

A Brief Theology of Inspiration

In previous articles we saw that Jesus and the apostles viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. It is my aim in the next few articles to consider the doctrine of inspiration. As we do so, we shall briefly look back over the Old Testament testimony, the New Testament testimony to the Old Testament Scriptures, the meaning of “given by inspiration of God,” and the New Testament testimony to its own inspiration.

The Inspiration of The Old Testament

The Old Testament does not present us with an explicit statement of its inspiration. That should not discourage us, however, because there is an abundance of testimony to the inspiration of the Old Testament to be found within its pages.

One noticeable thing is that there were times that we find God commanding men to write things down for posterity. For example, when Israel fought against Amalek and conquered them, YHWH told Moses to write a memorial of the battle in a book so that it would be remembered. *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.”* (Exodus 17:14, AV 1873) We also see that God spoke the words of the law, and then Moses wrote them down (Exodus 20:1;24:4). Not only so, but later those records which Moses wrote down were spoken of as being written with the finger of God (Exodus 31:18;32:15-16;34:1-4,27-28). Instead of thinking that God actually has physical fingers with which He writes, I believe we should understand this as God speaking the words and Moses recording them as He spoke. The end result was that Moses, as the finger of God, wrote God’s words. Commenting on the phrase “written with the finger of God,” John MacArthur says it is “A figurative way of attributing the law to God.¹” We could certainly say along with others that “The phrase ‘finger of God’ is best understood as an anthropomorphism, that is, a metaphor comparing some aspect of God with the traits of a human being. The phrase does not assert that the Lord God possesses a human body; it affirms that God, and not Moses, was ultimately responsible for the creation of the text inscribed on the stones (cp. 24:12; 32:16; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 9:10). The wording suggests that the means by which the words were recorded was supernatural, but does not indicate the exact method God chose to inscribe them.”² If we do subscribe to a miraculous recording of the law instead of Moses writing them, we still have a document that is the very Word of God.

After the tablets containing the law were broken by Moses, he was instructed to write them again. The command to Moses was, *“Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.”* (Exodus 34:27, AV 1873) We see that Moses was given specific words to write as he recorded the covenant that YHWH was making with Israel. Those words were the words of God, though written by Moses. JFB comments on this verse saying, **“Write thou these words”—**that is, the ceremonial and judicial injunctions comprehended above (Ex 34:11–26); while the rewriting of the ten commandments on the newly prepared slabs was done by God Himself.³ Their thoughts were that God re-wrote the tablets of the law and commanded Moses to write some additional words regarding the covenant with YHWH. This does seem to be what happened, as Moses later said, *“At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me.”* (Deuteronomy 10:1–4, AV 1873)

At the end of Moses’ life he wrote even more and commanded Israel to keep it in the ark of God along with the tablets of the law: *“And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,”* (Deuteronomy 31:9–10, AV 1873). Later he was commanded to write more concerning Israel and their covenant with God (Deuteronomy 31:16-27). John Calvin commented on this passage and said, “Since the two Tables were enclosed in the Ark of the Covenant, a place at the side was assigned to the interpretation, so that they might have no doubt but that it proceeded from the same Divine Author...⁴” His understanding of this passage was that the Word of God as given to/through Moses was more than the ten commandments, but included the rest of Moses’ writings. It is instructive to note the context here, because Moses told Israel to keep all of the commandments which he had given them regarding the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 31:1-5). This leads us to the reasonable conclusion that all of Moses’ writings were indeed the Word of God. When he concluded his writings he commanded the elders of Israel to put them in the ark of the covenant along with the law of God (Deuteronomy 31:24-26), thus signifying that they were equal to the ten commandments in their authority

¹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006.

² Ted Cabal, Chad Owen Brand, E. Ray Clendenen et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*, 136 (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007).

³ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, Ex 34:27–28 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Dt 31:14 (Galaxie Software, 2002; 2002).

and origins. We have good reason to conclude that Moses' writings were the inspired words of God.

Time and space do not permit us to exhaustively survey the Old Testament for testimonies to its inspiration, but we do find numerous instances in which other Old Testament writers and prophets declared that they were presenting the very words of God. David understood that he recorded some of the words of God (2Samuel 23:1-2). He also acknowledged the inspiration of the five books of Moses saying, "*He hath remembered his covenant for ever, The word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, And his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, And to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, The lot of your inheritance: When they were but a few men in number; Yea, very few, and strangers in it.*" (Psalm 105:8-12, AV 1873) David speaks of the Genesis account of God's promise to Abraham as being God's Word, as well as the promises to Isaac and Jacob. All of these things, and the law, are listed as part of God's covenant with Israel. God's covenant is His word of promise to Israel to be their God, and they His people. We can conclude from this that David recognized the Pentateuch as the Word of God. In Isaiah chapters six and eight we find Isaiah given commandments to speak God's Word and to write God's Word. Jeremiah was commanded to speak God's words which God would put in his mouth (Jeremiah 1:1-10), and later spoke of those same words burning within him (Jeremiah 20:9). We also have record of Jeremiah being commanded to write God's Word in a book: "*The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.*" (Jeremiah 30:1-2, AV 1873) We find again in Jeremiah 36:1-2 that he is commanded to write God's words in a book. This book was destroyed by king Jehoiakim, yet Jeremiah was commanded to write the words of God once again (Jeremiah 36:27-30). Ezekiel, too, was given a command to write God's words (Ezekiel 43:10-11). So, too, was Hakkuk commanded to write the vision that he had seen (Habakkuk 2:1-2). If we couple this with the multiple instances in which we read of God's words coming to people, men speaking the words of YHWH to Israel, and the many times that "thus saith the LORD" is cited, we find that the Old Testament certainly claims to be the inspired Word of God.