

Blessèd Jesus, at Thy Word

Tobias Clausnitzer (1619–1684), tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878)

Blessèd Jesus, at Thy Word
we are gathered all to hear Thee;
let our hearts and souls be stirred
now to seek and love and fear Thee;
by Thy teachings sweet and holy
drawn from earth to love Thee solely.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
till Thy Spirit breaks our night
with the beams of truth unclouded;
Thou alone to God canst win us;
Thou must work all good within us.

Glorious Lord, Thyself impart!
Light of Light from God proceeding,
open Thou our ears and heart,
help us by Thy Spirit's pleading,
hear the cry Thy people raises,
hear and bless our pray'rs and praises.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise to Thee and adoration!
Grant that we Thy Word may trust
and obtain true consolation
while we here below must wander,
till we sing Thy praises yonder.

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In the Nick of Time

The Holy Spirit and Production of Scripture

Kevin T. Bauder

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, all scripture is God-breathed or inspired. In other words, inspiration applies to the scriptures themselves, not to the process by which they were produced. The word *inspired* is a result word, not a process word. The writers were not inspired. The thoughts were not inspired. The various activities in which the biblical authors engaged while preparing to write were not inspired. Scripture itself was God-breathed, and that is what inspiration means.

Nevertheless, God did use a process that resulted in the inspired text. The Bible does not refer to this process as inspiration, but understanding the process helps to explain how the finished product (scripture) could be spoken of as *God-breathed*. This process is described in 2 Peter 1:20–21.

In the preceding context, Peter discusses the Mount of Transfiguration, where he and other apostles witnessed the splendor of the Lord Jesus and heard the heavenly voice (1:16–18). Having drawn attention to the magnificence of this incident with expressions like *majesty, honor, glory, and excellent glory*, Peter then pivots to the subject of scripture. His point is that the written scriptures constitute a firm and reliable word from God (1:19). This is the point that he will explain more fully in verses 20–21.

The thrust of Peter's argument is that the written scripture (or, more specifically, every “prophecy of scripture”) constitutes a revelation from God. God truly spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration, but He speaks just as truly when He reveals Himself in the Bible. This is Peter's whole point: the Bible is from God. The passage is about where scripture comes from. This emphasis is underlined by the leading verb in verse 20, which is the verb for *becoming* or *coming into being*. Peter means to explain how scripture came to be, i.e., how it originated, and he starts by stating how it did *not* come to be.

Most English translations take verse 20 to be saying that no scripture is of any “private interpretation” (KJV), “one’s own interpretation” (NASB), or “someone’s own interpretation” (ESV). Such a statement, however, makes little sense in a discussion of how scripture came to be. The noun that is translated *interpretation* (*epilusis*) can be used as a metaphor meaning *to explain*, which is how these translations take it. More literally the word means



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to *release*, as from prison or exile; to *set free*, as from fear; or to *discharge*, as from military service. In context, Peter is talking about how scripture originates, not about how it is to be understood. Consequently, the literal use of the term is far more germane to his point than the metaphorical use. Peter asserts that no scripture “came to be” of “its own unloosing.” To put his statement in a modern idiom, Peter is saying that the Bible didn’t write itself.

In the first half of verse 21, Peter makes this statement even more emphatic. Here he talks about how prophecies are produced, first by stating how they are not. Using a very strong negative, Peter denies that prophecies were ever produced (a past tense of *phero*) by human will. In other words, nobody ever simply decided to utter a prophecy or to write a passage of scripture. God spoke through human prophets and He produced scripture through human authors, but neither the decision to produce the message nor the content of the message itself was theirs.

Thus far, Peter has been speaking more about how scripture was not produced. It did not come to be of its own unloosing. It was never the result of any human decision. How, then, did scripture arrive? Peter offers his positive observations in the last half of verse 21.

He begins these observations with a strongly stated *but*, using this adversative to draw sharp contrast between how scripture did not originate and how it did. In contrast to scripture coming to be by its own unloosing, and in contrast to scripture ever being produced by an act of human will, *people spoke from God*.

The word for *people* (which most versions translate as *men*) is the generic word for *humanity*. As far as we know, all the authors of books of the Bible were males. Nevertheless, these documents contain within them multiple separate utterances that were originally produced by women (for example, the songs of Miriam, Deborah, and Mary). These, too, are now part of the “prophecy of scripture,” and their authors were among those through whom God spoke. Peter’s main point is that these people *spoke from God*. The message that they delivered was not merely their own; it was God’s message. The Bible is God’s Word.

How could this be? How could mere humans speak a message that was genuinely from God? Were they mere automatons, losing their individual identities as God used them as His mouthpieces? Not at all! Peter says that people spoke from God *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*. The participle that is translated *as they were moved* is a form of the same verb (*phero*) that appears earlier in the verse. Here it has the sense of being *borne* or *carried along*.

The word is used in a similar way in Acts 27. There, Paul and his companions are passengers on a ship that is caught in a storm. The sailors are far from inactive, but the tempest is overpowering. Although they do what they

can to sail the ship, they eventually allow it to be *driven along* by the wind (Acts 27:17). The expression *driven along* is a form of the same verb that Peter uses in 2 Peter 1:21.

In other words, the recipients of prophecy and the authors of scripture were *carried along* or *borne along* by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that they became mere recording devices for God. They were still the ones who did the actual speaking and writing. They retained their own personalities and even idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, the decision to communicate God’s message was not theirs but His, and God’s Holy Spirit assured that what was written was exactly what God wanted.

In other words, every scripture has two authors: a human and a divine. God is fully and completely the author of every word of scripture, but so is each human author of the text. The true humanity of the authors is on full display as each exhibits unique interests and writes in a unique style. The divine authorship of scripture is also on full display, as every word comes with the full authority of God.



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.
