

The Inspiration of the Scriptures

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In this issue of *The Unity of the Spirit* we are going to be setting forth a review and recommendation of books for Christian believers who are interested in in-depth study of the Bible and in subjects closely related to the Bible. In part, this will be a revision of an earlier issue published in the Fall of 1998. Nevertheless, there will be a great deal of new information presented and it is hoped that it will be information that is useful for those who are searching for a greater in-depth knowledge of the truth. It should, of course, come as no surprise that the most important book that will be recommended is the Bible itself. In doing this we are following the pattern of most of the great figures of the Bible, both Old Testament and New, whose own lives were rooted and grounded in the Scriptures. We begin, therefore, by setting forth the biblical view of the Scriptures themselves.

The classic view of God's inspiration of the Scriptures was set forth by the apostle Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy and it serves as a good example of the view of all faithful Jews and of the early Christian churches about the inspiration of the Scriptures:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:14-17).

In their original context these verses referred primarily to the Old Testament Scriptures since most of the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written or collected into what we today call the New Testament canon. During the Old Testament era all faithful Jews viewed the Scriptures – that is, the

holy, or set-apart, writings - as inspired by God (e.g. Psalm 1, 19, 119, etc.).

These Scriptures began to be written down and collected by Moses many centuries before the time of Christ. They contained the record of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, the calling of Abraham and God's covenant people Israel, the giving of the Mosaic Law, and most importantly, the promises of God that ultimately would be fulfilled through Christ in the New Testament. These Scriptures gave the Old Testament people of Israel their guide for daily living in all aspects of their lives as well as promises for the working out of God's purposes for the world through them. When looked at from a New Testament, or spiritual, perspective the main story line - always operating behind the scenes - is about God's plan of salvation. This eventually focused on the promise of a coming Messiah, or Christ, who would bring about a new covenant relationship between God and his people and, ultimately, establish the glorious kingdom of God in a new heavens and earth forever.

When we come to the New Testament Scriptures, we see that the promised Messiah, or Christ, based his whole life and ministry on the Old Testament Scriptures and consistently confirmed their divine inspiration (e.g. Matt. 4:4; 15:1-9; 22:29). In fact, Christ saw himself as the fulfillment of those Scriptures and he stated that the entire Old Testament testified of him (Luke 24:45-49). In short, the New Testament writings can best be understood as being the collected witness and explanation of the fulfillment of God's promises to his covenant people in the Old Testament. The late NT scholar F.F. Bruce summarizes this understanding of the New Testament Scriptures:

“The NT stands to the OT in the relation of fulfillment to promise. If the OT records what ‘God ... spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets’, the NT records that final word which he spoke in Son, in which all the earlier revelation was summed up, confirmed and transcended. The mighty works of the OT revelation, culminate in the redemptive work of Christ; the words of the OT prophets receive their fulfillment in him.” (FF Bruce, “Bible”, *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 137).

All of the New Testament writers shared this view of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New and it is set out in The Letter to the Hebrews:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Thus, the Scriptures were based first and foremost on all that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had taught his apostles. These truths were then handed down to the other disciples either by word of mouth or, eventually, in written form – a process summarized by Luke:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good for me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

The New Testament Scriptures also clearly indicate that God, through Christ, continued to guide his apostles in their understanding of the truth both by direct revelation (e.g. Gal. 1:11-12) and through the guidance of God's Spirit (e.g. Eph. 3:2-6). These truths were then written down and sent to the different churches. In fact, Paul's Letters seem to be specifically spoken of as, or on a par with, Scripture:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother

Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (II Pet. 3:15-17).

All of the writings, or Books, of the New Testament were either written by apostles or by close associates of the apostles. It is precisely for the reason that they were considered to be an inspired and faithful presentation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the truths of the new covenant that he established, that they were later collected and put into the form – i.e., the New Testament - that we have today. Ultimately, however, the greatest evidence for the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures comes from their own internal evidence, and, from their manifest success in helping believers to understand the “gospel” – the “good news” of God's salvation accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, after all, one of their chief purposes as expressly stated in the Gospel of John:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).