**Some Brethren’s False View Of Inspiration**

Several years ago my wife read in the Introduction to Truth Magazine’s “Bible Text Books” workbook on I and II Samuel (by my friend Mike Willis) that “the author relied on previously existing narratives in writing the book.” This was pretty shocking to us at the time because up until then we had never heard of a Christian who took such a loose view of inspiration. This view reminds me of the liberal’s theory of the “Q document,” namely that “some biblical scholars have proposed that there was a document prior to the writing of the gospels which was used by the writers of Matthew and Luke as a source of information” (Achtemeier, Paul J., Harper’s Bible Dictionary, 1985).

Later I read something similar to Mike’s view in Bert Thompson’s booklet “Scientific Evidences Of The Bible's Inspiration” (Apologetics Press). On page 6 Mr. Thompson wrote “For example, it did not require revelation for Moses to write of the journey of Israel from Egypt to Sinai or the Plains of Moab. Moses was there; he was an eyewitness observer to the things about which he wrote.” And then on page 10 Mr. Thompson quoted Dr. Harold Lindsell to say “When we say the Bible is the Word of God, it makes no difference whether the writers of Scripture gained their information by direct revelation from God as in the case of the Book of Revelation, or whether they researched matters as Luke did or whether they got their knowledge from extant sources, court records, or even by word of mouth.”

There are two problems with this incorrect understanding of inspiration. First and foremost, it runs contrary to how the Bible says inspiration works. Second, though Mike and Bert believe the Bible to be inerrant, some who read their view of inspiration will likely take it further and say the parts of the Bible that the human authors had to research to write are subject to error just like any other document generated through human research. Tersely put, the unintended consequences can lead to modernism.

The truth is passages like I Corinthians 2:13 teach God gave the human authors each and every word they wrote. That verse reads “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” When I brought this point up to Mike back in 2007, he accused me of having a “dictation theory of inspiration.” But I don’t believe the human mouthpieces only took dictation like a secretary does from her boss. Certainly God did dictate each and every word, but He used the prophets’s vocabulary and writing/speaking style when choosing which words to supply them. In this way God could ensure the Bible said exactly what He wanted it to say, and at the same time still allow the human author’s personality to be represented.

A distinction is sometimes made between inspiration and revelation where inspiration is basically “protection from error” and revelation is “unveiling something not previously known.” But that is a false dichotomy. The way God protected scripture from error was by revealing the actual words to put down. Prophets were “inspired” by God to “reveal” His words. I Cor 2:9-13 even describes the process of inspiration using the word “revealed.”

We have heard many times “inspiration” in II Tim 3:16 means “God-breathed” and Mr. Thompson so defines it in his work referenced above, but if God “breathed” it (spoke it), that would mean He supplied the information, not just that He watched for errors in information humans breathed/supplied/researched. And get this because it is very important: II Tim 3:16 is talking about “all scripture,” so “word for word revelation” is how the inspiration of scripture worked in all cases.

The Old Testament taught the same process of inspiration as the New. Deuteronomy 18: 18 reads, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” So the way God inspires is though revelation, by putting words in the prophet’s mouth, not by just protecting the prophet’s own words from error.

It is not a matter of how God could have revealed his word; it is a matter of how he said he did do it. Parallels: (1) God could save without water baptism, but is that how He does it? (2) I suppose God “could” have created the world’s inhabitants through a long drawn out evolutionary process, but Genesis 1-2 tells us He didn’t do it that way.

There was no need for the prophet to read or study previous writings. We see that from Jesus’ promise to his disciples in Matthew 10:19-20 (“take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”), which is a good description of how revelation works. Bible writers didn’t even have to think about (much less study about) what they were writing; God supplied word for word what He wanted put down. Acts 2:39 is illustrates this well. Peter revealed (in effect) in this verse that Gentiles should be welcomed into God’s kingdom, but he didn’t really realize what he was saying until the unclean animals on a sheet trance of Acts 10:10ff.

John 16:13 (“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come”) is another verse that helps us to see how revelation worked. The way the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth was not just by protecting their research (like me nudging my son Wesley and his bike back onto the driveway when he strays). John 16:13 says the way it worked was that God spoke, and the Holy Spirit relayed what God said to the inspired writers. Even if a man with a photographic memory could write out a document he had seen word for word with 99% accuracy, that is still not the same as giving him a copy of the document and having him mail it as is.

Our brother Mr. Thompson should realize this (God supplied the words) because he wrote that statements such as “’God said’ … appear thousands of times in the Bible.” If the words of the Bible are what God said, then that means He provided those words, not just that He oversaw the words man said in order to make sure there was no error. A few of the examples Mr. Thompson gave are:

* Exodus 20:1 “And God spake all these words”
* Exodus 24:4 “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord …”
* Matthew 22:31 “Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?”
* Acts 28:25 “Well spake the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers”

All four of Mr. Thompson’s above examples indicate God not only protected the Bible from error, but that He did so by furnishing the words that have been handed down to us.

II Peter 1:20-21 is another passage strongly teaching that God revealed each and every text of the Bible. It reads “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.” You see, the Bible authors didn’t get what they wrote via “previously existing narratives,” “extant sources, court records, or even by word of mouth.” Instead, they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost moved them to write divine information; He didn’t just police what they were moved to write of their own accord. The bottom line is prophets and apostles didn’t get their material from elsewhere. Certainly we see at times they were exposed to other people’s information, but God gave them the words of that information to make sure everything was 100% accurate.

In some ways, inspiration worked like speaking in tongues did. For example, an apostle didn’t have to research and study “Egyptian” real fast to determine what he was saying in Acts 2:4ff. Instead, Holy Ghost gave the apostles the very words to say, and in a language they had never learned. Tongues were supernatural, a miracle - and so was revelation. After all, tongues is a method of divine relation anyway.

Consider also a passage like I Corinthians 14:37 which reads “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” So Paul claimed the things he wrote were commandments of the Lord. That not only means Paul’s writings were approved of and bound by the Lord (Matthew 18:18); it also means those commandments originated with the Lord. See my point?

The Lord didn’t rely upon the knowledge or memory of the apostles regarding what He had taught them while on earth. Instead He promised them He would send the Holy Ghost to “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). There was no research type work needed because the supernatural was used instead.

Jeremiah described how the inspiration process worked in him at the beginning of his book 1:4 “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.” Again, God didn’t just guard what Jeremiah was saying against error; God was the one doing the “saying.” There is similarity in how Ezekiel described it in his book 2:4 - “Thus saith the Lord God.” I read somewhere “thus says the Lord” is found 413 times in the KJV, and “God said” is found 46 times. So the Bible is full of what God says, not what man says (under protection). Isaiah phrases it this way in 1:2 - “the Lord hath spoken.” Acts 1:16b puts it like this: “the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before ….” So the Holy Ghost didn’t just oversee what humans spake; the Holy Ghost actually spake.

Conclusion: When we read in II Timothy 3:16 that “all scripture is inspired of God,” that doesn’t mean Godly men shared the results of their theological research; instead it means God directly told man what to put down in the scriptures, each and every word in each and every verse. That is why the word of God is called the word of God. The Bible’s words are actually God’s words. And that is why the Bible can be depended upon to the same degree that God can be depended on. Any view that compromises that truth only serves to cheapen the Bible’s trustworthiness.