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# Inspiration, its contents and products

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*Inspiration Its Content and Product*

*Arthur W. Sears.*

*Inspiration: Its Content and  
Product.*

I wish to consider the subject of inspiration. And in doing so two questions at once present themselves. Answers to these questions contain the gist of the whole matter. The questions are these: What is meant by inspiration? What kind of a book is the Bible as the result of its inspiration? To answer these two questions is the work we have in hand.

Perhaps it is well at the beginning to remind ourselves of the importance of having right answers to these questions. Only as we have right ideas as to the content of inspiration, and as to the nature of Bible can we use the Bible in such a way as to do it justice. For example, if the writer of Genesis was inspired to write the history of the creative process so as to have it correct in all its details, this fact ought to

be known, so that due honor may be given to the Bible. But if, on the other hand, the writer of Genesis was inspired to teach religion rather than geology, this fact ought to be known so that no one will hold the Bible responsible for anything which does not justly come within its sphere. To be able to use the Bible with fairness it is necessary to know what inspiration is and what the Bible is as the result of its being inspired.

But how shall we determine the exact content of inspiration? By going to the Bible, of course. But when we come to the Bible, what sort of an answer do we find? Surely we do not find any express statement as to the meaning of inspiration. Still it is true that we must find out the nature of inspiration by studying the Bible. How

then does the Bible teach us the nature of inspiration? In precisely the same way as the flower teaches us the nature of the work done by the sunlight in the flower's growth. We have to study all the phenomena presented by the growing flower, and, as we do so, we are able to reach <sup>the conclusions</sup> as to the part performed in that growth by the sunlight. So we have to study all the phenomena presented by the Biblical literature, and, as we do so, we can discover the nature of inspiration and we can discover it in no other way.

So then we turn to the Bible to answer our first question: What is inspiration? We look first to the etymological significance of the word. We turn first to the classic passage in II Tim

9:16. Here we find θεόπνευτος from  
θεός God <sup>and</sup> πνεύμα to breathe. The word  
then means God-breathed. But this  
simply means God imparted. A  
person is inspired when God has  
breathed into him, or, in other  
words, has imparted something to  
him. But this gives us no light  
as to what is imparted when  
God inspires a man. So we  
have not yet discovered what is  
the full meaning of the word  
inspiration. We have found simply  
that it consists of God's impart-  
ing something to man. What that  
something is still remains a  
mystery. Our question now takes  
on this form. What does God  
breathe into a man, or impart  
to him, when he inspires him?

Manifestly if we apply  
the term inspiration to whatever

God imparts to man we have a term of very wide meaning. All man's powers, in a certain sense, are God-breathed. They are God imparted. It is because God has breathed into man that man is a living being. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" Gen. 2:7. In this broad sense of the term we would have to say that all men are inspired. Their powers are God-breathed, or God-given. This idea runs through the whole warp and woof of Holy Scripture. It is in God that we live and move and have our being. The wisdom and skill, are given to him of God. If we turn to Ex. 28:3, we shall find the Lord speaking of

the workmen who are to make garments for Aaron as workmen who are filled with wisdom by himself. He imparts skills to them. If we turn to Ex. 35: 30-33, we shall find that the Lord called Bezaleel and filled him with skill, in all manner of cunning work. If we turn to Psa. 144:1, we shall find the psalmist speaking of the Lord as giving him skill in fighting. The Scriptures teach clearly that all our powers are God given. Now, if for God to impart power to a person is for God to inspire that person, then all living persons are inspired. And, taking the term inspiration in its broadest sense, this is true.

This being true, every human act is a complex thing. It is composed of the divine-given power plus the human element. This human element is the

real thing that determines the moral nature of the act. The human being has ability to use the divinely-given power rightly or wrongly. He does the first when he lives a moral life. He does the second when he sins. To use an illustration of Dr. Brooks, the boy at the organ keeps filling it with breath. His work is complete and perfect. But the kind of music that will issue from the organ depends on the one at the keys. The one at the keys may turn the breath of the organ into beautiful music, or distort it into hideous sounds. God breathes power into us, but we can use this power as we see fit. We can turn it into the beautiful music of righteousness, or into the discordant notes of sin. So every human act has these two elements, the divinely imparted power and the human coloring of righteousness

ness, or sin. In this widest sense of the term inspiration, meaning simply a divinely-imparted power, every human being is inspired.

We have now found the content of the term inspiration in its broadest sense and we have found that it refers to any God-imparted power. But this broad meaning is not usually the one attached to the term when we speak of the Bible as inspired. We have yet to find what is the content of the idea of inspiration in its Biblical sense.

It is not difficult to see how a narrower sense of the term should arise. At first, it might be applied to all God-imparted powers and then, by and by, come to be applied to only the highest products of such powers. Just as we speak of a person whose education

is limited as one not educated at all, so we come to speak of a person whose inspiration brings forth only the lower products as one not inspired at all.

What now is the narrow and Biblical sense of the idea of inspiration? To this question a variety of answers are given. The correctness of each of these answers is to be determined by its adequacy to explain all the facts of the Bible. If a certain theory is proposed which explains a part of the Bible's facts, but clashes with others, such theory is to be rejected. We come now to examine a few theories as to the nature of inspiration.

First there is sometimes advocated a theory of inspiration which makes it include historical infallibility. According to this theo-

ry, no error in historical detail can be admitted. But the Biblical facts do not harmonize with such a theory. There are errors in the details of the history. We give an example, or two.

Take as the first example the account of David buying the threshing-floor, where he might offer sacrifice to stay the plague. We turn first to II Sam. 24:24. Here we find the price which David paid stated as fifty shekel of silver. Now we turn to ~~first~~ I Chron. 21:24-25. Here we find an account of the same transaction. The price is given as six hundred shekel of gold. It would seem as if one of these must be wrong.

Another instance is found in the fixing of the date of Hoshea's reign. We turn first to II Kings 15:30. Here we are told that Hoshea began

to reign in the twentieth year of Jo-  
tham, king of Judah. Now we turn  
to the thirty-third verse of the same  
chapter. Here we are told that Jotham  
reigned only sixteen years. How then  
could Hoshea have begun to reign  
in the twentieth year of Jotham's  
reign? But this is not all. We turn  
to II Kings 17: 1. Here we are given  
to understand that Hoshea did  
not reign in the time of Jotham at  
all, but in the time of his successor  
Ahaz. If now the historian had said  
that Hoshea began to reign in the  
fourth year of Ahaz, matters would  
not be so badly mixed up as they  
now are. For in the fourth year of  
Ahaz would be the twentieth from the  
beginning of Jotham's reign. But  
our historian tells us that Hoshea  
began to reign in the twelfth year of  
Ahaz. We are thus landed in inextric-

cable confusion. Some of these statements must be wrong. There are other instances of historical inaccuracies in both Testaments.

In view of these facts, the theory as to the nature of inspiration now under consideration must be given up. Such a theory is not adequate to explain all the Bible facts and hence is not true. Our conclusion, then, is not that the general credibility of the Bible writers is to be given up, but that their infallibility as to historic details cannot be maintained. In writing history they were like other men. They were liable to miscount, or misquote. Therefore we cannot hold to a theory of inspiration which makes the inspired one historically infallible.

There is another theory of

inspiration which we think is incorrect and which we wish to examine. According to this theory, the conceptions of the Bible writers as to nature are scientifically correct.

Now do not believe that this theory is in harmony with the facts. Take the conception of nature and of the order of creation as held by the author of Genesis. Here, of course, we are on debated ground, and we can simply state our idea of the author's conception. When we take the account of creation given in the first of Genesis and place it alongside of similar accounts among other oriental peoples, we cannot but feel that the author of Genesis had the same crude conceptions in regard to the world that his contemporaries had. He seems to have conceived of the process something as follows. The beginning of

present things he thought of as a watery chaos. Then light was created. Then the watery mass heretofore undivided was separated by the expanse of the sky. Next the waters under the sky were collected together in the sea and dry land, with its herbs, appeared. Next the heavenly bodies were created. Following this was the creation of fishes and fowl. Then, on the sixth day, were created land animals and man.

Of course there are many correspondences between the conception of Genesis and the conception of modern science in reference to the subject in hand. But there are, in the minds of many, important variations in these conceptions. They point us, for instance, (1) to the fact that in Genesis various great types of plant life are represented as

created before the sunlight was. But now science teaches us that this was impossible. Again (2) they point us to the fact that in Genesis the creation of the heavenly bodies was put after the separation of the water from the dry land, and after the creation of plant life. Now science reverses this order.

I am not at all anxious to show that variations exist here. But, in the opinion of many eminent scholars, they do. And, personally, I think the position of these scholars is correct. So holding, I must give up any theory of inspiration which makes those inspired to be necessarily infallible in their scientific conceptions.

There is another theory as to the nature of inspiration which we wish to examine. According to this

view, Biblical inspiration consists of God-given, spiritual insight, used in a stream of revelation that culminated in the perfect Revealer. There are, in this view, three things that need to be noted. First, the inspiration is God-given. Second, the essence of inspiration is spiritual insight. Third, this inspiration manifested itself in a stream of revelation that led up to Christ.

This is the view that I hold to be correct. I hold it to be correct because it is the only one that does not clash with any of the Bible facts and suffices to explain them all. The conclusion of the whole matter then is this. The Biblical phenomena compel us to hold a conception of inspiration which does not make the inspired ones infallible as historians, or scientists.

Now that we have fixed the content of our idea of Biblical inspiration we can compare our Bible with the sacred writings of other peoples, so far as inspiration is concerned. When we do this, we see that there is both a likeness and a difference. The likeness is found in the fact that they are both inspired. They have both been given spiritual insight. The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world shown, with more or less clearness, into the hearts of all the ancient prophets of all the nations of the world. But the inspired characters of the Bible are strongly differentiated from the characters in the other sacred books. First of all, the inspiration of the Bible character was deeper than that of the others. They had a deeper insight into spiritual truth. They

knew more about God. Their conceptions of God and spiritual things was fuller of truth and free of error. But if it should be shown that the inspiration of the Jewish prophet was no deeper than that of some contemporaneous teacher in heathendom, his inspiration would still be of a higher order, because he was inspired in a stream of revelation that finally brought itself to perfection in Jesus Christ. This latter element of superiority is due to his relation to Christ. Our conclusion then is, when we compare our Bible with the Bible of other people that its inspiration is of a higher order. No book in the world is inspired as the Bible is.

We come now to our second question. This one of supreme practical importance. What is the Bible as the result of its inspiration? What heritage

have we received from God inspired men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?

I answer first we have received a divine-human book. It has a human element and a divine. To say that it is purely a human book is not to do it justice. It is more than that. To say that it is purely divine is to give it more honor than is its due. It is less than that. It is the product of the joint working of the human and divine. It has error in it; this is human. It has truth in it; this is divine. In this respect it is like the Christian life. The Christian life is not purely a human thing, nor purely a divine thing. It is divine-human, the product of the joint work of the two. The human element accounts for the crude and transitory; the divine element accounts for the true and permanent.

I answer, in the second place, we have received from God's inspired men of old a unique book. There is nothing like the Bible in the world. Grand sentiments, lofty morality, high ideals have been expressed by a Confucius and a Zoroaster. But no teachers or prophets of any nation have ever given to the world a book like the Bible. It stands alone. Its inspiration is deeper than that of any other book. It is free from error than any other book. It is fuller of truth than any other book. In it is found a perfect revelation of all that man needs to know of God and spiritual things. This is true of no other book.

I answer, finally, we have received from God's inspired men of old an infallible Bible. In what sense is our Bible infallible? Not, indeed, as a text book on geology, or as a text book

on history. The Bible itself lays no claim to infallibility in either of these spheres. It is infallible in the sense pointed out in II Tim. 3: 16, 17. It is infallible as a guide to God and as to the way in which a man ought to live. It is infallible just as a good compass is infallible. The compass is not infallible as an instrument to show which way the wind blows. It is infallible in the sense that, when rightly used, shows a person which way is north and south and east and west. It is infallible in that sphere for which it was made. Just so it is with the Bible. It is infallible in its own proper sphere. Its own proper sphere is to lead men to God. No man intelligently following the Bible in his seeking after God ever lost his way.