



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Lesson 17.2 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures**

#### **The Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures**

The men who wrote the books of the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) did not decide on their own to write the books they wrote. God chose them and God called them to their tasks of revealing God's truth in human words. Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Not only did God call Moses to lead His people out of their slavery in Egypt, but **"the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua'"** (Exodus 17:14). **"The LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'"** (Exodus 34:27).

The prophet Jeremiah received a similar order from the Lord. **"Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you'"** (Jeremiah 30:2). So also **"the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest"** (Ezekiel 1:3). Many times the prophets introduced their messages by saying: **"Thus says the LORD"** (Isaiah 66:12; Jeremiah 4:27; Ezekiel 12:10; Amos 2:1; many other places). The apostle Peter maintained that all the writers of the Old Testament **"spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1:21). The word translated "moved" means to be carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus personally chose twelve disciples to be His apostles: **"When it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles"** (Luke 6:13). To these same apostles Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and give them the words that they were to speak and write (John 14-16). The apostle Paul insisted that he also was **"called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God"** (Romans 1:1), **"called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God"** (1 Corinthians 1:1). Speaking for himself and his fellow-workers, Paul said: **"God ... has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us"** (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Jesus appeared to His apostle John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos and told him: **"What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches"** (Revelation 1:11). The Lord also stopped John from writing down certain things John had seen. At one point John writes: **"I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them'"** (Revelation 10:4).

The writers of Holy Scripture wrote the words that God wanted them to write. This does not mean that they themselves were not involved in what they wrote. They were not simply secretaries taking dictation. No, they themselves thought about what they were going to write. They did research, they conducted interviews with eyewitnesses at times, they quoted earlier prophets, they gathered information from various sources, they meditated on what they were writing as they were writing it – all of this under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. The result is that the Bible has human authors who were involved in what they wrote, but at the same time the very words they wrote were given to them by the Holy Spirit, so that we can say that the Bible as a whole and in all of its parts is the book of the Holy Spirit. God is the true author of Holy Scripture.

The psalmists were undergoing intense experiences as they wrote their psalms, and yet the Holy Spirit guided their words also, so that we can call the book of psalms a prayer book written by the Holy Spirit Himself. In his last words David said: **"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue"** (2 Samuel 23:2). In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon wrote about his experiences and his

growth in understanding. He said: **"I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all"** (Ecclesiastes 9:1). Of his own writing he said: **"The Preacher sought to find acceptable words: and what was written was upright – words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd"** (Ecclesiastes 12:10-11). The Shepherd is God Himself.

The prophet Daniel in Babylon studied the prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem, and this led him to pray the great prayer of repentance recorded in Daniel 9. For he writes: **"In the first year of his reign (the reign of Darius of the Medes), I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"** (Daniel 9:2). Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last for 70 years, and based on that prophecy Daniel prayed that God would bring the captivity to an end in accordance with His promise. At a later time the prophet Zechariah referred to earlier prophets when he wrote: **"They (the Israelites) made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets"** (Zechariah 7:12). The source of these prophecies was the Lord God Himself. The Holy Spirit used the prophets as His spokesmen. As Peter said to the 120 believers waiting for the Holy Spirit, **"This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas"** (Acts 1:16). Peter was referring to Psalms 69 and 109. Notice that it was David's mouth that spoke these psalms, but at the same time it was the Holy Spirit speaking through David. Thus, the Bible has human authors, but at the same time it has a divine Author.

The fact that the Holy Spirit gave the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles the very words they used in the writing of the Holy Scriptures is called verbal inspiration, or word-for-word inspiration. The term "verbal inspiration" stresses the point that God did not just choose the writers of Scripture and let them use whatever words they wanted. God did not just give the writers of Scripture the general content of their message. God gave them the very words in Hebrew and Greek that they wrote down and that have been transmitted to us even to this very day.

The term "inspiration" comes to us from the usual translation of Paul's words to Timothy: **"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The word "inspiration" is not the most accurate translation of the Greek word *theopneustos* θεόπνευστος. A more accurate translation would be this: **"All Scripture is God-breathed"**, that is, breathed out by God. Inspiration implies that God breathed into the writers the words that they wrote, but "God-breathed" means that God breathed out the words that were used. The Bible is the breath of God. The words of the Bible came out from God.

Since every word comes from God, we do not dare to alter or change any word that God has given us, nor should we change any letter of any word. Jesus said: **"Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled"** (Matthew 5:18). Jots (iotas) are the smallest letters and tittles (dots) are not even whole letters but only parts of letters, and yet they must all stand unchanged as long as this earth remains. The apostle Paul made the same point in his letter to the Galatians when he stressed the fact that God used the singular **"Seed"** rather than the plural seeds when He gave the promise of the Savior to Abraham. **"He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ"** (Galatians 3:16).

In one of His arguments with the Jewish leaders Jesus quoted one verse from Psalm 82 and referred to one word in this verse to make His point. They were accusing Him of blasphemy because He implied that He was the Son of God. This is the unusual way in which Jesus responded to their charge: **"Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods''? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of**

**God”?”** (John 10:34-36). Jesus’ defense centers on that one word **“gods”** that occurs in Psalm 82:6. Jesus was saying that the Bible applies the word **“gods”** to persons to whom the word of God came. How, then, can He be guilty of blasphemy if He applies the word **“God”** to Himself, since He is much more God than those persons to whom the word of God came, since He is the One whom God sent into the world? Notice that Jesus was using just one word from Psalm 82 as the basis for His argument, and of that one word He said: **“The Scripture cannot be broken.”** In other words, that word from the Bible must stand, since it is Scripture that cannot be altered, changed, or corrected. That word stands as the impregnable and indestructible word of God.

In his first letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul assured his readers that the words that he spoke (and wrote) were not his own words but the words of the Holy Spirit: **“The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches”** (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). We cannot know what other people are thinking in their hearts unless they tell us. So also we cannot know what God is thinking unless He tells us. The Holy Spirit knows what God is thinking because He is God. Paul got his teaching about God from the Holy Spirit, and this is what he was teaching. Notice that the very words Paul used in his teaching came from the Holy Spirit. This is why we call it verbal inspiration, that is, word-for-word breathed out by God.

We who are Christians are brought to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin by the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures. After the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Christ through the Scriptures, He uses those same Scriptures to convince us that these Scriptures are the very Word of God, breathed out by God and completely trustworthy in everything that they tell us.

This is the way it was for the Thessalonian Christians. Paul wrote to them afterwards: **“Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance”** (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul and Silas preached the Gospel of Christ, and the Holy Spirit worked through that Gospel to bring the Thessalonians to faith in Christ. The Gospel proved that it was not just a powerless word, but the Holy Spirit’s Word of power that converted them. At the same time the Thessalonians became convinced that the Word that was brought to them was not a merely human word but the very Word of God. Paul wrote to them: **“We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Bible proves that it is the Word of God by what it accomplishes in the hearts of men.

The entire 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm is devoted to the Word of God – what it is and what it accomplishes. Listen to these few verses from this psalm. **“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth”** (Psalm 119:43). **“My soul faints for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word”** (Psalm 119:81). **“I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life”** (Psalm 119:93). **“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”** (Psalm 119:103-105).

After the Holy Spirit has convinced us that the Bible is God’s Word, we find that there are other facts that corroborate this conviction. The Bible has proved itself accurate in matters of history, geography, and chronology. Many times doubters and detractors of the Bible have been proved wrong by archaeological discoveries. One of the most amazing things about the Bible are its prophecies of future events which have been fulfilled later, sometimes almost immediately and sometimes many hundreds of years later, as is the case with the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus, the Christ. Besides that, the Bible has wielded a greater influence for good than any other book, and it has changed the lives of many persons from countries in every part of the world.

We need to remember that God chose to give us the Holy Scriptures in written form, using two ancient languages: Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. It is important for the understanding and teaching of Scripture that some Christians in every group of Christians become familiar with these Bible languages so that they can read the Holy Scriptures in the original languages in which they were written. Only those who know the original languages should attempt to translate the Bible into other languages to ensure that the translation is as accurate as possible.

Nevertheless, good translations are also the Word of God, and we should accept such a translation as the Word of God. But if there is a question about the meaning of some word or phrase, we must always go back to the original language as the authority to determine what God actually said. Pastors and teachers of God's Word should try to become as familiar as they can with the original languages so that they can be confident that they are correctly teaching the very Word of God.

God's Word will endure forever. It is written: **"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven"** (Psalm 119:89). Jesus Himself said: **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"** (Matthew 24:35). This echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah: **"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever"** (Isaiah 40:8). From time to time God's enemies have attempted to get rid of the writings of the Bible, but they have never managed to succeed. Those who have accepted the Bible as God's Word have continued to make copies of it, at first by hand and in our time with printing presses and copy machines of all kinds. When King Jehoiakim of Judah tossed the writings of the prophet Jeremiah into the fire, God saw to it that Jeremiah's secretary Baruch would be able to write them down again (Jeremiah 36:27-28). The apostle Peter wrote that we who believe in Jesus have **"been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"** (1 Peter 1:23).

## Questions

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1. Name some of the persons God chose to write the books of the Bible.
2. Why do we say that the writers of the Bible were not simply secretaries taking dictation from God?
3. Why do we say that the Holy Spirit is the true author of the Holy Scriptures?
4. What is meant by the term "verbal inspiration"?
5. What is the meaning of the Greek word *"theopneustos"*?
6. How did Jesus show He accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
7. What did the apostle Paul claim for the words he spoke and wrote?
8. How did the Thessalonians receive the teaching of the apostles?
9. What makes the Bible different from every other book in the world?
10. How has archaeology corroborated the teachings of the Bible?
11. How has prophecy shown that God is the true author of Holy Scripture?
12. Why is it important for church leaders to learn Hebrew and Greek?
13. When can we regard Bible translations as the Word of God?