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## Indications of Verbal Inspiration

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Evangelical believers assert that "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."<sup>1</sup> The doctrine that the Bible is the Word of God written is known variously as the doctrine of plenary inspiration, verbal inspiration, or verbal plenary inspiration. Although no label is universally employed, the last identification seems preferable to avoid confusion.

Verbal plenary inspiration may be defined as that work of the Holy Spirit whereby the third person of the Trinity controlled and guided reception and communication of the divine message to mankind such that the word product is inerrantly authoritative.

The aspect of reception recognizes three general sources for the information recorded in Scripture. Very often that information came by divine self-revelation, that is, God making known information which man could not otherwise attain. At times it involved recollection of the writer's own personal experiences, such as Luke in the book of Acts. At times it included information from other people or other written sources, the area referred to as research.

Inspiration is properly distinguished from revelation and from illumination. One possible source of inspiration is special revelation. Illumination has to do with comprehension. Inspiration may or may not be accompanied by illumination (I Pet 1:10-12), that work of the Holy Spirit enlivening man's cognitive powers to comprehend spiritual truth.

The product of verbal plenary inspiration, the Bible, is God's one and only authoritative message to the human race. The doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures is basic in Christian faith. There are different theories regarding the inspiration of Scripture. There is only one doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. From study of the

Scriptures themselves, "it is either 'plenary inspiration' or nothing at all."<sup>2</sup> For a Bible-believer, there is only one explanation of the origin of Scripture to consider, an explanation by God rather than inventions of men.

As a further introductory remark, it seems wise to characterize two different concepts of how to "do theology." For some, theology is an arrangement of various ideas of various men, an entertaining "zoo" through which subjective preferences are expressed. Study of men, their ideas and actions, falls into the department of church history, not systematic theology. Theology is the result of exegesis of Scripture. God's truth is the proper subject matter, not human ideas (Isa 55:8-11). If a doctrine is not from God, as mere speculation it may be entertaining but never authoritative (Deut 29:29). The goal of exegesis is to comprehend the Word of God correctly. The method of exegesis is to employ all tools God has provided to enable comprehension. The survey of this article is to examine several exegetical indications of verbal plenary inspiration. If it is correct for a believer to accept divine authorship of the Scripture, the information regarding this doctrine as for all others must come from God Himself and not from the imaginations of a human mind.

The procedure for presenting this survey is first to consider several verses which assert truths to be included in the doctrine and then to assemble various indications.

### **Significant Verses**

As directly contributing to the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration eight verses are considered in this section. Numerous less direct passages could be added; the eight considered here seem adequately to provide clear exegetical basis for the doctrine. For this summary, only exegetical aspects directly bearing on the doctrine will be noted.

#### **II Timothy 3:16-17**

The verse usually considered to be the most important to the doctrine in KJ translation uses the word inspiration, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim 3:16). Evidences appear in three areas: context, word studies and intended results.

**Context.** The preceding context of II Tim 3:16 seems clearly to identify the writing (Scripture) being spoken about by the Apostle Paul. It is recognized, written and holy.

(1) That it was the recognized corpus among the Jews is indicated in verse 15. From a child Timothy had been taught the writings.

Between Samaritans and Jews there was a difference as to what constituted Scripture. Among the Jews there were differences of interpretation, the greatest between Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:8), but no difference regarding content of the canon. There are evidences of textual variants extant in the time of Timothy and Paul but no indication of differences among the Jews as to which writings constituted the authoritative divine writings.

That what today is called the OT constituted the recognized sacred writings of the Jews is evident from incidents in the public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. After being questioned by the chief priests and elders of the people as to the authority whereby He acted (Matt 21:23), Jesus cited the authority of Scripture. "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures" (Matt 21:42) using Ps 118:22, the authoritative nature of which was recognized both by the people and also by the chief priests and Pharisees (Matt 21:45).

The same recognized writings were used as the authority to answer inquiry by the Sadducees (Matt 22:23). Their deficiency was two-fold. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29), using Exod 3:6. The multitude (v 33), the Pharisees and the Sadducees (v 34) all recognized the finality of the authority of Scripture.

The certainty of fulfillment of that taught in the accepted Scriptures and even detail of fulfillment are evident in Matt 26:54, 56. At the betrayal of Judas Jesus refused to call for divine intervention. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt 26:53-54). Jesus told them, "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took Me not; but the scriptures must be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49). "But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt 26:56). On these occasions there clearly was Jewish recognition of the authority of Scripture.

In His response to Jews who objected to His healing on the sabbath (John 5:16) Jesus referred to the collection the Jews recognized as authoritative. "Search the scriptures (or ye search the scriptures); for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

The resurrected but not yet ascended Jesus referred to the accepted corpus in a customary way naming major portions. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The two said one to another "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way. And while He opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). To the eleven Jesus said, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45).

The Hebrew Scriptures were regularly read in synagogue worship (Luke 4:16-19; Acts 13:15; 15:21; 17:2,11; 18:24,28). Paul's doctrine was firmly grounded in the Scriptures (I Cor 15:3-4; Rom 15:4; 16:26). Jesus, disciples, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, synagogue worshipers, all accepted the authority of a collected corpus known as the Scriptures. Timothy's grandmother and mother (II Tim 1:5) and others had taught him from the distinct collection of sacred writings accepted among all Jews.

(2) That it was a written corpus is especially significant for consideration of verbal (word-expressed) inspiration. If a preferable label be employed, "inscripturation" (the writing down), Timothy had been taught from scrolls containing ink-formed letters in word group and syntactical formation originally divinely produced.

From a child Timothy had learned the Scriptures (*grammata*). The Greek word *grammata* identifies marks inscribed on some surface or engraved in some material such as wax, clay, or stone. In Israel the one professionally trained and employed for inscribing written characters was called a scribe. The word *grammata* could be used of the message conveyed by the letters, the lettering itself, or the entire inscription, scroll or collection of writings. The sacred Hebrew Scriptures were variously referred to as the writings of Moses, the Scriptures of the Jews, the Hebrew Scriptures, our writings, and most frequently the holy Scriptures.

There is no reason to conjecture that Timothy as a youth in Asia Minor had access to original autographa, the actual original writing of any OT prophet. He had been trained from youth by studying written copies rather than the actual originals. This seems important in considering whether the inspiration spoken of in the passage has to do with the process of production or an enduring character of a written text. Considering the possibility that the holy Scriptures he had studied as a youth may have been a translation in Greek (the LXX) rather than Hebrew copies, the decision seems more evident. The inscribed copy or translation he studied as a young boy was holy and divinely used unto his conversion because it correctly conveyed information which had come from God, not from men. The letters on the parchment or papyrus were not themselves charged with a spiritual electrical voltage, a quality different from other written letters. They were holy and beneficial unto salvation because they faithfully conveyed a message from God.

(3) That the Scriptures Timothy had studied as a youth were properly designated as "holy" (II Tim 3:15) is equally significant. The context clearly speaks of a corpus recognized as holy writings, of a copy or a translation containing letters and words the human eye can see. This particular corpus differs from all other extant writings in that it can properly be labeled "holy."

The root idea of holiness is to be set apart. This involves both a separation from other mundane things and also special restriction unto divine purpose. Paul's reference to the scrolls of Timothy's youth indicated that they were distinctly different from common writings. They conveyed divine truth rather than human wisdom. It further indicated that these scrolls were a special tool in God's hand, employed "to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim 3:15).

Holiness is supremely asserted of God (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). Holiness is to be the supreme goal of man: "as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (life); because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet 1:15-16; Lev 11:24; Matt 5:48). Timothy's childhood scrolls were holy in every possible sense, as distinct from the mundane, as a divine instrument effective unto initiation of a holy life in conversion, and as fully effective unto sanctification.

**Words Used.** Three words in II Timothy 3:16 deserve careful consideration as they assert verbal plenary inspiration, in KJ

translation they are the words scripture, inspiration and all. The interrelationship (syntax) obviously enters in as well, and can be adequately comprehended along with consideration of the individual words in the assertion (KJ translation) "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

(1) The word for scripture is *graphe*, the singular rather than the plural *grammata* of verse 15. Corresponding to that considered in the context, the word in the singular identifies a distinct, discernable kind of or collection of writings. The emphasis of the singular at this point is on the unity of the recognized canon. What is asserted (inspiration) applies to Scripture as a whole and in distinction from all that is not of that whole. The twenty-two books of the Hebrew canon (39 in the English OT) manifest a recognized unity. It is a unity not of location or of mutual binding or of similar subject matter, but a unity of origin, of God.

That which is Scripture is obviously that which Timothy had learned from as a child. There is not a contrast in the shift from the plural in verse 15 to the singular in verse 16. Denotation is identical, the Hebrew canon; connotation shifts, from many written letters on scroll surface and numerous distinct compositions to an emphasis on that which characterizes the whole. It is of one mind, of one ultimate author. It presents a single, unified message. Each of the various discernable parts must be seen as subordinate to and consistent with the whole. Not only unity but interrelatedness is thus asserted.

The singular word *graphe* (as the plural) identifies a corpus existing in enduring written form. This is in contrast to oral repetition. This asserts prior use of a writing instrument and a writing surface. This is a touchable, readable, understandable corpus. It has reference to current copies existing in the time of Paul and Timothy and not to autographa, the actual copy penned by the OT prophet. To repeat the distinction, "inspiration" is control at origination, not a continuing divine activity. Because the OT was a message from God it could be profitable unto conversion (v 15) and sanctification (vv 16-17).

(2) The word in KJ translated "given by inspiration of" (*theopneustos*) is a combination form, simply translated "God-breathed." It is often rendered, "out-breathed by God." As well demonstrated by B B Warfield, "It does not express a breathing into the Scriptures by God."<sup>3</sup>

This contrast is important. An author did not compose a book which God chose to approve as canonical. The written document was not humanly composed and then divinely selected for a special collection upon completion. The writings were not in any sense breathed into by God but were instead out-breathed by God. This out-breathing gives indication of the source of that which is written, the process of the writing, and the quality of that which was written.

(a) The source of Scripture is the result of an activity of God in out-breathing that which is now represented by letters on parchment page before the eyes of young Timothy. God-breathed clearly indicates that Scripture is throughout a divine production, not in any sense a result of divine approval or enlivenment of a human production. The content of the message is from God. The framework of the conveyance (syntax) is the result of an out-breathing work of God. The words, even the letters have been God-initiated and God-guided. The process of out-breathing has resulted in a corpus written and enduring.

(b) That the process of "inspiration" was a divine activity is the most thrilling and most important truth evident in a study of "God-breathed." Other passages contribute to a proper understanding of the relation of the divine and human in the inscripturization process; this verse declares any comprehension must acknowledge that the process was so divinely controlled that it must needs be understood as a God-breathing activity.

It should also be noted that the divine out-breathing has particular reference to the reception and writing resulting in what is referred to as autographa. The original corpus, not every copy thereafter, was out-breathed. The copy in Timothy's hands is valuable because of the divine origin of the corpus, not because of infallible transmission. Paul proclaims an authoritative, benefit-producing message which can be effective because of its divinely-controlled origin.

(c) The quality of that corpus is radically superior because of its special production. The autographa were God-breathed, produced under full control of a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). If human thought had been its origin, error would predominate throughout. If human effort were relied upon at any point, error might easily enter in (as it occasionally did in copies). If the process was divinely controlled as an out-breathing of the creator God, the autographic copy bore witness to the total, perfect knowledge of God.

That autograph copies are not extant seems wise; otherwise sinful men would worship them as icons. That so few errors have been introduced through centuries of copying gives adequate assurance of what was written as autographa.<sup>4</sup> To employ an analogy often used in classroom presentation, a soap 99 and 44 one hundredths percent pure is normally employed for the cleansing provided and not normally analyzed to ascertain the 56 one hundredths percent non-pure.

(3) The word "all" (*pasa*) has seemed to cause trouble but in reality it does not. It serves both as all-inclusive, the whole, the entirety, and also as specific, every portion, every bit. The entire corpus, the full OT canon, has been God-breathed. The entirety, every small portion, is to be included. The KJ translation stresses entirety: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The English Revised looks at various parts, distributively, translating "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable."<sup>5</sup>

Some have misused the ER translation as suggesting that some Scripture is inspired and some not inspired.<sup>6</sup> This would consider that only inspired portions are profitable and would leave discernment of which portions might be inspired open to subjective evaluations. Contrary to this, Paul (God Himself) asserts that every bit of the entire corpus, because it is all inspired, is profitable. It has been well observed that there are no degrees of inspiration; there are only differences of profitability. But there is no absence of profitability. Every portion was God-breathed and each portion is profitable in one or more ways.

**Intended Results.** Intended benefits provided for by God through the corpus of God-breathed writings appear in verses 16b and 17. Four important areas of operation are named and the intended final result: Scripture "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect (mature), throughly furnished unto all good works."

The benefit of these verses builds on the pre-conversion work of Scripture (v 15), declaring its profitability to the man of God (v 17). The end or goal of that profitability is a work of being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). It involves spiritual maturity, solidity in the faith (Col 2:7), and full equipment enabling characteristic good works.

The path to this goal involves an active work of the Scriptures. Two of the benefits are positive in nature, profitable for doctrine and for instruction in righteousness. These may be likened to truth and wisdom, the wise use of truth. There is a conveyance of information in both. Scripture tells the what and the how. The information from Scripture must be accepted and assimilated in both cases, for knowledge and for righteous conduct.

The other two suggest discipline, correction. Sinful man is dead and thus needs life and growth; he is, even after regeneration, persistently perverse and needs constant correction. There is authority in the reproof of God-breathed Scripture. There should be confession, repentance and forsaking as God disciplines for the good of His children.

## **II Peter 1:20-21**

A second passage perhaps equally important to the doctrine of inspiration, is II Pet 1:20-21, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Whereas II Tim 3:16-17 stresses the divine work, II Pet 1:20-21 deals extensively with the human aspect. Peter says Scripture was not initiated by men, was not produced by men (solely), was spoken by men, was only by chosen, holy men, and was as men were borne along in that speaking by the Holy Spirit.

**Initiation.** The origin of OT Scripture is strongly declared by Peter to be "not by man's will." Man's desire or choice was not the determining factor in initiating that special revelation which a prophet would record. No prophet, so to speak, could go before God and demand that God specially speak for his time and situation. A man might come in humble supplication before God, realizing that only God knows and only God chooses to reveal; the choice of whether to reveal, when to reveal, and what to reveal remains a choice of God. Daniel and his companions prayed and God chose to provide the answer (Dan 2:17-23).

Prophecy was "brought" by man but never by the force of man's will. The prophets frequently bore solemn testimony, "the word of the Lord came unto me" (Jer 1:4,11; 2:1, etc). They declared that the origin of what they proclaimed and authorization for the message was not any choice or decision of their own.

Perhaps at times it was against their choice to speak, but the word was "as a burning fire" within such that the prophet must speak (Jer 20:9). In contrast to His manner of speaking with Moses "mouth to mouth" (Num 12:8), God had indicated that for the prophets to follow Moses He would initiate communication: "I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (Num 12:6).

A second indication regarding origination of prophecy has by many been seen in verse 20: realizing as of primary importance that no prophecy of Scripture came from a prophet's personal interpretation. "When the prophets spoke, it was no private opinion they were giving; it was a revelation from God and, therefore, their words must be carefully heeded."<sup>7</sup> Most, however, consider "own" to refer, not to the prophets but to readers. No man can go to Scripture and interpret it as it suits himself.<sup>8</sup> So understood, the passage asserts the divine origin along with clarity of communication such that there is just one proper meaning to prophecy.

**Production.** Peter is clear in recognizing that prophecy came by men, though not by the will of men. The writings were written by writers. Peter would not ignore the writing on the tables of stone "written with the finger of God" (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10), but asserts concerning the extant corpus of Scripture of his day that it came by human production. The development is throughout to explain that it was a special, even unique process.

**Spoken.** It may be strange to twentieth century patterns to read that writings were spoken. A prophet spoke his message orally and as so directed by God recorded it using written consonants. Reading of letters or inscriptions was always aloud. The term "spoke" therefore correctly identifies both the oral and the written communication by the prophet.

Asserting that prophets spoke does not deny direct divine oral messages to the nation or to prophets. God spoke to the entire nation (Exod 20:1,19; Deut 5:4,22). He spoke audibly to prophets, sometimes a sound others could hear (but not always distinguish the words), sometimes by the inner ear. Even then, it was a voice objective to the prophet, not subjective in origin or nature. OT prophets made plain the message they proclaimed was God's, not theirs.

**Holy.** Holy Scripture (II Tim 3:15) came by the agency of holy men. This was the customary pattern. The life of the prophet was

consistent with the message he proclaimed. He was a holy instrument being used for a holy purpose by a holy Person.

The usual pattern may be heightened by the exceptions. God predominantly chose qualified, holy representatives. But God could use the ungodly: Balaam (Num 23:5) or Caiaphas (John 11:49-52) and even the beast of Balaam (Num 22:28-30). OT prophets were qualified; they were specially selected by God for their task. This involved a great variety of personalities, abilities, and occasions (Heb 1:1). Scribes copied and explained Scriptures. Sons of the prophets proclaimed publicly previously revealed prophecy. No man himself chose to be a recipient of God's message. God chose, and God authenticated. God provided near-fulfillment of prophecy (Deut 18:22) to establish the certainty of far off fulfillment and also clearly to indicate the writings to be incorporated into the canon.

**Borne along.** The crucial portion of this passage is the assertion that holy men of God spake as borne along by the Holy Spirit. The verb is used of a ship borne along by the wind (Acts 27:15,17). More vivid is the picture of a leaf being borne along by a rushing stream. In the producing of the books of the OT a human agent is recognized but regarding this human agent there is divine initiation of movement, divine continuation of movement, divine control of movement. Divine supervision and enablement guided human prophets in the production of OT Scripture.

This has been falsely presented as a caricature invention of a "dictation theory." The spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets (I Cor 14:32). Prophets borne along were heightened, sharpened, fully animated, not passive amanuenses. Just as the colloquial usage of inspired may refer to a preacher or musician manifesting special unction of the Holy Spirit, so the theological comprehension must recognize a heightening of senses and powers of expression. OT prophets may not always have comprehended the full meaning of all they wrote (I Pet 1:11) but they accurately and fully recorded what had been revealed to them. They were not engaged in any mumbo jumbo or gobbledegook.

The enablement, superintendence, control, supervision (all inadequate words) was by the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit. As God, it is contrary to His very nature to lie (Titus 1:2) or engage in any inaccurate or inadequate communication. Divine control produced an infallible product.

The two passages already considered seem fully to establish the teaching of Scripture as to its origin. The other passages yet to be examined further clarify what II Tim 3:16-17 and II Pet 1:20-21 assert. If God had given only these two passages, our comprehension of the doctrine would be identical but not nearly so clear. Each following passage augments in a distinctive fashion.

### I Corinthians 2:13

Paul speaks of "the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also ye speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but (in words) which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual"(I Cor 2:12c-13). Important information comes both from the context and from verse thirteen.

**Context.** The second chapter of First Corinthians contrasts human wisdom with divine information. Paul interweaves those areas we know as self-revelation, inspiration and illumination. Apart from God's provision, truth has been hidden from intellectuals and from rulers of this world (I Cor 2:6-8). Neither eye, ear nor heart could attain to comprehend (I Cor 2:9), but God has revealed His plans, His provision (I Cor 2:9-10). Such revelation is foolishness to the unregenerate (I Cor 2:14) but has been made known unto those who have received the Spirit of God (I Cor 2:12).

**Contribution.** The contributions of I Cor 2:13 to the Scriptural doctrine of inspiration are to be seen from consideration of speaking, words, and teaching.

(1) The speaking has clear reference to the proclamation by Paul and others who have preached at Corinth. It probably also includes later preaching by the Corinthians themselves. Christians are able to comprehend and communicate regarding truths they have obtained as a result of God's self-revelations by means of the indwelling illuminating Holy Spirit.

Paul and company had proclaimed the Word of God. What they proclaimed had been revealed to OT prophets (see Isa 64:4). That revelation was not just for one OT generation; it was "unto us" (I Cor 2:10). Preaching the OT Scriptures is preaching the revealed truth from God. The content is from the very heart of God which only the Holy Spirit knows (I Cor 2:11-12).

(2) Words (*logois*) are vehicles of communication. Thinking and speaking employ words. Concepts of eye, ear and heart (v 9) are expressed by meaning-carrying sounds. The words which Paul and

company had proclaimed were not words in the realm of human wisdom and teaching. Again this does not suggest undiscernible or unintelligible words; they were words giving understanding of divine self-revelation (vv 9-10). They were words conveying truth and information from the heart of God.

Grammatically, the ellipsis (understood, the words which the Holy Spirit teaches) does not lessen the force of what is said: inspiration is verbal (by words) inspiration. Revelation from God was by using words. The writing of that revelation by OT prophets employed words. What Paul and other preachers of his day proclaimed employed words. The truth whereby Corinthian believers had been saved was understood by words that had been preached.

(3) Teaching is that communication that results in learning. The truth conveyed employing words is hidden from the unsaved; such truth can be comprehended only if one has the indwelling Holy Spirit (v 14). Two assertions in verse 13 explain the nature of the words Paul had preached: they were words whereby the Holy Spirit teaches and they compare spiritual things with spiritual.

(a) The words of Holy Spirit teaching were of divine origin and control. The words taught by human wisdom have been attained from human investigation and contemplation. In Greek philosophy there had been great advances in exactness of linguistic expression. But no man by searching can find God. Such human (Greek) wisdom is only of the earth. Words taught by the Holy Spirit owe their source to the heart of eternal God. They have been chosen by an all-wise Being to convey divine truth to mankind. Words chosen by the Spirit of God, inscripturated by men of God, proclaimed by missionaries in Corinth, convey truth in a special spiritual realm. Preachers today should proclaim the Bible message employing words the Holy Spirit has chosen to use and not seek from words of the worldly-wise for novelty or invention.

(b) The words of the Spirit compare spiritual things with spiritual. Educators employ teaching methods building on previous experience. The Holy Spirit does the same, building spiritual truth upon other revealed spiritual truth. The pattern of God's self-revelation has been seed-form.<sup>9</sup> The pattern of growing in knowledge in the Christian life is similar. Great knowledge in medicine or science is not the basis for increased knowledge of spiritual truth. Increased knowledge of Scripture is the base for additional comprehension.

## I Thessalonians 2:1

A similar but stronger statement appears in Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica. The context is not a contrast to Greek wisdom but commanding rapid spiritual maturity. Their response to Scripture was a commendable witness to other churches (I Thess 1:6-10). Paul and company had preached the Gospel (I Thess 2:2-9). Their response was proper (I Thess 2:13-14) in that they recognized the divine nature of the message. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess 2:13).

First, note that they received Paul's preaching not as the word of men (v 13). This has to do with the source. It did not originate from the mind of men but from God. It was not a result of the wisdom of man. It thus indicates supreme authority. The word of man, even of rulers, is only of limited, earthly authority. Men respond in varying ways to human wisdom and to human authority. The response in Thessalonica was not of such a nature.

They did receive it as the word of God (v 13). To this statement Paul himself further certifies: which it truly is. They had ascertained its true nature, they had responded to the content of Paul's preaching recognizing it for what it really was, the Word of God. The main lessons again are source and authority. To these may be added verbal communication. The Greek uses *logos*, word. What Paul preached (not all that he said) used words from God. His message was really the message of God proclaimed by employing sounds and syntax.

Further, Paul indicates that the Scripture continues effectually to work in believers (v 13). The same message still preached in Thessalonica after Paul has left there is truly the word of God such that it continues spiritual instruction and growth. But it does not work mechanically or automatically. The same Scripture preached among others has not been as effective as among believers at Thessalonica. Its effectiveness there is because of their recognition of it as verily the Word of God and their respect for it as authoritative. The effectiveness depends on their faith and response. They have greatly benefited and will continue to benefit.

### **John 10:35**

The special authority of Scripture was asserted by Jesus in defending Himself against a mob bent on stoning Him (John 10:31) because He clearly taught that He was God (John 10:33). Using the OT Scripture in His response (John 10:34-38), Jesus declared, "the Scripture cannot be broken." Even the unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians might be legally modified (Esther 8:7-14). The Word of God however is set and sure. Nullification is not possible; there is no power able to do so (*ou dunatai*).

The Scripture referred to by Jesus as comprehended by the Jews to whom He spoke was the inscripturated canon of the Hebrew OT, containing the portion, expressed in words, which Jesus quoted (Ps 82:6). Jesus identified it as "your law" and as "written" (v 34).

The argument of Jesus is built on just one word, "gods" (vv 34-35). If God used the word "gods" of human beings made in His image and likeness, should they not recognize Him who is the exact image (Heb 1:3)? The response of Jesus makes clear that the choice of words by God in the OT Scripture was significant and authoritative. For today, as for the Jews of Jesus' day, careful exegesis is essential, because each word is important and exact.

This exactness as expressed in the phrase "cannot be broken" has to do with fulfillment as a part of authority. None can lessen the authority of the words inscripturated. What has been predicted to come to pass will surely take place. There is no power greater than God able to hinder or thwart the plans and purposes of God. None can repeal any law of God. God Himself will not effect any change because He Himself changes not. What He has proclaimed among men is always true, always binding, certain to occur.

This Scripture of which Jesus spoke cannot be broken in the sense that a part of it might be fallible. It is a unity, a whole that cannot be sorted out into separate parts, some of which might be authoritative and others set aside as lacking authority. Man cannot choose to obey some and reject other parts. God will not bring to pass a part of what is predicted and cancel a portion of His program. The entire OT canon is eternally authoritative.

### **Matthew 5:17-18**

The Lord Jesus Christ declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot

or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt 5:17-18). The indications from this passage may be treated as to Scripture, endurance, plenary, and transmission.

**Scripture.** That corpus about which Jesus was speaking is identified as the law and the prophets in verse 17 and again as the law in verse 18. Law is frequently employed to refer to the entire OT canon. Law and prophets is a two-fold all-inclusive label. A three-fold designation was also frequent, the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms (Luke 24:44) or, as the third group, the writings. The Jews to whom Jesus was speaking in this sermon on the mount in Matthew five had a clear, unquestionable understanding of His reference to their Holy Scriptures.

**Endurance.** Jesus declared that details of the writing would endure until final destruction of the universe. "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

This assertion by Jesus pertains to prophecy and the fulfillment of all that OT Scripture predicted. Everything God has predicted to come to pass will come to pass (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:49). God controls fulfillment and God determines the time of final destruction. The nature of God is involved.

Amillennialists tend to see fulfillment of all OT promises in the church. They disagree as to whether there will yet be a national conversion of Israel (Rom 11:24-26) prior to end-time destruction. Premillennialists see future fulfillment of additional OT promises to Israel. For them, the certainty of fulfillment Jesus asserted in Matt 5:18 is exceedingly important.

But the enduring character Jesus spoke of is not so much in connection with fulfillment of prophecy as it is with continuity of a written text. His contrast in speaking of this endurance is that He has not come to destroy. This has primarily the sense of abolish, to do away with the usefulness or effectiveness, to nullify the authority of the OT law. That which God gave Israel in OT law has been misused; Jesus develops the true meaning of that law (cf Matt 5:27-28). Christians do not set aside OT revelation. It is the entire Bible, not just the NT, which believers accept as God's written word. The authority of the OT will continue as long as the earth does.

This passage has equally the promise of the endurance of written letters of that OT law. The jot and tittle refer to letters forming words of a written text. The *yodh* (jot) is the smallest Hebrew letter

(in many English Bibles above Ps 119:73), half the size of the *waw* (Ps 119:41) or *zayin* (Ps 119:49) at times, and one-fourth the size of most square Hebrew letters. The tittle was a distinguishing feature of a letter, corresponding to the dotting of an *i* (not an *e*) or crossing of a *t* (not an *l*) in cursive English. It was a written law which Jesus said would endure.

**Plenary.** The assertion of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt 5:17-18 certifies the full endurance of written Scripture in both senses, entirety and details. The entire Hebrew OT is commandment from God in contrast to tradition of men (Matt 15:1-9). All Scripture is from God and will endure. Yet how wonderfully significant to the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration, Jesus certified that minute details of the Hebrew text will endure! Inspiration of Scripture applies to individual letters of the written text and even to the features which distinguish one letter from another similar letter. The instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself demands no less than full divine control of an authoritative autographa. How it applies to extant copies is the difficult area.

**Transmission.** It is not likely that there was an autograph copy of any book of the Hebrew OT in existence at the time Jesus spoke. Jesus did not distinguish an official Temple copy (cf Deut 17:18) from the copies with which the Jews to whom He spoke were familiar. His guarantee was not in regard to any single copy as infallibly correct, but to the retention and continuity of the text. To state it for today, somewhere in extant copies every jot and tittle has been retained. No single extant text is certified as infallible. No "family" of texts is fully correct. No expert in textual criticism is infallible. But God has not let pass out of existence a jot or tittle. In His own due time He will direct in fulfillment, and probably in the millennium He will provide a textual restoration to the autographa.

### **Galatians 3:16**

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul gives what serves as an illustration and application of Matt 5:17-18 in his letter to the Galatian churches. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as

of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal 3:15-16). The passage presents unchangeableness, exactness, and the difference of a *yodh*.

**Unchangeableness.** Using human relationships, Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that a man's last will and testament when confirmed by his death cannot then be changed by any man. It cannot be nullified. No one is able to add to it. A man may change his own will while he is yet alive. Only he can change it at that time. Once ratified no one has power or authority to modify. Paul's application of this life-principle is that only God can change His word or add to it; none can nullify or negate His covenant declarations. The initial declarations were to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham was as unchangeable as the ratified will of a man in human society.

**Exactness.** What cannot be changed of the promise of God to Abraham has been exactly recorded. A human last will employs words and phrases whose exact meaning has been well established in the courts. God employed language with a definite message-content in His covenant with Abraham. The exactness and accuracy of the written record is the basis for Paul's evidence. God had said seed singular and not seed plural. We cannot change what God has said. God deliberately, purposely employed a singular form.

As to interpretation, God's promise had to do with the physical progeny of Abraham, becoming a great nation (Gen 12:2) as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen 15:3-5), becoming strangers in Egypt (Gen 15:13), becoming many nations (Gen 17:4), and inheriting the land of Canaan (Gen 15:16-21). God's promise, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 26:4) as God stated it following the offering of Isaac (Gen 22) contains the wording employed by Paul: "in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen 22:18). The physical seed of Abraham has not always been a blessing to other nations through the centuries. The Messiah-seed of Abraham is the great blessing of all the ages.

God's reference to this Messiah-seed, Paul indicates, is clearly possible in that a singular word was employed. The blessing of the Messiah-seed to the nations of the world far exceeds any possible blessing of the total physical seed of Abraham. The Jews who were troubling saints in Galatia (Gal 5:12) were certainly not a blessing among Gentile nations. It is the seed of woman, seed of Abraham, son of David Messiah that God spoke of in Gen 22:8.

**Yodh.** The Hebrew consonants for the phrase "in (by) thy seed" are *bzr'k*. The *b* prefix is the preposition translated in or by. The *k* is the suffix translated thy. The radicals (consonants) of the word seed are *zr'*. If seed had been plural, a *yodh* would have been employed: *bzr'yk*. The argument of Paul thus depends entirely on the presence or absence of a *yodh*. He is as exact regarding the Hebrew text as was the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 5:18). He beautifully manifest respect for a verbally, plenarily inspired Scripture.

## II Peter 3:16

The last of the select passages to be examined as having pertinent bearing on the teaching of Scripture as to its divine origin is II Pet 3:16. The thought begins in verse 15: "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (II Pet 3:15-16). This passage contributes in the areas of authoritativeness, written autographa, and entirety.

**Authority.** This passage makes very clear that Scripture is authoritative whether it is understood or not. There is inspiration even if illumination is lacking. They that are unlearned and unstable struggle with the Word of God to their own destruction. The problems that the unsaved mind may have with the revealed Word of God should not disturb one who knows the Lord of salvation. Their attacks do not lessen the authority of divine revelation but result only in damnation of the doubters.

**Written.** The authoritative message against which attacks are being made is identified as "letters" and "writings." The letters written by Paul were in the usual form of epistles of the day. Paul declared his message was of the Lord (I Cor 7:10, 12). Copies were to be shared with other congregations. Probably all the epistles of Paul gathered in the NT were in common distribution before Peter wrote this second epistle. Peter thus speaks of a great bulk of the NT circulating in written form. Peter's reference to "scriptures" is at the least the OT and may well include NT gospels, possibly Acts. Peter's reference only to the epistles of Paul does not indicate the scope of

NT canon known to him as Scripture but rather the group among them presenting difficult (though identical teaching regarding salvation, growth and sanctification, vv 14-15) and drawing reaction, even opposition, from those Peter considers unlearned and unstable (v 16).

The things Paul has written in his epistles are things which Paul is speaking (*lalon*). As noted earlier, the twentieth century distinction between speaking and writing is not in evidence in the NT. What is written is spoken; what is spoken may be written. Without tape recorders, what was written had enduring quality. God guided the oral proclamation of the prophets as they spoke to Israel or NT apostles as they taught NT churches. More important for us, God guided the written efforts of these chosen holy men.

Illumination may be lacking; epistles and Scriptures relate God's message. Interpretations may be different; written texts endure. Some may endeavor to twist the truth; God's truth remains unchanged. God may have used a fisherman for some revelation, a learned scholar for other; though presented simply or technically, God's message is of salvation.

**Entirety.** The word translated "other" (as also the other scriptures, v 16) is important for the doctrine of inspiration. It is not that Paul's epistles are similar to Scriptures. Paul's epistles are hard to be understood, harder than the remaining (*loipas*, the rest of) Scriptures. Peter declares Paul's epistles to be Scripture, to be part of the entirety recognized as the revealed Word of God. To use the likeness of pieces of pie, he is not speaking of a piece that is also an apple pie, from a different pie; rather it is a piece out of the same, the whole pie. To use our count today, Paul's epistles are a part of the total of sixty-six books; the "rest" was written by other human authors. God is the real author of all sixty-six. All sixty-six are inspired. It is an entire unit of Scripture and the epistles written by Paul constitute one discernable portion of Scripture.

Other passages considered above had direct reference to the OT canon. In this passage the NT is clearly included. This is not the only reference to equate the two. Peter had earlier exhorted the recipients of this second epistle to be "mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior" (II Pet 3:2). The chosen holy men of the NT writings were equally borne along as were the men of the OT writings. In his first epistle, Peter had spoken of

revelation to OT prophets which they did not fully understand (I Pet 1:11), the same truth now being preached by NT witnesses. The two are of equal authority; illumination is the difference.

## Significant Indications

This has not been a survey of all that Scripture teaches concerning its initial composition but only a survey of eight significant verses which seem directly to set forth the truths of the entire Scripture. This section is summary in nature, grouping the teachings of the eight verses as to authorship, process, result, and copies.

### Authorship

Two levels of authorship have appeared, divine and human. Both are present; neither can be omitted. The recognition of the two is in no sense contradictory.

**God.** Scripture is the Word of God, not a word of man. This has to do with source, it is God-breathed. It is not by the will of man. This has also to do with content. It is revealed truth, not tradition of men. It is specially-operative Gospel, not worldly wisdom. God is the true author of the sixty-six books.

**Man.** Each of the sixty-six books was initially written by a man. God Himself did not perform the material physical activity involved. These men wrote other things than the canonical books. They themselves seem to have been aware when they were specially guided by God when they were used to write Scripture. There was clear recognition of divine authorship.

### Process

It is in regard to the method of God's control and guidance of the human agents that extensive disagreements arise. The problems are often semantic. Words are not used the same or understood the same. More than that, words are inadequate to express the miracle that took place. Three areas contribute to proper comprehension: out-breathed, moved, spoke.

**Out-breathed.** The out-breathing characterizes the entire process of reception and recording that which results in Scripture. It is an expressive activity of God giving enduring shape to His message.

This is a special, selective work of God unlike any other work; yet it falls into the general category of creation, miracles or regeneration. It is divine activity, supernatural. It was activity only in connection with sixty-six books in all history. Inspiration does not apply to religious writings in general or to orthodox creeds or fundamentalist sermons. Only Scripture is out-breathed.

**Moved.** The human prophets were borne along. Holy Spirit control was exercised throughout. Reception and recollection were accurately guided. Prophets were kept from error and so stimulated by the control of the Holy Spirit as to use the exact words, to write the exact letters most effectively to convey God's message. Inspiration resulted in an errorless authoritative autographa.

**Written.** Human prophets conveyed their messages both orally and also committed some to writing. The initial oral proclamation was guided by the Holy Spirit; it was inspired. The initial written record was inspired. Further oral repetition, additional written copies are outside the scope of God-breathing activity; they are in the realm of providential guidance.

## Result

Two qualities of the autographa must be recognized. As God-breathed Scriptures they have supreme authority. As borne along products they must be without error.

**Authoritative.** Scriptures are authoritative because of their source; they are God-breathed. They are authoritative because they are a divine knowledge, not in the realm of human wisdom. They are authoritative because in the production of the written record the human authors were divinely directed.

**Infallible.** The autographa were without error. God the author cannot speak a lie. A God-breathed message is a true message. A Holy Spirit controlled process results in a product true to the nature of Him who fully guided. Words and written letters and even distinguishing features of letters were included in that divine control.

## Copies

The passages considered enable us to make important distinctions concerning available copies made from the autographa or earlier copies. The divine message has been retained. The variants must be weighed seriously.

**Message.** Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek copies as referred to by Jesus and by Peter conveyed the divine message. A translation (LXX) conveyed truth. Human respect and providential control have been such that not one doctrine is affected by textual variants. The Bible preached today is the Word of God.

**Variants.** From the time of Moses God directed that there be an official copy in Jerusalem by which all questions of copyists' variants might be checked. Textual analysis is evident prior to the time of Jesus. He did not excite Himself about it. He did assure that every jot and tittle of the autographa would survive until the end of the world. Textual criticism is not unimportant (it is tedious and discouraging) but it certainly is of far less importance than effectively proclaiming the message of Scripture which is the power of God unto salvation. Preaching the Word is the primary task of each generation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Doctrinal statement signed annually by all members of the Evangelical Theological Society.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 13

<sup>3</sup> Chapter VI, "God-Inspired Scripture" in B B Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948) 296

<sup>4</sup> For a clear comparison of ancient texts see Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 307-8

<sup>5</sup> Edward J Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 19

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 312; see also R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St Peter, St John and St Jude* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945) 297

<sup>8</sup> Barclay, 313

<sup>9</sup> Vos, 7-8