

## 'Twas on That Dark, That Doleful Night

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

'Twas on that dark, that doleful night  
When pow'rs of earth and hell arose  
Against the Son, our God's delight,  
And friends betrayed him to his foes.

Before the mournful scene began,  
He took the bread and blessed and broke.  
What love through all his actions ran!  
What wondrous words of grace he spoke!

"This is my body, slain for sin;  
Receive and eat the living food."  
Then took the cup and blessed the wine:  
"'Tis the new cov'nant in my blood."

"Do this," he said, "till time shall end,  
In mem'ry of your dying friend;  
Meet at my table and record  
The love of your departed Lord."

Jesus, your feast we celebrate;  
We show your death; we sing your name  
Till you return and we shall eat  
The marriage supper of the Lamb.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Inspiration

Kevin T. Bauder

When people think about the inspiration of the Bible, they tend to imagine it as a process. They think of inspiration as a way of stating *how* the Bible got to be what it is. Trying to answer the *how* question is one of the reasons that we are surrounded by so-called "theories of inspiration." Some theories suggest that God gave ideas to the writers, which they then expressed in their own words. Others argue that God simply dictated every word of the finished text. Still others speak in terms of inspired *writers* rather than an inspired *text*. Some talk about documents other than the Bible being inspired to some degree, and some see the Bible as inspired to varying degrees. To clear up these misunderstandings, our doctrine of inspiration should rest firmly upon the Bible's own use of that term.

The only biblical passage that speaks directly about the inspiration of the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16. Unfortunately, the older translations tend to obscure the meaning of the text. Both the King James and the New King James versions read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...." In this translation the first verb is *given*, which does not even appear in the Greek text. Alternatively, the American Standard Version of 1901 reads, "Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable...." This translation seems to imply that some scriptures are inspired while others are not, and that only the inspired scriptures are profitable.

This verse is critical for defining a biblical doctrine of inspiration. Given the variety of ways in which it has been interpreted, how should we understand it? The answer is that we will grasp its meaning correctly only if we pay close attention to its grammar and structure.

The first thing to notice about the verse is that the Greek text does not contain a verb. That is not an uncommon occurrence: Greek sentences have ways of implying verbs rather than stating them outright. In this case, the implied verb must be some form of the verb *to be*. The verse is stating that every (or all) scripture *is* something.

But what is it? The verse contains two adjectives: *inspired* and *profitable*. This is the point at which a problem arises. Are both adjectives to be understood as predicates of *every scripture*? Or is *inspired* a qualifier that narrows the



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scope of the scripture that is in view? In other words, should the verse be translated, “Every scripture is inspired and profitable,” or should it be translated, “Every inspired scripture is profitable”? The first usage is called the *predicate* usage; the second is the *attributive* usage.

As shown above, Bible translations have gone in both directions. How, then, is an interpreter to make a choice? The hard work has already been done. During the late 1970s Daniel Wallace wrote his Th.M. thesis for Dallas Seminary on this problem. He later published the results as, “The Relation of Adjective to Noun in Anarthrous Constructions in the New Testament,” *Novum Testamentum* 26 (1984) 128-167. Wallace decisively showed that in constructions like that of 2 Timothy 3:16, both adjectives must be taken as predicate adjectives.

In other words, the verse is predicating two properties that apply equally to every (or all) scripture. The first is that all scripture is inspired. The second is that all scripture is profitable. For the moment we can set aside the discussion of what the verse means when it says that all scripture is profitable. What we want to do is to explore the meaning of all scripture being inspired.

The Greek term translated *inspired* is a compound word that Paul appears to have coined just for this occasion. The word is *theopneustos*, which means something like *God-breathed* (see the New International Version for this exact translation). What the verse affirms is that every scripture possesses the quality or property of being God-breathed.

The meaning of the text is not that God has breathed something *into* scripture, as if scripture might stand on its own as a human product apart from being God-breathed. Instead, the verse is teaching that every scripture is itself breathed by God. A more interpretive but very legitimate way of translating this verse is to say that all scripture is “breathed out by God.” Indeed, the International Standard Version uses just that language.

Inspiration, then, does not answer a *how* question but a *what* question. It does not tell us *how* scripture came into existence but *what* scripture is. It is God-breathed. It is the product of God, something that proceeds from God Himself.

To state it differently, the subject of inspiration is the scripture itself. Scripture is inspired—all of it. The writers are not inspired. The ideas are not inspired. The scriptures (i.e., the writings) themselves are inspired.

Since inspiration applies to the writings, not the writers, then it must involve the words. One cannot have writings without words, sentences, grammar, and syntax. If the writings are inspired, then all these matters are included within the orbit of inspiration. This teaching is sometimes called *verbal inspiration*.

Furthermore, since inspiration applies to all scripture (the entire Bible), then there are no degrees of inspiration. Either a writing is inspired or it is not. Either it is breathed by God or it is not. Consequently, the whole of scripture—the entire Bible—is inspired. This teaching is sometimes called *plenary inspiration*.

Finally, if all scripture is God-breathed, i.e., it is the product of God and proceeds from God Himself, and if God is incapable of error, then scripture must include no error in anything that it affirms. Of course, the Bible might inerrantly record the errors that others have committed (and it does), but the Bible does not affirm those errors. A necessary consequent of verbal, plenary inspiration is the *inerrancy* of scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 provides a very strong statement of the divine origin of scripture. This statement does not contradict in any way the genuinely human authorship of the biblical text. Exploring that issue, however, would take us beyond the scope of our present discussion. Perhaps we can return to it at some future point.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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