

How We Got the Bible: Evidences for Biblical Inspiration

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INTRODUCTION

When affirming his veracity, man swears by God. In contrast, God swears by Himself (Heb. 6:13-14). There is nothing greater than God to which one could appeal for authority. If the Bible is God's Word, then the same principle holds true: it becomes the ultimate and final self-authenticating authority (Heb. 4:12-13).

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. Yet, what evidence supports this claim? After all, other books, such as the Koran and the Book of Mormon, claim to be the Word of God. However, they contradict the Bible.

God is true (John 3:33) and His word is truth (John 17:17). God can no more contradict Himself than His word can contradict itself. In his salutation to Titus, Paul refers to his apostleship, designed to instill faith in God and result in the knowledge of the truth, based upon promises made by God, who cannot lie, that are manifested in His word (Titus 1:1-3). The Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible contradict one another; accordingly, all cannot be the true word of God. So, how does one decide which is right and reliable?

One must offer evidence supporting the claim that the Bible is the Word of God, as opposed to other books that claim religious authority. Since Christians are commanded to obey civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-4), we should heed one who claims to be a police officer, provided he offers evidence that he is really an officer of the law, and not just an imposter posing as an officer. Likewise, any book demanding we submit to it as the Word of God needs to support its claim to be the authentic voice of God. What then, is the evidence that the Bible speaks with divine authority?

It is one thing to claim divine inspiration for a set of writings; it is quite another to provide evidence to confirm that claim. Before considering the supporting evidence for the inspiration of Scripture, let us summarize its claims for inspiration.

SUMMARY OF THE CLAIMS FOR BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Biblical inspiration is not to be confused with poetic inspiration. A gifted poet has a way with words, an ease of expression making that which is difficult appear easy. However, as applied to the Bible, inspiration refers to the God-given authority of its teaching.

The Biblical Description of Inspiration

The Significance of 2 Timothy 3:16

The Greek word for inspiration (*theopneustos*) means “God-breathed,” but in its broader usage it includes the process by which Sacred Scriptures or writings were invested with divine authority for doctrine and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Greek word *theopneustos*, a compound of *theos* [God] and *pneō* [to blow], meaning “God-breathed, i.e. inspired by God” [Thomas & BDAG #2315], occurs once in the NT (2 Tim. 3:16).

The Significance of 1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Spirit-moved men recorded their messages, putting spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:12-13). Hence, when viewed comprehensively, inspiration is what occurs when Spirit-moved writers recorded God-breathed writings. Paul said, “We speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (v. 13).

The Three Elements in Inspiration

Three elements are contained in the total process of inspiration: the divine causality, the prophetic agency, and the resultant authority.

God’s Causality

The first element in inspiration is *God’s causality*. Jehovah is the Prime Mover by whose promptings the prophets were led to write. The ultimate origin of inspired writings is the desire of God to communicate with man.

In the beginning, God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light...” (Gen. 1:1-3).

During the time of the Judges, as God raised up physical deliverers for Israel, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon” Gideon (Judg. 6:34-35), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), Samson (Judg. 13:24-25; 14:19), etc. They acted as agents of God.

When David was anointed as the next king of Israel, “the Spirit of the Lord” departed from Saul, and came mightily upon David (1 Sam. 16:13-14).

The contrast between Micaiah and Zedekiah illustrates the difference between a true prophet of Jehovah, who courageously foreshadowed the divine judgment, and a false prophet who functioned as a “Yes Man,” telling the wicked king Ahab what he wanted to hear (2 Chron. 18:12-27).

Prophetic Agency

The second element of inspiration is *prophetic agency*. The Word of God comes through men of God. Jehovah employs the instrumentality of human personality to convey His message.

Inspired individuals were empowered as divine spokesmen. The Old Testament repeatedly says, “the word of the LORD came to Abram (Gen. 15:1-4), Samuel (1 Sam. 15:10-11), Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4-7), Elijah (1 Kings 18:1-2), etc.

Divine Authority

Finally, the written prophetic utterance is invested with *authority* because of its divine origin. The prophet’s words are, in fact, God’s Words. Prophets who communicated such messages spoke with divine authority, and could thus say, “Hear the word of the Lord...” (1 Kings 22:19-23; Isa. 1:10-15).

The Characteristics of an Inspired Writing

Verbal, i.e., Guided

The first characteristic of inspiration is implied in the fact that it is an inspired writing; namely, starts as a form of *verbal* communication. Sacred Scripture is inspired, i.e., “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). The words of the prophets were God-given, not by dictation but by the Spirit-directed employment of the prophet’s own vocabulary and style of expression.

Plenary, i.e., Full

Inspiration also claims to be *plenary* (full). Webster says the adjective “plenary” is descriptive of that which is “complete in every respect: absolute, unqualified.” Paul wrote, “All scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). No part of Sacred Scripture is without divine inspiration.

Inerrancy, i.e., Accurate

In addition, inspiration implies the *inerrancy* of the teaching of the original documents (called autographs). Again, Webster says “inerrancy” signifies “exemption from error: infallibility.” Whatever God utters is true and without error.

Divine Authority, i.e., Profitable

Finally, inspiration results in Sacred Scripture possessing divine *authority*. The teachings of Sacred Scripture is binding on believers as the foundation of faith and practice (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10)

The Biblical Claim to Divine Inspiration

Inspiration is not something merely attributed to the Bible by Christians; it is something the Bible claims for itself. There are literally hundreds of references within the Bible about its divine origin.

Old Testament Claims

The Old Testament claims to be a prophetic writing. The familiar expression, “Thus says the Lord...” fills its pages. Prophecies that proved to be from God were preserved and revered. The growing collection of sacred writings was recognized and even quoted by later prophets as the Word of God.

New Testament Claims

Jesus and the New Testament writers held these writings in the same high esteem; they claimed them to be the unbreakable, authoritative, and inspired Word of God. By numerous references to the Old Testament as a whole, to its basic sections, and to almost every Old Testament book, New Testament writers overwhelmingly support the claim of divine inspiration.

The apostolic writings were boldly described in the same authoritative terms that denoted the Old Testament as the Word of God. They were called “Scripture,” “prophecy,” and so on. Every book in the New Testament contains some claim to divine authority. The apostolic church read, circulated, collected, and quoted the New Testament books along with the inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament.

The contemporaries and immediate successors of the apostolic age recognized the divine origin of the New Testament writings along with the Old. With only heretical exceptions, all the great Fathers of the Christian church from the earliest times held to the divine inspiration of the New Testament. In summary, there are continuous claims for the inspiration of both Old and New Testaments from the time of their composition to the present. In the modern era, that claim

has been challenged by many from inside and outside Christendom. How will we respond to this challenge?

SUPPORT FOR THE CLAIMS FOR BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Defenders of the Christian faith (apologists) have responded to the challenge in various ways. Some have attempted to transform Christianity into a rational system, others have claimed belief in it because it is without reason, but informed Christians through the centuries have avoided either rationalism [reliance on human wisdom] or fideism [reliance on blind faith]. Claiming neither absolute finality nor complete skepticism, Christian apologists have given “an account for the hope that is in” them (1 Pet. 3:13-16, esp. v. 15). The following section offers a summary of evidence for the biblical doctrine of inspiration.

The Prima Facie Evidence for Inspiration

The Bible on its surface seems to be an inspired book. The term “prima facie” refers to that which is “(1) true, valid, or sufficient at first impression: apparent; (2) self-evident; (3) legally sufficient to establish a fact or a case unless disproved” [Webster].

Like Jesus, the Bible speaks with authority (John 7: 40-49, esp. v. 46). It gives every appearance of having come from God. Not only does it claim to have a divine origin, but it appears to have a supernatural character. Although such is not full proof of the Bible’s inspiration, it is at least an indication that merits examination. To rephrase the gospel writer, “never did a book speak the way this Book speaks.” The Bible has the ring of truth. As such there is at least *prima facie* evidence for its inspiration. Such self-evident credentials call for further examination of other evidence.

Evidence from Biblical Miracles

Another support for the inspiration of Scripture comes from miracles. A miracle is an act of God that confirms the Word of God as spoken by a prophet of God (see chap. 13). Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:1-2). Peter said to the crowd at Pentecost, “Jesus the Nazarene, [was] a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him” (Acts 2:22). The same is true of other spokesmen for God in the Bible. Moses, for example, was given the ability to perform miracles so that Egypt would believe his message was from God (Exod. 4:1-9). So also other prophets, such as Elijah (1 Kings 18) and Elisha (2 Kings 4). In the New Testament the apostles’ message was confirmed by miracles (Heb. 2:3-4).

The Bible is a prophetic book. Every book in it was written by a prophet or spokesman for God (see Chapters 3-6). And since there were miracles to confirm the prophetic messages given by

authors of Scripture, then the Bible is confirmed to be the Word of God by acts of God (miracles).

Evidence from Biblical Prophecy

Another forceful external testimony to the inspiration of Scripture is fulfilled prophecy. According to Deuteronomy 18, a prophet was false if he made predictions that were never fulfilled. No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfulfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time (Dan. 2:44-45), city (Mic. 5:2), and nature (Isa. 7:14) of Christ's birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection (see Isa. 53). Numerous other prophecies have been fulfilled, including the destruction of Edom (Obadiah), the curse on Babylon (Isa. 13), the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 26) and Nineveh (Nah. 1-3), etc. Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the Veda, but none of those books contain predictive prophecy. Fulfilled predictive prophecy provides undeniable evidence of the unique, divine authority of the Bible.

Evidence from the Testimony of Jesus Christ

In connection with the evidence of the historicity of the biblical documents is the evidence of the testimony of Christ. Since the New Testament has been documented as historical, and since those same historical documents provide the teaching of Christ about the inspiration of the Bible, one needs only to assume the truthfulness of Christ in order to argue for the inspiration of the Bible. If Christ possesses any kind of authority or integrity as a religious teacher, then the Scriptures are inspired, for He taught that they are God's Word (Matt. 7:28-29; 22:33; Luke 4:31-32). Jesus appealed to the authority of Sacred Scripture, by repeatedly saying, "It is written..." (Matt. 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; etc.). Quoting from Moses and the prophets, Jesus attributed their words to God (Matt. 15:3-6; Luke 11:47-52). To falsify this contention, one must reject the authority of Jesus to make pronouncements on the subject of inspiration. The New Testament conclusively reveals that Jesus held to the full divine authority of Sacred Scripture (see chap.6). Indications from the gospel records, with ample historical backing, show that Jesus was a man of integrity and truth. The argument, then, is this: *If what Jesus taught is true, and Jesus taught that the Bible is inspired, then it follows that it is true that the Bible is inspired of God. In order to deny the authority of Scripture one must reject the integrity of Christ.*

Evidence from the Unity of the Bible

A more formal evidence of the Bible's inspiration is its unity. Composed as it is of sixty-six books, written over a period of some fifteen hundred years by nearly forty authors using

several languages and containing hundreds of topics, it is more than accidental or incidental that the Bible possesses an amazing unity of theme—Jesus Christ. One problem (sin) and one solution (the Savior) unify its pages from Genesis to Revelation. This is an especially valid point because no one individual or group put the Bible together. Books were added as they were written by the prophets. They were then collected because they were considered inspired. Only by subsequent reflection, either by the prophets themselves (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12) and subsequent generations, has it been discovered that the Bible is really one book whose “chapters” were written by men who had no explicit knowledge of the overall structure. Their individual roles could be compared to that of different men writing chapters of a novel for which none of them have even an overall outline. Whatever unity the Bible possesses must come from beyond the individual authors. Like a symphony, each individual part of the Bible contributes to an overall unity that is orchestrated by one Master.

Evidence from the Historicity of the Bible

Much of the Bible is historical and as such is subject to historical investigation. The most significant area of confirmation in this regard has come from the field of archaeology. The renowned archaeologist William F. Albright said, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition.” Nelson Glueck adds, “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible.” Millar Burrows notes that “more than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.” Clifford A. Wilson has added still more support to the historical reliability of the Bible. No historical discovery is a direct evidence of any spiritual claim in the Bible; nevertheless the historicity of the Bible does provide indirect verification of the claim of inspiration. Confirmation of the Bible’s accuracy in factual matters lends credibility to its claims when speaking on other subjects. Jesus said, “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:9-12).

Evidence from the Integrity of the Human Authors

There are no good reasons to suppose that the authors of Scripture were not honest and sincere men. From all that is known of the disciples’ lives—even their deaths for what they believed—they were utterly convinced that God had spoken to them. What shall be made of those five hundred who claim as evidence that they saw Jesus of Nazareth, crucified under Pontius Pilate, resurrected, alive and well (1 Cor. 15:6)? What shall be made of the claim that they saw Him on about a dozen occasions over a period of a month and a half? That they talked with Him, ate with Him, saw His wounds, and handled Him, and even the most skeptical among them fell at His feet and cried, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)? It stretches one’s credulity to believe that the disciples were all drugged or deluded, especially in view of the number and

nature of their encounters and the lasting effect on them. But granting their basic integrity, one is confronted with an unusual phenomenon of men facing death with the claim that God had given them the authority to speak and write. When men of sanity and noted integrity claim divine inspiration for their writings and offer as evidence that they have communicated with the resurrected Christ, then men of good will who seek the truth must take notice. In brief, the honesty of the biblical writers vouches for the divine authority of their writings.

Evidence from the Transforming Ability of the Bible

Another so-called internal evidence is the ability of the Bible to convert the unbeliever and to build up the believer in the faith. The writer of Hebrews says, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12-13). Untold thousands have experienced this great power. Drug addicts have been cured, derelicts have been transformed, hate has been turned to love by reading the Bible. Believers grow by studying it (1 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:17-18). The sorrowing are comforted, sinners are rebuked, and the negligent are exhorted by the Scriptures. God's Word possesses the dynamic, transforming power of God. God vindicates the Bible's authority by its evangelistic and edifying powers.

Evidence from the Influence of the Bible

No book has been more widely disseminated and has more broadly influenced the course of world events than the Bible. The Bible has been translated into more languages, been published in more copies, influenced more thought, inspired more art, and motivated more discoveries than any other book in history. The Bible has been translated into over one thousand languages representing more than ninety percent of the world's population. Billions of copies have been printed. There are no close seconds to it on the all-time bestseller list. The influence of the Bible and its teaching in the Western world is clear for all who study history. And the influential role of the West in the course of world events is equally clear. Civilization has been influenced more by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures than by any other book or series of books in the world. Indeed, no great moral or religious work in the world exceeds the depth of morality in the principle of Christian love, and none has a more lofty spiritual concept than the biblical view of God. The Bible presents the highest ideals known to men, ideals that have molded civilization.

Evidence from the Apparent Indestructibility of the Bible

Despite its importance (or perhaps because of it), the Bible has suffered more vicious attacks than would be expected to be made on such a book. But the Bible has withstood all its attackers. Diocletian attempted to exterminate it (c. A.D. 302/3-305), and yet it is the most widely published book in the world today. Biblical critics once regarded much of it as mythological, but archaeology has established it as historical. Antagonists have attacked its teaching as primitive, but moralists urge that its teaching on love be applied to modern society.

Skeptics have cast doubt on its authenticity, and yet men continue to be convinced of its truth. Attacks on the Bible continue to arise from science, psychology, and political movements, but the Bible remains undaunted. Like the wall four-feet high and four-feet wide, attempts to blow it over accomplish nothing. The Bible remains just as strong after the attack. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31; cf. also 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

The Argument from Alternate Possibility

One of the most interesting arguments for the inspiration of the Bible has been suggested by Charles Wesley: The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

- It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.
- It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
- Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.

Of course these arguments do not rationally demonstrate the divine origin of Scripture beyond all question. Even if they did objectively *prove* the inspiration of the Bible, it would not necessarily follow that everyone would be *persuaded*. Rather, they are evidences, testimonies, and witnesses. As witnesses they must be cross-examined and evaluated as a whole. Then, in the jury room of one's own soul—a decision must be made—a decision that is based not on rationally inescapable proofs but on evidence that is "beyond reasonable doubt."

Perhaps all that need be added here is that the claim for Biblical inspiration is on trial, and each individual is part of a jury called upon for a verdict. That being the case, based on a comprehensive examination of the claim and alleged credentials of the Bible to be inspired, the jury would be compelled to vote that the Bible is inspired as it claims. The reader too must decide. For those who tend to be indecisive, one is reminded of the words of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:66-69). In other words, if the Bible—with its clear-cut claim to be inspired, as well as its incomparable characteristics and multiple credentials—is not inspired, then to what else can one turn? It has the words of eternal life.

CONCLUSION

The Bible claims to be and proves to be the Word of God. There are general claims for the Bible as a whole and more specific claims for sections and even individual books. This is true of both Old and New Testaments.

Support for the Bible's claim to be the written Word of God comes from many sources. First, there is *prima facie* evidence from the very nature of the Bible itself. Second, the *witness of the Spirit* to the heart of the believer adds further confirmation to the Bible's inspiration. Third, the *transforming ability* of Scripture is indication of its divine origin. Fourth, the very *unity* of the Bible amid all its diversity of authors, languages, and topics bespeaks of a divine Mind behind it. Fifth, the *historicity* of the Bible as confirmed by multitudinous archaeological discoveries, lends further support to its claim to divine authority. Sixth, the *testimony of Christ* is a clear indication it is the very Word of God. Seventh, uniquely the Bible offers numerous *fulfilled prophecies* as confirmation of its divine character. Eighth, the *influence of the Bible* has been more widespread than any other book in the world. Ninth, the *apparent indestructibility* of the Bible is another indication it is from God. Tenth, the *integrity of the human authors* also lends support to their claims for inspiration. Eleventh, *miracles* confirm the Bible to be the Word of God. Twelfth, there is the argument from *alternate possibility*, suggesting the unlikeliness that it was invented by either good or evil creatures but rather that it truly came from God as claimed.

Some of these arguments alone are indecisive. But when all of them are taken together they form a very persuasive argument that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. In fact, no other book in the world has such widespread and unique support for its claim to be the inspired Word of God.

Source: Geisler, Norman L., & William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible, Revised and Expanded*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, s.v. "Chapter 11: Evidences for the Inspiration of the Bible." Extensively edited and revised.