

The Breath of God

How We Got Our Bible – Part III
Why We Know It's True

Romans 3:2

Introduction

Let us take a personal survey today. You do not need to turn to any scripture. In fact, I would recommend that you do not write anything down, but instead, calculate in your mind the answers to these questions:

- How many hours, this past week, did you spend reading the newspaper or a magazine? Did you spend fifteen minutes, an hour, or two hours?
- How many hours, this past week, did you spend watching television or videos, going to the movies, or watching sports? Did you spend three, four, or five hours?
- Now, how many hours, this past week, did you spend reading and studying the Bible?

We could argue the value of hobbies, playoff games, movies, and the newspaper and never really get anywhere. In fact, I am not even suggesting that any of those things are wrong. My argument is not along the lines of any inherent value in any one of those things; my concern has to do with the influence those things have on the believer's mind and heart. We seem to be exposed to everything but the Bible.

One author recently wrote that, if all the Bibles were dusted simultaneously, we would have a dust storm that would hide the sun for an entire week.

Is it any wonder that the average Christian today, knows a lot about the world, but little about the Word? We can:

- discuss the events of the Middle East, yet know nothing about the Minor Prophets;
- identify fashion, but not define our faith;
- defend our political preferences, but we cannot defend the gospel;
- quote stock prices, but we cannot quote scripture;
- list the popular actors and actresses by name, but not the books of the Bible by heart.

Are we people of the world – or are we people of the Word?

What the people of God need today, is a return to the Word of God. It is in the Word where we learn to pray, to commune with God, to walk in the Spirit, and where we discover how to glorify and please our Lord. Yet, we seem to be everywhere but in the Word.

In light of that, consider what King David wrote about the Word of God, in Psalm, chapter 19, verses 7 through 10.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also

than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

In other words, if you want reviving, invigorating, wisdom, joy; if you want endurance and the understanding of what is really right and what is really wrong; if you want something better than gold in the bank and sweeter than honey to eat, take the Word of God and learn it and live it.

Review

In a previous discussion, we noticed Paul's encouragement to the Jewish nation in that they had an incredible distinctive. There are many, and Paul will deal with a longer list of benefits to being Jewish in Romans, chapter 9. But, in chapter 3, verse 2b, he highlights one which he considers pre-eminent.

. . . they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

In our previous discussion, we also discussed four views of the Bible:

1. It is a collection of fables.
2. It is a combination of the Word of God and fables.
3. It is the Word of God, but not the last word.
4. It is the final, inerrant Word of God.

Now, the skeptic would say that to believe the Bible is the Word of God, just because the Bible says it is the Word of God, is circular reasoning. Let me give an example of what I mean – everyone would agree that a person on trial for murder cannot simply say, "I'm innocent because I say I'm innocent."

However, even the most hardened skeptic of Scripture would agree that the accused murderer should at least have an opportunity to mount the witness stand and speak in their own defense. Yes, let them be cross-examined. Let us find out if their story is consistent and worthy of belief. Where are their witnesses? Then the jury will weigh the evidence and see if they are indeed telling the truth.¹

Can the Bible hold up under close scrutiny?

I remember reading about four high school students who were several hours late for school. They were sent to the principal's office to explain where they had been. On the way, they put their heads together and agreed that their story should be the same. They would all say that their car had run over some glass and had gotten a flat tire. When they arrived at the office, they all told the same story – their car had a flat tire. The principal immediately sent them to the four corners of the room, with their

backs to each other. He then told them to write on a piece of paper, which tire it was that went flat!

A lie is an awful thing to try to defend – and more than likely, over time, the lie will be revealed as a lie. In fact, the more people involved in the lie, the more likely it will be that someone will slip up and mess the story up!

So, let the Bible take the witness stand on its own defense. It has forty authors and was written over fifteen hundred years. Let it be cross-examined. Allow it to bring forward the witnesses of history, prophecy, archeology, science, sociology, philosophy, and the record of Christ Himself to the stand.

In our previous discussion, we looked at the prophets, as well. In fact, just five prophecies alone of Christ, that we looked at, were fulfilled with precision – from His birthplace, to His crucifixion, to words He said while on the cross, to His burial in a rich man's tomb. In other words, the Bible came true. And, if the Bible came true in its prophecies of the Messiah, we have every reason to believe, based on objective evidence, that the Bible is telling the truth about the future. In other words, if the Bible was telling the truth about Christ's first coming, the Bible is very likely telling the truth about Christ's second coming, as detailed in the book of Revelation.

Can you imagine that future day when Jesus Christ will give testimony to the Holy Scriptures? In Revelation, chapter 19, verse 13, we read of that moment when Jesus Christ returns to earth and,

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

In Romans, chapter 3, verse 2, Paul tells the Jews, "You received the "logia" of God – the oracles, the revelation, the very words of almighty God."

Well, just what do these oracles say about themselves? Do they consistently claim to be the Word of God?

There is absolutely no doubt about it. In fact, more than two thousand times in the Old Testament alone, the Bible claims that God spoke what is written within its pages. From Genesis to Malachi, it claims to be sourced from God.

In the New Testament, more than forty times you will read the phrase, "the word of God". Some of the New Testament claims include:

- In Mark, chapter 7, verse 13, the New Testament is equated with the Old Testament.

- In Luke, chapter 5, verse 1, we are told that Jesus Christ preached the Old Testament.
- In Acts, chapter 4, verse 31, we read that the apostles preached “the Word of God with boldness.”
- The word of God was the message the Gentiles heard, as Peter preached, in Acts, chapter 11, verse 1.
- It was also the content of Paul’s preaching throughout his missionary journeys, in Acts, chapters 13 through 18.
- Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians, in II Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 17, as well as chapter 4, verse 2, that he preached the Word, as it was given directly from God, and that he had not changed any of it.
- In Colossians, chapter 1, Paul announced that the Word of God was the foundation and source of his teaching and preaching.

By the way, for those who say that Jesus Christ is only a good man and a good teacher of moral truth and nothing more – they, evidently, do not know who He claimed to be. Over and over, in the New Testament, He claimed to be the embodiment and revealer of deity. He claimed to be older than Abraham. He claimed to have created the universe. He claimed to be able to forgive sins. He claimed to give people eternal life. He claimed to be the only way, the only truth, and the only life.

If Jesus Christ was not telling the truth, then untold millions of people have, and still are, following a liar. If He was not who He said He was, then He is not a good teacher, nor is He a good man, He is, in fact, the greatest deceiver to ever walk the face of the earth.

In that same way, the Bible is not a good book at all, unless it is, in fact, what it claims to be – the very words of God. If it is not the revelation from God, about God, man, and the universe, as it claims it is; if it does not hold the secret to eternal life, as it says it does, then it is not a good book, but a wretched, deceiving, manipulative book of lies. It is not a even little good and a little bad – it is either true, or it is the greatest hoax ever put into print in the history of mankind.

You cannot get away with saying, “It is only a good book!” – for the Bible undeniably claims to be the words, the oracles, the revelation of God.

How Did Mankind Receive the Word of God?

So, just how did God deliver His words to mankind? Did He write them in the sky; hide them in some dark cave; reveal them with magic or strange markings on stone tablets? How did mankind receive, from God, His words? I am so glad you finally asked!

In the book of II Peter, in chapter 1, verse 21b, we are told that the authors of scripture were,

. . . men moved by the Holy Spirit [as they] spoke from God.

That phrase, “moved by the Holy Spirit,” translates the Greek verb, “pheromenoi”. It means, “to be swept along by a power outside oneself”.

The same verb is used in Acts, chapter 27, when Paul is caught in a storm at sea and is about to be shipwrecked. As Luke records that event, in verses 14 through 15, and 17, he says,

But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and let ourselves be driven along. . . . After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.

Just as the ship was moved along and controlled by the wind, so the human authors of the Scriptures were moved along and controlled by the divine Author in their hearts and minds.

Even more fascinating is that God’s controlling and moving in the hearts of the human authors is actually likened, as well, to the wind.

In II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16a, we read that, *All Scripture is inspired . . .*

The word “inspired,” is a compound Greek word – “theo” meaning God, and “pneustos,” which literally translated is, “wind or breath”.

Thus, the Scriptures are the breath of God! They are sourced, as it were, from the very mouth of God.

That is the same idea Paul used in Romans, chapter 3, verse 2. He tells the Jews that they had been given the stewardship of the oracles – the very words from the mouth – of God.

The question remains, how did human authors – under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit, as we have seen – receive and record the breath of God? Let me give you three ways.

Through ordinary developments

1. First, through ordinary developments.

Luke, for example, wrote to his friend, an official of some sort, named Theophilus. Luke told him, in his opening comments, that he had done careful research before he wrote his account of the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Listen as he writes his opening remarks to Theophilus, in Luke, chapter 1, verses 1 through 4.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

In other words, Luke researched, journalized, recorded, interviewed, developed, and time-lined in consecutive order the events he had heard from eyewitnesses. And, Luke wrote it down, while at the same time, under the moving wind in his sails from the breath of God.

Through ordinary descriptions

2. Secondly, the Bible was received through ordinary descriptions.

God moved among these human authors, controlling the product of their quills and yet, giving them, at the same time, the freedom to write in their own style, through their own personality, and with their own descriptions of events.

Paul writes with his legal mind, with complicated grammar and vocabulary. Mark writes with his youthful enthusiasm, with rough grammar and simple words.

And, they recorded very human elements. Paul, writing to Timothy says, in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 13a,

When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus . . .

I am so glad Paul forgot something – it gives me hope!

At the same time, not one of the Bible's contributing assistant authors ever wrote, "I think I am right on this one, but I could be wrong . . ." or "You probably won't agree with me about this, but . . ."

No. They wrote, "Thus saith the Lord . . ."

Through divine dictation

3. Thirdly, through divine dictation.

There were times when God spoke to man. Moses did not one day, sit down and say, "Let's see, I wonder how this whole world came about? It seems to me that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . ."

No, Moses was not there. He could never have conceived of it, without both the record of God being handed down through time and the Holy Spirit revealing the inside details – right down to exactly what was created on what day.

Furthermore, Moses never said, "I need some rules for all of these people to follow, because if I don't give them some rules, I'll never get this nation under control. So, I'll come up with, oh, let's say, ten of them . . . I know, I'll come up with ten commandments."

No.

Isaiah could never have sat down, centuries before the birth of Christ, and come up with his prophecy in chapter 7, verse 14,

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Virgins do not conceive – and God does not become a baby!

God spoke through the Old Testament prophets in the way we read in Deuteronomy, chapter 18, verse 18, as God announces,

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

By the way, we are told, in fact, that the prophets did not even understand at times, what they wrote. Listen as Peter writes, in I Peter, chapter 1, verses 10 through 12,

... the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you ...

The mystery of inspiration is this dual authorship – that God collaborated and controlled mankind to produce inerrant text – the written Word of God.

This same mystery of collaboration, by the way, of the *written* Word, is seen in the *Living* Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. God collaborated and controlled a woman, named Mary, and sinless God the Son became flesh-robed deity.

If you can understand the incarnation, you can understand inspiration. The chances are, you, like me, cannot begin to understand either one.

Now, I have been asked a number of questions about this topic that I will never be able to answer, if we ever hope to make it to verse 3, in Romans, chapter 3. I recommend that you read a wonderful, easy to follow defense of the Bible, by Pastor Erwin Lutzer, one of my favorite authors. It is a book entitled, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible*, and is published by Moody Press.

Let me at least address a couple more issues, however. One of them is the issue of the canon of Scripture. And, lest you think I am talking about firearms, let me explain.

The Canon of Scripture

The word canon is actually a metaphor – a play on words. It comes from the Greek word “kanon,” which means, “a rod or a measuring bar”. The Greek term came from a root word that meant, “a reed”. In Bible times, a reed was used as a Hebrew unit of measure. So, the word came to mean, in a metaphorical sense, a measuring standard.ⁱⁱ

Eventually, the term “canon” was used to refer to the completed list of books given to man by God. Athanasius, the godly bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century, referred to the twenty seven books of the New Testament as the completed canon.

Before him, around 170 A.D., Melito, the bishop of Sardis, actually listed the books of the Old

Testament in his writings. No apocryphal or other dubious writings were included in the list.

It was not until more than one thousand years later, at the Council of Trent, that the Roman Catholic Church officially declared the Apocrypha to be part of the canon. It is significant, however, to know that the Council of Trent was the response of the Roman church to the teachings of Martin Luther, a converted monk, as well as to the rapidly spreading Protestant, or protesting, movement.

Wayne Grudem wrote some insightful words in his *Systematic Theology*. He records that, by affirming the Apocrypha as a part of the canon, the Roman church affirmed writings that supported their doctrines; such as, prayers for the dead and justification by faith plus works. More importantly, Roman Catholic leaders could hold that the church has the authority to constitute what is Scripture, while Protestants hold that the church cannot make something to be Scripture, but can only recognize what God has indeed revealed.

Grudem went on to give an illustrative analogy. He said that a police officer, in an investigation, can recognize counterfeit money as counterfeit and genuine money as genuine. However, a police officer cannot make counterfeit money to be genuine, nor can any declaration by any number of police officers make counterfeit money to be something it is not.ⁱⁱⁱ

Today, when we use the term “canon of Scripture,” we are actually saying that the sixty six books of the Bible are a complete record of divine revelation. I would also add, with my Protestant forefathers, that no church or council has authority over sacred Scripture – sacred Scripture has all authority over the church.

How Was True Scripture Identified?

So, how did the early believers identify true Scripture?

Through the providence of God’s protection and preservation

1. First, through the providence of God’s protection and preservation.

We know that Paul actually wrote more letters than God preserved. The Bible, however, says it is sufficient for every good work. That means, we will not discover one day, that the believer has lived for

thousands of years without some New Testament book, written by Paul or someone else, that he, or she, needed all along in order to live an obedient life for God's glory. No, God preserved everything for us that we needed.

Through the record of authorship

2. A second identifier of true Scripture is through the record of authorship. A prophet or a member of the apostolic community wrote the books of the canon.

Through the test of content

3. Then, there is the test of content. This is actually where it becomes obvious as to what God breathed and what man created.

For instance, the Shepherd of Hermas claimed to be sacred writings, yet it teaches the necessity of penance and the possibility of the forgiveness of sins at least one time immediately after baptism. In other words, you would want to save up a really big sin for right after your baptism, because it would automatically be forgiven.

The gospel of Thomas, which was held by many to belong to the canon, ends with this strange conversation,

Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life."

Jesus said, "Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling all males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven."^{iv}

Through the test of usefulness and spiritual growth

4. A fourth ancient test of authenticating Scripture is through the test of usefulness and spiritual growth.

In other words, the impact of Scripture on a life, radically changes the lifestyle.

Dennis Prager and an atheist professor, named Jonathan Glover, of Oxford, were publicly debating on the authenticity of scripture. Prager posed this question, "If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at midnight in a desolate Los Angeles street, and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding

footsteps behind you, and you saw ten burly young men who had just stepped out of a tenement house coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know that they were just leaving a Bible study?"

The world knows that those young men, who have just finished studying the Bible, would be planning, most likely, not to hurt that man, but to help him.

Ladies and gentlemen, other books were given for our information. This Book, the Bible, was given for our transformation. These are the sacred words, the very breath of God.

What Does the Word of God Do?

Let us explore this thought a little further. Just what does the Word of God do?

In the life of the church

1. First, what does the Word of God do in the life of the church?

To begin with, the Word makes the difference between being a dead church or a living church. Have you ever walked into a church and felt death? I have. I can smell it. It is nothing more than a morgue with a steeple.

In Revelation, chapter 3, verse 1b, the Lord rebuked the well known church in Sardis, that had left obedience to the Scriptures, by saying to it,

... I know ... that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Jesus Christ rebuked the church in Laodicea as well, in Revelation, chapter 3. He told them they were blind – they could not see spiritual issues clearly. He said to them, in verse 17b,

... [I know] you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind ...

This is not a list of things a church wants to be, right? He said to them, "You're blind."

It is more meaningful, if you understand that Laodicea, the city where this church was located, was famous for producing a medicine called the "tephra Phrygia". It was exported in tablet form and then, ground down and mixed with water and applied to the eyes. The Phrygian powder was held to be a wonderful remedy for weak and ailing eyes. It was to the church in this city that Christ said, in verse 18,

I advise you to buy from Me ... eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

What was the solution for both of these churches? It was to listen to the written warning, the sacred words God.

In the life of the world

2. Secondly, what does the Word of God do in the life of the world?

It is the instrument for bringing unbelievers to saving faith.

Paul wrote, in Romans, chapter 10, verse 17,
So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

The apostle Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 1, verse 23,

. . . you have been born again . . . through the living and enduring word of God.

In the life of the believer

3. Finally, what does the Word of God do in the life of the believer?

The Bible is the complete, sufficient resource for living a holy life. II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 through 17, tells us,

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable . . . that the man of God may be . . . equipped . . .

The word “equipped” was used for a wagon that was fully stocked for the journey. The Bible says, “As you go through the journey of life, stock your wagon with the Word – it is everything you need.”

You are not missing a book by some prophet, or a letter from some apostle. You have everything you need. The better question is, “Just what are you doing with what you have been given?”

My friends, your response to the study of the Word should never be, “I’m going to think about doing the things God wants me to do . . . I just might put some of them into action . . . I’ll think about it.”

No. The true student of the Word opens its pages with the attitude, “I *will* do them . . . I *will* believe Him . . . I *will* obey Him.”

Let me tell you a story. There was once a businessman who had to leave town for quite some time. He was the president of his own business and had several hundred employees. Before he left town,

he sat down and wrote a long letter that detailed projects he wanted to be accomplished, clients he to be wanted contacted, and, in general, what he wanted the employees to do while he was away. He finished it, put it in the company post office box, and flew away, to be gone for several months.

At last he returned. As he drove his car into his company’s parking lot, he immediately noticed the grounds were in disarray. The grass had not been cut for weeks and there were a couple of broken windows. He parked his car and went in. Employees were lounging at their desks – drinking coffee and talking, feet propped up on tables – and most of the employees were dressed in anything but work clothes.

He immediately called a meeting of his entire staff. When they assembled, he said, “I can’t believe what I’ve seen. Everything is different than what I expected.”

Then, he asked, “Did you get my letter?”

They brightened up, “Yes, sir, we did. We love that letter. We read it just about every day.”

“In fact,” one man spoke up, “I’ve memorized a paragraph from your letter.”

“It’s so clear,” they all said.

Another spoke up, “Sir, we’ve organized some study groups. We gather, at least once a week, and re-read your letter to make sure we understand it all.”

The president said, “But, did you finish those projects? Did you call those clients? Did you do the things I asked you to do?”

Everyone sort of hung their heads. Then, one man spoke up for all of them, and said, “No sir, you see, we’re still studying your letter.”

My friends, the problem is not what we do not understand about the Bible – the problem is what we understand, and do not do. We all have been entrusted with the very sacred breath of God, the inspired letter from God. What are you going to do with it today? What are you going to do about it tomorrow?

It is one thing for us, as a body of believers, to simply say, “We believe the Bible!” – it is another thing to behave just like you say you believe. May our belief and our behavior be one and the same, for the glory of God and in obedience to the breath of God – His Holy Word.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/20/2002 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2002 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.

ⁱ Erwin W. Lutzer, Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1998), p. 36.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, "How To Get The Most Out Of The Bible," Extra, p. 24.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wayne Gruden, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing, 1994), p. 54.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 54.