



## Q. To what extent is the Bible inspired?

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A. If a person recognizes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, he often questions the degree of inspiration. Does it include every book, every word? Does it extend to historical matters? How about scientific statements? Does it include manuscript copies and translations?

A classic statement on the extent of inspiration is given by B.B. Warfield, a reformed theologian:

“The Church has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by human authors (verbal inspiration, but not a mechanical dictation!) and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship — thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the biblical writers (inerrancy).

“The doctrine of plenary inspiration holds that the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted to exercise of their own personalities and literary talents, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to give man.” (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 173.)

Two words describe the extent of inspiration according to the Bible: verbal and plenary.

Plenary means full, complete extending to all parts. The apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired of God.” And Paul told the Thessalonians, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NASB).

The Bible ends with this warning, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18, 19, NASB). The entire Bible is inspired, not just certain parts! Inspiration extends not only to all parts of the Bible; it extends to the very words, “which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:13, NASB).

Sometimes the biblical writers base their arguments on a particular expression or a single word. For example, in Galatians 3:16 the apostle Paul cites Genesis 13:15 and 17:18 when God said to Abraham, “Unto your seed (descendant) will I give this land,” not unto your descendants, plural. Paul’s whole argument is based on the noun being singular rather than plural. Rene Pache, in *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (p. 77), gives a pertinent summary of this idea. We may agree with him that “very often the meaning of a whole passage rests entirely on one word, a singular or a plural number, the tense of a verb, the details of prophecy, the precision of a promise and the silence of the text on a certain point.” It is of monumental importance to identify the extent of inspiration to include every book of Scripture, each part of every book, and every word in each book as given in the original. This does not include any manuscript copy or any translation which is a reproduction.

No one manuscript or translation is inspired, only the original. However, for all intents and purposes, they are virtually inspired since, with today’s great

number of manuscripts available for scrutiny, the science of textual criticism can render us an adequate representation. Therefore, we can be assured that when we read the Bible, we are reading the inspired Word of God.

Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, wrote:

“The bible must be the invention of either good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God. Therefore:

“1. 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.

“2. 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.

“3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given divine inspiration.” (Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Chiles, *A Compendium of Wesley’s Theology*, p. 20.)

The evidence that the very words of the Bible are God-given may be briefly summarized as follows:

§ This is the claim of the classical text (2 Timothy 3:16).

§ It is the emphatic testimony of Paul that he spoke in “Words ... taught by the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

§ It is evident from the repeated formula, “It is written.”

§ Jesus said that which was written in the whole Old Testament spoke of Him (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Hebrews 10:7).

§ The New Testament constantly equates the Word of God with the Scripture (writings of the Old Testament, cf. Matthew 21:42; Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 3:16).

§ Jesus indicated that not even the smallest part of a Hebrew word or letter could be broken (Matthew 5:8).

§ The New Testament refers to the written record as the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12).

§ Occasionally the writers were even told to “diminish not a word” (Jeremiah 26:2, AV). John

even pronounced an anathema upon all who would add to or subtract from the “words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:18, 19).

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