



**Understanding the Doctrine  
of  
Verbal, Plenary Inspiration**

# Biblical Inspiration

## A Definition of Biblical Inspiration

The word *inspiration* is used only twice in the KJV—in Job.32.8, to translate the Hebrew word *neshāmāh* (“to breathe”), and in 2Tim.3.16, where it translates the Greek word *theopneustos*. The latter passage has given its meaning to the word *inspiration* as commonly applied to Scripture. Literally translated, *theopneustos* means “God-breathed”. The key to its meaning may be gleaned from the OT concept of the divine breathing as producing effects that God himself is immediately accomplishing by his own will and power (Psalm 33.6). By this word *theopneustos* Paul is asserting that the written documents, called Holy Scripture, are a divine product.

This divine (in)spiration is further confirmed by a host of NT passages. For example, Mark 12.26 states that scripture was written by the Holy Spirit through human authors; Acts 4.25; Hebrews 1.5 & 3.7 states that what the scripture says is really what God has said; in Matthew 19.4-5, Jesus attributes the authorship of the scripture directly to God.

Precisely the same idea is set forth in 2Pet.1.19-2Pet.1.21. In this passage the prophetic Word (i.e., Scripture) is contrasted with mere fables devised by human cunning. Scripture is surer and more trustworthy than the testimony of any eyewitness. The explanation for its unique authority lies in its origin.

Adapted from: [Free Online Bible Library | Doctrine of Inspiration \(biblicaltraining.org\)](http://www.biblicaltraining.org) Accessed August 5, 2021

## The Meaning of Inspiration

Inspiration recognizes the role of the Holy Spirit in producing the scriptures. Paul’s use the Greek word “*theopneustos*” (*pronounced thayo-new-stos*) communicated the idea of God “breathing out” the text of scripture through its human authors. It is interesting to note that the word used in the original language of the scriptures that is translated *spirit*, is also translated *to breathe*.

### Inspired Guidance

In 2Peter 1.21, the bible states that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”. These men were moved (*literally picked up and moved along*) by the Holy Spirit as they wrote down God’s message. Therefore, inspiration means the biblical authors were guided to go where God wanted them to go, not where they chose themselves.

Biblical inspiration shares no understanding whatsoever of the modern use of the word which implies the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.

### Inspired Authors

While it is true that the authors of the text of scripture were “*picked up and borne along*”, inspiration also incorporates the personality of the individual authors in the final product. Nowhere in the bible is this more in evidence than the 4 gospel accounts of the life of Christ. Matthew sees Christ as the lion of the tribe of Judah and therefore writes his account specifically to a Jewish audience. Mark, a young disciple of Peter, sees Christ as a man of action and thus writes his account principally to a Roman audience. Luke, the physician, reflects on the humanity of Christ and thus speaks principally to a

Greek audience who greatly value human achievement. Finally, John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” seems to be obsessed with his love for Jesus and Jesus love for mankind.

While it is inaccurate to say that the Holy Spirit simply dictated the words of the scripture to its human authors, it remains a fact that there are some very obvious instances (i.e. Revelation 2.1-3.22) where dictation was in fact the mode of transmission of the Word from God to the pages of Holy scripture.

### Inspired Words

The bible says that “*every word of God is pure*” (Proverbs 30.5). Every word in the scripture is divinely chosen by God, communicated to holy men of God through the moving of the Holy Spirit and expressed in written form through the personalities of the human authors. Every word was chosen by God in the grammatical form in which it is recorded and set withing the exact context to give it its richest and fullest meaning.

## The Manner of Inspiration

God has used a variety of ways to reveal His inspired Word to men. The following chart details some of these ways.

THE MANNERS OF INSPIRATION	
Dreams	Daniel 7.1
Visions	Ezekiel 1.1
The actual voice of God	Leviticus 1.1
Symbols/Object lessons	Jeremiah 19.1-15
Dictation	Revelation 2.1-3.22
Eyewitness reports	I John 1.1-3; Rev 1.2
Guidance of the Holy Spirit	2Peter 1.21
Experience of men/Testimonies	Psalm 23 & 51
Historical research	Luke 1.4
The Person of Jesus Christ	John 1.14; Heb 1.2

## The Internal Evidence of Inspiration

The total message of the bible is a supernatural one which only God could reveal to His spokesmen. They recorded the activities and conversations of God at times or places where no man was present to observe. That which was hidden from man and known only to God was revealed or shown to them by God. The bible teaches that its message came from God and the source of its words are from God.

### Moses

Moses made no attempt to hide his source in recording scripture but openly and readily acknowledged the source of revelation;

*“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29.29)*

### **Stephen**

At his trial, Stephen recognized that the writings of Moses were the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit;

*“Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. (Acts 7.51)*

### **David**

Jesus attested to the special relationship David had with the Holy Spirit;

*“For David himself said by the Holy Spirit; Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psalm 110.1)*

This comment by Jesus recognizes that God permitted David the full use of his faculties and personality so that it is accurate to say *“For David himself said...”* while at the same time he spoke *“by the Holy Spirit”*

In his determined desire to be right with God following an egregious sin, David wrote;

*“Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51.11)*

As David recorded the psalms he was recording what the Holy Spirit revealed in him in his walk with God

Luke, in writing the book of Acts also recognized the work of the Holy Spirit through David;

*“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” (Acts 4.24-25)*

### **The Prophets**

In the major and minor prophets we constantly read the statement *“Thus saith the Lord”* indicating that their message is not of themselves, but has been received from God. Isaiah, for example said;

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.....” (Isaiah 61.1)*

These are prophetic words, received by Isaiah from the Holy Spirit that Jesus applied to Himself as He declared Himself to be the long awaited Messiah.

In another place, God told Jeremiah;

*“Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth .....” (Jeremiah 1.9)*

The prophet Zechariah also relates how he received direct revelation from God;

*“This is the word of the Lord ..... not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts” (Zechariah 4.6)*

## **The Disciples**

Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would reveal Himself to them so they could record the Word of God;

*“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come”* (John 16.13)

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John....”* (Revelation 1.1)

## **Paul**

The Apostle Paul made it plain in his letters to the first century churches that the revelation he received was from the Holy Spirit;

*“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith .... “* (Romans 16.25-26)

*“But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”* (I Corinthians 2.10)

## **Peter**

In his second epistle, Peter makes the following bold assertion;

*“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”* (II Peter 1.21)

## **Conclusion: Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

The term ***verbal plenary inspiration*** should not be taken to mean that the words in the Bible themselves are “holy.” The Greek word *halas* (“salt” in Matthew 5:13) is not “holy” simply because it’s found in the Bible. Other, non-inspired writings also contain the word *halas*, and their use of the word does not make them special. What verbal plenary inspiration *does* mean is that all the words, forms of words, combination of words, and wording in the Bible are God’s divine intention for Scripture. The words, phrases, and clauses work together to give us His message, and each portion of Scripture is purposefully there.

Verbal plenary inspiration applies to the original manuscripts of the books of the Bible. The Bible translations we have today are the works of scholars who have studied copies of the original manuscripts, but the doctrine of inspiration does not extend to translations. Most modern translations are trustworthy, but no one translation is divinely inspired in the way the original manuscripts are.

Verbal plenary inspiration is an important concept and tenet of the Christian faith. God’s inspiration of the text of Scripture extends to the very words themselves and to all parts of Scripture and all subject matters of Scripture. The doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration stands in contrast to the belief that only parts of the Bible are inspired or that only the thoughts or concepts that deal with religion are

inspired. Verbal plenary inspiration is an essential characteristic of the Word of God, as His words reveal who He is and what He has done for us through Christ (see John 5:39–40; Acts 8:35).