

PETER ROENNFELDT

ENJOY THE
LIVING
WORD

INSPIRATION, MANUSCRIPTS AND TRANSLATIONS



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INTRODUCTION

THE WRITTEN AND LIVING WORD

The Bible is God's written Word. Through reading it, we come to know Jesus—the Living Word. We can enjoy getting to know Him by reading the books of the Bible—all inspired by the Holy Spirit. If we have friends who cannot read, we can read books of the Bible to them and they will hear about Jesus. God wants all people to hear and understand the Good News about Jesus, and the Bible is written so all can know and believe in Him as their Saviour. This Good News is not to be hidden in special language.

The Bible is a wonderful gift from God

I treasure the Bible and read it every day, and I want to share with you some insights that I have discovered about the Bible.

When I was a boy, the King James Version (KJV) was the Bible translation most Christians used. It was the one everyone preferred when I entered ministry 50 years ago. It was also the version I used when I arrived in Papua New Guinea in early 1974—and used when I preached in English-speaking churches and to evangelistic audiences. It was the words of the KJV that my translators—Pastors Lui Oli, Tauku Gagari, Tony Kemo, Thomas Davai and many others—translated as we shared God's Word together in villages, the city, marketplaces and on university campuses across the country.

John 3:16 was one of the first scriptures I memorised as a child. However, it was not from the original King James Version written in 1611. The KJV has been revised and updated a number of times. And the English language had changed so much by the time I was a boy that no-one understood English from the time of King James I. Here is John 3:16 in the original King James Version:

For God so loued þe world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne:

that whosoever beleueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.

—John 3:16 (KJV, 1611).

You can see that the language has definitely changed. The KJV was edited many times in its first 150 years to correct misprints and translation errors—and to update the language. Cambridge University completed their major revision in 1760, but Oxford University's 1769 edition became the main King James Version Bible that is used today.

When I lived in Papua New Guinea, pastors and members were encouraged to use the scriptures available in local languages—especially Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu. On one occasion, I accompanied Pastor Lester Lock to Hanuabada (Port Moresby) for a special service to dedicate portions of the *Hiri Motu* Bible. It was a day of celebration for a new group of Bible readers. They would now be able to better understand what was being read, which is the most important issue when we are talking about the Bible.

Some other translations

By the time I returned to Australia at the end of 1979 to conduct public evangelistic meetings, it was clear that many attending the meetings were not familiar with the old-style English of the KJV. Most evangelists began using the New International Version (NIV), first published in 1973. It was well structured, a literal translation and easy to use when sharing the message.

Of course, the New King James Version (NKJV) became available in 1982, and some began using it. It sounded more like the KJV that we had used for many years. But I stayed with the New International Version because those who had never seen a Bible—as well as those with English as a second language—found it easier to understand than the King James language still reflected in the NKJV.

In 1996, the New Living Translation (NLT) became available. It was a revision of the 1971 paraphrase called the Living Bible. I purchased a copy and carried it with me to the 25 to 30 countries where I was preaching and equipping pastors each year at that time. Those who were translating told

me they found the structure and language of the NIV a little easier to work with when compared to the NLT. However, when reading to people for whom English was a second language, they always appreciated the language of the New Living Translation. It is also easy to use when sharing—even with prophetic verses like Daniel 8:14 with the 2300 days.

Now I have a New Living Translation Filament Bible (2016)—a digital study Bible, with access to excellent online resources. And, of course, these days many other English translations of the Bible are also available.

So how did we get the Bible in its present form? What was God’s way of getting His Word to us? To answer these questions, we need to understand four major concepts.

Four important ideas to consider

We will look at questions that relate to these concepts:

1. **Inspiration:** How were the prophets, apostles and other Bible writers inspired? Did they write down God’s words as dictated or spoken to them by the Holy Spirit?
2. **Bible books:** When were the books brought together to form our Bibles? When were the chapter and verse numbers added?
3. **Manuscripts:** Do we have any of the original books or letters that were written? What do we mean by Bible manuscripts—and what have been found?
4. **Translations:** What manuscripts did the translators use? Why are verses missing from some Bibles? Which verses were added after the Bible was first written?

Most importantly, to conclude, we have a section on how to read and hear our Bibles—the inspired written Word of God. At different times in history, people have been prepared to die to give us Bibles in our languages. What is the best way to read the Bible so as to really know Jesus the Living Word?

These questions are very important for all believers—members, elders, ministers and pastors. This small book is specifically written for anyone wishing to understand how the Bible has come to us. Seventh-day

Adventists have a special understanding of inspiration that helps with some of these questions. And this understanding can be a great blessing to other Christians as well.

CHAPTER 1

INSPIRATION—EIGHT KEY IDEAS

Adventists have an extremely high regard for the Bible. We believe the writers and their thoughts were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is different to many evangelical Christians who believe the individual words were inspired—even dictated by God—and that their writings are therefore inerrant. In this sense, *inerrant* means the words selected cannot be wrong or are incapable of being the wrong words.

Here are eight points about inspiration from the Bible:

1. Inspiration involves God and prophets working together. Peter wrote, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of this grace that was to come to you, *searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing* when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10, 11). The prophets “searched” to understand what the Holy Spirit was pointing out, so that they could share it with us.

2. The Bible writers “were moved” by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter is clear: “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God *as they were carried along* [or *moved*, KJV] by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Paul put it this way, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16).

3. Inspiration is more than “human wisdom.” There are many good and inspiring books, but the inspiration of the Bible is higher and has more authority. Inspired by the Spirit, ordinary words became “spiritual words.” So the Bible is more than “human wisdom.” The biblical writers shared “spiritual truths in spiritual words” that are “spiritually discerned” (see 1 Corinthians 2:13, 14).

4. The Bible is “the word of God.” While the Bible had many writers,

God is the author. Because of the Spirit's inspiration, we accept the ordinary human words of these writers as "the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). When we look closely at the Bible's language, we find that:

[It] is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Vol 1, page 20).

5. God's word comes to us in human words. Peter said that Paul wrote "the same way in all his letters"—with some things "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:15, 16). Each Bible writer used a different style, using their own words and illustrations, and expressing their own personality and background. Each word was not inspired; rather, the people were inspired. When we look carefully, we see:

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is infused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Vol 1, page 21).

6. Inspiration was a team activity. Think of the inspired writers as part of a team or circle of activity:

- *They used helpers or secretaries.* Jeremiah had the help of Baruch (see Jeremiah 36:32). Paul dictated to Tertius, who wrote down his letter to the Romans (see Romans 16:22).
- *They used other writings to gather the facts and help them.* Luke tells us he did this (see Luke 1:1–4). And Paul quoted Greek pagan poets in his teaching in Athens (see Acts 17:27, 28).

The inspired person was at the centre of this *circle of inspiration*. So, in one

way, the Bible was written as any book—with secretaries, helpers and research—but the Bible is special because the person at the centre of the writing was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

7. The message is more important than the messenger or words. We know little about many of the Bible writers. We are drawn away from them to focus on their message. Jesus said it is the message that is important. He rebuked people who focused on the words, saying, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.” Then He said, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39, 40). Biblical study is vital, but it is important to remember that we do not receive eternal life by focusing on the words or the messenger. We must discover the message—and so follow Jesus.

8. Inspiration is experienced. The psalmist wrote, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). We cannot prove that food is tasty or that the scenery is beautiful. We taste and see, and we experience the beauty. We can point to evidences of God’s inspiration of the Bible writers—the unity of Scripture, the discoveries of archaeology and the change the Scriptures bring in our lives when we read—but we cannot prove inspiration. It is what we “taste and see.” It is experienced.

God is not on trial in the Bible

From these eight points that the Bible makes, we see:

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Vol 1, page 21).

This might surprise you. It might even shock you. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets and apostles, but they used their own words, logic, persuasive speech and style to share the message. God did not dictate or give the words, so He was not the writer. This is what we have seen from the Bible

in the eight points in this first section.

What is the purpose of inspiration?

Adventists “accept the Bible as their only creed” (see the “Preamble” to the *Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs*). Paul urged Timothy:

Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14, 15).

This is the purpose of the inspired, unfailing Word of God—“*to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” To the believers in Rome, Paul wrote: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify” (Romans 3:21). The purpose of Scripture is to point us to Jesus and salvation. And, in his letter to Timothy, Paul continued:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

All the Bible prophets and apostles were inspired. However, they were ordinary people who used their own words and logic to express these ideas. The words were not perfect or inerrant. However, we believe the Bible is infallible for its purpose. This means it is unfailing in what it says about faith and Christian practice. It is the supreme authority to guide us to saving faith, belief and practical Christian living:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible is our authority for knowing God, understanding our need and how to find salvation, and guiding us in the right way to live. Paul wrote that through “the encouragement of the Scriptures” we can have “hope” (see

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