

The Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration #3

Questions:

1. **If scripture is literally “God-breathed” (remember 2 Tim. 3:16) does that make the human writers robotic, like “automatic writing” (an occult practice)?**

No. Different authors of the Bible books show their own personality and background in their writings. They don't all use the same grammatical or rhetorical style. Those who cover the same events (e.g., the gospels) show remarkable consistency and yet significant differences. If they were all identical we wouldn't need four, would we?

The mystery, or marvel, is how God chose to use individual men of differing backgrounds and lingual skills, to speak and record his Word, in such a way that the words were their own and yet exactly what God wanted to be spoken and written.

This doesn't mean that everything they did, spoke, or wrote, was “God-breathed”, but only what God intended to be saved as scripture. We don't believe that the writers of scripture were in themselves infallible, but that what they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was infallibly the Word of God.

If God wanted to give us scripture independent of fallible men, he could have “zapped” them to us miraculously, or used just anybody as a robot-pensman and done it all at once (like Joseph Smith and his pretended Book of Mormon). God chose to use real men, in real historical circumstances over the course of at least 1500 years, to write scripture.

2. **If we believe the original scriptures were inerrant and infallible, what about the fact that we no longer have the originals?**

Is it surprising that we don't have the originals? How long can any writings physically exist? It depends on the ink, the “paper”, the climate, humidity, amount of use, etc. Even our Declaration of Independence and Constitution are preserved only through amazing technological efforts, and they are only hundreds, not thousands, of years old.

We have many more old documents of scripture than ANY of the ancient writers (Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Heroditus, Cicero, Philo, Josephus, ...), and they show remarkable and detailed agreement. They were meticulously copied and checked to verify their accuracy, and the actual documents we have are a testament, not only of the dedication and effort of human copyists to maintain accuracy, but of the preserving actions of God to make sure what we have is reliable.

3. **Are older manuscripts more reliable than younger ones?**

This is one of the arguments used to justify newer translations like the RSV, NIV, etc. They say that since the KJV was done (in 1611), we have discovered numerous older fragments or copies of scripture. The assumption is that older is better, and so the KJV is seen as being based on less reliable source documents. This is why some modern versions leave out complete verses, or they come to the end of Mark 16 and give multiple “possible” endings.

I do not believe that “older is better” is invariably true, however. In the conditions of those early centuries, the most reliable copies would be the ones most often used and worn out, thus being unavailable to us. Copies that were incomplete or less trustworthy may have been put aside and not used, thus making them more likely to survive.

The point is not that older copies are unreliable, but that they are not necessarily more reliable than those used by the translators of the 15 and 1600's.

4. **If we acknowledge the reliability of our Hebrew and Greek versions, what about the translations that most people through church history have used? Can they be trusted?**

If God had intended the scriptures to be in the original languages only, then almost nobody would be able to read them. How many people even today have the time, skill, and motivation to learn Hebrew or Greek? There is also so much difference between NT Greek and modern Greek that they are different languages. God meant the Word to be a revelation to mankind, and so it is apparent that the Word needs to be translated into the common languages of the world. Not every translation is equally well done or accurate, and there is certainly a giant challenge in translating Biblical concepts into the languages of primitive peoples, but men and women around the world are dedicating their lives to making the Word understandable to every language group.

Such translations should be done prayerfully and with as much skill as the people involved can apply, and we believe God will use those translations to enlighten and convict sinners, and bring

them into God's kingdom. I am sure that God can use even the worst (and I believe dishonest) modern translations to speak to individual people, but continued use of paraphrases and "bad" translations will result in stunted spiritual growth.

5. Why was the OT written in Hebrew, but the NT in Greek?

The OT was in Hebrew because it was a revelation to and through God's chosen people, the Jews. That was their language, so that is obviously how it was recorded.

The NT was written in Greek because at that time, Greek was the lingua franca of the whole Roman empire. Even though the gospel began in Jerusalem, it was to go out to all the world, and for that reason it needed to be in a language that all the world could understand.

It is interesting that God chose the time of the Roman empire's dominance to send out the gospel. Why? Partly because there was a commonly understood language across such a broad area, but also because the Romans built roads and provided a measure of security for travellers. This, and the advanced state of travel by sea (ships that could carry hundreds of people), allowed for people from many nations to be present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and also allowed them to return to their lands with the news, and later Paul and the other disciples to travel freely over all the western world with the gospel.

6. What about the alleged contradictions in the Bible?

Critics of the Bible always make blanket statements that the Bible contains contradictions and is therefore not reliable. These objections can be countered:

- a. Just because something is not agreeable to the mind of an unbelieving scientific mind doesn't mean it is false. They don't believe the miracles of the Bible really happened, because they don't believe miracles can happen (!).
- b. Many so-called contradictions only appear to be so because the critic has a very superficial knowledge of the Bible. What at first appears to be a problem is often cleared up by teaching or more Bible reading.
- c. Some "contradictions" can be resolved by a knowledge of the original languages, like whether or not the men with Saul on the road to Damascus did, or did not "hear" the voice that came to Saul (compare Ac. 9:7 vs. Ac. 22:9).
- d. Some "contradictions" are purposeful, like Prov. 26:4-5 (should you answer a fool according to his folly, or not?)
- e. Almost all the "contradictions" of Kings and Chronicles can be resolved by recognizing that
 - a. Judah and Israel during those centuries used two different calendars, one with a year beginning in the spring, and one in the fall, and there is evidence that they sometimes would switch from one to the other over the centuries.
 - b. They also practiced what is known as co- or vice-regencies, where a son would be proclaimed king while his father king was still alive.
 - c. If a king dies midyear, is the remainder of that year called the first year of the new king's reign, or does it start with the next "new year"? There are evidences that both methods were used at different times, or one by Judah and the other by Israel.
- f. They object that the Bible says the value of pi is 3, which is unacceptably less than its true value of 3.1415965..... 1 K. 7:23-26 says the laver was 10 cubits across and 30 cubits around, which would initially appear to be an error of almost 2 feet. But the laver's thickness was a "handbreadth", or about 4". Perhaps the encircling line was taken as the inner circumference, conveniently measured by running a line around the mold that was used to make it. If this is true, but the diameter was done from outer rim to outer rim, then a laver diameter of 180" (10 cubits) would produce an inner diameter of 172" (10 cubits minus 2 handbreadths), which we know would have a circumference of 540.35", an error of less than half an inch (since 30 cubits would be 540").
- g. The right approach to something that appears to be a Biblical contradiction is to wait for additional information. Often you later see that it was not a contradiction at all, or it could have been translated better, or another part of scripture clarifies it. In the meantime, say "I don't understand it, but I am sure God's Word is true, so I will trust Him to resolve it to my understanding in His own time and way."

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