

INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

by James P. Dawson

Perhaps the most significant question posed to believers in our "post-Christian" culture revolves around the inspiration of Scripture. Is the Bible in fact divinely inspired or merely human in origin? The view that an interpreter holds as to the origin of the Bible will determine what meaning that interpreter will find in it. If the Bible owes its source to Almighty God who has revealed his message to human writers, then the reader must consider it an inspired document and search for the message God presents. If the interpreter adopts an alternative explanation of the Bible's origin, then he or she will prescribe other goals in interpreting the text. I embrace the presupposition that the Bible is a supernatural book, God's written revelation to his people, given through prepared and selected spokespersons by the process of inspiration. This has been the Church's universal creed throughout its history. It follows from the first presupposition that the Bible is authoritative and true, and possesses ultimate authority. It is the guideline and goal for all human belief and behavior. It speaks truthfully about whom we are and how we are to live, so rejecting the message of the Bible means rejecting the will of God.

What God says must be true, for God cannot lie neither will he mislead. Conservative scholars have usually maintained that inspiration implies Inerrancy -- that what God authored must of necessity contain no errors. Others defend the Bible's infallibility, which allows a greater amount of imprecision to be present in the Bible. Some prefer to defend a more limited Inerrancy in which the biblical authors did not err in what they intended to teach theologically, but may have erred in other incidental (to their purposes) issues. To the left of these conservatives are the neo-orthodox theologians who argue that the Bible only becomes the Word of God as it is faithfully read, preached, and comprehended by believers. Finally, still further to the left are those liberal scholars who grant the Bible inspiration only as far as all the world's great literature is inspired. Hence, they accord it no divine status and study it only as they would other ancient (religious) documents. For them the Bible has at best only limited authority and no privileged claim to truth. For us, the Bible is true in all it intends to teach. Its statements convey what is factual; its record is faithful and reliable. This includes all its individual parts and its overall message. This is not the place for an exhaustive defense of the Bible's truthfulness. We also believe this presupposition alone does justice to the Bible's character and claims of truthfulness.

We realize that only a minority of scholars holds this presupposition today, though it is standard for believing Christians. How do we handle apparent contradictions or errors? Following our supposition of truth, we are bound to seek viable solutions or admit that with the present state of our knowledge we cannot find a solution. This does not mean that no solution exists; it simply means that we do not know how to solve the problem at this time. This is no more presumptuous than assuming a modern, scholarly, critical omniscience about such questions. Our presupposition of truthfulness disposes us to reject the position that the Bible errs and to assume, in such instances that the data, our knowledge, or our theory to explain the evidence remains deficient. The Bible has the unique power to affect the reader spiritually and manifests unparalleled spiritual worth and a capacity to change lives. Scripture has inherent power. (156) This makes the Bible a unique book in human history--useful in ways unlike any other book.

The view one holds of the nature, authenticity and authorship of the Bible will determine how one accepts and acts on its content. One division of Judaism accepts it as their history, but also accepts "other inspired documents" in addition to and equal to the Bible. If one accepts it as the Word of God, then what is the degree of acceptance. If one believes as the new theologians do, then he can discard what he considers incorrect and make the Bible fit his own life-style without fear of a final judgment or retribution. However, if parts of the Bible are not God's Word, which part? Who decides which part is true and accurate? If part is in error, is it the part where one's salvation is given as a gift or is it just the part that speaks of judgment in error? The acceptance or rejection of the Inerrancy of the Scripture is a momentous decision. One cannot argue that because the Bible claims to be the Word of God the question is settled. Christians do not accept the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon just because they claim they are from God. However, if one takes what has been written about the future and it is verified, then one must consider the validity of the other statements in the Bible. Parts five and six present some fulfilled prophecies in detail.

God has given us His Word that reveals much of His nature. Essentially every Christian believes that God speaks through the Bible, but many do not know the exact meaning of certain terms used to describe its uniqueness. Several key words apply to the Bible and its inspiration which distinguish it from all other books. They are: inspired, verbal, plenary, infallible, and inerrant.

The word "inspired," as used to describe the Bible, meant that God literally gave life to the book or as 2 Timothy 3:16 relates it was "breathed of God." The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the trinity, revealed divine truth to the prophets of old and then led them to record it accurately in writing and He called to remembrance to the Apostles all

that Jesus had taught them (157). The term "verbal" indicates that God's supernatural guidance included the very words chosen by the human writers. (158) The Old Testament language affirms the divine inspiration with quotations like: "The Lord says . . . (159) showing that the spokesperson believed they were speaking God's message, not their own. The New Testament writers, when quoting the OT, also indicated that they believed they were quoting God's message.(5) We could never accept the idea that only the thoughts but not the words of the writers were inspired of God, because that allows room for human error. "Plenary" means that divine inspiration extends from Genesis through Revelation. The whole Bible, from start to finish, with everything in between, is God-breathed and is suitable for instruction. (6) This is the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Word of God.

Those who hold to verbal, plenary inspiration also use another expression, the infallible Word. This declares that the Bible is not only the inspired Word of God, but is completely without error, never wrong. They thought the use of this word should leave no room at all for any misunderstanding. However, it was not long before some theologians were professing the infallibility of Scripture, but limiting the scope of that absolute freedom from error to only spiritual truth. They pointed out that God used fallible men to do the writing and that this made elements of imperfection inevitable. They have come to the conclusion that the Bible is infallible in its basic moral and spiritual teaching, but that it may include mistakes in matters of history, wrong conceptions of scientific data, and some blind spots which stemmed from the cultural limitations under which the writers of Scripture lived. This line of reasoning leads to more serious problems because once you start allowing for errors of any kind in the Bible, you are losing it as the authoritative Word of God. Whoever does this is opening the door to subjectivism in handling the Scriptures. Such a concept of inspiration gives each Bible reader the right to decide what he wants to believe and what he wishes to reject. What is more important, it casts doubt on the validity of any and all Scripture. Did Christ really rise from the dead? If not, Christianity has no meaning. To safeguard against and to counter this abuse of the term "infallible," conservative scholars have added the word "inerrant" to their statement of belief regarding the inspiration of the Bible. They believe the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, to be the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God. Now, as with the word "infallible," some are professing to believe in the Inerrancy of Scripture, but they say that this means simply that the Bible writers were not guilty of outright lying, deliberate fraud, or willful deception. They state Inerrancy means that nothing in the Bible leads us astray from the will of God or the knowledge of His truth. The conservative view is that inerrant means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their **original autographs** and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that it teaches, whether that teaching relates to doctrine, history, science, geology, or other disciplines of knowledge.

According to that definition, the word "Inerrancy" goes much further and deeper than simply saying that the men who wrote the Bible were honest and sincere. It is a declaration that what they wrote was completely free from error. With this definition no one has a right to say that he holds to the Inerrancy of the Bible unless he is willing to declare its complete freedom from any and all mistakes. This use and definition of the word "inerrant" divide the views of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The confession that the Scriptures are inspired, infallible and inerrant carry with it a great deal of practical significance, because the very authority of the Bible is at stake. If one doesn't believe in absolute Inerrancy, he can play fast and loose with Bible history, and even with some matters of conduct. He can justify this by saying that the writer as a fallible child of his time was bound by the limitations of his environment. However, those who are committed to a high view of inspiration and are convinced that the original manuscripts were written completely free from error. When they encounter difficult passages which seem to defy any explanation, they believe the Scriptures to be right and they follow their directions. They conclude that their limited human understanding is the problem, not the Bible. They place themselves under its authority. It makes a world of difference whether or not you regard the Bible as the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Our view of inspiration, infallibility, and Inerrancy has tremendous implications when it comes to our acceptance, understanding, and application of Bible truth.

An example of this comes from the Law with its provision of the death penalty for 18 different sins and crimes. Most 20th-century people are aghast at the thought of the death penalty, they claim that it is barbaric. Those who do not hold to the absolute Inerrancy of Scripture are quick to conclude that these are man made laws not Gods. They say that Moses sincerely thought they came from God, but he was wrong. These laws came from the mind of Moses and not from God, but did reflect the corporate thinking of the time of Moses. This low view of Scripture Inerrancy enables one to rationalize and justify his own reasoning and convictions.

A second example relates to miracles. Those who deny biblical Inerrancy find it too easy to dismiss the scriptural accounts of supernatural phenomena, such as the virgin birth or the turning of the water into wine. They discount the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, the cause that brought down the walls of Jericho, the plagues on Egypt and the giving of a son to Abraham and Sarah when they were beyond the age of reproduction or any of the miracles performed by Elijah, Elisha, Christ and His apostles. They simply say that the writers who recorded their occurrences were mistaken and/or the events could be explained from natural phenomena.

When confronted with fulfilled prophecies, some theologians claim they wrote the book of Daniel in the days of the Maccabees and after the fact of the world empires. (162) They make this claim even in view of the validation of Daniel as a prophet by Ezekiel, Mark, Matthew and Jesus. (163) They also claim that the revolt of the Israelites fulfilled the events in Matthew 24-25 and the book of Revelation climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But they are at a loss when faced with the rebirth of Israel (164) and the return to the land that God promised Abraham, (165) (166) One has but to read the headlines in the daily newspapers to see these fulfilled promises and prophecies. The alignment of the nations against Israel as specified in Ezekiel 38-39 is in itself astounding, (167). The odds against the eleven nations of the Middle East aligning against Israel, as indicated in Ezekiel by chance, are more than 68 billion to 1.

One can see, then, that one's attitude toward biblical Inerrancy has great practical and spiritual significance. The vast majority of the general population does not know Hebrew and Greek languages and must depend of the English translations for our Biblical knowledge and interpretation. This adds to the confusion about Inerrancy, because of the variance between different translations. Some translations clearly conflict and lead to divisiveness. Most of the changes between the King James Version (KJV) and the new versions, the New International Version (NIV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB), do not affect the meaning of the verse; however, many do. (168).

This generation is embracing a series of translations of the Bible that makes it easier for them to "do their thing." It removes the pressures of the moral code in the Scriptures and leads us into the type of world conditions required for the end times, i.e., "as in the days of Lot (169) and "in the days of Noah. (170) According to the NIV, fornication does not exist, very few things are forbidden by God, He does not condemn personal actions or perversions, He does not hate the perversions, now He only dislikes them. Eighty six percent of the things God considered an abomination in the KJV, He now only dislikes them, according to the NIV. These changes reflect modern mans "New Age thinking" and the destruction of a moral society and are now condoned and taught in the churches by default in accepting and recommending the new translations without giving a warning as to the changes.

The changes presented in Versions are only a few of the changes made in the "New Translations" but they do represent the diluting of the Scriptures. The meaning of the new substituted words is less demanding, reduce the judgment consequences or lessen the condemnation of the individual. If taken in the whole the new translations are much easier to read, but place a less stringent requirement on the reader, and by that reduce the moral code which is the basis for our entire justice system.

Many New versions are systematically trying to wipe out the Biblical references to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Look at John 6:47, this is an example of what they have changed.

KJV: "Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

NASB: "Truly, truly I say unto you. He that believes has eternal life."

What does that mean? Believe in what? This completely changes the meaning of the Word and is not a better translation of the Greek but is a deliberate attempt to eliminate the reference to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Those of us who believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God contend that it is error-free in the original manuscripts. God so guided the human authors that they did not make a single mistake, not even in matters of history or science. We therefore believe that every doctrine the Bible teaches, every event it records, every scientific statement it makes, and every prophecy it expresses is true and accurate. The following chapters present the evidence for this belief. Because the Bible is the inerrant Word of the living God, it is important to read it, study it, believe it, and obey it! I use all the translations in my studies. They sometimes are easier to read, but I believe the KJV is a better translation of the original manuscripts and is not diluted by the "politically correct" or liberal ideas of modern man. I am afraid that the newer translations are giving some credence to the ones who claim the Bible is **not inerrant**.

The younger generations are not using the King James Version because they are telling them the NIV and the NASB are better translations. The work for the apologist in this area is clear and urgent. The attack on the Inerrancy of the Scripture has taken a more direct and deadly approach. It is no longer an academic, theological debate, it is a fight against the principalities and powers of darkness. Nevertheless, we take heart because we know that the Word of God will go forth and men will come to the cross in spite of all that Satan and man can do to thwart the will of God.

Cited References

(1) **Isaiah 55; Hebrews 4:12-13. Return**

(2) **John 14:26** But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you..

(3) **II Peter 1:20-21** First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(4) **Genesis 26:2** And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, God not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of;

Exodus 6:2; And God Spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty.

I Samuel 9:17 And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.;

(5) **2 Corinthians 6:16** What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Matthew 19:5 And said, **For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.**

Acts 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, **Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?**

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, **Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.**

(161) **2 Timothy 3:16** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;

(162) D. S. Russell, *Apocalypse and the Prophetic Dream*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.

(163) **Ezekiel 14:14** So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 14:20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.

Matthew 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (who so readeth, let him understand:)

(164) **Ezekiel 36-37; Isaiah 10:21-22, 35:10, 51:11; Jeremiah 12:15, 30:3, 31:8.**

(165) **Genesis 12:1-2** Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Genesis 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

Genesis 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

(166) **James P. Dawson**, *Why Believe?*, Aaron C Ministries, 1997: Chapter 13.

(167) _____. *Why Believe?*, Aaron C Ministries, 1997: Chapter 24.

(168) _____. *Why Believe?*, Aaron C Ministries, 1997: Chapter 7

(169) **Luke 17:28-30** Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

(170) **I Peter 3:20**. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.