

Chapter 2: INSPIRATION AND THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Before going further in our study of the Tetragrammaton, we must consider the inspiration of Scripture. We are primarily concerned with the Christian Scriptures in this study.

••20•• It should be obvious that the inspiration of Scripture is of paramount importance. Logically, if the Bible were not inspired (and thus, infallible), the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Scriptures would merely become a historical and textual topic of scholarly interest. However, to those of us who hold a view of inspiration which acknowledges that God had purpose for *each word* the inspired writers used, the inspiration of Scripture itself becomes a foundation on which we must build our study of the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures. The author concurs with the Watch Tower Society in the view that God inspired each word of the original Christian Scriptures.

The study of the inspiration of Scripture is not an all-or-nothing discussion. It is not simply divided between those who believe in full inspiration and those who categorically reject any involvement by God in the human writing of the Bible. Christendom has introduced much confusion into the discussion of inspiration by way of debates regarding partial inspiration, faulty human authorship, and the like.

The author appreciates the position taken by the Watch Tower Society regarding inspiration and inerrancy.¹ Before going further, we need to review the meaning of the inspiration of Scripture,² for this will characterize the Greek texts with which we are dealing. Much of this discussion can be verified in the book "*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*."³

The meaning of inspiration

The term *inspiration* is frequently used in reference to the Bible. In the book already mentioned, we read,

••21•• "All Scripture is inspired of God." These words at 2 Timothy 3:16 identify God, whose name is Jehovah, as the Author and Inspirer of the Holy Scriptures. [And further that] Jesus...set the highest value on God's word, declaring, "Your word is truth."⁴

Though often not addressed as such, the fundamental question in a study of inspiration is the character of God. We must ask ourselves, "What kind of book would Jehovah write?" It would be a book entirely free of error. Furthermore, because successive generations would read it, the Author would carefully protect his book so that it might be read in the most accurate form possible. Regarding its survival, *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* says,

[The Bible] says: "The saying of Jehovah endures forever." (1 Peter 1:25) If the Bible really is the Word of God, no human power can destroy it. And right up into this 20th century, this has been true. (p. 24)

"*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*," continues by saying,

All the words of the inspired Scriptures are "faithful and true," bringing immeasurable benefits to those who heed them.—Rev. 21:5.

How do these benefits come about? The complete expression of the apostle Paul at 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 supplies the answer: "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work." The inspired Scriptures, then, are beneficial for teaching right doctrine and right conduct, setting things straight in our minds and lives,

¹ Inerrancy describes Scripture's freedom from error. Strictly speaking, inerrancy applies to the *original* manuscripts rather than later copies or translations. Nonetheless, we can use our Bible today with the confidence that the Hebrew and Greek text is totally reliable.

² Just as does the Watch Tower Society, we limit our use of the word *inspiration* to the 66 canonical books of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. That is, we do not include the Apocrypha.

³ This is an excellent book dealing with the accuracy of both the Hebrew and Christian Greek Scriptures. For a more complete study than we can present here, we recommend the material from *Study Four* to the end of the book. *Study Six*, "The Christian Greek Text of the Holy Scriptures," is particularly helpful.

⁴ "*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*," p. 7.

and reproof and disciplining us so that we may walk humbly in truth and righteousness.⁵

Because we understand that the source of Scripture is Jehovah himself, we do not expect a faulty Bible. However, we need to be careful that we correctly understand what we mean when we say that Scripture is without error. The *original* writings were free of error. Could copies—and translations—of the original writing contain errors? History shows us that this has happened. That does not mean we cannot have confidence in our Bible, but it means that we must remember that we are talking about the original Hebrew and Christian Greek Scriptures when we say there is no error.

To this point, we have only talked about the *result* of inspiration; that is, that God as an Author would not make mistakes. But we still ••22•• have not explained the *process* called inspiration. We understand the *process* when we learn the definition of the word *inspiration*. To quote our previous source, "The expression 'Inspired of God'...is translated from the Greek *The- α neu-stos*, meaning 'God-breathed.'"⁶ For the most part, we do not know how God gave his revelation to each of the original writers. (In some cases, however, the writer tells us. Daniel is an interesting example of a Scripture writer explaining how God communicated various revelations to him. John also describes the process in the book of Revelation as, "A revelation by Jesus Christ... And he sent forth his angel and presented [it] in signs through him to his slave John" [1:1].) Yet, irrespective of the individual process God used, we believe that God gave each writer his thoughts in such a way that they wrote the *very words* which Jehovah intended to communicate to the readers.

Inspiration and scribal errors

Prior to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1456, all documents were hand copied. Needless to say, hand copied texts contained errors.⁷

There is a fascinating history regarding the reproduction of ancient manuscripts which is too long to tell here. However, a study of that history will indicate the inadequacy of making simple generalizations about the resulting manuscripts or the scribes who produced them. In some cases, the procedures used for hand copying texts were followed with extreme care and resulted in few scribal errors. The Jewish scribes who copied the Hebrew Scriptures probably developed the highest standards for accuracy by counting numbers of lines and characters of a copied section. However, because of this intensive labor, fewer old manuscripts were kept,⁸ reducing the number of texts available for study today. On the other hand, Greek texts copied by Gentiles were ••23•• often copied more hurriedly, resulting in more frequent scribal error. Nonetheless, though they are somewhat less accurate, there are many more of these copies available for study.

Nor was scribal error always accidental. Copying mistakes probably account for the bulk of the manuscript errors. Yet, there were also errors which were intentionally inserted into the text, having the objective of either introducing or removing theological biases. Origen (who lived between 182 and 251 C.E.) was a leading writer in the early church era. He wrote regarding intentional alteration of manuscripts in his day:

Nowadays, as is evident, there is a great diversity between the various manuscripts, either through the negligence of certain copyists, or the perverse audacity shown by some in correcting the text, or through the fault of those, who, playing the part of correctors, lengthen or shorten it as they please (*In Matth. tom. XV, 14; P. G. XIII, 1293*).⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial," p. 9.

⁷ Printing presses do not eliminate all errors. However, it is easier to identify an error when it is identically repeated in all copies from a single press run. Hand copied manuscripts produce random errors which are unique to a single copy and thus are more difficult to locate. Of course, printed documents are also more recent.

⁸ In many cases, when a Hebrew Scripture text became too worn to be used in public synagogue reading, it was reverently buried after copies were made. In some cases, before burial, it was kept in a special room of the Synagogue called a *Geniza*. (The word may also be spelled *Genizah*.) Some of the richest finds of ancient manuscripts have come from these Genizas when scrolls destined for destruction were misplaced. A famous such find was from a Geniza in Cairo. (See the reference to the book, *The Cairo Geniza in Insights on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, p. 9.)

⁹ Quoted in *The Identity of the New Testament Text* by Wilbur Pickering, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977, p. 42.

As ones who love and respect God's written word, we would strongly denounce any attempt to alter Scripture. We would correctly demand a faithful reproduction of God's revelation by both the scribal copyists in early centuries and a translator's rendering of the text into another language today.

Inspiration and a correct text

If we believe that Scripture was inspired by God, then we want to know the exact words he caused the Scripture authors to write. For this reason, we desire Scripture manuscripts which are free of all scribal error and corruption. Will we ever obtain these perfect documents?

Far from being a hopeless dilemma, the probability of reconstructing the Christian Scripture text as originally written by its human authors is high—and, in fact, has already been largely completed. This is true because a large number of early Christian Greek Scripture manuscripts have been discovered. First, however, we need to briefly review a branch of scholarly study called *textual criticism*.¹⁰ Textual criticism is the study of the *text* (the written words themselves) to determine the most likely wording of the original ••24•• writers. These scholars work with the oldest obtainable Greek manuscripts.

"*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*" succinctly defines textual criticism on page 318. The authors say, "Textual criticism is the method used for reconstruction and restoration of the original Bible text."¹¹

(We must clearly differentiate between the terms *textual criticism* and *higher criticism*. As we have already indicated, *textual criticism* is concerned with the reconstruction of the original text. This is very different from the similar sounding term *higher criticism* which describes a literary study of the Scriptures. *Higher criticism* has often been extraordinarily speculative and used by some to discredit the reliability and inspiration of Scripture.¹² *Textual criticism*, however, is an important ally of those who love Scripture and desire to know what Jehovah originally communicated to man.)

Textual criticism is probably best understood by using the following illustration. Say, for instance, that the original edition of an important historical document had been destroyed. Imagine that printing presses did not exist before its loss. Thus, only copies—or copies of the copies—of the document would be available for examination. As you would expect, there would be errors made in the copying process. If you were assigned the responsibility of establishing the most accurate reproduction of the original document, could you do it? You certainly could. First, you would look for as many copies as you could find. Secondly, you would attempt to establish the date when each copy was made, looking for the oldest manuscripts. Then you would establish some guidelines to determine the reliability of each copy. Finally, you would compare all the copies to each other in order to reconstruct the original document.

The oldest manuscripts would probably be the most accurate because fewer copies would be interposed between them and the original. A very old copy could be a copy made from a copy of the original. If very old, it could be a copy made from the original itself. A more recent copy, however, may have a large number of copies between it and the original. The greater the number of copies between it and the original, the greater the probability of error. In the same way, the older the ••25•• manuscript of any portion of Scripture, the more likely is its accuracy. (We say *likely* because there could be exceptions. If, for example, it could be shown that a more recent copy had been made from a very early copy, then the recent copy might be more accurate than other older copies.)

Returning to the subject of Bible manuscripts, we find that many ancient copies of the Greek Scriptures exist today.¹³ Furthermore, a significant number are available with dates in the third century C.E. Some of these manuscripts are referred to in the footnotes of the *New World Translation*

¹⁰ See the Bibliography for two excellent books describing textual criticism and the transmission of the Greek text: *The Text of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger, and *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* by Harold Greenlee.

¹¹ Strictly speaking, *textual criticism* as indicated by this quotation is a branch of study which is distinct from *inspiration*. However, for our purposes in maintaining brevity, we are combining the subjects of the purity of the Greek Scripture text and the study of textual criticism under the heading of inspiration.

¹² See the comments on higher criticism in the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* pp. 31-32 and 38-43.

¹³ See the table on page 313 in "*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*."

and are extremely important references in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*. (See Appendix F for actual reproductions of an early Greek manuscript.)

Today biblical scholars actually possess copies of the Christian Greek Scriptures made between 201 and 300 C.E. The original writers wrote between 41 C.E. (Matthew) and 98 C.E. (the Gospel and Epistles of John).¹⁴ This means that the oldest extant (currently existing) copies were made within a relatively few years—to at most 150 years—of the Christian Scriptures' writing. In one case, a very small manuscript portion of the Gospel of John is available which was copied about 125 C.E. This was about 25 years after the original was written.¹⁵

Again, consider the illustration above. How would you compare the copies after you had assembled them chronologically? Could you actually determine what the original said? Again, the answer is *yes*. Say, for instance, that each copy had ten copying errors. You would soon find that each copy had dissimilar errors. That is, the errors in each copy would be random—the errors would not always be in the same word or location in each manuscript. (On the other hand, if you found a repeated and identical error in a series of manuscripts, you could assume that they were copies from a common source containing the identified error.) Now you would tabulate the highest frequency of ••26•• agreement (that is, copies which were the same for a given sentence or word) for determining the most likely possible reading of the original. (Again, there are exceptions. One exception to the highest frequency of agreement is made when a large number of copies can be traced to an earlier copy with errors.)

Needless to say, we have oversimplified the problem of identifying errors. In practice, there are many steps which must be taken to determine the authenticity of any variation within a Greek manuscript. The process is not done simply or casually; however a high degree of certainty can be attained.

In this way, biblical scholars (such as Westcott and Hort, the textual critics who produced the Greek text used in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*) have been able to compare the available manuscripts and determine the content of the original Christian Scriptures with amazing accuracy. This is aided by the fact that there are over 5,000 ancient manuscript portions in the original Greek language available today.¹⁶ A very accurate summary of the reliability of our Greek text is given in the reference cited:

F.J.A. Hort, who was co-producer of the Westcott and Hort text, writes. . . "If comparative trivialities. . . are set aside, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt [in the Greek text] can hardly amount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament. . . ." Sir Frederic Kenyon [says] "The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed."¹⁷

Inspiration and today's Bible

Before leaving the subject of inspiration, we need to apply the truth of inspiration to the Bible we possess today. The subject of inspiration forces us to recognize the intervention of Jehovah himself in the entire process. Not only has he revealed his message to inspired Scripture writers, but he has made provision throughout history to assure its availability to each generation as a trustworthy guide to faith.

¹⁴ *Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 318.

¹⁵ "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial," pp. 316-317. From other sources (Metzger) we have a description of this very small manuscript portion. (It measures only about 2½ by 3½ inches and contains portions of John 18:31-33 on one side and 18:37-38 on the other.) It is called the John Rylands fragment, and is classified as P⁵². Its importance comes from its date and location. It was written—as determined by the style of its script—in the first half of the second century and was discovered in the Nile River area of Africa. Contrary to claims propagated by German scholarship during the first half of this century, it establishes that the Gospel of John was written early enough to have been circulated from Ephesus and copied in Africa by this early date. See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 323 for a color photograph of P⁵².

¹⁶ "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial," p. 316.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

Jehovah's concern with Scripture did not stop after he gave it to the inspired writers. We often fail to recognize Israel's great care for its preservation. In spite of their times of idolatry and careless walk with Jehovah, they nonetheless possessed a consuming passion for the accurate safeguarding of their Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures we ••27•• possess today owe much to countless Jews throughout history who sacrificed their lives for it. God himself intervened in that process so that his Word was not lost during Israel's wanderings, their military defeats and captivities, and the times of their political turmoil.

Jehovah continues to intervene in the transmission of his inspired writings since the completion of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Throughout the history of the early church, the rise of the political church of Rome, the dark ages in Europe, and the awakening of both secular and religious scholarship in our own cultural history, God has preserved the Scriptures so that we can know him in truth today.

Jehovah has used men and women of diverse callings and interests to assure accurate transmission of the biblical text. There have been martyrs willing to risk their lives in order to hide precious scrolls. There have been unknown copyists who devoted their lives to accurately reproducing Scripture in spite of the pressure of the political and religious institutions to produce a "Bible" in support of sectarian dogma. There have been scholars who combed the monastery libraries of the Sinai Peninsula and Northern Africa for ancient manuscripts, always in search of older and more reliable copies of the Greek Scriptures.

However, as important as the *means* of preservation is, we must never overlook the author of Scripture himself. *The God who inspired Scripture will certainly take the necessary precautions to preserve it.*

Thus, we can be certain today that we have a faithful reproduction of the very words the apostolic writers penned almost 2,000 years ago. On page 64, *Reasoning from the Scriptures* says,

In the introduction to his seven volumes on *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri*, Sir Frederic Kenyon wrote: "The first and most important conclusion derived from the examination of them [the papyri] is the satisfactory one that they confirm the essential soundness of the existing texts. No striking or fundamental variation is shown either in the Old or the New Testament. There are no important omissions or additions of passages, and no variations which affect vital facts of doctrines. The variations of text affect minor matters, such as the order of words or the precise words used...But their essential importance is their confirmation, by evidence of an earlier date than was hitherto available, of the integrity of our existing texts."

Is the Greek Scripture text trustworthy?

No better conclusion for this chapter can be given than a brief quotation from the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* found on pages 59 and 60 under the heading, "Is the Text Trustworthy?"

••28•• Is it possible that these eyewitness testimonies [of the disciples] were accurately recorded but later corrupted? In other words, were myths and legends introduced after the original writing was completed? We have already seen that the text of the Christian Greek Scriptures is in better condition than any other ancient literature. Kurt and Barbara Aland, scholars of the Greek text of the Bible, list almost 5,000 manuscripts that have survived from antiquity down to today, some from as early as the second century C.E. The general Testimony of this mass of evidence is that the text is essentially sound. Additionally, there are many ancient translations—the earliest dating to about the year 180 C.E.—that help to prove that the text is accurate.

Hence, by any reckoning, we can be sure that legends and myths did not infiltrate into the Christian Greek Scriptures after the original writers finished their work. The text we have is substantially the same as the one that the original writers penned, and its accuracy is confirmed by the fact that contemporaneous Christians accepted it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY. The question of inspiration and the reliability of the Greek text of the Christian Greek Scriptures has been the primary concern of this chapter.

1. The source of the Scriptures is Jehovah himself. We can be certain that God would not give us a Bible with errors. By this we mean that the *original* writings were without error.

2. The process of inspiration is best understood from the definition of the word. *Inspired of God* comes from the Greek word *The-op neu-stos*, meaning *God-breathed*. Jehovah gave the original writers his thoughts in such a way that they wrote the words that he intended to communicate to mankind.
3. The Greek text of the Christian Greek Scriptures which we have today is essentially error-free. We can verify this because:
 - a. We have many early manuscripts—some dating little more than a hundred years after the time when the originals were written.
 - b. We have a large number (over 5,000) of ancient Greek manuscripts to study.
4. Inspiration must also consider the intervention of Jehovah in the continued faithfulness of his written revelation to man. We believe that the God who is capable of *inspiring* Scripture is also capable of assuring its preservation.