQUENCE OF INSPIRATION

Because the Bible is divinely inspired, it is a **profound book**. The Bible is not composed of the simple writings of men. It is divinely inspired and it is not always a simple book for the human mind to understand. Take for example the verse which says, “**The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.**” That verse is really beyond human comprehension. We can learn many things about the atoning blood, and experience its reality in our lives, and receive new insights into its meaning; but to understand the full miracle of how the blood of Christ cleanses sin is impossible.

Because the Bible is divinely inspired, it is an **authoritative book**. It demands our obedience. It is the supreme court from which there is no appeal. An old bishop used to say, “Show me something in the Bible that I don’t teach, and I’ll start teaching it; or show me something I do teach that’s not in the Bible, and I’ll cease teaching it.” When the Bible speaks, you can be sure that it is the voice of God speaking, and therefore it demands our obedience. The Bible is the mind of God and therefore it is essential that we believe it and obey it.

Because the Bible is divinely inspired, it is a **profitable book**. The concluding portion of **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “**and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.**” It is profitable for doctrine – for teaching (it teaches us the way to God). It is profitable for reproof – it shows us where we’re wrong. It is profitable for correction – it tells us how to get right. It is profitable for instruction in righteousness – it tells a saved man how he ought to live. The Bible is useful and profitable in that it teaches truth.

The Bible is **God’s Book**, and for this reason you can build your life and your eternal destiny on what it says. The child’s song expresses the truth: “Jesus loves me this I know, **for the Bible tells me so.**” The Scriptures tell us about Jesus Christ. They tell us how He died; they remind us how we sinned; they assure us that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. The Bible was written to reveal a Person. It was written that men might believe, know, love, understand, and follow Jesus Christ (**John 20:30-31**).

Some church leaders today are saying that those who believe the verbal inspiration of the Bible are “bibliolaters,” and that Bible-believers are making a black leatherbound book the object of their devotion. They say we must not worship a dead book but

rather a living person. Such a statement sounds very pious indeed, but when we examine the argument carefully we see that it is faulty. Our true object of worship is Jesus Christ, But what do we know about Jesus Christ except what we find in the Bible? How do we come to know Him except through the message of the Bible? Our only source of information about the character and attributes of Jesus Christ, is the Bible. It's from this despised Book that we learn of Jesus Christ. And if the Bible is filled with errors and contradictions, then it might also be in error concerning Him.

We don't worship the Bible (it's paper and ink and leather covers), but we do love the book because of its message. Our love for Jesus Christ *grows* every day when we meditate on the pages of the Book. Our belief in an infallible Bible does not *obscure* our love for the Saviour; rather it *deepens* our devotion to the Lord of Glory! The fact is that men who say that to believe a perfect Bible is to worship the Book instead of the Christ — *are themselves* worshipping something instead of the Christ. They worship the *infallible mind of man*. They believe that man in himself has the intelligence and the capacity to decide what is truth.

We urge all in the Church of the Brethren to put the Bible in its proper place. The **138th Psalm** says, "I will praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." God thinks highly of His name (we are not to use it profanely) – but He has magnified His *word* even above His *name*.