

5. Revelation and Inspiration (4Q 2026 Gift of Prophecy)

Biblical material: Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:18-21; Exod. 17:14; Rev. 1:19; Ezek. 4:1-8; Revelation 1:1, 2.

Quotes

- The particularity of each New Testament author was in no way smothered by the unique process of inspiration. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit first prepared, and then used, their individuality of upbringing, experience, temperament and personality, in order to convey through each some distinctive and appropriate truth. *John Stott*
- The shortest road to an understanding of the Bible is the acceptance of the fact that God is speaking in every line. *Donald Grey Barnhouse*
- The Bible speaks to you in the very tones of God's voice. *C.H. Spurgeon*
- The sacred Scriptures come from the fullness of the Spirit; so that there is nothing in the Prophets, or the Law, or the Gospel, or the Epistles, which descends not from divine majesty. *Origen*
- The Scriptures sprang out of God. *William Tyndale*
- The Bible is a revelation of the mind and will of God to men. Therein we may learn, what God is. *Jupiter Hammon*

Questions

What does the word "inspiration" actually mean? How do we understand the way in which the prophets were inspired? Is it more exact to say that Scripture is the product of inspiration? What about inerrancy? Why is inspiration important, and does this affect us in the way we understand the Bible? How do revelation and inspiration correlate? How does God communicate?

Bible summary

Hebrews 1:1, 2 tells us that previously God spoke through the prophets, but now through his Son. "All Scripture inspired by God is useful for teaching, for confronting what is wrong, for setting us straight, and for telling us what is right" 2 Timothy 3:16. 2 Peter 1:18-21 explains that God spoke through his prophets, and that revelation is trustworthy. God told Moses to write things down so it could be read aloud later as a reminder (see Exodus 17:14). Revelation 1:19 states that the book is to explain what is happening in the present and the future. Ezekiel 4:1-8 is an acted parable to symbolize what was going to happen to Israel. Revelation 1:1, 2 is the revelation of Jesus that will show his servants what will happen soon.

Comment

The Bible is itself not "inspired," since the Holy Spirit inspires people. The Bible is the product of inspiration, not of divine dictation. "The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not his pen." (Ellen White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 21.). As a result, the fundamental themes and principles are totally in agreement. But the forms of expression vary, the styles are different, and the details do not always match. Instead of giving cause for concern, this should encourage us to see the way in which God works through us, humanity in all its defects, yet with an unwavering will to bring us His salvation.

There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures... Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures.... But... The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole." (Ellen White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 20.).

The question of inspiration is often misunderstood, and can lead to many mistaken ideas. The concept that the Bible was given by dictation from God is not endorsed by the Biblical evidence.

Nor is the idea that the Bible is infallible in its human aspects—like the sun “standing still” and so on, based on old ideas of astronomy. Human writers write using their own human language, and try best to communicate God’s ideas. The Holy Spirit guides, so that there is no error in delivery of spiritual issues. But there is an advancing of truth, and deepening of understanding, a growing in meaning. Especially is this true as we compare the New with the Old Testament. We do not say that previous writings are deficient, rather that each writer wrote only that which he could understand. With the coming of Jesus, things become so much plainer, wider, deeper, so that we are the most fortunate, living with the benefit of the accumulated explanations of so many of God’s penmen.

God is sure and certain. He speaks to us, and assures us of his truth, his love, is trustworthiness. The Bible is his word to us. But it is modulated through our human language, and through our understanding.

There's no question that prophecy is part of the evidence. But in another sense, the greater emphasis should be on the nature and character of this prophecy-fulfilling God. For even if prophecy is true, no one would want a relationship with a God who is as the Devil describes him. Consequently we have to look not only at the events, but at reasons and consequences. God is always working for good, yet in this world of sin tragic and problematic things happen. That's another thing we need to learn from history--that sin is very corrosive to God's kingdom and methods, that the innocent suffer with the guilty, and that God is affected too.

The issue is truly a question of trust. Not only whether God can be trusted to fulfill prophecy, but whether he can be trusted to run the universe wisely and well, and whether we will be comfortable and happy in his presence. Most importantly, do we trust God enough to give ourselves to him, so that he may repair the damage done by sin, to heal us from the disease of evil, to remake us into his divine image once more? Only then can we say we truly trust this trustworthy God.

Ellen White Comments

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not his pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God. Manuscript 24, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886). {1SM 21}

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God’s condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. {FLB 10}