***The inspired Bible***

*2 Timothy 3:16-17*

In my first year of Secondary School some old, bald men in crusty suits came to an assembly. They looked as miserable as they did terrified. They were Gideons. Afterwards, they gave us all a small, red copy of the New Testament. It had an immediate effect on me at school: I found I could hide it in my pencil case and so cheat my way through RE.

Since then, I’ve found the Bible can come alive in my hands: a verse of encouragement (or rebuke) leaps out, just when I need it; a passage I’ve read many times before suddenly takes on a whole new meaning or relevance. It’s like it’s alive, living and active.

People sometimes say a book has inspired them. Often, it’s not so much the *book* per se; it’s who wrote it, and the story they tell. It’s the same with the Bible. We’re inspired, no such by the physical or digital *per se* – the paper, pages, ink, stitching/ glue, hard cover; we’re inspired by who wrote it and what they say.

After all, the Bible is *God’s* story. It’s also *our* story.

But who wrote it? Was it God? Or was it people, like Moses, Ruth, David, Matthew…?

Paul wrote a letter to young Timothy, in which he said:

***“******All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

What did he mean by “*All* Scripture..”?

Did he mean, what we call, the Old Testament, the 39 ‘books’/ scrolls? What made it into the Hebrew Bible was only settled around 4th Century BC

What about the Apocrypha writings? Even Luther (not Detective Luther or Luther Vandross) included 14 Apocrypha books in between the OT & NT

Did Paul think the letter HE was writing to Timothy was Scripture? Think of the pressure!

What about the ‘books’ that were written AFTER Paul wrote “All Scripture is God-breathed..”?

Yet, Paul was adamant: “All Scripture is God-breathed…” There’s something sacred about these texts; they’re full of life, they’re life-bringing.

In Greek, it’s: “All Scripture is *‘theopneustos’*. This is the only time in the whole of the Bible this word is used. It’s another of Paul’s word creations. A ‘portmanteau’ is a new word that is created by adding together two other words. Here, Paul joins together *Theos* (God) and *pneo* (breath or spirit.)

What are you made of? Bones, blood, muscles, hair… And yet, you are more than the sum of your parts. You have thoughts, a conscience, soul, a spirit… Genesis reminds us that God has breathed spirit, His Spirit, into each of us. All humans are God-breathed… We are truly alive. Many people testify that, when they became a Christian, they started to feel more fully human, more alive – like they’d be born again. We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) – we are made to reflect back something of God’s nature. We are a heap of bones, blood, skin… And yet, because God has breathed into us God’s Spirit, we are more than just bones, blood, and skin. We are people – living and active; alive to God and one another.

In the same way, the books of the Bible are paper, ink, screen, words.. And yet, God has breathed life into them. They are God-breathed. The writer to the Hebrews says of Scripture, it is:

*“living 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*

Yes, but.. was it *people* or *God* who wrote these Scriptures?

Some emphasise the Bible’s humanity: it was people who wrote the Bible. People like Moses, Ruth, David, Matthew, Paul…They were real people; people with real histories, cultures, triumphs and failures. People who did amazing things; and people who screwed up. People like us!

The 40+ writers powerfully and accurately reveal humanity’s gradual understanding about God. Initially very fuzzy, gradually with successive generations, the image becomes progressively clearer/ sharper, until – BOOM – Jesus, the image of the invisible God (Colossian 1:15)

* Genesis was radical: this world is too amazing to have come be accident; there is God.
* Moses realised it matters how we live – hence the Law.
* David helped us see this God is King of Kings, Lord of Lords
* Isaiah realised this God is a suffering servant.

They were all inspired by God. They told stories. They wrote it down. God-inspired, God-breathed. Called ‘progressive revelation’, the Bible is understood as the unfolding story of God.

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).* All the Bible writers, to varying degrees, were pointing to Jesus. It was always about Jesus. BUT the understanding of Abraham, David, even Isaiah, was only partial, in comparison to that of Paul.It is God-inspired because they were inspired by God – by what they were beginning to understand God to be like.None of them had the full picture/ the full truth. Only Jesus, THE Word of God, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Other Christians emphasise the Bible’s divinity – it was God who wrote the Bible. They claim it was written – OK, dictated – BY God. Every word, every sentence is precisely what God-alone wrote and meant. They might use words like:

* Infallibility – the Bible’s inability to fail in matters of faith and practice.
* Inerrancy – the Bible is completely free from error and fault in all matters, including historical and scientific details, not just matters of faith and practice. No mistakes, no contradictions.

What they often mean is, the Bible is precious to them; that they accept – and seek to live by – every word of it. (Just to be very clear, *as do I!*) These terms – infallible and inerrant – can sound worthy, yet I suggest, they are hard to apply to every verse/ word in the Bible (at least, to my understanding.) Here’s a few examples why I think this:

Last week, we saw that in the Synagogue Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 but dropped the bit about *“the day of God’s vengeance”*. Isaiah and Luke are both Scripture and yet Luke is different to Isaiah. Isaiah is God-breathed Scripture and yet Jesus changed it? Is Isaiah still as God-breathed?

In 1 Samual 21 the High Priest is Ahemilech, whereas, referring to the same, in Mark 2, the High Priest is Abiathar. They’re factually different. They can’t both be right.

Then there are the two Creations accounts (Genesis 1 & 2), each with different details, or the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), each differing in some of their details.

Then, was the Law, with some of its apparently pedantic or peculiar rules, ever going to work as a means of salvation? Does God think polyester is really *that* bad?

Even our Bibles acknowledge in the small print, *“The earliest manuscripts and ancient witnesses do not have [Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11]”* There’s some debate, a degree of uncertainty, and yet even the respected publishers of the Holy Bible are content to include these passages. Are they part of the “All Scripture is God-breathed..”?

Paul did NOT say “All Scripture is *infallible”* or “All Scripture is *inerrant*.” He said, “All Scripture is God-*breathed*.” We must be careful not to make claims about the Bible which not even the Bible or its contributors make. To do so would perhaps be like the loyal but fearful child who feels they have to make wildly exaggerated claims about their parent, “Well, *my* Dad is 4 metres tall and can carry a truck above his head.”

God-breathed Scripture brings life to those who read it, live by it. Why? Because it points us to the Author of Life – Jesus.

**And useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting…**

We can learn through good examples. We can also learn through bad examples. We learn from good bosses. But we can also learn from bad bosses. (Just ask Amy, Alice, Elaine, Sooz!) The Bible is full of good people, doing good things, saying/ teaching good things. Their words inspire us to make good decisions…

Then there are things in the Bible that seem at odds with what Jesus taught, did, and was. Just think of all the violence described, even called for, in the Old Testament. For example, in 1 Samual 15:3 the Lord Almighty says*, “attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”* Are we really saying God, the Prince of Peace, the Author Life, wants us to kill babies?

So, back to the original question. Who wrote the Bible: God or people?

Some make out it’s just a collection ancient works written by people.

Other Christians make out it’s all down to God. It’s what God wrote. And, therefore, what’s written in Leviticus or Ezekiel is to be taken as literally as that found in Luke or Ephesians. It can be this one dimensional approach that leads to the charge of contradictions.

It’s both/ and.

Of course it is, because it’s all about the Word of God – Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. Its 39 Old Testament books are all pointing to His Coming. The books that follow the life, death/ resurrection of Christ, are all making sense of this Coming.

Jesus was both/ and. Jesus was God. Fully God. Totally God. Jesus DID things that only God could do. Jesus SAID things that only God could do.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1*

Yet, Jesus was human. Fully human. Totally human. The Word *made flesh*.

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14*

*“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”*

*Colossians 1:15*

Jesus wasn’t half n’half: half God; half human.

In the same way, the Bible, the Scriptures – that testify about Jesus – is both/ and. Written by people. Every word. People with different histories, cultures, traditions, even ‘takes’ on God. Inspiring people who were inspired by God. And yet, the Bible is also the inspiration of God. A divine partnership.

On the one hand, Jesus acknowledged the human writers of the Old Testament. Jesus recognised that Moses wrote the Law

* “So Moses wrote down this Law and gave it to the priests..” (Deuteronomy 31:9)
* “Do what Moses commanded” (Mark 1:44);
* “Moses said, Honor your father and your mother” (Mark 7:10)
* “David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared . . .” (Mark 12:36)
* “Well did Isaiah prophesy . . .” (Mark 7:6)

On the other hand, Jesus acknowledged the Divine-human partnership

* “David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, . . .” (Mark 12:36) (In other words, David wrote, but his writings were the result of the Holy Spirit’s work (2 Peter 1:20-21).
* “Well did Isaiah prophesy . . .” (Mark 7:6). The mere mention of prophecy suggests that Isaiah wrote from God.
* when speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus asserts, “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8).

The Bible is both God’s story and our story. It’s impossible to live the Christian life without the Bible. We need to engage with the whole of Scripture, not just our ‘go to’ favourite verses or the bits we understand (or agree with!) Having a high view of Scripture calls us to accept the Bible as it is (including its internal difficulties, duplications, differences, as well as profound teaching, wisdom, and encouragement), not the version of the Bible we wish it was. It’s both/ and to live by.

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