

40 Days of the Bible #2:  
**What do You Mean, 'Inspired'?**  
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

October 9, 2005

This really happened.

When I was in seminary, my pastor, Jim Hay, had a man come by the church, the First Baptist Church of Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts. He just walked in off the street. He said that he'd lost his job, but had an idea for a new job. He wanted to know what was involved in being, as he put it, "a reverend." He also said he wanted to know what the church believed.

Pastor Jim patiently explained what was involved. A call from God. A passion to do His work. The right education. A love for people. On and on he explained. And when he got to the part about what the church believed, Jim mentioned "the inspiration of the Bible."

"Oh yes," the man said. "The Bible is inspiring. Like...Shakespeare."

After a while the guy left, and we never heard from him again. Hopefully he's selling insurance...not pastoring a church.

In this emphasis on Forty Days of the Bible, it might be good to ask, "Why the Bible? What's so special about it?" And the short answer is—**we are convinced that the Bible is inspired by God.** It's not just another book. It comes as a gift from God to guide us into all vital truth. It's God's word.

Why do we believe that? Well, let's start by noting that we would have no grounds to believe that unless we found claims like that in

the Bible itself.

A key passage along these lines is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Here's how it reads in the NIV:

*16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The NIV translators made a bold translation decision when they translated the Greek word *theoneustos*. They choose to translate it as "God-breathed." Most translations translate that as "inspired by God," which is great, but actually this word means even more than that.

When we breathe, we inhale and we exhale. Another way to say that is that we *inspire* (breathe in) and we *expire* (breathe out). I know it's not the usual way we use these words, but technically it's accurate. We inspire and we expire.

That word expire: the first thing I think of is the *expiration* date on foods. Lynann is a stickler on expiration dates. We always have to reach way in the back to get the milk with the latest expiration date. (Do you do that too?) I read that fresh food is such a passion in Japan that people won't buy milk unless it says it was processed *that day*. As a result, all over Japan, dairies bottle nearly all their milk between midnight at 5 AM. Then it's rushed to market to be on the shelves by 8 AM or so. And that plan is to run out by mid-evening, and to start over again at midnight. Anything for freshness!

Another way we use the word "expire" is to describe a death. As in, "Lincoln expired the day after he was shot." That is to say, he *breathed out* for the last time.

The world Paul uses in 2 Timothy 3:16 to describe the Scriptures is a compound of the word for God and the word for exhaling, for “expiring” in this sense. It is *theo* (God) *neustos* (exhaled, or breathed).

This is a unique word. It is found nowhere else in the Bible, or from any Greek literature of the time. It’s a good guess that Paul coined the word to make his point. And what was his point? It’s that Scripture—the Bible—takes its form and existence from the heart and mind of God Himself.

You can kind of illustrate this with a balloon. Take a limp balloon. Next, “expire” (exhale, breathe out) into the balloon. What was a limp little plastic lump takes its shape, form and usefulness from the breath inside it.

Where the comparison with the balloon breaks down is that when we talk about the “God-breathed” nature of the Bible, we’d go even farther: God’s “breathing” created the balloon itself. You see, it’s not as if God took human word and just “breathed into” these human words. He *used* ordinary human authors, but these authors didn’t write words that God chose to use. God was behind it all the way.

The apostle Peter makes this really clear in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

*20Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Here, “prophecy” means the same thing as a portion of Scripture, like a book, or a letter of Paul, or a Psalm. These portions of the Bible

aren't the product of human ideas or speculations about God. They didn't start in the mind of human beings; they started in the mind of God, and the people that wrote these things down did so "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." That's actually a word picture from sailing—and Peter knew boats if he knew anything! The wind of the Spirit blew through the minds and hearts of people like Moses, and Isaiah and Matthew and Paul and what we get is—the Bible, the "God-breathed" book.

Jesus Himself endorses this understanding of the Bible. In Matthew 5:17-18, He says this about the Bible of His time, which we call the Old Testament:

*17"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

"The least stroke of a pen" refers to the little marks that distinguish one letter from another. Jesus also showed total confidence in the Old Testament Scriptures as God's fully trustworthy word—right down to the individual letters! Jesus didn't just think that the "ideas" of Scripture were absolutely trustworthy—He believed that every little letter was inspired by His Father. We who are called "Christians"—followers of Christ—should follow His lead as well, and place our total confidence in the Word of God.

What about the New Testament? Even though not one word of the New Testament had been written down during Jesus' ministry, He clearly had the New Testament in mind when He said what He does in John 14:26:

*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

Jesus looked ahead and told His disciples that the Spirit would teach them and remind them of all the things He'd taught them.

There are a number of words that you might hear to describe the nature of the God's word. Let's look at a few of them, and let's also make sure we understand what inspiration does not need, and then finally, let's get really clear on the practical impact of the Bible as God's word.

**Inspired.** That means the Holy Spirit so moved the writers to express exactly what God wanted, fully and word for word. This is sometimes called *verbal plenary inspiration* ("full word" inspiration). That's clearly what Jesus, Peter and Paul all teach.

That also means that the Bible **is** the Word of God—not just that it **contains** the word of God. Sometimes I hear people say things like, "Well, of course the Bible is from God. But then again, that doesn't, mean that we should take 'literally' what it says about science, or history. What matters is the **religious** truth in the Bible. And then there's Paul! Everyone knows he hated women!"

Setting aside what a person speaking like this means by "literal", this is a view of inspiration that falls well below the standard we saw in the words of Jesus and the apostles. We believe—and the Bible teaches about itself—that every word is fully inspired by God.

Now be careful. That does not mean that the Bible was dictated from heaven. This actually goes by the name, "the dictation theory."

That's not what we mean when we say it comes from God. What we mean is that God kept the personalities, writing style and perspectives of the writers in tact and spoke through them.

One way to understand that is compare the written word, the Bible, to the Living Word. Who is the living word? According to John 1:1 and 14, the Living Word is Jesus Christ. And we know that He is fully God and fully man. He's the 200% man. So also is the Bible the 200% book. The written word is fully inspired by God, but at the same time fully written by human beings. God inspired about 40 people over about 1400 years to write down His word, His written revelation of Himself.

Another word you might hear is...

**Inerrant.** That means that, since Almighty God is the ultimate Author of the Bible, and since He is perfect, His word as well is perfect, without error, all fully trustworthy in all matters—of faith as well as of history, science, and so on. The doctrine of inerrancy does allow for the use of things like approximations, literary devices (like parables) and even errors in grammar, but not in matters where Scripture claims authority.

No mistakes! It's the perfectly good book. Now we need to make it clear that when we talk about the inerrancy of the Bible, we're referring to the Scriptures as they were written down in the original languages. We're not talking about the inerrancy of the King James Version, or the NIV or the Latin Vulgate. We're talking about the Bible as written down by the original authors 2000 plus years ago in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. I'll never forget one of my New Testament professors holding up his Greek

New Testament and saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, THIS is the New Testament."

Errors creep into translations. It's just the nature of translations. Fortunately, they tend to be tiny little errors and misunderstandings. And no major doctrine that we believe rises or falls on any matter of translation.

One objection you'll hear from people about the Bible is, "You can't trust it. It's been translated too many times!" Well, not really. All that matters is that it's translated once: from the original language into your language.

And how reliable has been the copies of the NT we have? Maybe it would be helpful to run the NT up against one other ancient document to see if we can rely on the copies we have today. Take Plato's *Republic*, which was written about 300 BC. We have 7 good copies of *The Republic*. The oldest dates from 900 AD—1200 after it was written. It's widely accepted that we have the *Republic* as it was written. Nobody really disputes that. Scholars rate the manuscript accuracy of the *Republic* at over 95%.

Plato's *Republic*: 7 copies, with a gap of 1200 from composition to oldest copy. How does that compare to the Old Testament?

Try 5600 copies, with the oldest portion less than 100 years from the time of writing. You can rest assured: the New Testament in your hand is 99.9% the NT as written by the apostles.

Finally, the Bible is...

**Authoritative.** If the Bible is inspired by God and inerrant, then it is fully authoritative when it speaks. It is fully authoritative when it speaks of matters of faith, morals, ethics and

so forth. As authoritative, it is the source that believers must turn to when dealing with matters of faith, morals, ethics, and so on, not our own opinions, feelings, or political persuasions.

The authority of the Bible means that in practical terms, I need the guidance to God's word for practically every matter imaginable. The reality is that our hearts and our minds and our imaginations can fool us. Our background can fool us. Our conscience isn't perfect either: it can be turned off or muffled.

God wants us to come to His word to get His perspective. Think of how comprehensive the word of God is. It talks about the nature of life, marriage, sex, children, family, racial prejudice, ethics, business, personal relations, forgiveness, sibling rivalry, the fate of nations, diet, agreements, pride, praise, music, worship, the future, life together, what's wrong with the world and how to make it right, what your purpose in life is and how to find it, and how this age will end.

And its doctrines give us insight into the toughest moral and ethical issues of our time. We need to look to Biblical teaching to form our thinking and actions on things like stem cell research, war and peace, capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality, human cloning, and end of life issues. Some of these are hard and sometimes the answers aren't immediately clear. But if we believe that God has spoken in His word about everything of importance, then we need to do our best to work our way through its teachings to find the way we should go now.

Imagine that you send off for a machine. Say the thing wraps packages. It's complicated and it has scissors and sharp edges and when

you plug it in it revs up and makes a downright scary sound. What would you do?

Years ago, before either of our kids was born, we moved into our first house—a church-owned parsonage in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. There were three bedrooms. One we turned into a family room, with a little 21 inch TV. One we used. And the third we set up as a combo guest room and a study. (That only lasted about three years, when it became a nursery.)

For the study, we bought a roll-top desk. Or, to be really accurate, we bought a box full of pieces that claimed to be a roll-top desk. There were like 10,000 parts. I remember Lynann grabbing two parts and saying, “These two look like they go together.”

We’d been married less than three years, so I guess you could say that we were still in “early marital adjustment.” When she said, “These look like they go together, I nearly had the proverbial cow. “No, no, no!” I said. “First you inventory all the parts, go through all the steps, arrange the pieces and then and only then do you start putting them together.” She looked at me as if I’d just flushed her goldfish. (This story tells a lot about both of us, doesn’t it?)

Now we ended up doing it my way, but only because of Lynann said I could (that tells a lot do, eh?) Then Lynann varnished it and we still have that desk, which has survived five moves.

We do have the Designer’s Handbook. The Creator of life has given us a detailed guide to how to understand and be winners in life. This machine does have dangerous sharp and even deadly moving parts. It must be handled carefully.

Praise God He has given us a perfectly good,  
God-breathed, inerrant, inspired and  
authoritative word.

*May our hearts be drawn to this magnificent  
word, may we be changed by it and may we  
be changed more and more into the image of  
His Son through the power of this word!*

END  
PRAYER