

# The Verbal Inspiration Of The Holy Scriptures

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For many years the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Bible has been attacked by the forces of unbelief inside the visible church: but for over a century, our church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, stood firm and staunch against these onslaughts of infidelity. The great leaders and teachers of our church, Walther and Stoeckhardt and Pieper and Engelder and Koehler, under whom many of you studied, were uncompromising defenders of this doctrine, and out of their struggles for the verbal inspiration, the inerrancy, and the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures was born the first article of the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, which says,

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called “theological deduction,” but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, II Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the Infallible truth also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.

Of late however, voices have been raised against this doctrine as it is set forth in the *Brief Statement*, so that it has become necessary for our Synod in convention assembled, repeatedly to reaffirm the *Brief Statement* as its official position, to which it expects all its pastors, teachers, and professors to conform. We are told, on the other hand, that this is not a doctrine on which we can demand unanimity in the Lutheran Church., since there is no article in the Lutheran confessions which deals with this matter, and that therefore *the verbal inspiration of the Holy Bible is an open question, on which each individual Lutheran is free to believe as he will.*

Yet an honest reading of the confessions will convince anyone whose eyes are not blinded by the devil that the Lutheran confessions assume the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures throughout, and they look upon the words of the Bible as the foundation of the Christian faith. We need only glance at the *Small Catechism* of Dr. Luther to see how true this is. His faith in the verbal inspiration of the Bible is surely indicated already in the close of the commandments, when he asks, “What does *God* say of all these commandments?” He does not for one moment doubt that when Moses tells us that this is what *God* says, then Moses is right, and in his explanation of the words of God, he says, “*God* threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments.” These words are so familiar to us that we scarcely notice that they assume *that Moses recorded the very words of God.*

“But,” someone may say, “it is admitted that these are the words of God, since in this particular place Moses quotes God as speaking.” But how do we know that God really said these things unless we first assume that Moses does not lie? If the words of Moses are not inspired and

infallible, then what is there to prevent us from adopting the rationalistic explanation of the events on Mt. Sinai which says that what the children of Israel experienced there if the story has any foundation in fact at all, was a violent thunderstorm, and what Moses really heard were loud crashes of thunder which he later interpreted as the ten commandments. No, once we surrender the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible, we will no longer be able to appeal even to those passages of Scripture in which God is quoted directly, for before we can accept the direct quotation, we shall first of all have to accept the truth and infallibility of the introductory formula, which says, "And God spake all these words, saying."<sup>1</sup>

What is really involved here will perhaps become clearer from a concrete example. Some years ago I discussed the doctrine of the immortality of the soul with another Lutheran pastor, who denied this doctrine. He insisted that this belief came into the Christian religion from Platonic philosophy, and that the church in its purest state did not profess it. When I quoted to him the words of Jesus, "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul," his answer was, "The Lord Jesus would never have said that. He was much too Christian ever to say anything like that. This is just what Matthew says He said." That ought to make clear to anyone how impossible it is to believe anything that Jesus says without implicitly accepting the infallibility of the record, unless one wishes to retreat into a pure subjectivism in which the sinner must rely wholly on the feelings of his desperately wicked heart.

But, lest we digress too far, we return once more to the *Small Catechism*. The close of the commandments is not the only place in the *Catechism* where the verbal inspiration of the Bible is taken for granted. In regard to the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, Luther says that "*God would by these words* tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father." And when he says in the explanation of the first petition that God's name is hallowed when the Word of God is taught in all its truth and purity, and that he who teaches otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us, we may again from those words of his form a rather clear picture of the awe and respect with which he regarded the Holy Scripture. If there is no room for any teaching that contradicts the Bible, then the Bible must be absolute truth. Remember also what he says in his treatment of the sacrament of holy baptism, and how he appeals there to the "words and promises of God." And notice how often he lays stress on the words of Holy Writ in the sixth chief part. In answer to the question, "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" he writes, "That is shown us by these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'" And then he goes on, and notice here the repeated emphasis on the words of the Bible, "Forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these *words* ...It is not the eating and drinking indeed that does them, but the *words* here written...which *words*,...are the chief thing in the sacrament; and he that believes these *words* has what they say and express...he is truly worthy and well-prepared who has faith in these *words*...But he that does not believe these *words*, or doubts, is unworthy and unprepared; for the *words* 'for you' require all hearts to believe."

Any Lutheran, therefore, who holds that he has a right to that name and who says that our faith must be in Christ and not in the words of a book ought just for a moment review what he has learned from the *Small Catechism*. If he does not see the inconsistency of his position, he must be blind indeed. To see the force of this argument it is only necessary to assume for a moment that Luther did not believe in verbal inspiration and then read once more what he says in the *Catechism*.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. 20:1

While it is true, therefore, that there is no special article in the confessions of our church which deals specifically with the verbal inspiration of the Bible, yet it is not true that the confessions know nothing of this doctrine. It is everywhere assumed, and the doctrine of the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Holy Bible was, in theory at least, so generally assumed both by the advocates and the enemies of the Reformation, both by radicals and conservatives, that it was scarcely necessary to discuss this teaching. It was simply taken for granted that anyone who claimed the name Christian, whether he was Catholic or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, would recognize the Bible as the inerrant and inspired Word of God.

But the question of whether the confessions teach this doctrine is not, after all, the most important question that we must put, especially when the verbal inspiration of the Bible is under fire, is, "What does the Bible have to say about itself?" And we can be grateful to our God that the Scriptures are on this subject no trumpet giving an uncertain sound. It has been said that the doctrine of our salvation through the holy, precious blood of God's own Son runs like a scarlet thread through the whole of Scripture, and we may add that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Sacred Writings is woven into the warp and woof of the Holy Bible like a silken thread which gives strength to the fabric and assures us that the promises of forgiveness and salvation that we have in our blessed Lord shall never be broken because they are the words and promises of God.

## **Chapter One**

### **Verbal Inspiration: Case Histories**

Now when we ask what the Scriptures themselves teach in regard to their verbal inspiration, it is difficult to know where to begin, because the evidence is so voluminous and so varied that it would be impossible to treat all of it in the time assigned to this paper. We shall in this essay begin with the consideration of several case histories which will help us to understand the nature of divine inspiration and give us a concrete background against which some of the individual passages and expressions of the Bible dealing with this subject will stand out more clearly.

#### **Case History I: Moses**

We turn first to the very first of the Biblical writers. When Moses was called by God at Mt. Sinai to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, he did not want to go, and one of the many reasons which he gave for declining the honor was that he was not eloquent, that he stuttered and stammered. In reply, the Lord gave him this promise, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."<sup>2</sup> When Moses still hesitated, God said to him, "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well...And thou shalt speak unto him., and put words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do." And then come the significant words, "He shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God."<sup>3</sup> When Moses, then, tells Aaron what he should say, when he puts words into the mouth of Aaron, when he uses Aaron as his mouthpiece, he stands in the place of God for Aaron. Here we have the doctrine of verbal inspiration set forth in its very simplest and concrete form. What we mean by this doctrine is simply this that God put words into the mouth of His holy prophets, that God told them what they should say, that God used these men as His mouth through which He spoke to the people. This is the way the Bible regularly speaks of inspiration, as we shall see.

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<sup>2</sup> Ex. 4:10

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 4:12, 14-16

It is, therefore, truly ridiculous and damnably culpable and stupidly unscholarly when men seek to cast doubt upon the truth of the doctrine of verbal inspiration by calling attention to the fact that there is only one passage in the Bible that speaks of the Holy Scriptures as being inspired. What makes such a claim doubly ludicrous is that it is usually made by men who charge us with an atomistic view of Scripture and of tearing passages out of their context.

This is, however, just the beginning of the story of inspiration of Moses. We are told in the sacred record that, in obedience to the command of God, Moses and Aaron gathered together the elders of the children of Israel, “and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses.”<sup>4</sup> It is in this same context also, that we, for the first time in Scripture, find the words, “Thus saith the Lord,”<sup>5</sup> which become almost the standard prophetic formula, which is used about four hundred times in the Old Testament.

In this same context, too, we find the word prophet used in a way that makes this very name imply the doctrine of verbal inspiration. In the seventh chapter of Exodus we read, “And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aaron thy brother shall speak to Pharaoh.” It is clear from this remark that a prophet is one who speaks for another. Since Moses felt that he was not able to speak well himself God sent Aaron with him to say the words which Moses would have said if he had been able to speak well. Aaron was to be the spokesman of Moses. And just as Aaron, as the prophet of Moses, was to speak the words that Moses told him to speak, so the prophets of the Lord spoke the words that the Lord commanded them to speak.

This definition of the word prophet is borne out also by the Messianic promise in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, which begins with the well-known words, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me.” A few verses later in the same prophecy we read, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and *will put my words in his mouth*; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto *my words* which *he* shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”<sup>6</sup> This is so simple and plain that it surely needs no comment.

Those who find it hard to understand how it is possible for God to communicate with men in this way might remember also what God said when Moses insisted that he could not be God’s spokesman to Israel. When Moses said that he was not eloquent, the Lord asked him “Who hath made man’s mouth?”<sup>7</sup> God, who opened the mouth of Balaam’s ass so that it spoke with the words of a human being, can surely also use the mouth of a man to speak what He wants spoken and the hand of a man to write the words of God. So, too, the Lord, who took a clod of earth and gave it the marvelous power of speech, so that on the same day that Adam was created he was able also to name all the animals, surely also knows how to use the mouth of a man to speak the words that He wants the world to hear. Of course, if men adopt the modern evolutionistic view of man, which makes of our speech nothing more than the sophisticated grunting of beasts, it will be difficult for them to see how the words which are spoken by men can be the words of God. It is significant, too, that such a view of man can be held only by those who play fast and loose with the plain and simple words of the Holy Bible, and it is easy to see why the doctrine of verbal inspiration is so distasteful to them. It cramps their style too much and

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<sup>4</sup> Ex. 4:30

<sup>5</sup> Ex. 4:22

<sup>6</sup> Deut. 18:18,19

<sup>7</sup> Ex. 4:11

they do not want to be bound by the simple statements of Scripture, which they delight in calling the outmoded thought-forms of another age which are no longer relevant to life in the modern world.

But to return to Moses. Throughout the account of his dealings with Pharaoh, the words of Moses are consistently treated as the words of God. Over and over we are told that the Lord spoke to Moses and told him what to do and to say. Repeatedly Moses begins his speeches to Pharaoh with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." And when Pharaoh and the Egyptians refuse to do what Moses says they are accused of disobeying God. In the whole story of the ten plagues it becomes clear also that the view which says that the words of God are really the acts of God which are then interpreted by men of special spiritual insight and discernment is completely untenable. First come the words of God telling Pharaoh what is about to happen, and then comes the act of God which fulfills the words that have been spoken.

And that the words of God are not to be interpreted mythologically and allegorically as the acts of God, but as ordinary human words spoken for God, is also made clear in the account of the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai. When they reached the mountain, God gave Moses a message to deliver to the people and told him, "These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the people."<sup>8</sup> The account then continues,

Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord had commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

The manifest parallel that exists here between the "words of the people," and the "words of the Lord" indicates clearly that the "words of God" are not His acts, as neo-orthodox unbelief so often asserts, but the actual spoken words of God, which are at the same time truly human words, spoken by the lips of a human being. At Mt. Sinai, too, God spoke to the people directly when He gave them the ten commandments, so that they actually heard "the sound of the words."<sup>10</sup> This experience, however, filled the people with such fear that they said to Moses, "Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it and do it."<sup>11</sup>

In this way we could survey the rest of the chapters and books of the Pentateuch and note how often the statement is made that the Lord spoke to Moses and that Moses in turn spoke to the people. Those who have read the Pentateuch know how often we read, for example, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying," But to list all these passages here would take us too long. Moreover, they are so similar in import and so numerous that the citation of them would only become monotonous.

But when we cite all these passages the inevitable objection raised by those who seek to cast doubt on the verbal inspiration of the Bible is that nothing is said here about the Scriptures, and that these passages all deal with the words *spoken* by Moses and not with the words *written*

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<sup>8</sup> Ex. 19:6

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 19:7-9

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 4:12 (RSV); cp. v. 10:36

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 5:27; cp. Ex 20:19

by him. But if these objectors would wholeheartedly and honestly admit that the words which Moses spoke were actually the words of God, then the battle for the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures would already have been won, for the objections of human reason against verbal inspiration apply as well to spoken words as to written words.

But the fact is that the same thing that is said about the spoken words of Moses is also said about his written words. The words of the ten commandments, engraved on the two tables of stone, where, according to the consistent testimony of Scripture,<sup>12</sup> written by God Himself, and the record specifically states that the words which were written on the tables were the words which the Lord had spoken from the mountain.<sup>13</sup> But the rest of the words of the Lord were written by Moses. When God finished speaking from Mt. Sinai Moses came and “told the people all the words of the Lord,”<sup>14</sup> and the account continues, “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> Then, when he had finished writing, he took the book and read it to the people, who responded to the reading by saying, “All that the Lord hath said we will do.”<sup>16</sup>

And this is not the only occasion on which Moses was commanded to write the words of the Lord, nor was it the first time that he was commanded to write. Some weeks before when the Amalekites had been defeated, God commanded him to write the account of the battle in a book, so that it might not be forgotten.<sup>17</sup> Later, during the second period of forty days which Moses spent with God on Mt. Sinai, where God revealed His Word to him, he was told, “Write thou these words.”<sup>18</sup> Toward the close of the book of Numbers we are told that Moses wrote the account of the journeys of Israel at the command of God,<sup>19</sup> and near the end of the book of Deuteronomy we read that Moses wrote the law<sup>20</sup> and when he had finished “writing the words of this law in a book,”<sup>21</sup> he gave the book to the Levites and told them to put it inside the ark. Thus the written book of Moses was placed side by side with the two tables of stone which had been written by the Lord Himself, thus demonstrating that what had been written by Moses was to receive the same consideration as the words that had been written by God.

Moses himself spoke of the words which he had written in such a way that it becomes clear that he considered them to be just as much the Word of God as what he had said to the children of Israel. He called upon them to “observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book.”<sup>22</sup> He commanded that the kings in future years should make a copy of the book of the Law which was in the possession of the Levites, that they should read in it diligently, and keep “all the words of this law.”<sup>23</sup> Evidently this command was already applied to Joshua, for when he took over the leadership of the children of Israel, God commanded him, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.”<sup>24</sup> In the light of all this it is

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<sup>12</sup> Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1,28; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 9:10; 10:4

<sup>13</sup> Deut. 9:10; 10:4

<sup>14</sup> Ex. 24:3

<sup>15</sup> Ex. 24:4

<sup>16</sup> Ex. 24:7

<sup>17</sup> Ex. 17:14

<sup>18</sup> Ex. 34:27

<sup>19</sup> Num. 33:2

<sup>20</sup> Deut. 31:9

<sup>21</sup> Deut. 31:24

<sup>22</sup> Deut. 28:58 (cp. v. 14)

<sup>23</sup> Deut. 17:18,19

<sup>24</sup> Josh. 1:8

certainly significant also that Moses, just a few days before his death, told the children of Israel, “Ye shall not add unto the word that I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it.”<sup>25</sup> It is evident that Moses did not expect the people to select from his writings those things that were good and right and true. They were to observe all these words, adding nothing and taking nothing away. How the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration would be taught more plainly is difficult to imagine.

This is by no means all that could be said about the verbal inspiration of the writings of Moses. We could, as we have already said, point out the many sections of his book which begin with the words, “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying,” and call attention the fact that the words which follow are in this way attributed directly to God, and unless we are willing to look upon the whole Bible as a fraud and a book of lies, we had better take these statements seriously and at face value. We might also remind ourselves that some of the things which Moses says are downright blasphemous<sup>26</sup> and insufferably boastful<sup>27</sup> if he is not what he claims to be, namely, the prophet, the spokesman of the Lord. But to go into all this additional evidence would only serve to underscore what has already been said to the point of monotony, and therefore we shall proceed to our second case history, the prophet Jeremiah.

## CASE HISTORY II: JEREMIAH

Like Moses, Jeremiah, too, was a reluctant prophet. When God called him into the ministry, Jeremiah felt completely incompetent, and he said, “I cannot speak, for I am a child.” But God answered him, “Say not, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.” And then the Lord touched his mouth and gave him a promise which was to sustain Jeremiah during all the difficult days of his ministry. He said to him “Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.”<sup>28</sup>

When Jeremiah was persecuted by the children of Israel, he comforted himself with this assurance that he had the words of God. One day he complained bitterly about the undeserved cursing that was directed against him, and he expressed his sorrow over the fact that he was a man of strife and contention, that he had to be involved in so much controversy, that his pain was perpetual and his wound incurable, but in the midst of all this self-pity he suddenly recalls the promise that the Lord had given him, and he says, “Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.”<sup>29</sup>

This particular passage makes clear also that the Word of the Lord consists of words. While this may seem self-evident to us, and hardly worth noting, yet it is very significant in the light of modern attacks on verbal inspiration. It is often said by the enemies of verbal inspiration, that when we call the Bible the Word of God, we do not mean that it consists of so many words of God. That is why so many theologians of our time are willing to speak of an inspiration of the word, an *inspiratio verbi* but not an inspiration of the words, an *inspiratio verborum*. There are others who hold, and here belong most of the neo-orthodox theologians, that when we speak of the Word of God we do not mean a book at all, nor a message, but a person. The Son of God, they say, is the Word of God, and therefore we call the Bible the Word of God only by a sort of figure of speech because it testifies to the Son of God. But here again it becomes necessary to

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<sup>25</sup> Deut. 4:2

<sup>26</sup> e.g. Deut 11:13ff

<sup>27</sup> e.g. Num. 12:3

<sup>28</sup> Jer. 1:7-9

<sup>29</sup> Jer 15:16

point out that if this is true then the plural use of the term “Word” would become impossible since it would imply that there are many only begotten sons of God.

But Jeremiah quite regularly uses the terms “the word of God” and “the words of God” as synonymous and interchangeable expressions. At one time, for example, the Lord said to him, “Go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom...and proclaim there the *words* that I shall tell thee, and say, Hear ye the *word* of the Lord.”<sup>30</sup> At another time, the Lord commanded him to go to the royal palace and to speak a “word” to the king and his retainers. His speech begins with an introductory formula which is used quite often by the prophets but most often by Jeremiah, and which implies the doctrine of verbal inspiration just as much as the more familiar, “Thus saith the Lord.” Jeremiah says, “Hear the *word* of the Lord.”<sup>31</sup> and calls upon the king and the courtiers to administer justice in the land, but then he continues, “If ye will not hear these *words*...this house shall become a desolation,”<sup>32</sup> At still another time, the prophet was sent to Zedekiah to bring him the *word* of the Lord, and in fulfillment of this command, we are told, “Jeremiah spake all these *words* unto Zedekiah.”<sup>33</sup> These expressions which definitely equate the Word of the Lord with the words of the prophet become extremely important in the modern controversies regarding verbal inspiration.

Beside all this, the book of Jeremiah abounds in commands and promises that make it crystal clear to anyone who is willing to take the Bible at face value that the words of Jeremiah are the words of God. We have already noted the assurance that God gave him at the beginning of his ministry. In addition to this the Lord gave him the promises. “I will cause thee to hear my words,”<sup>34</sup> and “I will make my words in thy mouth fire.”<sup>35</sup> Several times he tells us that he was commanded to proclaim, to prophesy, or to speak certain words to the children of Israel.<sup>36</sup> And the Lord left no doubt about the fact that every single one of the words that he gave to the prophet to speak was important, by telling Jeremiah, “Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah...all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word.”<sup>37</sup>

Because of these commands and promises, Jeremiah could with a good conscience say to those to whom he preached, “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard.”<sup>38</sup> When they threatened to kill him, he told them, “Know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves...for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.”<sup>39</sup> Can you imagine a man making such a claim in the face of persecution and death unless he is either completely demented or in dead earnest? And not only does he also at other times make the claim that he was speaking the words of the Lord.<sup>40</sup> and repeatedly use the common prophetic formula, “Thus saith the Lord,” but he actually says that his words were spoken by the

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<sup>30</sup> Jer. 19:2,3

<sup>31</sup> Cp. 2:4,31 (RSV); 7:2; 9:20; 10:1; 17:20; 19:3; 21:11; 22:2,29; 29:20; 31:10, 35:4; etc.

<sup>32</sup> Jer. 22:1-5

<sup>33</sup> Jer. 34:1-6

<sup>34</sup> Jer. 18:2

<sup>35</sup> Jer. 5:14

<sup>36</sup> Jer. 7:27, 28; 11:6; 19:2; 25:30; 26:2; 13:12; 14:17

<sup>37</sup> Jer. 26:2

<sup>38</sup> Jer. 26:12

<sup>39</sup> Jer. 26:15

<sup>40</sup> Jer. 43:1



Lord.<sup>41</sup> So completely does he identify his words with the words of God that he does not only say that he speaks the words of the Lord, but also that the Lord spoke His own words through him.<sup>42</sup> And when the people would not listen to his words, Jeremiah characterized them as a nation that would not obey the voice of the Lord their God.<sup>43</sup> Yet it was Jeremiah's voice that they heard.

There is another expression which Jeremiah uses more than a score of times and in which he also claims inspiration for himself. In the introduction to his book he describes himself as one of whom the word of the Lord came,<sup>44</sup> and he says again and again, "The word of the Lord came unto me" (or "unto Jeremiah").<sup>45</sup> It would, of course, be possible, if we had only this expression standing by itself, to interpret the "Word of the Lord" here as the personal Word, after the manner of neo-orthodoxy, but such an interpretation becomes impossible when one notices that the prophet almost as often uses this term as the title of various sections of his book. The first verse of the fourteenth chapter, for example, reads, "The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth," (a period follows the word "dearth" in our translation, and it cannot be punctuated in any other way), and then comes a description of the drought and the resulting famine that had befallen Judah. The first verse of the seventh chapter also is not a sentence, but a title, and it reads, "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying." This formula, or one very similar to it, is found at least eighteen times in the book, and in almost all cases it is followed by a direct message from the Lord,<sup>46</sup> but in at least one case there follows not direct speech in which God is represented as speaking but rather a historical account of what happened to Jeremiah.<sup>47</sup>

A careful study of Jeremiah will convince the student, therefore, that the sentence, "The Word of the Lord came unto me," means nothing more or less than "The Lord said to me." This is surely the conviction to which everyone who reads Jeremiah with a mind unobscured by neo-orthodox perversion must come. In fact, Jeremiah himself equates the two expressions in the first three verses of the thirteenth chapter of his book. He writes there, "Thus saith the Lord unto me, Go, and get thee a linen girdle...So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord...And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle...and hide it."

As in the case of Moses, so also in regard to Jeremiah, we are confronted with the argument that what has so far been presented has nothing to do with the Scriptures, since everything that has been said up to this point deals not with the written record that we have but with the preached messages of the prophet. While this is again technically true, yet the facts which have been set forth do indicate clearly that the prophet claimed to be the mouthpiece of God, which after all is the basic idea in the doctrine of verbal inspiration, and once a man has admitted that the prophet *spoke* the words of the Lord, there should be no difficulty in also conceding that the prophet *wrote* the words of the Lord. Once the miraculous aspect of the doctrine has been accepted there should be no hesitation in accepting the perfectly normal and natural complement to the speaking of the prophecies, namely the recording of these prophecies in written form.

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<sup>41</sup> Jer. 30:4; 43:1; 10:1

<sup>42</sup> Jer. 37:2

<sup>43</sup> Jer. 7:28

<sup>44</sup> Jer. 1:2

<sup>45</sup> Jer. 1:2; 1:4, 13; 2:1; etc.

<sup>46</sup> Jer. 7:1; 11:1; 14:1; 18:1; 21:1; etc.

<sup>47</sup> Jer. 40:1

But we are not limited to such arguments, logical as they may be, in establishing the inspiration of the written words of Jeremiah. We have seen that the Lord put His words in Jeremiah's mouth. At one time the Lord even said to him, "Thou shalt be as my mouth."<sup>48</sup> And the book of Chronicles says that the Lord spoke "by the mouth of Jeremiah."<sup>49</sup> Yet the book of Jeremiah itself speaks of the words which the Lord spoke "by the hand of Jeremiah."<sup>50</sup> While it may not be possible to establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that wherever the Bible says that a word came "by the hand of" the prophet,<sup>51</sup> it must have reference to a written message, yet this would be the most natural interpretation of the phrase, and there are instances of the use of this phrase where it most definitely refers to a written document.<sup>52</sup> Of special interest in this connection are two passages in Zechariah, the first of which speaks of the words which the Lord had "cried *by the hand of* the former prophets," while the second refers to the words spoken *by the mouth of* contemporary prophets<sup>53</sup>. When we consider that the people of Zechariah's time could have the exact words of the former prophets only in written form while they could listen to the words of the prophets who were active in their days, this contrast between the hand of the prophets and the mouth of the prophets certainly ought not to be passed over lightly, and the fact that we are told that the Lord spoke by the hand of Jeremiah becomes doubly important.

But we have even better proof than this for the inspiration of the written words of Jeremiah. In the twenty-fifth chapter of his book, which records events which took place when Jeremiah had been preaching for twenty-three years,<sup>54</sup> we read of words which the Lord had pronounced, which were written in a book, and which had been preached by Jeremiah.<sup>55</sup>

Evidently the book alluded to here is the same one referred to in a later chapter.<sup>56</sup> In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which was the twenty-third year of Jeremiah's ministry, the Lord gave him the command to write down all the words which the Lord had spoken to him since the days of Josiah when he had begun to preach. In obedience to this command, Jeremiah called his secretary Baruch and dictated to him "all the words of the Lord," and Baruch wrote them on a roll. When the work was complete, Baruch was told to read what he had written to the people in the temple, and in the verses that follow the words written in the roll are three times called the words of the Lord<sup>57</sup> and once they are spoken of as the words of Jeremiah.<sup>58</sup> When Baruch had finished with the reading of the book, the princes of Judah summoned him to read it also to them in a private audience. When they asked Baruch how the book had been produced, he told them, "He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book."<sup>59</sup> The book was then brought to the king, who cut it in pieces with a penknife and burned it in the fireplace of the palace. But the words of Jeremiah, or shall we say, the words of the

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<sup>48</sup> Jer. 15:19

<sup>49</sup> 2 Chron. 36:21, 22

<sup>50</sup> Jer. 37:2 (Hebrew)

<sup>51</sup> The AV usually translates this Hebrew phrase with the simple preposition [sic]. But see the Hebrew in 1 Kings 14:18; 16:7, 12; 17:16; 2 Kings 17:13, 23; 21:10; 24:2; 2 Chron. 29:25; 34:14; Ezek. 38:17; Dan. 9:10; Hosea 12:10; Hag. 2:1; Zech. 7:7

<sup>52</sup> See Chron. 34:14; Dan. 9:10

<sup>53</sup> Zech. 8:9

<sup>54</sup> Jer. 25:3

<sup>55</sup> Jer. 25:13

<sup>56</sup> Jer. 36:2ff. The chapters of Jeremiah are not in chronological order.

<sup>57</sup> Jer. 36:6, 8, 10

<sup>58</sup> Jer. 36:10

<sup>59</sup> Jer. 36:18

Lord, were not to perish in this way. God commanded Jeremiah to take another roll and write in it all the words that were in the first roll,<sup>60</sup> and we are told that Jeremiah took another roll and gave it to Baruch., who wrote in it all the words that were in the book which Jehoiakim had burned and many other similar words.<sup>61</sup>

A few years later, when Jehoiakim was dead and his wife and son had been carried captive to Babylon together with the skilled laborers of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives in Babylonia, and the letter begins with the same words with which so many of the oral messages of Jeremiah begin, “Thus saith the Lord.”<sup>62</sup> At about the same time, the Lord told Jeremiah once more to write all the words which He had spoken to him in a book, and the “book” here spoken of bears the title, “These are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah.”<sup>63</sup>

Thus it is made abundantly manifest by this mass of evidence that the Scriptures clearly teach that the words of Jeremiah, both spoken and written, are the words of God. And this is, very simply, what we mean by the verbal inspiration of the Bible. But lest someone should say that this is an Old Testament concept with which we who are free from the letter and who live in the spirit in the times of the New Testament ought not to concern ourselves, it may be well to examine the case of one of the writers of the New Testament.

### **CASE HISTORY III: THE APOSTLE PAUL**

The third case history we shall consider is that of the apostle Paul, the most prolific of the New Testament writers. This apostle claimed for himself the same sort of revelations as were given to the Old Testament prophets. In his letter to the Galatians, he states categorically that he did not receive the Gospel from men, that it was not taught to him by any man, but that God Himself revealed it to him.<sup>64</sup> In his first letter to the Corinthians he claims that he preaches the wisdom of God which was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost.<sup>65</sup> He begins his account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper with the words, “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.”<sup>66</sup> When we consider how easily Paul might have learned these things from eyewitnesses who were present at the Lord’s Supper on Maundy Thursday, these words at least ought to give us occasion to marvel at the wonderful ways of the Lord. In the letter to the Ephesians he claims the same sort of revelation, and he appropriates to himself and the other apostles the name of prophet, when he says, “By revelation He made known to me the mystery...which in other ages was not known to me the mystery...which in other ages was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> According to the rules of Greek grammar the words “apostles” and “prophets” in this case apply to the same individuals and they are here not designations for two diverse groups of men.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jer. 36:28

<sup>61</sup> Jer. 36:32

<sup>62</sup> Jer. 29:1-4

<sup>63</sup> Jer. 30:1-4. The date is not given but the contents of the “book” echo the promises given in the letter in the previous chapter, and therefore they are very likely from the same period of Jeremiah’s life.

<sup>64</sup> Gal. 1:11-17

<sup>65</sup> 1 Cor. 1:17 and 2:10

<sup>66</sup> 1 Cor. 11:23

<sup>67</sup> Eph. 3:3-5

<sup>68</sup> According to the rules of Greek grammar, when one article precedes two nouns, the nouns are to be understood as designations of the same person or thing. This is the case here.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament Paul could claim that he had been sent by God. The Old Testament often speaks of the prophets as men *who* are sent by the Lord. You will remember that God told Moses that he should tell the children of Israel that the Lord God of their fathers had sent him unto them.<sup>69</sup> The same thing is said of Isaiah,<sup>70</sup> of Jeremiah,<sup>71</sup> of Ezekiel,<sup>72</sup> and of Zechariah.<sup>73</sup> False prophets, on the other hand, are characterized as those who are not sent by God. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran," said the Lord.<sup>74</sup> It is this fact that should prompt us to take special note of the name "apostle," which in the Greek language means "one who is sent out." When Paul therefore begins most of his epistles by calling himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, he is really appealing to his authority as one who had been sent by God Himself to write to them. He could make this claim honestly, for when the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision a few years after his conversion, He told him, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."<sup>75</sup> The Scriptural record also says that when Barnabas and Paul left on the first missionary journey, they were sent forth by the Holy Ghost.<sup>76</sup> Paul makes the same assertion about himself when he writes to the Corinthians, "Christ sent me...to preach the Gospel."<sup>77</sup> This same thought is expressed also when he calls himself an ambassador for Christ.<sup>78</sup>

There is a third parallel between Paul and the Old Testament prophets. They asserted that God spoke through them and that they spoke the Word of God, and Paul also makes *this* claim for himself. He told the Corinthians that God was beseeching them by him or through him,<sup>79</sup> and that God spoke in him.<sup>80</sup> He told the Thessalonians, "God called you by our Gospel."<sup>81</sup> "The things that were spoken by Paul,"<sup>82</sup> are equated with the "word of God."<sup>83</sup> The book of Acts says at least ten times that Paul preached the Word of God<sup>84</sup> and Paul himself tells us that God who cannot lie made known His Word in the message<sup>85</sup> which was committed to him.<sup>86</sup> Therefore he also speaks indiscriminately of "my Gospel,"<sup>87</sup> "our Gospel,"<sup>88</sup> "the Gospel of God,"<sup>89</sup> or "the Gospel of Christ."<sup>90</sup> He says that the Gospel was entrusted to him<sup>91</sup> and that the Word of reconciliation was committed to him,<sup>92</sup> that he preached the word of faith,<sup>93</sup> and what he means

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<sup>69</sup> Ex. 3:12-15

<sup>70</sup> Isa. 6:8,9

<sup>71</sup> Jer. 26:12-15

<sup>72</sup> Ezek. 3:5,6

<sup>73</sup> Zech. 6:15

<sup>74</sup> Jer. 23:21

<sup>75</sup> Acts 22:21

<sup>76</sup> Acts 13:4; 18:9; 23:11

<sup>77</sup> 1 Cor. 1:17

<sup>78</sup> 2 Cor. 5:20

<sup>79</sup> 2 Cor. 5:20

<sup>80</sup> 2 Cor. 13:3

<sup>81</sup> 2 Thess. 2:14

<sup>82</sup> Acts 13:45

<sup>83</sup> Acts 13:44-46

<sup>84</sup> Acts 13:4, 7, 12, 26, 46, 48, 49; 17:13; 18:11; 19:10

<sup>85</sup> Greek: *keerygma*

<sup>86</sup> Tit. 1:3

<sup>87</sup> Rom. 2:16

<sup>88</sup> e. g. 2 Cor. 4:3

<sup>89</sup> e. g. 1 Thess. 2:9

<sup>90</sup> e. g. 2 Cor. 4:4

<sup>91</sup> 1 Th. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11

<sup>92</sup> 2 Cor. 5:19

by the word of faith becomes clear when in the same context he says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. In addition to all this, he says that he spoke the Word of God,<sup>94</sup> that men heard the Word of God from him,<sup>95</sup> that he preached<sup>96</sup> and spoke the Gospel of God,<sup>97</sup> that he did not corrupt the Word of God,<sup>98</sup> nor handle it deceitfully,<sup>99</sup> that he declared to men “all the counsel of God”<sup>100</sup> and the testimony of God.<sup>101</sup> He says also that he was separated unto the Gospel of God from his mother’s womb,<sup>102</sup> which certainly reminds us of what God said to Jeremiah when He called him into the prophetic office, “Before thou camest forth out of the womb...I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”<sup>103</sup>

There are other parallels between Paul and the Old Testament prophets. The children of Israel once asked the Lord how they could know whether a prophet spoke the word of the Lord or whether he was a false prophet. They were told that if his prophecies were not fulfilled, then he had not spoken the Lord’s word. The fulfillment of prophecy is therefore a Scriptural test of a man’s inspiration. Jeremiah had applied this test to himself and one of his opponents, the false prophet Hananiah. Hananiah had prophesied that an era of peace lay before the children of Israel and that within two years the captives would return from Babylon. Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be no peace and that the captivity would last for seventy years, and he told Hananiah that if his prophecy would be fulfilled and peace would come, then he would grant that Hananiah was a prophet of the Lord. But then he made a prediction of his own and said that before the year had passed, Hananiah would die. Two months later Hananiah was dead, and two years later the captives were still in Babylonia,<sup>104</sup> and thus the falsehood of Hananiah’s prophecy and the truth of Jeremiah’s word was established by empirical evidence.

The same sort of test was passed by Paul when he began his great work of evangelizing the Gentile world. When on the first missionary journey, he preached to Sergius Paulus, (of whom, by the way, it is said that he called for Barnabas and Paul because he wanted to hear the word of God),<sup>105</sup> Elymas the sorcerer, attempted to keep the Roman proconsul from believing the words of Paul. But Paul gave a graphic demonstration of the truth of his message by predicting that the sorcerer would become blind for a season, and the record says that he became blind immediately.<sup>106</sup> Here we have not just a simple prophecy of an event that might take place naturally, as in the case of Jeremiah cited previously, but Paul prophesies an event which takes place miraculously and unexpectedly, and Luke tells us, “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord,”<sup>107</sup> and we might note here that

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<sup>93</sup> Rom. 10:8

<sup>94</sup> Acts 13:46

<sup>95</sup> 2 Thess. 2:13

<sup>96</sup> 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Th. 2:9

<sup>97</sup> 1 Thess. 2:2

<sup>98</sup> 2 Cor. 2:17

<sup>99</sup> 2 Cor. 4:2

<sup>100</sup> Acts 20:27

<sup>101</sup> 1 Cor. 2:1

<sup>102</sup> Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15

<sup>103</sup> Jer. 1:5

<sup>104</sup> Jer. 29:1-17

<sup>105</sup> Acts 13:7

<sup>106</sup> Acts 13:11

<sup>107</sup> Acts 13:12

while the message which he had heard is called the “doctrine of the Lord,” it was nevertheless preached by Paul.

A second test of inspiration spoken of in the Old Testament is the performance of miracles. When Moses felt that the people would not believe that God had sent him and would therefore not accept his message to them, God gave him miracles to perform in order to convince them. When Elijah raised the son of the widow of Parephath, she said, “Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”<sup>108</sup>

The apostle Paul came with the same credentials. The case of Elymas the sorcerer might be cited also in this connection. It hardly seems necessary at this time and place to list the miracles of Paul and to speak of the lame man whom he healed at Lystra, and the demoniac girl who was cured at Philippi, and the young man who was raised from the dead at Troas, and of the sick who were made well at Ephesus and on the island of Malta. It will surely suffice to quote just one passage from the book of Acts, which says, “The Lord...gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”<sup>109</sup>

And Paul expected his hearers to consider his preaching to be the Word of God. He commended the Thessalonians and wrote to them, “When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God.”<sup>110</sup> He demanded obedience for his commandments. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote, “If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”<sup>111</sup> And it may be well to call attention to the fact that what Paul is discussing in the preceding context is not some fundamental doctrine that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, but is the relatively mundane question of a man working diligently to earn his daily bread. Can you imagine a pastor today writing this to his congregation unless he could quote a Bible passage to back up his demand? And when we remember how often Paul claimed that he preached the Gospel of Christ and brought it to places where it had never been proclaimed before, we ought not to overlook the import of his words when he says that the Lord will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on all those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup>

So convinced was Paul that the message which he proclaimed was the true Word of God, that he did not hesitate to pronounce a curse on anyone who would dare to preach another Gospel, even if he were an angel from heaven.<sup>113</sup> Those are certainly not the words of a man who has the slightest doubt about the absolute truth of his preaching. He told the Colossians that they should cling to what they had been taught, that they should let no man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of man, and let no one impose upon them the commandments and doctrines of men.<sup>114</sup> Someone might well have said to Paul, “But you also are a man. How dare you impose upon these people your concepts and your ideas?” And such a question would merely cause to stand out in bold relief the implied claim that Paul makes for himself here. And what he said to the congregations in Galatia and at Colossae, he said also to

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<sup>108</sup> 1 Kings 17:24

<sup>109</sup> Acts 14:3

<sup>110</sup> 1 Thess. 3:14

<sup>111</sup> 2 Thess. 3:14

<sup>112</sup> 2 Thess. 1:7.8

<sup>113</sup> Gal. 1:8.9

<sup>114</sup> Col. 2:7.8.20.21

Timothy when he told him that he should see to it that no other doctrine was taught in Ephesus.<sup>115</sup>

And this call for the recognition of the divine origin and authority of his message extends to the very words in which the message is proclaimed. In his first letter to the Corinthians he asserts that the message which he preached was one which no man could ever possibly know by natural means or discover by empirical investigation. The things of God, he says, no man knows. Only the Spirit of God knows them. But, he goes on, we now know these things, because this same Spirit of God, who searches the deep things of God, has revealed them unto us. And these things, which the Holy Ghost has revealed to us, he says, “we speak not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”<sup>116</sup> And this last phrase, which is so often misunderstood and which is mistranslated in the RSV, might better be translated thus, “combining spiritual things with spiritual,” that is, putting together spiritual things, or things revealed by the Spirit, with spiritual words, or words taught by the Spirit. The context makes it plain that this is the way these words should be understood. We have here, by the way, an illustration of the fact that when men accuse us of quoting texts in an atomistic way and separating them from their context, they often do us a favor for they drive us back to the context, and we discover that the passage in its context presents us with even better proof for our doctrine than it does standing by itself in the catechism. Earlier in this same chapter Paul had said that his speech and his preaching did not come in enticing words of man’s wisdom.<sup>117</sup> While this is a negative statement, the positive corollary is not hard to supply from both what precedes and what follows. Paul could have said that his speech and his preaching came with words of God’s wisdom.

This, however, is not the only chapter in which he makes this claim for his words. Toward the end of his first letter to Timothy, in which he had given Timothy a great deal of instruction concerning the administration of a Christian congregation, he says, “These things teach and exhort.” But then he goes on, “If any man teach otherwise,” in other words, if he teaches something different from what I have just told you, “and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud and knows nothing.”<sup>118</sup> A man must indeed be stupid if he does not see that Paul here maintains that his words are the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus. It was this conviction, too, that prompted him toward the end of his life to say to Timothy, “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me...And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”<sup>119</sup> There is no room here for our modern theological progress, so-called, and for new and deeper insights than were possible in prescientific and preKantian times. Timothy is told very explicitly to hold fast the words which Paul had used and to pass on things which Paul had taught. This is no way to make “progress” but if these are things revealed by the Spirit and words taught by the Spirit, it will be the height of presumption to imagine that we could possibly improve on them.

And what Paul here declares concerning his spoken words, he says also of the things that were written by him. He places his written messages on the same plane as his preached Gospel

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<sup>115</sup> 1 Tim. 1:3

<sup>116</sup> 1 Cor. 2:13

<sup>117</sup> 1 Cor. 2:4

<sup>118</sup> 1 Tim. 6:2,3

<sup>119</sup> 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2

when he tells the Thessalonians that they should cling to the things which he had handed down to them, whether he had done it by word of mouth or in a letter.<sup>120</sup> And to the Corinthians he wrote, “if any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”<sup>121</sup> Evidently then if a man does not recognize the divine origin and authority of what Paul has written he is not guided by the Spirit of God.

It is clear therefore that the writers of the New Testament as well as those of the Old professed to be the spokesmen and penman of the Lord. It was this that made them prophets, and we are confronted with two choices. Either these men come under the condemnation of God, who said, “I am against the prophets that use their tongues and say, He saith,”<sup>122</sup> or they were speaking the truth, Anything other position is not only Scripturally and logically impossible, but also morally reprehensible.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF VERBAL INSPIRATION**

Having thus seen how three of the Biblical authors dealt with their own inspiration and how they evaluated the speeches of their lips and the productions of their pens, we shall in this section of our paper summarize the testimony of the Holy Scriptures to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. We shall not attempt to deal with the whole doctrine under the three traditional headings of “the impulse to write,” “the suggestion of the things,” and “the suggestion of the words,” but we shall limit ourselves here to the last of these topics, which is usually what we have in mind when we speak of verbal inspiration in the strict sense of the term.

There are few people in the visible church who would deny the simple statement, “The Bible is the Word of God,” at least, there are few who would be willing to do so publicly. But most of the modern attacks on this doctrine are zeroed in on the idea that the inspiration of the Bible is a verbal inspiration, that is, that the very words of the Bible are inspired by the Holy Ghost.

We have already noted that the word inspiration is used only once in the Bible. While this is sometimes pointed out by those who seek to cast doubt upon the inspiration of Scripture, this argument itself, first of all, indicates how far they have drifted away from the sound Lutheran and Scriptural position. If they had the simple faith of a Martin Luther, they would say, “This one word makes the whole world too small for me.” Moreover, if these men would be willing to say what the Bible says scores of times, namely, that the words of the Bible are the words of God, we would grant that they have on this point a common faith with us, even if they had never heard the term “verbal inspiration,” for while the term “inspiration” is used only once in the Bible, the term “verbal inspiration” is never used. But if men will listen to the words of this book as they would listen if God Himself were present to speak to them, they would know all that they need to know about the origin and authority of this book. And even we, who confess this doctrine, need to develop a sense of awe and respect before the message which is proclaimed here for our salvation and our guidance. It will do us little good to confess this doctrine with our lips if we have lost it in our hearts.

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Now the Scriptures themselves leave us in no doubt that the words of the Bible are truly the words of God. We have already seen that they teach without equivocation that Moses wrote and spoke the words of the Lord, that Jeremiah wrote and spoke the words of the Lord, and that the apostle Paul steadfastly maintained that the words which he spoke were taught to him by the Holy Ghost, and that the things which he wrote were the commandments of the Lord, and that all of them, Moses, and Jeremiah, and Paul, were prophets and that prophets are often described as men into whose mouth the Lord has put His own words. These same ideas are set forth also in other places in the Bible and of other men. When Joshua succeeded Moses and was preparing to cross the Jordan, he called the children of Israel together and spoke to them. This speech, which is recorded in the third chapter of his book, begins with the words, "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord."<sup>123</sup> And when he was about to die, he called his people together once more to hear his farewell speech, and when he finished, so we are told, he "wrote these words in the book of the Law of God."<sup>124</sup> Thus the words of Joshua became a part of the book of the law of God, and what is just as significant for our purpose here is the fact that Joshua, when he had finished this speech, also set up a great stone and said, "This stone shall be a witness unto us, for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us."<sup>125</sup> The words which Joshua spoke and which he wrote into the book of the law of God are called the words of the Lord.

Seven hundred years later the Lord told the people through the prophet Isaiah, "Seek ye out the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate; for my mouth it hath commanded and His Spirit it hath gathered them."- It is evident that the children of Israel, seven hundred years before the birth of our Savior, knew that they had a book which was absolutely reliable because the Lord Himself had spoken what was written there. At that time, so far as we know, almost half of the books that we have in our Old Testament had not yet been written.s

A hundred years later, Ezekiel was called to be a prophet and the Lord told him, "Thou shalt speak my words unto them<sup>126</sup> ....speak with my words unto them<sup>127</sup> ....all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, 'Thus saith the Lord God.'<sup>128</sup> Later in the book the words of Ezekiel are equated with the Word of the Lord.<sup>129</sup> One of his visions, at least, was written down for the people at the command of the Lord.<sup>130</sup>

One of the last of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, called upon the people of his time to pay attention to the words of the former prophets and he says that these are the words which the Lord had spoken through these prophets.<sup>131</sup>

Thus from the earliest books of the Old Testament, written about 1500 years before the birth of our Lord, until the latest books, written a thousand years afterward, the idea that the words of God Himself were spoken and written by men was one which was familiar to the people of God.

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<sup>123</sup> Josh. 3:9

<sup>124</sup> Josh. 24:26

<sup>125</sup> Josh. 24:27

<sup>126</sup> Ezek. 2:7

<sup>127</sup> Ezek. 3:4

<sup>128</sup> Ezek. 3:10,11

<sup>129</sup> Ezek. 33:30-32

<sup>130</sup> Ezek. 43:11

<sup>131</sup> Zech. 7:7-12

And the New Testament writers have exactly the same view of the Old Testament. Often the New Testament refers to the prophecies of the Old and speaks of them as having been spoken by God. The men who wrote the New Testament were well aware that these words had been written and spoken by men, but they said that they were the Lord's prophecies nevertheless. When Zacharias, for example, celebrated the birth of his son and expressed his joy over the impending birth of the Savior in the words of the *Benedictus*, he said that this was the fulfillment of the promises which God had spoken "by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began." In a similar vein Mary said in the *Magnificat* that God had spoken to the fathers of the events which were now about to take place, To these people it was the normal thing to read the words of the Old Testament and to think of them as the words of God and to say that God had said the things that were written there.

Thus the New Testament also frequently quotes the Old and says that the quoted words were spoken by the Lord. Matthew says, for example, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet." A better translation in modern English style would be, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord by means of the prophet," or "through the prophet."<sup>132</sup> Our English word "by" can either be used of the direct agent *by whom* an act is performed or it can be used to denote the instrument through which the act is carried out. For example I can say, "I was brought here by Herb Garske" and I can also say, "I was brought here by car." In the Greek language, however, two different words would be used, and the first would make it clear that Mr. Garske was the man who brought me here and the second that the car was the means of transportation.<sup>133</sup> And the Greek preposition employed in the phrase "by the prophet" is the words used to denote the instrument through which an act is accomplished, while the preposition in the expression "of the Lord", or "by the Lord," is the word which is used to signify the direct agent by whom the act is done. In most instances, when the New Testament quotes the words of the Old and says that this was spoken "by the prophet,"<sup>134</sup> the preposition is used which makes it plain that the prophet is an instrument and that the actual speaker responsible for the words is someone else, and there is no room for doubt as to who the speaker is. This is also true of the written word. In one place, at least, we are told that a prophecy was *written* "by" or "through" the prophet.<sup>135</sup> This whole matter becomes so much clearer when we read that the Holy Ghost spoke "by the mouth of David," or "through the mouth of David,"<sup>136</sup> and when we are told in the book of Hebrews that God at sundry times and in divers manners spoke unto the fathers in the prophets.<sup>137</sup> In this latter case a preposition is used which could mean either that the prophets were the instruments through whom God spoke, or else it may indicate that God spoke in the writings of the prophets. While it is true that the writings of the prophets are not mentioned here, yet, if someone insists on being shown from Scripture that the written productions of the prophets are ascribed to God as the real author we can point to the fact that St. Paul says that God proclaimed the Gospel promises "through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Matt. 1:22; 2:15

<sup>133</sup> In the sentence, "I was brought here by Ford", the Greek language would in the preposition immediately make it clear whether it was Tennessee Ernie or a Ford Car.

<sup>134</sup> Matt. 2:17; 3:3; 4:13; 8:17; 12:27; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9; Acts 2:16

<sup>135</sup> Matt. 2:15

<sup>136</sup> Acts 1:16; cp. Acts 28:25; 4:25

<sup>137</sup> Heb. 1:1 (av: "by the prophets")

<sup>138</sup> Rom. 1:2

Thus it is surely clear to anyone that the New Testament looks upon the words of the Old Testament as spoken by God Himself and that it often explicitly teaches that the men who wrote and spoke these words were only instruments in the hands of God, the real author of the Holy Bible.

That this is the consistent position of the New Testament writers and of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is demonstrated also by the use that the New Testament makes of the words of the Old Testament. You are all acquainted with the fact that the New Testament writers often appeal to what is written in the Old Testament as proof of their assertions.<sup>139</sup> Many of the events in the life of our Savior and in the early history of the Church are depicted as fulfillments of prophecies of the old Testament and the words of the prophets are quoted in confirmation. This common practice is particularly worthy of note if we keep in mind that the fulfillment of prophecy was a test suggested by God Himself to determine which was the word which the Lord had spoken.<sup>140</sup>

There are even times when the whole argument in a certain section of the New Testament depends on one single word of the Old. The words of our Lord, "The Scripture cannot be broken." are often quoted in support of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. What we sometimes fail to remember is that these words were spoken in reference to one single word of the Old Testament.<sup>141</sup> The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews shows that the new covenant is superior to that which God had made with Israel by appealing to the fact that God Himself had called it a new covenant, and he says that if this is a *new* covenant, then the first covenant must be *old*, he says, is also ready to be discarded.<sup>142</sup> From the word "all" in Psalm 8 he shows that also the world to come must be in subjection to the Lord Jesus, for if it is not subject to him then the word "all" would not have been used,<sup>143</sup> for then there would be something which is not put under His feet. Much of his argument in chapters two and three of the epistle hinges on the word "Today" in Psalm 95, and in chapter five to seven he shows in many ways that the priesthood of the Lord Jesus is superior to the Levitical priesthood by citing repeatedly the fact that the Old Testament in Psalm 110 said that he was a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

St. Paul goes even farther than this when he appeals not only to one word, but to the singular form of the word. He says in his letter to the Galatians that the promise of God given to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," must refer to Christ since the word seed is a singular and not a plural noun. He writes, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."<sup>144</sup> We might hesitate to draw such a conclusion from this word, but the inspired apostle displays no such timidity, and the Holy Spirit, who taught Paul what he should say, thereby demonstrates that individual words of the Old Testament are exact and true.

St. Paul and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews are not the only ones who do this sort of thing. The Lord Jesus dealt with the Old Testament in this same way. He showed the Sadducees that men do not go out of existence when they die by reminding them that God, appearing to Moses about 400 years after the death of Abraham still says, "I am the God of

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<sup>139</sup> e.g. Rom 3:10

<sup>140</sup> Deut. 18:21,22

<sup>141</sup> John 10:35; cp. Ps. 82:6

<sup>142</sup> Heb. 8:13

<sup>143</sup> Heb. 2:8

<sup>144</sup> Gal. 3:15

Abraham.”<sup>145</sup> God, He says, is not the God of the dead but of the living, and if Abraham was no more, then God should have said to Moses, “I was the God of Abraham.” He also confounded the Pharisees by calling their attention to the word “Lord” in David’s prophecy concerning the Messiah in Psalm 110, and He says that David by the Spirit called the Messiah by this name.<sup>146</sup> The RSV is perhaps not very exact but surely not far from the truth when it translates here, “David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord.”

Up to this point we have cited only passages which imply the doctrine of verbal inspiration, just to demonstrate that even the weakest proof for the doctrine is still formidable. We proceed now to examine some of the most important passages of the New Testament testifying to the inspiration of the old Testament. You all know them by heart, but it may be well just for the sake of completeness to quote them once more. You know that St. Peter wrote, “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.”<sup>147</sup> Literally, we might translate these words, “Men, carried away by the Holy Ghost, spoke from God” But however we way translate them, it is clear from these words that the men who spoke the prophecies did not by their own free choice decide what they would say, but what they said was according to the will of the Holy Spirit. They said what He wanted them to say.

Of late, a most ridiculous argument has been advanced against this text which ought to tell us something about the scholarship of a man who would use such an argument, and it reminds me of the words of Paul, “Professing themselves to be wise, they have become fools.” It is said that since this passage says that the holy men of God *spoke*, it should not be applied to what they have written. In the first place, every one who reads his Bible with any attention and understanding knows that the phrases “it is written” and “it was spoken” are used as synonyms in the Scripture, just as we quote an author and say that he says a certain thing on a certain page of his book. While there may be a distinction between “it is written” and “it was spoken”, yet usually they are used interchangeably. Moreover, such an argument sounds strange coming from the lips of those who are trying to prove words of the Bible do not present absolute factual truth. Besides this, we need only call attention to the immediate context of this passage and note that Peter says that he and those to whom he is writing “have” this word of prophecy which was spoken by the Holy men of God under the influence of the Holy Ghost. They certainly did not have it in oral form since all the Old Testament prophets were dead. Finally, the written prophecies are specifically mentioned in the context, for the verse which precedes the one quoted says, “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” And how little distinction the inspired writers themselves made between what they said and what they wrote has already been alluded to in the case history of Jeremiah and it is graphically demonstrated by the words of David, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”<sup>148</sup>

The second New Testament passage most often quoted for the inspiration of the Old Testament is found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”<sup>149</sup> This is the passage which is always referred to when the remark is made that the word inspiration is used only once in the Bible. Also in the case of this passage, efforts are made to explain it away. It is suggested that it should be translated, “Every Scripture, inspired by God is

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<sup>145</sup> Matt. 22:32

<sup>146</sup> Matt. 22:43

<sup>147</sup> 2 Pet. 1:21

<sup>148</sup> Ps. 45:1

<sup>149</sup> 2 Tim 3:16

profitable.” However, this is not the most normal way of translating this passage since it ignores the “and” which preceded the word “profitable.” But even if it were possible to translate it in this way, as some insist, it would not by any means indicate that there are parts of Scripture which are not inspired. How Paul felt about this matter is shown by what he wrote to the Romans, when he said, “Whatsoever things were written aftertime were written for our learning.”<sup>150</sup> It is not necessary to remind you that the things that were written are the Scriptures, or the Writings. And in view of Paul’s own emphasis on the singular of the word “seed” in Galatians, it may not be amiss to point out, for what it is worth, that the word which he uses for the Holy Scriptures in one case in the Timothy passage really means “the holy letters,” and the word “letter” here does not mean epistle but rather one of the components of the alphabet.

We have said that the previous two passages testify to the inspiration of the Old Testament, but if we read them in context, it becomes very evident that it is a mistake to limit their application to the Old Testament, as is so often done. Let me read to you a series of selected passages from Second Timothy which precede the statement, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Paul says in this letter, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me...That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us...And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. ...Thou hast fully known my doctrine. . But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures.”<sup>151</sup> If Paul does not intend here to place what he taught Timothy on the same level with what Timothy had learned from the Holy Scriptures, it is difficult to see why he would write as he does here.

The same thing is true of the passage from Second Peter. In the first chapter Peter claims to have been an eyewitness of the life of Christ and that in bringing the Gospel to them he was not proclaiming cunningly devised fables or, as the original says, myths. He tells his people that he will always remind them of these things as long as he lives and also make an attempt to see to it that they will not forget them even after his death. This can only mean that he intends to leave some written record that could speak for him when his tongue lies silent in the grave. It is soon after this that he asserts that the prophecies of Scripture were spoken under the influence of the Holy Ghost. In the second chapter he goes on to warn them about the false teachers who will creep into the church. Then the third chapter begins with these words, “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance; that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”<sup>152</sup> It is as clear as anything can be that St. Peter places the commandments of the apostles of the Lord on a level with the words of the holy prophets. Moreover, he explicitly classifies the epistles of Paul with the Holy Scriptures when he says that unlearned men misuse the letters of Paul as they misuse also the other Scriptures.<sup>153</sup> Peter and Paul do not make such a sharp distinction between the writings of the Old Testament and of the New Testament as is commonly made in our day.

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<sup>150</sup> Rom. 15:4

<sup>151</sup> 2 Tim. 1:13,14; 2:2; 3:10,15

<sup>152</sup> 2 Pet. 3:1,2

<sup>153</sup> 2 Pet. 3:16

This is, however, by no means the only proof we have for the verbal inspiration of the New Testament. We shall not repeat here what has already been said about the inspiration of the writings of Paul, which make up almost one fourth of the New Testament.

The story of the inspiration of the New Testament really begins with the Lord Jesus, although many are quick to point out that the Lord Jesus never wrote anything. But He did lay great stress on the very words which He spoke. He expected the Jews to believe them and to give them the same reverence and respect that they pretended to give to the words of Moses.<sup>154</sup> He told them they by rejecting His preaching they were refusing to listen to the words of God,<sup>155</sup> and that they would be condemned on the last day because they would not accept His words.<sup>156</sup>

And He claimed the most extraordinary things for these words of His. He told His disciples that the words that He spoke unto them were spirit and life,<sup>157</sup> that if they would continue in His Word and would be His true disciples and they would know the truth,<sup>158</sup> that the words that He spoke came from His heavenly Father,<sup>159</sup> and that His words would never pass away.<sup>160</sup> And those who find themselves uncomfortable in the presence of the doctrine of verbal inspiration might do well to remember that the Lord said that on the day of judgment He would be ashamed of those who are ashamed of His words.<sup>161</sup> But those who believe in Him have no need to be ashamed of His words. They know what they are. They will agree with John the Baptist, who said that He spoke the words of God,<sup>162</sup> and with Peter, who confessed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."<sup>163</sup>

And what Jesus claimed for Himself in these sayings of His, He bestowed also on His apostles. In His great high-priestly prayer He said to His Father, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me...I have given them thy word...Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."<sup>164</sup> And He expected that their word would do for others what His word had done for them, for He said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."<sup>165</sup>

Not only did He pray in this way to His heavenly Father, but He spoke to His disciples in the same way. When He sent them out to preach, He told them, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."<sup>166</sup> And on the night before He died, He gave them the promise, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost...shall teach you all things., and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you...He shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning... 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 show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine,

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<sup>154</sup> John 5:47

<sup>155</sup> John 8:47

<sup>156</sup> John 12:47,48

<sup>157</sup> John 6:63

<sup>158</sup> John 8:31

<sup>159</sup> John 14:10

<sup>160</sup> Matt. 24:35; Mk. 13:31; Luke 21:33

<sup>161</sup> Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26

<sup>162</sup> John 3:34

<sup>163</sup> John 6:68

<sup>164</sup> John 17:8,14,17

<sup>165</sup> John 17:20

<sup>166</sup> Matt. 10:20

and shall show it unto you.”<sup>167</sup> A few days before His death, He told Peter and James and John and Andrew, “When they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.”<sup>168</sup>

Most assuredly, then, one who reads the books of the New Testament, keeping in mind the promises of the Lord Jesus, will be conscious of the fact that either these holy men of God are speaking the words of God, or else they are making the most outrageous and blasphemous claims for their writings. They knew that they spoke the truth,<sup>169</sup> that those who did not believe the record of Christ which they left made God a liar,<sup>170</sup> that those who did not acknowledge the things which they wrote as the commandments of the Lord were not men who were led by the Spirit of God,<sup>171</sup> that those who taught otherwise were false prophets who were to be avoided and rejected,<sup>172</sup> that a true Christian should not bid such a man “Godspeed,”<sup>173</sup> that their own words, on the other hand, were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>174</sup> that they were words taught by the Holy Ghost,<sup>175</sup> that they truly preached the Word of God,<sup>176</sup> and that their writings had the power to work faith<sup>177</sup> and to bring full joy to those who believed them.<sup>178</sup> Such was their own evaluation of the things which they wrote and spoke.

And in this view, we have, by the grace of God, come to agree with them, and we can be grateful to our great and glorious God, who in His great love has not left us to perish in our sins, but has given us His own words and promises as a sure basis for our faith, so that we can know with divine certainty, created through these words by the same Holy Spirit who inspired these words and promises into the mind, mouth, heart, and hand of His holy prophets and apostles. May God preserve this doctrine to us in these last evil days of the world, for Jesus’ sake.

### **CHAPTER THREE SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED**

This paper has been constructed on the theory that the best defense of verbal inspiration is simply to present what the Bible itself has to say on the subject, and we have said very little about the attacks made on this doctrine. But as the people of Nehemiah’s time built the walls of Jerusalem with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, we also must take note of a few of the major objections that are raised against this doctrine.

When we engage in controversy over this doctrine, we must always keep in mind what the true question at issue is. A particularly vicious approach to this controversy, which by its very subtlety often lowers the defenses of earnest and sincere Christians against the attacks made on verbal inspiration, is that it is not necessary for our salvation that God should have given us a verbally inspired and inerrant Bible, for just as the Holy Ghost can create faith in a church where

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<sup>167</sup> John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13,14

<sup>168</sup> Mark 13:11

<sup>169</sup> John 19:35

<sup>170</sup> 1 John 5:10

<sup>171</sup> 1 Cor. 14:37

<sup>172</sup> Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10

<sup>173</sup> 2 John 10

<sup>174</sup> 1 Tim. 6:3

<sup>175</sup> 1 Cor. 2:13

<sup>176</sup> 2 Cor. 2:17

<sup>177</sup> John 20:31

<sup>178</sup> 1 John 1:4

false doctrine is mixed with the truth, so He could also use an error-filled Bible to instill and sustain faith in the hearts of God's elect. But this argument always reminds me of the assertion that there are no angels for angels are unnecessary and God who is almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent, could very well watch over us and protect us without angels. One might just as well say that God could create children out of stones (this at least would be a Biblical statement), and therefore parents are non-existent because they are unnecessary, and that God could sustain life without food, and therefore food is unnecessary and consequently non-existent. Yet we all recognize that angels, and parents, and food are precious gifts of God, for 'Which we are grateful. So also a verbally inspired Bible might not be necessary for God and it might be possible for God to operate without it in the salvation of men, but this is not the question that we need to answer. The only valid question with which we can operate is this, "Did God choose to give us a Bible full of factual errors, or is it His will that we should have a Bible that is verbally inspired and errorless?" And the answer to that question is one that we need not discover by philosophizing about what God can or cannot do, for we have it plainly revealed to us by God Himself in this holy book.

We might, however, meet the enemy on his own ground, and ask ourselves just how important a verbally inspired and inerrant Bible is to us. Even if we grant, for example, that faith can be created and sustained in a church which teaches false doctrine, how many times would you have failed to find assurance for your own heart if you had been taught that Baptism does not save us and does not wash away all our sins, or if you had been brought up in a church which says that Jesus died only for the elect and that God has forgiven the sins only of those who believe. And if someone says that there are, however, many things in the Bible which have no connection with our salvation, we might ask him what makes him so sure of this, when Paul says that whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our salvation that we through patience and comfort of the Holy Scriptures might have hope.<sup>179</sup> We might remind him, too, that the Lord Jesus once said, "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?"<sup>180</sup>

And history itself ought to teach us what happens to churches which give up verbal inspiration. A few years ago, a layman of the ULC wrote, "You cannot fill the Bible full of question marks and expect to build either a virile Christian faith or a God-pleasing Christian stewardship." The layman of the Christian Church often have a better sense of the importance of this doctrine than many theologians, who, of course, will often despise the position of the layman and call it a primitive type of Christianity. When they speak in this way we might call their attention to the words of our Lord, "I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."<sup>181</sup> I do not know what you think of Lynn Landrum of the *Dallas Morning News*, but I was impressed by a column he had published in the *News* on July 12 of this year (1960), in which he dealt with "clericalism" in whatever denomination and said,

When a clergyman says that the Bible is a "parcel of historical uncertainties and problems, a compendium of outmoded, outdated, obsolete and senseless rules, regulations and behavior patterns, a tissue of legends, curious and bizarre arguments, fantastic and outlandish figures of speech, symbols and

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<sup>179</sup> Rom 15:4

<sup>180</sup> John 3:12 (Greek)

<sup>181</sup> Luke 10:21



patterns of thought --- when a preacher and teacher of theology talks that way about the Bible—it is evident that he has lost something. It is evident that he is going to have to substitute something for what laymen are accustomed to call old-fashioned Bible preaching.

Or take another excerpt from a modern theologian: “But the fact must not be obscured that the world-view of the New Testament is altogether unscientific, because pre-scientific, and that it is not untouched by mythology.”

This school of clerical thinking, still says (sic) “Thus saith the Lord,” in effect, but no longer quotes the Bible to prove it. By latter-day theology, it seems, the Lord is concerned with cheap electric current for Tennesseans at the expense of Texas taxpayers, with repealing the right-to-work law, with sending contraceptives to India, with recognizing Red China, with abolishing congressional inquiry into the Communist conspiracy to do to this country what the Communist conspiracy is now doing to Cuba and so on.

Take away a preacher’s belief in the Bible and there is nothing left for him but to quote poetry, give book reviews or dive into politics and line up the lay vote for this, that and the other.\*

We need to remember, therefore, when the argument that verbal inspiration is not necessary is propounded by those who have never felt its power in their own lives, that the only proper question is, “But what does God say about it in the Bible?” The question can never be, “What did God have to do?” for that question itself involves a denial of God’s absolute freedom, but the question must always be, “What did God in His kindness and mercy to us propose to do for our salvation?” And about the answer to that question there can be no doubt, God has made it plain enough in His Word.

Another philosophical objection raised against the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible, which is being heard more and more often in our time, is the assertion that such a view of Scripture assumes that God has revealed a certain set of truths to us, and that this is an unworthy view of revelation, since God’s revelation is always personal. God, they say, does not reveal things to us, but He reveals Himself. This argument is heard particularly from neo-orthodox sources. It obviously involves the logical fallacy of begging the question, but what is more important to us is that it sets up a false antithesis. God does indeed reveal Himself to us, but He reveals Himself by telling us things about Himself, and while the Scripture says a few times that God reveals Himself, it says much oftener that God reveals things to men. Moses says, for example, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.”<sup>182</sup> (Lest someone imagine that we are basing our argument here on the word “things” we hasten to point out the manifest distinction that is made here between God and what is revealed.) We have already seen how Jesus spoke of the things which the Father had revealed to babes, and how St. Paul said that the things which he spoke had been revealed to him by the Holy Ghost.

A second objection often heard from neo-orthodox theologians is that God is Himself not in words, or at least not primarily in words, but in acts, which are then interpreted by spiritually-minded men. But we have already noted that often the word precedes the act, as is the case in all

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\* Permission to quote granted by Mr. Landrum.

<sup>182</sup> Deut. 29:26

prophecy. However, this argument too, involves a false antithesis. The acts of God are indeed revelations of God, in a certain sense, but the acts would often be unintelligible or of doubtful meaning if we were dependent on them. just suppose for a moment that we had seen the death of Christ, but had no words of Scripture to explain it. How much of a revelation mould that act be without the words that tell us what it means? Just what would it mean to us? Some of us might well conclude that here was a man dying for the crime of treason. Others, on the basis of better evidence, would hold that He was a good man wrongfully executed by hate-filled men, which is about as far as modern Protestantism which has rejected the inspiration of the bible goes. But without the verbal revelation of God not one of us could ever possibly know from the act itself that He died there for the sins of the world, It is only the Word that makes us sure of this, and therefore, when Jesus appeared to the Emmaus disciples He did not begin by persuading them that it was really He, but rather He hid His own identity and reminded them that the Scriptures had foretold that Christ must suffer and enter into His glory. And so God's revelation to us is what He has told us about Himself in the Holy Scriptures, and thus we come to know Him as our Lord and our God.

A more common and persistent objection, which is not a passing fad, such as the ones previously referred to are likely to be, is the view that the Bible is full of errors, or perhaps it would be better, since the constitution of the Missouri Synod days that the Bible is inerrant, to say that it contains no errors but that it is full of mistakes, and that therefore it cannot be the sort of book that we have always said it was, -- that it is indeed verbally inspired (this shibboleth, too, one must learn to pronounce if one is to have any prospect of deceiving Missouri Synod Lutherans), but that the words cannot mean what they say, for what they say is often not true.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the verbal inspiration of a Bible in which the words do not mean what they say would indeed be a useless business. And what is strangest of all is that those who hold this opinion sometimes display an insistence on a literalistic interpretation of an individual word which is every bit as misguided as the mistakes sometimes made by some well-meaning defenders of verbal inspiration.

One favorite passage which has been employed again and again in the present controversy is the verse in Matthew which says that Jeremiah foretold the betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. This prophecy, they say, is found in the book of Zechariah., and therefore the statement of Matthew is a manifest mistake. A careful study of the prophecy will show that part of what Matthew says is found in Zechariah, but some of the words that he quotes may very well be an allusion to something that is said in Jeremiah. But whatever the solution to this admitted difficulty may be, we should like to point out that I myself have heard men, who say that Matthew is in error here, also say that the passage from Second Peter cannot be applied to the written Word, since it says that the holy men of God spoke. Applying this same argument to the Matthew passage, we might call the attention of these people to the words of Matthew, which say that this was spoken by Jeremiah, not that it was written by Jeremiah, and that therefore, according to their own argument, one could hardly expect to find this passage in the writings of Jeremiah. After all, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. But, seriously speaking, it may well be that this is the solution to the difficulty. We know that Zechariah ,was much interested in the words of the former prophets who had gone before him, and we also know that later prophets do sometimes quote earlier prophets. It is entirely possible that these words were spoken by Jeremiah, something which the Holy Ghost knew when He inspired Matthew to write the word "Jeremiah" in this passage, and Zechariah in his book is simply repeating and recording a prophecy which up to that time had been preserved by oral tradition.

It is not my intention to give a solution to every apparent mistake that occurs in the Bible, neither would it be possible for me to do so. I would only plead with you that, before you believe anyone who points out a mistake in the Bible, you study the Bible itself to see what it really says. For example, in the present controversy over verbal inspiration, a man said before the pastoral conference of an entire district of Synod that there are manifest mistakes in the Bible, not errors, mind you, but mistakes in fact, and as proof he cited the story of the ascension of our Lord as it is recorded in Matthew and in Luke. Luke, he said, tells us that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany in Judea, while Matthew says that he ascended from a mountain in Galilee. Even the most cursory reading of the last chapter of Matthew would reveal that Matthew does not even say that Jesus ascended into heaven, much less that He ascended from Galilee. It is very evident who has made the mistake here, and a stupid, inexcusable mistake at that.

It would surely be much more fitting for us to take a humble view of our own knowledge and intelligence and conclude that when there seems to us to be a mistake in the words of Scripture, the fault may lie in our ignorance. Unbelievable as it may seem to us, it just may be possible that the Holy Spirit knew more two and three thousand years ago than even we know today in this modern, enlightened, and scientific age of ours. Remember that Luther said that we should give the Holy Spirit credit for being more learned than we are.

A more serious objection to verbal inspiration which often troubles even many who desire with all their hearts to maintain this doctrine of verbal inspiration is the matter of the variant readings. The original documents may have been errorless, but what good does this do us if we no longer have the originals? Now this question itself could very well occupy us for a long time and we cannot treat it in detail here.

But in a general way it might be pointed out in answer that the difficulty here is not at all as great as it might appear at first blush. When men propose this argument, they usually hold before us the Greek and Hebrew text, and the strange languages are already enough to frighten us. But it ought to be pointed-out that there are "variant readings" also in our English Bibles. Several hundred years ago a Bible was printed which is a collector's item today because it said in the sixth commandment "Thou shalt commit adultery." Does this create doubt in your mind as to what God wants you to do? We have a Bible in our house, which we often use for family devotions, which has many printer's errors.- It says, for example, that Paul preached the Word *of* Perga, a town in Asia Minor. But we have six other Bibles and two Greek testaments in our house which say that he preached the Word *in* Perga. Do you have any doubt as to which of them is right? The problem of the variant readings in the Greek and Hebrew text is just about that simple, but the trouble is that those who know a little Greek and Hebrew are always able by laying great stress on the variant readings to impress with their superior learning those whose major field of study is something else.

And why a verbally inspired Bible, inerrant in all its parts and words is important to us, even though not one single manuscript copy that we have is without handwriting mistakes of some kind, will perhaps be clear to us if we would imagine the situation reversed. Suppose we had a thousand errorless copies of the original, but the original itself were full of errors, and not the Word of God. We would then have nothing but errorless copies of a fallible human document. As it is, we have thousands of copies, some made by experts and relatively free of copyists' errors, and some made by amateurs and full of such mistakes. As we study these manuscripts we learn first of all how wonderfully well the text has been preserved, so that one of the translators of the RSV says that all the new manuscript discoveries made since 1611 actually have had very little effect on the text of the Bible. And the latest reports on the Dead Sea scrolls,

which contain Biblical texts which are a thousand years earlier than any Old Testament manuscript that we had up to the time of their discovery, say that these scrolls will not make any significant difference in the text of the Hebrew Bible.. Moreover, by diligent work on the manuscripts the correct text can be established.

The same thing that is true of variant readings is also true of the translations. We know, of course, that translations are not verbally inspired in the sense that the Holy Ghost in a miraculous way gives to the translators the words that they are to use. But we should be careful that we here do not concede too much. The problem of the translations is also not as serious as it may seem to some at first. Our problem here is sometimes complicated by the fact that we here in America are so sure that everything worth reading has been written in English that we do not trouble ourselves to learn the speech of other people. But if we know more than one language we would also know that it makes absolutely no difference whether one says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son", or "*Also hat Gott die Weltgeliebt dasz er seinen eingebornen Sohn gab* " or "*Do tal manera amo Dios almundo, que lia dado a su Hijo unigenito.*" It means exactly the same thing in whatever language you say it, and if the original is inspired and reliable, then we can be sure also of what the translation says.

But if a mistake is made in the translations it can always be pointed out and corrected on the basis of the original. But if the original itself were nothing more than a fallible human record of what some men thought God wanted them to say, then we can correct translations until dooms day and revise our Bibles every year and no improvements would bring us one step closer to the mind of God.

Something should be said also before we close about the charge that verbal inspiration is mechanical inspiration. When we hear this charge we so often hasten to inform the critics that of course we do not believe in a mechanical inspiration, that we do not mean that the inspired penmen were nothing more than typewriters, that they were not just secretaries taking down dictation, that they used their own minds and wrote in their own style. But it is usually only the most ignorant of the enemies of verbal inspiration who insist that if the Holy Ghost used men to write his words then the linguistic style of the Bible would have to be the same throughout. The fact of the matter is that when the Holy Ghost inspired a man who spoke Greek, He gave him Greek words to speak and to write, and if he spoke Hebrew, he gave him Hebrew words to speak and to write. The varying styles of the books of the Bible are only an extension of this same principle. If a man spoke a scholarly, cultured Greek, the Holy Spirit gave him words which he was used to employing in his ordinary speech. If his Greek was strongly tinged with a Hebraistic cast, this is the kind of Greek the Holy Spirit had him use when he wrote a book of the Bible. The doctrine of verbal inspiration does not mean that a certain doctrine can be said only in one way and in one set of words. After all, "We experienced precipitation of diluvial proportions," is just another way of saying, "We had a heavy rain." Verbal inspiration means only that whatever is said, however it maybe said, is absolutely correct.

But what is usually meant by mechanical inspiration is an inspiration which makes errors impossible. If we assume an errorless Bible then the human authors were not free agents to write what they wanted to write, but their hands and their wills were bound. So goes the argument. But certainly, a Lutheran Christian, who believes with Luther that the bondage of the human will is a basic principle of Biblical Christianity ought to be swayed very little by such an argument. The angels are not free to sin, but this does not mean that they cannot do what they want to do, and if the Lord would come to me and tell me that from this day on He will so guide my heart and mouth that I will no longer be able to utter a single word that is wrong. I would not be

disappointed, but I would say that from now on, for the first time, I am the kind of teacher of religion that I would like to be. This is the type of bondage that we would rightly call perfect freedom.

But when we have said this, we still need to remember that the Bible makes it clear that there were times when men spoke the words of God against their will. Balaam\_who sought to curse Israel, could only bless them.<sup>183</sup> And while the apostles and prophets generally were conscious of their inspiration, yet the case of Caiaphas shows that God sometimes used men as His spokesmen who were not aware that they were being used in this way.<sup>184</sup> While men usually spoke in the style and the language to which they were accustomed, yet the miracle of Pentecost demonstrated that God sometimes inspired men to speak in languages which they had never learned.<sup>185</sup> While it is true that we do not teach a dictation theory of inspiration, yet the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor seem to have been dictated to the apostle John.<sup>186</sup> While we insist that the men were more than mere “typewriters,” yet we ought not to lose sight of the fact that David spoke of his tongue as the pen of a ready writer.<sup>187</sup> While it is true that at times the holy writers used previously written documents and did research work in preparing for the writing of a Biblical book, yet they wrote many things which they could not know by any method of research.<sup>188</sup> While it is true that they were living, thinking personalities, yet it is also true that often they did not understand fully what they had written and had to study their own writings to discover what the Holy Spirit meant by the words which they had written.<sup>189</sup> All of this should make us cautious not to limit God’s power and wisdom in any way in this matter of the inspiration of Holy Writ. Instead we ought to read and to study what He Himself has written through his inspired penmen and thus discover in ever fuller measure what He wants us to know for our growth in Christian faith and love, for our comfort and for our hope. God grant us all such an attitude toward His Holy Word. Amen.

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<sup>183</sup> Num. 24ff

<sup>184</sup> John 11

<sup>185</sup> Acts 2

<sup>186</sup> Rev. 2,3

<sup>187</sup> Ps. 45:1

<sup>188</sup> 1 Cor. 2

<sup>189</sup> 1 Pet. 1:10-12