

INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The Book of Books

The Bible is unique among books. It claims to come from God. Other religious books may claim to come from God, but they always prove inferior in their message and reliability. Books like the Koran, the Book of Mormon, or the Hindu Vedas cannot match the Bible for its sublimity nor for its consistent ability to penetrate the depths of the human heart.¹ The Bible alone gives voice to man's greatest aspirations of worship of the living God, and the Bible alone gives God's answer for man's greatest need of reconciliation with a holy God.

The Bible's singleness of purpose and its consistent treatment of man's condition and God's nature set it apart from other religious guides. The Bible's message is the same from the beginning of history to its closing pages that foretell the culmination of history. For a book that was written over a period of 1500 years, its unity is remarkable.

From Sacred Message to Sacred Scriptures

The writing of the Old Testament spanned a millennium from the days of Moses to the days of Malachi. Before Moses and even before the flood there were God-fearing souls who preserved the stories of their encounters with God, as well as His revelations and promises to them. These early accounts were preserved in an era of exacting oral tradition that carefully related the details and substance of the message from generation to generation.²

With God's founding of a holy nation at Sinai to worship and serve Him, God would give a written record of His will. There Moses transcribes from God the Book of the Covenant.³ It contains the Ten Commandments and the civil and religious code that Israel would live by in union with God. Forty years later, Moses wrote down the amplified version of God's law code for the generation coming up out of the wilderness.⁴ So sacred was this covenant law that it was deposited inside the ark of the covenant in the house of God's dwelling. In effect, this covenant law from God was the holy nation's constitution. More than that, it was God's infallible word of revelation to a chosen people.⁵

The Biblical teaching of the divine inspiration of Scriptures begins with Moses' deposit of the record that he had transcribed from God. The two facts that covenant document was given by God through His mediator, Moses, and that it was preserved in a sacrosanct place speak of the special nature of that law. Added to this beginning was the warning that none should add to God's word in that document nor take away from them.⁶ They accurately reflected the perfect will of God.⁷

The deposit of the sacred writings in the sacred place was the beginning of the recognition of the sacred Scriptures. It set a precedent in the minds of God's people that what God had spoken through His mediator, Moses, could and should be preserved in writing for review by future generations. Following on the heels of the written constitution came the subsequent sacred history written by Joshua and other recognized mediators after him. God was continuing to do wonders, and His prophets were confirming His message with predictions that could be verified.⁸ Because of the organic unity of God's workings, it was an easy step from receiving the Torah as God's scripture to receiving the scrolls of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, et. al., as the continuing sacred record.

Prophetic Predictions

A key element that argues for the divine nature of the Bible is prophetic prediction. A stream of predictions is given in the Hebrew Scriptures, some short-term, and others with a longer horizon. Sometimes short and long-term predictions are uttered in the same message in order to confirm the surety of the distant prophecy when the near prophecy is fulfilled.⁹

In either case predictive prophecies are given by God's servants to verify the validity of their prophetic message. This test is necessary because of false prophets who may claim God's sanction but who really are leading people away from God. Therefore God gives the necessary test of early religious leaders proving their credentials:

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.¹⁰

Predictions recorded through the Bible, likewise, confirm the authenticity of the Bible's message. The approximately 200 predictive passages of the OT,¹¹ many of which were fulfilled before and at the first coming of Christ, are offered as rational proof of the supernatural nature of these Scriptures. The Old Testament, like the New Testament, offers its own falsification test to verify itself and to discredit counterfeits. Other religious books cannot and do not make the same kind of detailed predictions that the Holy Scriptures do.

How the OT Viewed Itself

From the days of Moses the writers of the OT had a self-conscious knowledge of the divine origin of their message. The prophetic writers may not always have understood the timing or the end of their message from God,¹² but they faithfully transmitted it. God's people received it as the voice of majesty, and the angels contemplated the mystery of grace.

God's prophetic messengers did not generally rush to become mediators of God's Word. Jeremiah is illustrative of the sentiment of others like Moses and Amos when he relates the difficulty and even human opposition in preaching and conveying God's Word: "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart

like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”¹³
Jeremiah recorded God’s Word even though his disobedient king might destroy it in the fire.

The prophets and canonical writers persevered in their calling of putting God’s Word to paper. It was not their inspired message, but God’s. Anyone who reads the Old Testament will find more than 2,000 occurrences of the introductory formula, “Thus saith the Lord.” Without controversy, the biblical writers understood that God was the author of the message.

The sweet Psalmist of Israel gives one of the clearest expressions of a writer consciously channeling God’s Word. David claims, “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me....” This passage (2 Sam 23:1-3) is doubly interesting because the Psalm found in the preceding chapter, 2 Samuel 22, is nearly the verbatim form of Psalm 18. In 2 Samuel 23 the Psalmist comments on the divine nature of the Psalms (like Psalm 18) that were appointed for God’s temple praise. Some Psalms may have arisen out of the Psalmist’s life experience, but the end result of the Psalm came by God’s Spirit speaking through the Psalmist.

OT claims of God’s superintendence of His canonical prophets does not prove conclusively that the Old Testament was inspired. These matter-of-fact claims, just the same, are strong indications of how the writers understood and explained their cohesive message that spanned the centuries before Christ.

How the NT Writers Viewed the OT

The concept of the sacred canon was established well before NT times. By Daniel’s time there is reference to the “Scripture of truth”¹⁴ to describe a heavenly revelation. The word for “Scripture” may be translated “writing,” but the New Testament commonly uses this word in a technical, theological sense. “Scripture” and “scriptures” in the NT are used in a matter of fact way to reference the canonical writings of the Old Testament.

Jesus taught the authority and inspiration of the OT because the stream of the OT canon led to Him as God’s Messiah. After His resurrection He walked incognito with two of His disciples; to them He “expounded” the Scriptures, He “opened” the Scriptures, and finally He “opened their understanding” so that they might comprehend the Scriptures.¹⁵

Jesus and the NT writers often spoke of the [OT] Scripture being fulfilled. The OT was not an outdated, dead message nor a dark message with lucky predictions; it was a living message that looked for a terminus of fulfillment in the Messiah. It was full of life when God breathed it into existence, much as God gave life to Adam by His own breath.¹⁶

It was the law that Jesus lived by while on earth; He insisted that God’s law to the smallest part would be fulfilled by Himself. The language of Matthew 5:18, where Jesus speaks of the smallest part of Hebrew alphabet (“jot”) and even the smallest part of a Hebrew letter (“tittle”), implies that the very words of the divine record that contained the law were intentional.

Jesus' words here support the doctrine of verbal inspiration. His high view of OT Scripture, from its parts to its purpose, is expressed in His statement, "...the Scripture cannot be broken."¹⁷

Conclusion

Peter believed his Master's teaching about the OT canon. It was nothing less than God's inspired Word. It is not inferior to the New Testament; rather it was the corpus of writing that shaped the thought and words of Jesus and His apostles. In his final own canonical message, Peter affirmed that "The prophecy [of the OT prophetic Scriptures] came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."¹⁸ Any other words apart from God's canonical Word can never have the same power of God's Spirit to change lives and move the world and tease angels.

¹ Gleason Archer observes that "The Book of Mormon is vitiated by many historical inconsistencies and inaccuracies, and the Koran (which is claimed to have been dictated from a heavenly archetype coeternal with Allah) exhibits not only the most startling historical inaccuracies but also the changing viewpoints of a human author (Muhammed) in the light of the current events of his own day." (*Survey of OT Introduction*, rev. ed., p. 23). See his Appendices #2 & #3 for a listing of anachronisms and historical inaccuracies in the Koran and in the Book of Mormon.

² A tome like Homer's *Odyssey* in the early first millennium was transmitted orally for generations before it was put to paper. Even earlier the dramatic account of Job probably was preserved orally before being written.

³ Exo 24:4, 7.

⁴ Deut 31:9-13.

⁵ "...to [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2).

⁶ Deut 4:2; cf. the similar warning at the end of the canon of Scriptures in Rev 22:18.

⁷ "...those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29b).

⁸ A key test of a true prophet is whether his short-term predictions came true (Deut 18:21, 22).

⁹ Examples of near and far predictions combined together are the two advents of Jesus seen in Isa 61:1-2 and Zech 9:8-10.

¹⁰ Deut 18:22.

¹¹ J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* catalogs 600 topics of prediction in the whole Bible that have already been fulfilled, with another 127 topics foretelling the Lord's return.

¹² 1 Pet 1:10-12.

¹³ Jer 20:9.

¹⁴ Dan 10:21.

¹⁵ Luke 24:27, 32, 45.

¹⁶ 2 Tim 3:16 refers to the OT Scriptures that were "God-breathed" (see the Greek). Consider also the witness of Heb 4:12 to the living Word.

¹⁷ John 10:35.

¹⁸ 2 Pet 1:21.