

# The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures



By  
John Urquhart

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SAMPLE PAGES

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# The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures

By John Urquhart

EDITOR OF "WORD AND WORK," AND OF "THE KING'S OWN," AND AUTHOR OF  
"WHAT ARE WE TO BELIEVE?", "WHAT IS THE BIBLE?", ETC.

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## Preface.

A FEW PREFATORY WORDS may help the reader of the following pages to see the writer's purpose. It seemed to me essential to ascertain, first of all, what the Scriptural view of inspiration is. How did inspired men regard the words which they and others have handed on to us, and, above all, how did our Lord receive them? A clear and full answer to that question is the need of the hour. Once got, it would settle this controversy for many. There is still loyalty enough in the Christian ranks to go anywhere with Jesus, and to separate from everything that would separate from Him. The first part of the present volume is an attempt to meet this want.

The second part answers another question. We want to know something of the other party to the controversy. "The higher critics" demand the surrender of our "traditional beliefs," and ask us to gratefully receive from their hands a "reconstructed" Bible. Who, then, are those new masters in Israel? Whence are they? What is their aim, and what has been their history? "The Genesis of Rationalism," which forms the second part of the Book, contains a reply.

One section more appeared to be necessary. Criticism has reached certain conclusions regarding various Books of Scripture. The older narratives are declared to be mere legends, and the history generally is described as tradition tinctured by the time when it was put into writing. Certain Books of the Old Testament are said to fall below even this low level. They are declared to be fictions, the soothing epithet "pious" being generally added, the representation being that evil was done by the writers that good might come! All these conclusions are placed before the public as genuine scientific discoveries.

Now, in the strangest fashion, facts have been brought to light, which enable us to put those statements to the proof. Parallel records in the history of Ancient Persia, Assyria, Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt have been recovered. These have poured a flood of light upon the Scripture, verifying many of its narratives, explaining many of its allusions, and settling the age of



disputed Books. The third section of the present volume, brings these resources to bear upon the questions regarding Esther and Daniel, two Books which criticism has condemned with the utmost confidence.

Archdeacon Farrar's work on Daniel, which was published as this Book was passing through the press, is noticed in the appendix.

JOHN URQUHART.

April 8th, 1895.

# **Book I: The Scripture Doctrine of Inspiration**

## **1. The Customary View of the Bible.**

IT IS ABUNDANTLY EVIDENT that the time has come when the question of the Inspiration of the Bible must be re-investigated. It is necessary for all parties. Those who believe most firmly will still have difficulties to meet and questions to answer, and these cannot be met and answered without inquiry and consideration. Those who are troubled cannot be reassured by mere authority: they need the assurance of conviction. Those who have surrendered the old belief will not be led back, unless it can be shown that former convictions were parted with under misconception, that supposed arguments were fallacies, that imagined difficulties were only obscurities which fuller knowledge is clearing away, and that the positive evidence in support of the old belief is simply overwhelming.

The task of this re-investigation will no doubt command the service of abler pens than mine; but in this great struggle each must do his part. In the day of battle, the lad, who only guides a battalion through vale or forest that it may take its appointed position, performs no mean service. If I merely help to make a place where others will smite the darkness with force and skill, it will be no trouble to me that the honors of war are given to those who have won the victory. There is one thing, however, which I trust will mark this attempt of mine. I hope to be guided by perfect honesty and straightforwardness. The reader and I shall look at this matter broadly and fearlessly. We shall listen to what is to be said for and against. We shall

shirk no difficulty; and we shall decline to skirt a “dangerous” place, merely because the ice seems weak, and because people weighted with a theory may easily fall in. If there is a weak place, or a difficulty, we shall go right up to it, and see just what it means.

In this inquiry we shall have to find answers to three questions. The ordinary view is attacked. To understand this matter rightly, we have to inquire what the ordinary view is. Unless that is thoroughly done we may be led astray by misconceptions, and find that our reasonings are vitiated and our labor lost. This must clearly, therefore, be our first inquiry. We shall (1) ask what the ordinary view of the Inspiration of the Bible is, and whence it has come — in other words, what is generally said about the Bible, and who first said it.

We shall then listen to its assailants, and ask (2) on what grounds this view is rejected; and finally, having heard and considered all that is urged on the other side, we shall (3) inquire whether any positive evidence can be brought forward in favor of the ordinary view. Treating the matter in this exhaustive, and, we trust, impartial fashion, we shall hope to arrive at some clear and satisfactory conclusion.

There is one epithet commonly applied to the ordinary opinion regarding the Bible which I refer to at the outset, because it may occasion a certain amount of unworthy and harmful prejudice.

It is said to be “traditional.” Well, there are many things “traditional.” The Copernican theory of the motions of the heavenly bodies has long ago become “traditional.” We all believe in it, though not half a dozen men in this generation may have taken the trouble to test and prove it. It has been handed down to us; it gives what seems a simple and satisfactory explanation of the movements of the earth and of the heavens; and we consequently accept it willingly and gratefully. It will not trouble us much, should it be called “the traditional view.” That it is “the traditional view” might be regarded, on the contrary, as something in its favor. It could hardly have endured so long, under the close and continued inspection of modern science, unless it had much to support it. It is quite true that there have been hoary traditions that have been burden and confusion to men; but, on the other hand, there is nothing so “traditional” as truth. The whole body of knowledge and discovery becomes “traditional.” There is not a single science, or art, or manufacture in the world that is not governed by tradition. We may, therefore, discharge this term of whatever offense it has seemed to impute

to the ordinary view, and we may use it freely to designate the long continued belief of the Christian Church regarding the Scriptures.

What, then, is “the traditional view,” which not very long ago ruled unquestioned in the churches of this land, and which today, for hundreds of thousands, is bound up with Christianity itself? The reply can be given fully only in the two words — Verbal Inspiration. But here again we have to guard against misconception. Opponents of this view run away with the inference that verbal inspiration must imply that the words were dictated to the inspired writers. The belief is, therefore, labeled “a mechanical theory,” and is frequently at once thrown aside with contempt. Those who act in this way have no idea that they are doing injustice to the ordinary view; but such is, nevertheless, the fact. The presence of the word “inspiration,” ought to have prevented them confounding it with dictation. The merchant does not inspire his clerk when he dictates to him. Dictation excludes the possibility of inspiration as completely as anything can. “Verbal Inspiration” merely intimates how far inspiration has gone, and that it has extended to the form as well as to the substance of the divine message. Verbal Inspiration implies no theory whatever as to the mode of inspiration; it only defines its result. It tells what we have in the Bible; not how it has been given. It is a rational answer to a natural and urgent question. We place the Bible in some man’s hands, telling him that it is God’s message to him, and that it has been given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He asks us in what sense he is to understand our statement. Does the inspiration extend only to the purpose of the Book? Were the writers prompted to undertake this varied service, and then left to find their own arguments? The ordinary view replies that the miracle of inspiration has gone further than that: the arguments were the result of the illumination and direction of the Spirit of God, cooperating with and informing the mind of the writer.

“Well, then,” he replies, “you have taken me so far; but there is something more I wish to know. Did the Holy Spirit inspire the thought and leave the writers to find out, and to write down, what words they pleased? Are the thoughts inspired, but the words not inspired?” To this the ordinary view replies that the miracle of inspiration has gone further still. Thought is defined by words. Perfectly clear thought is wedded to the words which express it — to these very words and to no other. The Spirit of God is Light. The Spirit’s thought is perfect in its clearness, and it is sharply defined, therefore, in its expression. Into the clearness of this thought the mind of the

writer came, and he was “borne along” into its clear expression. The words, as they fell on the page one by one, were each like an added ray of light, and all of them bound together formed the beam which scatters the darkness. The mind of the Spirit is expressed in the words of the Scriptures as they were originally given.

That concluding phrase, “as they were originally given,” is sometimes treated as if it cast a doubt upon the Scriptures as we now have them. How little ground there is for that misunderstanding we shall see by-and-bye. The Christian Church has not always had the apostolic autographs. Even in the apostolic age it was only the Churches to which they were specially sent that had these. But the Churches of Christ have always had the original Scriptures. They have possessed the Old and the New Testament in a form which the fullest investigation has never challenged in any important point. Meanwhile, I repeat that “Verbal Inspiration” defines the extent of inspiration, but says nothing as to the mode in which the Spirit of God operated. It expresses the result, but ventures no theory as to the process. It tells us that the inspiration of the Scriptures is such that it has left its clear impress upon the words of the Book, and that these words are what they are, and their very arrangement is what it is, in order that in them the mind of the Spirit might be clearly and fully declared.

How the Spirit of God has operated to give us a Book reliable in every word it has never concerned Christian men to say or even to know. A few have ventured upon theories of inspiration; but the mental gymnastics, which we dignify by the name of metaphysics, have never been popular. The intellectual tight-rope, on which one has to balance oneself by the adroit use of definitions, has few attractions for the multitude. And the popular instinct has been fully justified by the barrenness of the results. The intellectual Blondins [tightrope walkers —Ed] of our race have gone to the end of their slim and aerial pathway and found — nothing. There has been much ingenuity but small enlightenment. We find ourselves on solid ground when we speak of what the Spirit of God has given us: the moment we talk of how the Spirit of God operated to give us an absolutely accurate Book we have ventured out upon the air, and the only result that can be looked for is a fall: When one asks how the dead are raised, Paul’s reply begins with the significant words, “Thou fool!”

I have now to answer the second part of our question — whence has this belief come?

Webster, in the first edition of his Dictionary, defines inspiration as “The supernatural influence of the Spirit of God on the human mind, by which prophets, apostles, and sacred writers were qualified to set forth Divine truth without any mixture of error.” That was Webster’s judgment of the meaning which the term bore when applied by Christian men to the Bible. The Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England, in a united protest addressed to Bishop Colenso, in 1863, said: “All our hopes for eternity, the very foundation of our faith, our nearest and dearest consolations, are taken from us, if one line of that Sacred Book be declared unfaithful or untrustworthy.” If any further confirmation is needed that this has long been the customary view of the Bible, it will be found in the confessions of those who attack the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. They speak of it as “the ordinary view.” When they attack it, and endeavor to show that it is overthrown by the alleged existence of errors in the Bible, they are perfectly aware that they are saying or writing what will offend the vast majority of Christian people. They take the position, not of those expounding a belief which is in possession, but of those who set forth a belief which has got to make its way. They allow their beliefs to be named, without protest or offense, “the new views.” They are the confessed champions of “the New Theology.” Behind all these admissions lies the consciousness that, to the Christian community of our time, the Bible is, from beginning to end, the faultless Word of the faultless God.

The truth of that admission will be felt by everyone. The attitude of Christian men towards the Bible is that of absolute trust and of deepest veneration. There can be no question as to how the teachers in our Sunday-schools have regarded it. They teach the children to look upon it as God’s Book. Rightly or wrongly, they always speak of it as standing apart from all other literature; and the reason which they assign for this unapproached excellence is that, while other books proceed from men, this has come from God. If we enter our churches and chapels, and ask how the Bible is regarded there, we have the same reply. The words of this Book are approached, expounded, and applied to the conscience and the heart as the very words of God.

I do not cite this belief as an argument, though it is only fair to note in passing that it ought, nevertheless, to have some weight with us. Multitudes of these are men who do not revere the Bible merely because they have been taught to do so. They know it. They have read it again and again. They