



HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

Lesson 2

Theories of Inspiration¹

While virtually all Christians believe that the Bible is inspired, there are different theories concerning how this inspiration came about. Here are some of the most popular inspiration theories:

The Intuition Theory

According to this view, the writers of the Bible exhibit a natural religious intuition that is also found in other great philosophical or religious thinkers such as Confucius or Plato.

The Illumination Theory

This view holds that the Spirit of God, in some way, objectively impressed himself upon the consciousness of the biblical writers but not in a way that is essentially different from how the Spirit communicates with all humanity.

The Dynamic Theory

This view asserts that God gave the biblical authors definite, specific impressions or concepts but allowed the writers to communicate those concepts in their own words.

¹ Robert L. Plummer, *The Story of Scripture: How We Got Our Bible and Why We Can Trust It* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013), 27-28.

The Dictation Theory

This view holds that God dictated the exact words to the human authors. Like court stenographers, the authors of Scripture exercised no human volition in the composition of their writings.

The Verbal Plenary Theory

This view asserts that there is a dual authorship to the Scriptures. While the authors of the Bible wrote as thinking and feeling human beings, God so mysteriously superintended the process that every word written was also the exact word he wanted to be written—free from all error.

How do these theories of inspiration align with the teachings and traditions of our church denomination? Are there specific theories favored or taught more prominently?

How does your belief in how the Bible was inspired affect your personal faith journey and daily walk with God?

Inerrant & Infallible²

Inerrant/Inerrancy

The doctrine of inerrancy, or the claim that the Scriptures are inerrant, means that the Bible is completely truthful in all things that the biblical authors assert—whether in geographic, chronological, or theological details.

Infallible/Infallibility

According to modern dictionaries, infallibility also means “incapable of error.” However, the word has taken on more narrow connotations in current debates over the Bible. To claim the scriptures as infallible is to assert that they are error-free in matters of theology or faith. This view is sometimes also called limited inerrancy.

² Plummer, 36.

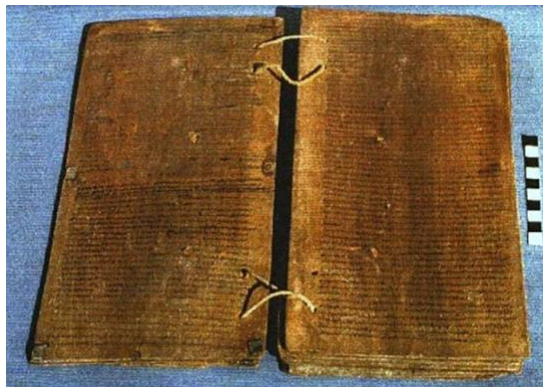
Advocates of full inerrancy certainly would affirm that the Scriptures are infallible, but not all persons who affirm the Bible's infallibility would affirm full inerrancy.

How do we distinguish between the inerrancy of Scripture and our interpretations of it? Are there examples where our understanding or interpretation of a biblical text has evolved over time?

How do we reconcile faith-based affirmations of inerrancy or infallibility with empirical or historical evidence that might seem contradictory?

The Birth of the Bible³

Before diving deeper into the Bible's origins, let's talk about how ancient books were made. Back when materials like papyrus and leather were commonly used, books were usually in the form of rolls or scrolls. To make a scroll from papyrus, sheets were glued together end to end. Most of the time, writing was only on one side of the scroll, but sometimes both sides were used. The writing was organized into columns, about three or four inches wide. These scrolls were typically at most thirty-five feet long and about nine or ten inches tall.



Eventually, the scroll was replaced by the codex. The term "codex" originally referred to a Roman writing tablet, but later, it came to mean a book with pages, similar to the books we use today. The first codex was made of papyrus and, later, parchment (a type of leather). The early versions of the codex were quite basic, with all the sheets folded together. Over time, this evolved, and four sheets were combined to create a "quire," which now means a collection of sheets grouped together.

The Early Form of the Bible

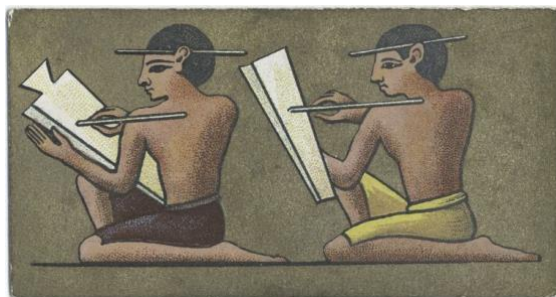
The Bible as we know it today didn't just appear overnight; it developed slowly over time. The Bible tells us that in the beginning, God talked directly to people like Adam, Noah, and Abraham. But eventually, there was a need to write down what God said to keep a record for future generations. The first person mentioned in the Bible as a writer is Moses, around 1500 B.C. Jewish tradition strongly believes that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch.

Once the practice of writing down God's words started, recording other events and revelations made sense, too. Moses' successor, Joshua, wrote in "the book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26). This set a trend for other religious leaders to write about history and prophecies (1 Samuel 10:25; Jeremiah 36:2). This is how people later on, like Daniel and Nehemiah, ended up using these writings (Daniel 9:2; Nehemiah 8:1). The Old Testament, as a result, was gradually put together and became a recognized collection around 400 B.C., around the time of Ezra. The historian Josephus said no new books were added to the Hebrew Scriptures after Malachi.

The New Testament also developed over time, but the books were written relatively quickly, between 50 A.D. and 100 A.D. These books were primarily letters written by inspired people to different churches and individuals. Right from the start, these writings were seen as important and authoritative, so they were read out loud in church meetings (1 Thessalonians 5:27). Soon, churches started sharing these letters with each other (Colossians 4:16), allowing them to learn from the teachings of the apostles.

Ancient Scribes

The significance of early scribes cannot be overstated. In ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, trained scribes were greatly valued for their skills. In Palestine, these professional scribes took on the crucial task of writing and



replicating Hebrew documents. Similarly, following the Greeks' example, the Romans devoted themselves to book production and sales. Multiple scribes often worked together, copying texts through dictation. Publishers even promoted popular books,

³ Neil R. Lightfoot, "The Birth of the Bible," in *How We Got the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), chap. 2, 21-32.

widely distributing them across the Empire. This all points to a substantial level of scribal activity in the ancient world.

The initial Christian texts were likely produced within local church communities by their members. As Christianity expanded, the demand for additional copies and translations for new adherents and in various languages increased. Imagining oneself beside an ancient scribe and observing his methods reveals much about the process. Instead of a chair and desk, the scribe would sit on a bench or stool, possibly with his legs elevated, the codex resting on his knees.

The scribe's primary tool was a reed pen, tailored to a fine point with a slit to serve as a nib. His ink, initially a simple mixture of soot, water, and gum, was black carbon ink. Later on, metallic inks in diverse colors came into use. His equipment also included a stylus and ruler for drawing lines on parchment, a sponge for erasing mistakes or cleaning the pen, a penknife for sharpening the reed, and a piece of pumice for smoothing the pen or the writing surface.

Texts written on papyrus and parchment were organized into one or more columns, depending on the codex's size. Before writing, scribes prepared their sheets by drawing lines, which defined the margins and guided their writing. These lines, inconspicuous to readers in the completed manuscript, were created by pressing a stylus against the parchment, leaving faint, colorless marks.

Scribes worked in a "scriptorium," a dedicated writing room for mass production of copies. Here, they would write while listening to a reader who recited aloud from the text. This method was integral to the process of creating multiple copies of manuscripts.