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# Inspiration



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# Introduction

The topic of miraculous inspiration is often overlooked, treated in an overly-simplistic manner, or simply ignored in much of what is called ‘biblical scholarship’ today. However, it is very important that we take the time and energy necessary to delve into this issue as it is the root of our understanding of the scriptures.

A misunderstanding of inspiration is responsible for many of the attacks made on the bible. Efforts are made to set one author against another, twist plain biblical teachings, and dilute the message of Christ by denying the manner in which the word has been given to us. The author of this study is hopeful that the student will take the time to consider the ramifications of each individual lesson as placed alongside the topic as a whole.

**Some of the questions the student should keep in mind include:**

Why has God chosen to give His will in this manner?

What impact does culture play upon the process of inspiration?

What impact does the individual being inspired have upon the message of God?

How often, and to what extent, does the change of culture affect our interpretation of what was inspired by God?

What is our goal in handling the inspired word?

By careful study and reflection not only can we come to a better understanding of miraculous inspiration but we can also come to a better understanding of ourselves as His children. May God grant us wisdom as we consider the process by which truth was made known by the apostles and prophets before us.

“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.”

(1 Corinthians 2:10)



# A Bold Claim

## IN PREPARATION

READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17  
AND EPHESIANS 3:1-5

### QUESTIONS

WHAT IS INSPIRATION?

WHY HAS GOD  
INSPIRED PEOPLE?

WHY IS THE INSPIRED  
MESSAGE IMPORTANT  
FOR EVERYONE?

HOW CAN WE KNOW  
IF A MESSAGE IS  
INSPIRED BY GOD OR  
NOT?

## What is inspiration?

Artists and musicians often remark on the events around them that “inspired” the painting or song they recently completed. In the sense in which the word is often used, the word “inspiration” merely means ‘any thing or event that influences thought or action.’ While we find such inspiration in many places and for many purposes, the claim of inspiration made by the apostles and prophets is much greater.

Consider the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Contextually, Paul was referring to the writings of the Old Testament that Timothy grew up learning. However, his words are not limited to those writings alone. In fact, in Ephesians 3:1–5 Paul claims that the message he wrote and preached was also given by God, and Peter says the same of his own message (2 Peter 1:12, 16, 19–21) and of Paul’s (2 Peter 3:15).



# A Bold Claim

Note the implicit and explicit claims of 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

## 1. **There is a God.**

If there were no God then He would not exist to inspire. God's existence is assumed throughout the Scriptures. As David wrote, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 14:1)

## 2. **He has "inspired" people.**

The word translated "inspired" (NASB) literally means "God-breathed." In order for Scriptures to be from God, then people –since men are the penmen of these books– must have received God's message.

That God would "breathe" a word to mankind shows that He must have an interest in humanity. While Agnostics claim there is no knowledge of God and Deists claim God has no dealings with His creation, Paul claims that God has acted to inspire men with a knowledge of His will.

## 3. **Inspired persons have written His message down.**

Some of those who have received the message of God in a miraculous manner have written it down or else there would be no Scripture. The power of such a thought is in the end result; these words are not merely bits of wisdom from men. Paul says of his own writing, "when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ... as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." (Ephesians 3:4–5) Without these written words we would be in a predicament of ignorance concerning God's will.



# A Bold Claim

## 4. These inspired messages are authoritative.

We are told to use Scripture “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” (v. 16) If these were merely the writings of men they should not hold such a sway over us! As human equals we critique one another and challenge one another– and as well we should. Debate and divergent views are to be expected among us. However, there is a standard delivered by God that true instruction comes from.

When one is inspired by God, their message is not to be considered as an opinion or debatable position among men. Rather, when proven to be a message from God, we should be submissive to the heavenly teaching. Not only on the negative side (‘thou shalt not’s and the like) but on the positive side (‘thou shall’).

## 5. These writings equip us for “every good work.”

What is “good”? Such a question will receive various answers depending upon the values one holds. When Paul claims that inspired writings equip us for every good work, it is a value statement. Contextually, the “good” must be according to God. As He has “breathed” the message, He is the one communicating what “good” is to Him. He is equipping us to do good as He sees it.

God’s view of what is good should be esteemed highly by all mankind! He is our creator and sustainer of life (Acts 17:24–28). He is holy and righteous above all (1 Peter 1:14–16). And He will judge all against the “good” of the message given mankind (John 12:48, 2 Corinthians 5:10).



# A Bold Claim

## Is it a lie?

In a later lesson we will examine several accounts where individuals claimed to be inspired by God but were lying. The question is then raised, “How can we know if one is truly inspired by God or not?” The apostle John told the brethren, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) How can we “test the spirits”?

## Do claims of future events come to pass?

Read Deuteronomy 18:18–22.

To “prophecy” is to speak miraculously the mind of God. Many times a message of prophecy does not consist of a future event, but when a future event is announced and it does not come to pass “you shall not be afraid of him.”

## Is there a known prophet who will vouch for the messenger?

The apostles publicly supported the apostleship and inspiration of Paul (Acts 9:27–28). Their approval won a respectful position for Paul among the brethren. While Paul did not need the other apostles approval for his message to be true, having inspired men agree with him certainly helped the audience.

## Does the message harmonize with the other inspired messages?

“As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the Lord is tested...” (2 Samuel 23:1) God will not contradict Himself. The word of a prophet will not contradict the other messages God has inspired. If it does then that one is not speaking the mind of God!



# A Bold Claim

## **Was the prophecy confirmed with a miracle?**

When Jesus sent the apostles to preach the word He sent them with the power to perform miracles. (Matthew 10:1) He did this with a purpose in mind; to confirm the word they spoke. “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.” (Mark 16:20)

The Lord did not expect people to believe the apostles without evidence. Neither should we believe a supposed “inspired one” without evidence!

## **Is the supposed prophet (or prophetess) living during the time of inspiration?**

It would be wrong for us to assume that prophecy was meant to last indefinitely. While a future study will focus on this point particularly, we should remember the words of Paul; “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away... For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.” (1 Corinthians 13:8–10)

A limit of time was placed on miraculous inspiration. We would be wise to consider whether an individual claiming inspiration is speaking before or after this time period came to an end.

## **Conclusion**

Claiming to be “inspired by God” is a bold claim! Yet, by testing to see “whether these things [are] so” we can prove, or disprove, this claim. (Acts 17:11) In this and all areas we should strive to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)





# A Bold Claim

**How do people today commonly use the term “inspiration”? How does that compare to the biblical topic of miraculous inspiration?**

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**How does the existence of miraculous inspiration contradict the teachings of Agnostics and Deists?**

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**How does 2 Timothy 3:16–17 imply that the Scriptures are authoritative? What should that mean for our lives?**

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**How can we test to see if a supposed prophet is truly inspired by God?**

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# A Work of the Spirit

## IN PREPARATION

READ JOHN 16:1-15  
AND 1 CORINTHIANS  
2

## QUESTIONS

WHO SENT THE SPIRIT  
TO MANKIND?

HOW DOES THE SPIRIT  
KNOW WHAT TO  
REVEAL TO THE  
PROPHETS?

IN WHAT WAYS DOES  
THE SPIRIT GUIDE THE  
PROPHET IN  
DECLARING THE  
WORD?

If to prophesy is ‘to speak the mind of God,’ inspiration is the means through which a prophet comes to know the mind of God. Without miraculous inspiration there would have been no prophets, nor would there have been an inspired word. In this lesson we are seeking to explore the Holy Spirit’s task regarding miraculous inspiration: How He is sent, how He receives the message, and the guidance that is given.

## The Spirit is Sent

At various times and in various ways, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of inspiring men. Numerous times Scripture speaks of God “pouring out” the Spirit (Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 39:29, etc.). Jesus elaborates on the Spirit’s work in John 14:26 saying, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” In further explanation Jesus says,

“I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7)

Note that in 14:26 Jesus says the Father will send the Spirit “in my name,” yet in 16:7 Jesus says “I will send Him.” When the Spirit was sent to begin this work on the day of Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, the apostles proclaimed that Jesus, “having received



# A Work of the Spirit

from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you now see and hear.” (Acts 2:33) After His resurrection, Jesus was given authority over all except the Father (1 Corinthians 15:27–28). Therefore, the Father sent the Spirit “in His name” (that is, ‘by His authority’) and so it can be rightly said that “[Jesus] poured forth” the Spirit.

The Spirit’s work was essential to the proclaiming of the gospel. Without His work the apostles would not have had the understanding capable of spreading the gospel to all and building local churches according to the true pattern.

## The Spirit Searches

Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit was to

“guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me for He will take of what is Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of what is Mine and will disclose it to you.” (John 16:13–15)

Just as Jesus was sent by the Father with a purpose to carry out (John 3:16) so the Spirit was given the task of ‘guiding into all the truth.’ But how was He to accomplish such a task? The apostle Paul explains;

“For to us God revealed [these truths] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God... which things we also speak...” (1 Corinthians 2:10–13)

In order to reveal the truth to mankind the Spirit searches out the will of God and then reveals it, according to the task given Him. Praise be to God that our faith does not “rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God”! (1 Corinthians 2:5)



# A Work of the Spirit

## The Spirit Guides

Having been given the task and having searched God for the message, the Spirit imparted it to the apostles and prophets. The message has a purpose for the inspired teachers, as well as for those who sit at their feet; to guide into all truth. As we considered in the last lesson, the purpose of Scripture is to make the man of God “equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17) This ‘equipping’ is done by grounding us in all that is spiritually necessary for our salvation.

The Spirit also guided the prophets in determining when to reveal the message of God. For instance, having revealed thoughts and purpose of God to Daniel, he was told to “conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time...” (Daniel 12:4) Although the message had been given, it was not yet time for others to know of it. At other times, the inspired message was not given until the moment was appropriate. Consider the words of Jesus to the apostles concerning their future persecutions;

“When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:11–12)

The apostles were to trust that the Spirit would guide when the time was right and not to even worry about what they would say. The Spirit’s guidance of the prophet allowed God to work out His will much more effectively than any man could do by his own wisdom.

In a secondary manner, the Spirit also guides the spiritually minded student of the word. As Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my and a light to my path.” If we are to be “led by the Spirit” we must humbly conform our lives to the word He has delivered to humanity!



# A Work of the Spirit

**Who did Jesus say would send the Spirit after His ascension? What do His words reveal about His authority?**

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**What did Jesus tell the apostles the Spirit was coming to do? How does the Spirit's work accomplish the purposes mentioned in John 16:7-11?**

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**Was the Spirit's work in the early church important for the spreading of the gospel? Why or why not?**

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**Does the Spirit guide us today? If so, how and why?**

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# Being Inspired

## IN PREPARATION

READ ACTS 26 AND  
EXODUS 3-4

## QUESTIONS

WHAT EMOTIONS DO  
YOU THINK THE  
PROPHETS FELT WHEN  
FIRST CONVERSING  
WITH GOD?

HOW DO YOU THINK  
GOD CHOOSES WHO  
TO SEND?

WHY WOULD A  
PERSON REJECT  
GOD'S ASSIGNMENT?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN  
FROM THE PROPHET'S  
EXAMPLES?

It can be difficult to empathize with the inspired servants of God since we have never been miraculously inspired. Through the study of Scripture and its subsequent explanation of inspiration a pattern begins to emerge that can aid us in our empathy. In this study we seek to ask, "What was it like to receive the call and be a messenger for God?" A knowledge of the pattern is, therefore, necessary for our understanding.

It should be noted that inspiration has not always happened in the same way. In a future lesson we will be looking at a few outlying examples. This lesson will be examining what seems to have been most typical.

## Conversing with God

The "first contact" a future-prophet had with God was often conversational in nature. Consider a few examples:

### Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-10)

Hearing the voice of the Lord for the first time, Samuel thought Eli was calling to him. Finally, he answered the call by saying, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:9)

### Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

Upon hearing what the Lord purposed for him, Jeremiah objected due to his youth. The Lord was not persuaded and only further pressed Jeremiah.



# Being Inspired

## **Amos (Amos 7:12–15)**

Amos says of himself, “I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and grower of sycamore fruit.” (Amos 7:14) That is, before the Lord came to him for this work he was just a regular man– working and providing with his hands. However, the Lord came to him and told him, “Go prophesy to My people...” (Amos 7:15) Thus we see that Amos’ work also began by a conversation with the Lord.

## **Paul (Acts 26:1–15)**

Although Paul was a persecutor of Christians, Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and spoke with him. This conversation changed Paul’s focus and goals in life. Once a murderer of Christians, Paul was to become one of the greatest Christian prophets– an apostle of the faith.

## **Assignment of Task**

Not every prophet had the same task. Although they all were to preach the inspired word given them, they were assigned different locations, audiences, and messages. Consider a few of the tasks given:

### **Deliver My people (Exodus 3:10–17)**

Moses was assigned the task of bringing the people forth from Egypt and leading them to the promised land. Although he doubted his ability, as several of the prophets did, the Lord knew him better than he knew himself.

### **Preach, ‘Repent or be destroyed’ (Isaiah 6:8–13)**

Isaiah’s task was to preach to a hard hearted people “until cities are devastated and without inhabitant...” (Isaiah 6:11) Although the Lord knew that the people would not repent of their deeds, the message was to be preached to them until their destruction came.



# Being Inspired

## **Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16–18)**

Jesus told Paul that his work was to primarily preach to the Gentiles. The Lord, knowing His purposed task, is not foolish in choosing whom to send. Paul later said that “God, who had set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...” (Galatians 1:15–16)

## **Acceptance or Rejection of the Duty**

Although the Lord has assigned a task, the prophet still has free will and can choose to obey or disobey the Lord— just as all men today are called to Christ through the gospel but can choose for themselves to receive or reject the invitation. (2 Thessalonians 2:13–15) We see prophets respond in both ways in Scripture.

### **“You shall eat no bread” (1 Kings 13:7–24)**

One identified only as “the man of God” in 1 Kings 13 was assigned the task by the Lord to preach to Jeroboam of Israel. Part of the assigned task was to “eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came.” (1 Kings 13:9) The prophet initially accepted the task and went. On the return trip he was deceived by another and went into the man’s home and ate. Due to his disobedience a lion killed him. Although a prophet, he had choice— and he chose poorly.

### **“Go to Nineveh” (Jonah 1:1–3)**

Jonah was told to preach in Nineveh, but he chose to disobey the voice of the Lord. He escaped by ship but was hurled into the sea and swallowed by a great fish. After he humbled himself to obey the Lord (Jonah 2) the fish vomited him up and he did the work he was assigned.





# Being Inspired

## **“I did not prove disobedient” (Acts 26:19–20)**

Paul heard the assignment from God, accepted it, and went to the work. A prophet who accepted the task could expect the aid and inspired word from the Lord in carrying out their mission.

## **Onto the Work**

The prophets were tasked with being a vessel for the word of the Lord. As Paul described Isaiah’s preaching he said, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers...” (Acts 28:25) For the message he preached, Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden blade. Nevertheless, it was essential that the work be done. In Ezekiel 33 God tells Ezekiel of his duty; “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me.” (Ezekiel 33:7) The Lord goes on to say that if Ezekiel does not preach to the wicked they will die– and their blood will be on his hands. If they do not repent upon hearing the message they will still die, but their blood will be on their own hands. (Ezekiel 33:8–9) What a responsibility!

The prophets often suffered discouragement, trials, persecutions, and sometimes death for doing the work of God. At one point Jeremiah purposed to no longer preach the word. He went on to explain, “But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak any more in His name,’ Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.” (Jeremiah 20:9) Although a difficult life, the prophets were typically driven by their unquenchable love for truth and God.

Despite hardships, the reward attained for the faithful far exceeds any suffering in the present realm. We would do well to learn from the examples of the apostles and prophets.



# Being Inspired

**Samuel became a prophet at a young age. What does that teach us about being a prophet? How did Samuel prove (or disprove) his ability in 1 Samuel 3?**

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**God chose different men for different tasks. What does that suggest to you about the nature of being a prophet? Does God view personality as relevant to the work?**

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**Why was God angry with the “man of God” (1 Kings 13) for stopping to eat with another prophet? What can we learn from the example?**

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**Compare Jeremiah’s words in Jeremiah 21:9 with Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:16. Do these statements reflect the conscience of the prophets, the importance of God’s assignment, or both? Explain.**

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# Subject to the Prophets

## IN PREPARATION

READ NUMBERS 22  
AND 1 CORINTHIANS  
14

## QUESTIONS

WHY DOES A  
PROPHET NEED SELF-  
CONTROL?

WHAT PROBLEMS DO  
YOU THINK THE EARLY  
CHURCH SUFFERED  
FROM PROPHETS  
LACKING SELF-  
CONTROL?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN  
FROM THE MISTAKES  
OF THE PROPHET  
BALAAM?

We saw in the last lesson that a prophet may choose to accept or reject the assignment from God upon the initial call to prophesy. It is also true that a prophet could, in general, choose to speak or not speak the miraculous message given from God.

## Self- Control Required

A prophet must have self-control in order to be effective. There were many prophets in the early church and the message was being poured out abundantly as was prophesied beforehand in Joel 2:28-29;

“It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

Peter saw the fulfillment of this prophecy beginning on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:16ff) The message was poured out on the church so that the early Christians were to be “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7). However, this miraculous spiritual gift, like all of the others listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, could be abused. What if miraculous inspiration were given to an individual during worship while another was prophesying? When situations like this one did arise, Paul taught the following;



# Subject to the Prophets

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirit of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” (1 Corinthians 14:29–33)

When Paul says “the spirit of prophets are subject to prophets,” he gives us a glimpse into the self-control that is required to prophesy properly. Inspiration was a great gift, but if wielded by an uncontrolled prophet it could become the cause of distraction rather than edification in the church.

## Lacking Self-Control

Balaam was a prophet of old who was weak in self-control and almost made a terrible blunder. Numbers 22 records the account for us. Balak, king of the Moabites, was afraid of the Israelites who were camped nearby during their wilderness wandering. He sent messengers to Balaam, a prophet of God, saying, “Please come, curse this people for me... perhaps I may be able to defeat them...” (Numbers 22:6)

God told Balaam not to go with the messengers but Balaam eventually went, not to preach the truth to them, but as Peter explains, “Balaam... loved the wages of unrighteousness...” (2 Peter 2:15) His love of money and lack of self-control nearly cost him his life. However, “a mute donkey, speaking with the voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.” (2 Peter 2:16) When Balaam finally arrived before Balak he spoke the word of God and refused to curse the people.

Just as Balaam would have sinned before God had he cursed the Israelites, so would the Corinthian prophets have sinned if they had refused to obey the commands of the apostle and keep their services orderly. It is a great responsibility to receive the inspired message and prophesy for the Lord.



# Subject to the Prophets

## **Boldness Required**

Self-control is also necessary for the prophets to have boldness at the right moments. Would you have had the boldness to deliver the message even when it was unpleasant for the recipient? Samuel's first message was difficult for him to deliver to Eli. (1 Samuel 3:11-18) Eldad and Medad prophesied during the days of Moses and even Joshua, who would later become the leader of the people, wanted to silence them! We read,

“a young man ran and told Moses... ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ Then Joshua... said, ‘Moses, my lord, restrain them.’ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!’” (Numbers 11:27-29)

Not all prophets were so blessed to have a leader to defend them! The apostles would face persecutors as well. Jesus told them,

“But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say... Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:19, 32-33)

Although they would be given the message, they could choose to speak boldly or to be conquered by fear. Jesus reminds them to confess Him and be confessed in heaven.

Although we are not given miraculous inspiration of God, we do have His inspired word to stand on. Let us also have self-control with His word that we can be silent when needed and speak boldly when necessary.



# Subject to the Prophets

**Does the prophecy in Joel 2 mean that every person on earth would prophesy? Does it mean that all Christians would prophesy? Use the book of Acts to support your answer.**

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**What does it mean that “the spirit of prophets is subject to prophets”?**

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**How did Balaam lack self-control? Have you ever lacked self control in a similar manner? How did you overcome it?**

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**What did Jesus tell the apostles would be their punishment if they denied Him? What are some ways that we can deny Him today? Is the punishment the same?**

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# Plenary Inspiration?

## IN PREPARATION

READ ACTS 8:25-40  
AND 2 CORINTHIANS  
4

## QUESTIONS

WHAT AFFECT, IF ANY,  
DOES THE PROPHET  
HAVE ON THE  
PROPHECY?

WHY DO THE  
PROPHETS DIFFER  
FROM ONE ANOTHER  
IF THE MESSAGE IS  
INSPIRED BY GOD?

WHY HAS GOD  
CHOSEN TO GIVE HIS  
MESSAGE THROUGH  
PROPHETS?

“Plenary Inspiration” is the theological term used to describe the idea that the Scriptures are inerrant, having been dictated by God through the Holy Spirit. In this lesson we are seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the message given through the Spirit to the prophets. While we have already seen that the word is given through the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16–17, 1 Corinthians 2:10–12, etc.) we may still ask, “What effect does the person inspired have upon the message given?”

## Differences in Prophets

One may object to plenary inspiration due to the differences found in the language and style of the prophets. For instance, Luke uses medical terms throughout his writings— a trait unique to this physician. The apostle John writes in a very distinct manner as well— emphasizing the deity of Jesus and love between brethren. Certainly the prophets of the old law were very different from one another in their presentation and emphasis. Yet, if the Holy Spirit is the author, how can that be? Shouldn’t all of the messages contain the same style and characteristics if they are given through the same Spirit? After all, Peter says,

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20–21)



# Plenary Inspiration?

## One Divine Source

Throughout the Scriptures we find inspired people claiming that their message came from one source despite their stylistic and linguistic differences. Certainly Peter knew that he and Paul had different styles, yet he says, “our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you... which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of Scriptures...” (2 Peter 3:15–16) Peter not only claimed Paul’s wisdom was “given him,” but also implies that Paul’s writings are Scripture.

When Jesus was telling the apostles that they would be given the message to speak when standing before their persecutors He also said, “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” (Matthew 10:20) Did Jesus not know that they would use different words to convey the message?

Nehemiah knew of the stylistic differences of the prophets of old, yet when speaking to God he said, “You bore with [the Israelites] for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear.” (Nehemiah 9:30) Nehemiah also knew the prophets were different from one another, yet believed the Spirit spoke through each of them.

Are modern bible students the only ones wise enough in the history of the world to see the differences in speech among the prophets? Could Peter, Jesus, and Nehemiah not recognize the stylistic variations from prophet to prophet? Certainly they could. Yet, they did not see this as evidence of a lack of plenary inspiration. Perhaps we should not be so quick to jump to such a conclusion. If we seek to understand how one Spirit can inspire several people with the same message and yet different terms are used to express it then we need only answer this question; “Why does the Spirit communicate the message through a person at all?”





# Plenary Inspiration?

## Earthen Vessels

The gospel plan of salvation was purposed by God before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20), Jesus was sent by the Father to die (John 3:16), and the Spirit was sent to preach this message to man (1 Peter 1:12). Why then does God not speak directly to unbelievers? The Spirit sends people to preach to unbelievers— He never does it Himself. In Acts 8:25–40, an Ethiopian court official was studying Scripture. An angel of the Lord told Philip, a gospel preacher, “Get up and go south...” and then, “Go up and join this chariot.” (Acts 8:26, 29) He taught the Ethiopian of Christ and then baptized him into the faith. Why didn’t the Spirit teach the man himself?

Saul was a persecutor of Christians who was heading to Damascus to arrest others. Acts 9:1–9 tells us of the bright light that shone around him as Jesus appeared before Saul. However, Jesus did not teach Saul how to be saved. Instead, He told Saul, “get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” (Acts 9:6) Why did Jesus not simply teach Saul Himself? Why did He not send the Spirit to Saul? Jesus sent Ananias, a Christian in Damascus, to Saul instead. (Acts 9:10–19)

Perhaps Paul gives the best explanation in 2 Corinthians 4:5–7;

“For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves...”

The “earthen vessels” refer to people— prophets— who are given the message of God. Paul goes on to speak of the persecutions they face which show their weakness. He knows they lead to death. He seems to be teaching that the



# Plenary Inspiration?

weakness of the prophets shows the strength of the message from God. Although they will die, the message will not die. Although their lives in this realm will be forfeit, their “light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory...” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Since God has chosen to put His message into earthen vessels, it stands to reason that the particular messenger is chosen for a reason. Jesus purposed to make Paul an apostle to the Gentiles for a reason, didn't He? It was not a random choice. The servant chosen will affect the way the task is done. We see, then, the following things about the prophet and message relationship:

## **A prophet speaks his/her own language**

We will speak in a future lesson about the gift of “tongues,” but prophecy and tongues are distinguished from one another. Prophets speak the word of God according to their own language. While most of the Old Testament prophets wrote in Hebrew, Daniel wrote in Hebrew and Aramaic because he knew both languages. Most of the New Testament was originally written in Greek because the authors knew Greek. God chose these men with their knowledge of language for a reason and faculties they already had were put into the service of God.

## **A prophet uses terms familiar to him/her**

We mentioned earlier that Luke uses medical terms in his writing. The education levels of prophets varied. When the Jewish leaders had arrested Peter and John, they were amazed at their preaching because “they were uneducated and untrained men.” (Acts 4:13) Although these men were trained by Jesus and filled with spiritual understanding, they employed the terms they were familiar with to preach the truth of God.



# Plenary Inspiration?

## **A prophet keeps his/her own mannerisms and style**

The fiery style of Hosea is not the same as the ‘Weeping Prophet’ Jeremiah. Each of these prophets come to their task with their own personalities and demeanors. The Lord knew that about them before He chose them for the work. Sometimes He desired a soft spoken messenger; other times He wanted a ‘fireball.’ He placed the appropriate message in each for the task. As God told Moses, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” (Exodus 3:11) The Lord knew that Moses was the right man for the job, despite what Moses thought, because the Lord knew both the task and Moses!

Is the message from God? Yes. Is plenary inspiration real? Yes. But does that disregard the earthen vessel chosen for the task? No. After all, God chose these people for a reason!



# Plenary Inspiration?

**What is “plenary inspiration”? Do the bible authors claim to be inspired in this way?**

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**What evidence do some use to argue against plenary inspiration?**

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**What does Paul mean when he refers to the message in “earthen vessels”?**

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**Why is the issue of plenary inspiration important? Why do you think many do not want plenary inspiration to be true?**

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# Living and Active

## IN PREPARATION

READ HEBREWS 3-4

## QUESTIONS

WHY ARE WRITINGS THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF US REGARDING THE HANDLING OF INSPIRED WRITINGS?

HOW CAN I HELP OR HINDER GOD'S TASK FOR HIS INSPIRED WORDS?

The inspired prophets had a great work to do during the days of their assignments. We should not think that their work ceased when their lives ended. In fact, since the word they preached was from God Himself it is sometimes represented as having the attributes of God. For instance, in Hebrews 3 and 4 the prophet speaks of the wilderness wandering of Israel and the judgment upon them because of their unbelief. Using this example, he urges the Christians to heed the warnings for their own faith and says;

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

Let us consider some of the attributes of the inspired word in this text.

### “the word of God is living”

The Hebrew author explained this principle to remind the Christians that, although thousands of years old, the inspired word is still relevant to our lives. Paul told the Philippian Christians to continue “holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory” in them. (Philippians 2:16) The word does not change with the times or lose relevance, but “is living” in that it continues to teach the will of God. After all, God has spoken and His words are “words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)



# Living and Active

The inspired word teaches in eternal principles. Although our culture is very different from the culture of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, the will of God is the same just as God Himself is the same. (See Hebrews 13:8) The inspired words, particularly those that were written down for our learning, will be the standard by which we are judged. Jesus Himself says, “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him in the last day.” (John 12:48)

Since this word is so important it makes sense that God will keep it from perishing. Peter explains,

“you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is as grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.” (1 Peter 1:23–25)

Although wicked men may try, as many have, to destroy the word of God the Christian knows that it will remain even until judgment.

## “and active”

The word for “active” in Hebrews 4:12 also means “effective.” The purpose is to express that the inspired word is not stagnant, but rather it accomplishes the purpose of God in a zealous manner. God explains through Isaiah,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10–11)

When the Lord pours His word upon the prophets He knows exactly what He is doing. So, **what is His word purposed to accomplish today?**



# Living and Active

## **It warns of judgment**

The inspired word left for us in the Bible warns of the return of the Lord and the destruction that will fall upon the world. The Spirit through Paul proclaims,

“the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8)

Without the inspired word we would be ignorant of the coming judgment.

## **It preaches salvation in Jesus**

Salvation from judgment for our sins is found in Jesus. Without the word we would be ignorant of the Christ. “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

## **It teaches godly standards of living**

Having become Christians, the inspired word tells us how to live in a godly manner.

“Therefore, prepare you minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely upon the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:13–16)

Praise be to God who has revealed His will so plainly for us!



# Living and Active

## **“sharper than any two-edged sword”**

The inspired word, being figuratively pictured as having the attributes of the One who gave it, is said to be so ‘sharp’ that it can pierce “as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) There will be no deception concerning our handling and respect of God’s word. As the text continues, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:13) Many claim ignorance of God’s will but are lying to themselves and God.

God has purposed His word to accomplish His task. Would we be so foolish as to fight against it? “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)





# Living and Active

**In what way is the word of God “living”?**

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**The inspired word is said to be “active.” What does the idea teach us about the purpose God has for His word?**

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**Can you think of any other purposes God’s word is accomplishing? What helps or hinders the word in its tasks?**

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**What is the purpose of telling Christians that ‘nothing is hidden from His sight’?**

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# Speaking in Tongues

## IN PREPARATION

READ ACTS 2 AND  
I CORINTHIANS 14

## QUESTIONS

WHY DID GOD  
CHOOSE TO POUR  
OUT THE GIFT OF  
TONGUE SPEAKING?

HOW DOES SPEAKING  
IN TONGUES RELATE  
TO PROPHECY?

HOW DID SOME  
EARLY CHRISTIANS  
ABUSE THIS SPIRITUAL  
GIFT?

Some may wonder why a lesson on the miraculous speaking of tongues would be included in a lesson book on inspiration. The relationship of tongue speakers and prophets in the early church show that, although distinct spiritual gifts, tongue speakers were miraculously speaking the mind of God—only in a foreign language formerly unknown to the speaker!

## Defining “Tongues”

Much of the confusion that exists surrounding the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues stems from a biblical misunderstanding of what it is. The word translated “tongues” in the New Testament (Acts 2:4, et al) is defined by Strong’s Greek as “the tongue; by implication, a language (specially, one naturally unacquired).” The Greek word was commonly used to describe foreign languages.

In Acts 2 the apostles received the ability to speak foreign languages (“tongues”) for the purpose of spreading the gospel. In Acts 2:4 we read that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” As “devout men from every nation” were coming together, we are told that “each one of them was hearing [the apostles] speak in his own language.” (Acts 2:5–6) With twelve apostles speaking, they were seemingly all speaking in



# Speaking in Tongues

different languages. Some have misunderstood the event to think that one apostle spoke and it was heard in several languages, but the miracle took place in the mouths of the apostles not in the ears of the hearers. Each apostle spoke a different tongue so the people said, “are not all these who are speaking Galileans?... [We] hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.” (Acts 2:7, 11) Thus we see that speaking in “tongues” referred to the speaking of human foreign languages, formerly unknown to the speaker.

To further confirm this fact, Paul speaks of miraculous tongue speaking as referring to foreign languages. Note how the gift is described in 1 Corinthians 14:

“But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way or revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?” (14:6)

“There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.” (14:10–11)

“Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.” (14:13)

“in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (14:19)

“In the law it is written, ‘By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,’ says the Lord.” (14:21)

Throughout the text we see that Paul is instructing the brethren on the proper usage of the miraculous gift of tongue speaking; that is, the miraculous ability to prophesy in foreign languages.



# Speaking in Tongues

There is one text charismatics often point to in order to justify their supposed tongue speaking of incoherent sounds; 1 Corinthians 13:1– “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.” It is often argued that they are speaking in tongues of angels. The bible student should note that there is **no biblical example of anyone ever speaking in a tongue of angels.**

In this passage Paul is using hyperbole– he is exaggerating to prove his point. He does the same in the following verses. “If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge” (13:2)– Prophets did not know all mysteries and all knowledge. In fact, Paul later says prophets only “know in part” (13:9) He is again using hyperbole. He does the same with miraculous faith (13:2), giving of possessions (13:3), and giving of self (13:3).

The point in all of these examples is that no matter what a person does, if it is not done from love it has no benefit. Paul is **not** proposing that Christians can speak the tongues of angels.

## The Purpose of Tongues

From the very first time the Holy Spirit poured out the gift of tongues it was done to bring unbelievers to Christ. It accomplished its goal in Acts 2 (see verses 6 and 12). Paul again told the Corinthians, “So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.” (1 Corinthians 14:22)

However, if used incorrectly speaking in tongues could actually push people away from the faith! Paul explains, “Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?” (1 Corinthians 14:23) He went on to teach these brethren about the proper use of tongues.



# Speaking in Tongues

## Proper Usage of Tongues

The Corinthian brethren incorrectly valued speaking in tongues over the other spiritual gifts. Paul sets them in order with these words;

“And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:28)

“[Greater] is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.” (14:5)

“If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” (14:27–28)

“God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” (14:33)

The student should note that the message of the tongue-speakers could only edify if it were understood. If they were speaking to someone who understood the language there was edification (such as in Acts 2). If there was an interpreter available then the church could receive edification. However, if there was no interpreter then the tongue speaker should remain silent.

The gift of tongues was of great value to the early church. Using this gift the Christians were able to speak the mind of God (prophecy) in a foreign language in order to teach and prove the gospel message to the people of their day. Although this gift has run its course, just as prophecy has, its past existence stands as a testament to the miraculous confirmation of the gospel message.



# Speaking in Tongues

**What affect did the apostles' ability to speak in "tongues" have on the audience in Acts 2?**

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**What passage is often used to suggest that people can speak in the "tongues of angels"? What is a proper understanding of that text?**

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**What did Paul say the purpose of tongue speaking was?**

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**How do charismatic groups today ignore Paul's instructions on the use of tongue speakers?**

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# Breaking the Mold

## IN PREPARATION

READ I SAMUEL 19 AND JOHN 11

## QUESTIONS

WHY WAS KING SAUL FORCED TO PROPHECY WHILE PERSECUTING DAVID?

WHAT DID THE SPIRIT SEEK TO ACCOMPLISH BY SPEAKING THROUGH CAIAPHAS?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT GOD FROM THE "EXCEPTIONS"?

In the previous lessons we have been studying the typical patterns that miraculous inspiration follows. However, there are occasionally exceptions to the patterns that God used to prove a point to His people. In this lesson we will be considering two of those exceptions and the lessons that are taught by them.

## King Saul: Forced to Prophecy

The prophet Samuel anointed Saul and proclaimed that he would become king, and Saul went on his way and met a group of prophets. Just as Samuel had told him, the Spirit came upon him and "he prophesied among them." (1 Samuel 10:10) This was no great event as Saul was, at the time, seeking to do the will of God. It could be argued that Saul desired the gift, so the will of the Spirit and the will of Saul were the same. However, something similar happened to King Saul later in life when he was not seeking the will of God.

David had been anointed by the Lord to be the next king. Saul, in his anger, sought to take David prisoner and kill him. Saul sent messengers to bring him. The account reveals the details;

"Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying... the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied..." (1 Samuel 19:20)



# Breaking the Mold

Saul sent a second and third group of messengers and the same thing happened to them. (1 Samuel 19:21) Finally, he decided to go himself.

“The Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually... He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’” (1 Samuel 19:23–24)

In a former lesson we saw the typical pattern that prophets follow; the call from God, the assignment, the acceptance by the person, and the work. In 1 Samuel 19 neither the messengers nor Saul went through that pattern. In fact, they were purposely warring against the will of God!

It is likely that God was attempting to teach a lesson to Saul. Formerly, Saul served God and prophesied at his anointing. Now, he has refused to listen to the Lord concerning David’s appointment to the same task. What could be more humbling than having God miraculously intervene in Saul’s plot by forcing him to prophesy again? We should also remember a lesson; the word of the Lord is not something to be ignored. If we do, it will one day be imposed upon us. (John 12:48)

## **Caiaphas the High Priest: Prophesying Without His Knowledge**

Many people were angered by the teachings of Jesus during His days and none more so than the Jewish leaders. While Jesus’ disciples were increasing we read, “the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘What are we doing?... If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’” (John 11:47–48)





# Breaking the Mold

Jesus had caused no real threat from the Romans. These men were greedy for power and saw Jesus as a threat. Caiaphas, the high priest, spoke to them these words in response;

“You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.” (John 11:49–50)

The rulers understood Caiaphas to be insinuating that they should plot to kill Jesus. We are told, “from that day on they planned together to kill Him.” (John 11:53) It even seems that Caiaphas purposed the statement in the same manner.

However, the apostle John tells us that something else was going on;

“Now [Caiaphas] did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.” (John 11:51)

Caiaphas did not know that he was prophesying, yet he was! The Spirit was speaking through him to tell the rulers that the death of Jesus was soon to take place and that by His sacrifice the people could be saved!

Although not a faithful servant of God, the Spirit spoke through Caiaphas—and He did so without Caiaphas knowing it. We should also remember that it is easy to pass by the word of God and ignore its great truth. However, it is only through Jesus that we can know the path to our heavenly home. (John 14:6)

These two examples serve to show that, although there was a typical pattern that miraculous inspiration followed, God is able to perform His will as He sees fit. Thankfully, His will is always to bring men to a knowledge of His will for the salvation of souls. (2 Peter 3:9)



# Breaking the Mold

**When did Saul first prophesy? What relevance might that have to the account in 1 Samuel 19?**

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**What lesson can we learn from God's dealing with King Saul in 1 Samuel 19?**

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**Why did the Spirit speak through Caiaphas? How did Caiaphas understand his own words?**

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**What lesson can we learn from Caiaphas' ignorance of the Spirit's words?**

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# False Prophets

## IN PREPARATION

READ 1 KINGS 18 AND  
2 PETER 2

## QUESTIONS

WHY ARE FALSE  
PROPHETS SUCH A  
GREAT THREAT TO  
GODLINESS?

WHY WOULD A  
PERSON FALSELY  
CLAIM TO BE A  
PROPHET?

IS THIS ISSUE AS  
IMPORTANT TODAY AS  
IT WAS IN “BIBLE  
TIMES”?

Any study of inspiration would be lacking if it did not address the issue of false prophets. Nearly from the beginning of time there have been people falsely claiming to be inspired by God. Most often these liars are attempting to gain authority over others for selfish reasons or seeking wealth and fame. There are more examples of false prophets in the Scriptures than we can recount, but we will consider three different types: Idolaters, lying Israelites, and Gnostics.

## Idol Prophets

Pagan religions have always been full of people claiming to receive miraculous messages from their gods. In the days of Elijah there were “450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah” that ate at Jezebel’s table. (1 Kings 18:19) There were so many false prophets, “Elijah said to the people, ‘I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.’” (1 Kings 18:22) If the number of prophets each religion had proved truth then Elijah was not on the side of ‘right’!

Elijah went on to prove that these men were false by calling on God to perform a miracle, which He did. (1 Kings 18:38) Many Israelites were led away by claims of Idol prophets throughout their history. They should have put them all to the test of Deuteronomy 18:20–22.



# False Prophets

## False Hebrew Prophets

Besides the false prophets in pagan religions, there were also false prophets among the Jews who worshiped the same God! Jeremiah dealt with them continuously. Even as Jerusalem was about to be destroyed these individuals would tell the kings not to heed Jeremiah. As he records,

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.’” (Jeremiah 14:14)

Although they gained the attention of the people, kings, and priests, it was all for nothing and the city was destroyed. Jeremiah lamented,

“Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; And they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity, but they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.” (Lamentations 2:14)

False prophets gave comfort when warning was needed. In so doing they sealed not only the fates of the people but their own as well!

There were still false prophets among the Jews in the first century. Jesus said there would be men claiming to be the Messiah leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem; “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24) Paul found one in his preaching as well. Luke records, “When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-jesus...” (Acts 13:6) Wherever there is an audience there will be men seeking to gain influence over them– even through deception.



# False Prophets

## False Prophets Among Christians

Jesus Himself promised that there would be no shortage of false prophets among the Christians. He warned the disciples, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:24) As the apostles began spreading the gospel it was not long before these deceivers arose.

Knowing the great peril false teachings can cause, Peter exhorts the Christians saying,

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Peter was speaking of the Gnostic teachers. They claimed to receive special messages from God and taught many terrible things including that Jesus never took the form of flesh, our flesh is inherently sinful, and sinful living is acceptable before God. The risk to souls was too great for the apostles to ignore. Peter explains,

“For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires... promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.” (2 Peter 2:18–19)

He goes on to speak of the condemnation that awaits these false prophets and the Christians that follow them.

## False Prophets Today

There is no shortage of false prophets today. Many claim that God is leading them. If the message is from God then it is delivered through the Spirit. The Spirit has inspired the word. (2 Timothy 3:16–17) If someone speaks a word contradicting the Bible then they are not led by the Spirit of God! May we have the wisdom to “test the spirits.” (1 John 4:1)



# False Prophets

**How did God prove that the prophets of Baal and Asherah were false? Compare 1 Kings 18 to Mark 16:20. What do we learn about God's work with prophets?**

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**Why do you think the false prophets spoke lies to the king during Jeremiah's day? Do you think false prophets have the same motivations today?**

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**How were the early Christians to distinguish between false prophets and true prophets?**

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**Is it "judgmental" to identify false prophets today? How can we identify them?**

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# Interpreting the Spirit

## IN PREPARATION

READ 2 TIMOTHY 2

## QUESTIONS

CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE INSPIRED WORD?

DO ALL COMMANDS IN SCRIPTURE APPLY TO US?

WHY IS 'COMMON SENSE' NECESSARY TO PROPER INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE?

How many times have you been discussing the Scriptures with a person of another belief system and the refrain is offered, "That's just your interpretation of the Bible." Certainly it is possible for us to impose our own preconceived notions on the inspired word and thus nullify its teaching. However, the thought typically behind this response is that there is no right or wrong way to view the inspired word— or, at least, there is no way to know the right way of interpreting the inspired message.

Such a view borders on agnosticism. Is there a God? Has He revealed His will to man? Did the Holy Spirit inspire the written words of these prophets? And, yet, it seems many think it was all pointless because we cannot read and understand what they penned! In this lesson we will study the topic of hermeneutics— that is, we will do a study of 'how to study.'

## Respect the Source

In previous lessons we have discussed the miraculous nature of the message given through the prophets. Since these instructions came from God we ought to handle them with respect. As the apostle Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)



# Interpreting the Spirit

## Divide the Covenants

Many bible students fail to grasp the importance of dividing the covenants. For instance, Abraham was not under the law of Moses when he married his half-sister, Sarai. (Genesis 20:12) Had someone under the law of Moses done the same they would have violated that covenant. Deuteronomy 27:22 says, “Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” What was allowed before the Mosaic law was not allowed later on.

Likewise, many Christians fail to distinguish between the law of Christ and the law of Moses. The New Testament reveals that Jesus has “[taken] away the first in order to establish the second.” (Hebrews 10:9) In various ways we are told:

“[He] canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us... He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:14)

“there is a setting aside of a former commandment... and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope.” (Hebrews 7:18–19)

“the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ... But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” (Galatians 3:24–25)

We are not under the law of Moses so we cannot allow that “obsolete” covenant to bind us. (Hebrews 8:13) Instead, “whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4) The old law teaches us a number of things about God and faithfulness, but it is not meant to be the law that Christians follow.





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## Common Sense

Besides respect for the source of the word and properly dividing the covenants, the only other thing we really need in order to properly interpret the Spirit's message is common sense. That is to say, we need only to apply the normal rules of communication that we use on a daily basis. After all, the inspired message was delivered to 'normal' people and was meant to be easily understood. (See Ephesians 3:1-5) Let us consider these rules of communication.

## Figures of Speech

We use figures of speech so commonly that we often do not even realize we are doing it. We understand things like sarcasm, hyperbole, similes, etc. during normal conversations. We simply need to have that reasonableness when handling the word of God. For instance, when Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheep," we can contextually understand that He is not literally a door. (John 10:7) Rather, He is using a figure of speech to teach a lesson. Look for figures of speech as you study the word of God and apply the same understanding you normally would.

## Declarative Statements

When a command is given by the authority of God it is meant to be obeyed. How many times in Scripture does man fail to apply common sense and respect for the source to a declarative statement from on high? For instance, Paul told the Corinthians, "In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh..." (1 Corinthians 5:4-5) A man was in sin and refused to repent. The instructions Paul gave were by the authority of God and were to be obeyed! Failure to do so would be rebellion towards God. We



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would be wise to pay attention to the declarative statements in Christ's covenant and do our best to obey them.

## God-Approved Example

If, under our covenant, something is done that God approves of then we know that it is acceptable for us to do the same. For instance, under the direction of the inspired apostles and prophets financial assistance was sent from one group of Christians to another group. (Acts 11:27–30) Therefore, we know that we have God's approval to send financial aid to brethren in need. There are many approved examples in the new testament that we look to for the authority to act. This approach is respectful and necessary since the apostles instructed, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17)

## Logically Demanded Conclusion

There are some things which may not be specifically spelled out for us but are logically demanded conclusions that we must reach. If I tell you that I fell out of a tree you will logically conclude that I was up in a tree. This manner of reasoning appears throughout Scripture as well. For instance, Matthew 3:16 says, "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water..." If Jesus "came up" from the water, then it is logically demanded that He went down into the water. Matthew did not have to spell that out for us as it is perfectly understandable with the rules of communication.

When we speak of the rules of bible interpretation we are merely speaking of the normal rules of communication. It is a shame so many fail to see the importance of handling the inspired word with common sense! All our praise should be to God who has given us such an understandable word.



**Why is respect for the source necessary to proper handling of God's word?**

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**Are we under the law of Moses? If not, what good does it serve?**

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**Can you think of any other "God-approved examples" for the church in the New Testament?**

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**Why is it unwise for a church to act without new testament approval? What risk is a church taking when it does so?**

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# End of Inspiration

## IN PREPARATION

READ 1 CORINTHIANS  
12 AND ACTS 8

## QUESTIONS

WHAT WAS THE  
PURPOSE OF  
INSPIRATION?

HOW WERE  
MIRACULOUS GIFTS  
IMPARTED TO  
CHRISTIANS?

IF INSPIRATION HAS  
ENDED, ARE WE AT A  
SPIRITUAL  
DISADVANTAGE?

Miraculous inspiration has been essential to the establishment of each covenant. When the gospel was first issuing forth from Jerusalem the Spirit, and inspiration, were poured out on the church. (Acts 2:17–18) Is that still the case today? Are individuals still miraculously inspired with the message of God, or has that time come to an end?

## A Gift of the Holy Spirit

We have seen throughout our lessons that inspiration is a gift from the Holy Spirit. The early Christians understood this fact well. Paul says,

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit... and to another prophecy, and to another... various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:4, 8, 10)

Prophecy and all 9 miraculous spiritual gifts given to Christians were given by the same Holy Spirit, which was bestowed through the apostles.

## Given Through Apostles' Hands

There was a pattern in the early church for the receiving of miraculous gifts. As we've seen, the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1–4. After that, they were the ones responsible for passing miraculous gifts on to others, the Spirit



# End of Inspiration

deciding which gifts to give whom. For instance, in Acts 8:5 a man named Philip went to Samaria preaching the gospel. Philip had been given the gift of working miracles by the apostles.

We read that a sorcerer named Simon was there who had “astonished [the people] with magic arts.” (Acts 8:11) However, many obeyed the gospel at the teaching of Philip. “Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.” (Acts 8:13) Word came to the apostles about what was taking place. Peter and John were sent to Samaria and, “came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit... Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:15, 17) We might ask, “Why didn’t Philip give them the Spirit?” It’s because Philip was unable to!

As the apostles were giving gifts, it is possible –and likely– that Simon was given the ability to work miracles as well. We read,

“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 8:18–19)

Note that Simon was not trying to buy the ability to work miracles; he was trying to buy the ability to pass spiritual gifts to others! He saw the apostles were essential to the process of receiving spiritual gifts.

**There is one exception to this rule:** Cornelius and his household. In Acts 10, Peter was sent by an angel to preach the gospel to a Gentile named Cornelius. Having done so, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.” (Acts 10:44) Some point to this account as proof



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that the apostles are unnecessary to spiritual gifts, but note the response of Peter and his companions;

“All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also... Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’” (Acts 10:45–47)

After returning to Jerusalem, many criticized Peter for baptizing Gentiles. In answer to their complaints he recounts,

“as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did us at the beginning... Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also... who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:15,17)

With these words the Jewish Christians were convinced!

Note that no other account can be found (besides the apostles) of this happening. In every other place the apostles laid on hands. Besides that, the response of the Christians watching is amazement. There is no indication that they had ever seen someone receive the Spirit in this way. Also, Peter had to go back to “us at the beginning”– in Acts 2– to find another account of the Spirit working in this fashion. Finally, all of these things were done to prove that Gentiles could become Christians.

The Lord had a divine purpose in mind for this occurrence. We now know that all can become Christians! This exception proves the rule– the apostles were always present to pass spiritual gifts on to believers!



# End of Inspiration

## Apostles No Longer Present

The church in Rome had never had an apostle visit when Paul wrote to them. Some had moved there who had known Paul so there were only a few who had spiritual gifts. Knowing their situation, Paul says,

“For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.” (Romans 1:7)

Why would Paul need to be present to “impart some spiritual gift” to them? Simply because he was an apostle and no one else could do it.

If miraculous inspiration is a gift from the Spirit, the apostles were always present to impart spiritual gifts, and the apostles are no longer alive, does it not stand to reason that we no longer have access to miraculous inspiration?

Let us not lament the end of inspiration. Rather, we should rejoice! The ending of this gift is according to the divine plan to bring about a better method of teaching. Something “perfect” was on its way that was purposed by the Spirit, apostles, and prophets.



# End of Inspiration

**What was the pattern for imparting spiritual gifts to believers?**

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**What did Simon try to buy from Peter? Was Simon able to work spiritual gifts before this conversation?**

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**How does Cornelius “prove the rule” that the apostles involvement was to be expected in receiving the Spirit?**

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**What was a primary reason for Paul desiring to go to Rome? What does the absence of an apostle teach us about our reception of spiritual gifts?**

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# The Perfect

## IN PREPARATION

READ ZECHARIAH 13  
AND 1 CORINTHIANS  
13

## QUESTIONS

DID GOD GIVE  
WARNING THAT  
INSPIRATION WAS  
GOING TO END?

WHY ARE APOSTLES  
NO LONGER NEEDED?

CAN WE LEARN THE  
WILL OF GOD  
WITHOUT  
INSPIRATION? HOW?

The passing away of prophecy was not accidental or unexpected to the early Christians. In this lesson we seek to understand why prophecy came to an end and how it was received in the early church.

## End of Inspiration Prophesied

There were times during the days of the Israelites that prophecy was rare. As 1 Samuel 3:1 says, “word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.” Inspiration came and went depending on a number of things. However, a day was spoken of in which prophecy would cease and not return.

The Lord spoke through Zechariah about this day in Zechariah 13.

“In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and impurity. It will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord of hosts, “that I will... remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the Lord.’” (Zechariah 13:1–3)

Wrapped in figurative language, the Lord says that a “fountain” will be opened for forgiveness of sins and that in that same time period He will remove prophesy. When is this “day”? It is tied to the coming the “Shepherd.” (Zechariah 13:7) This passage is referring to Jesus. (Compare to Matthew 26:31)



# The Perfect

## Prophesied by Paul

After Jesus ascended and poured out the Spirit, the apostles went forth passing the gift of prophecy to many brethren. Just as Zechariah had spoken, prophecy immediately ceased among the Jews. Would it continue forever among the Christians?

It seems prophets were in nearly every church— especially after an apostle had visited to fully “establish” them. Some of these prophets were in Corinth when Paul writes to the church,

“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophecy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.” (1 Corinthians 13:8–10)

Paul clearly places an expiration date on miraculous inspiration. Note that prophecy was only “in part”— that is to be contrasted with something coming which was “perfect.” Besides that, when “the perfect” comes, the “in part” will “be done away” or “fail” (NKJV).

Many have sought to interpret “the perfect” as being Jesus. Therefore, they claim, prophecy will continue until Jesus returns. However, Paul points out that this time period will be before the Lord’s return in the following verses. “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (13:13) The “now” is a change of tense which alludes to the time in which prophecy has ceased. During those days, there will only be “faith, hope, love”— not miraculous gifts. If this is after Jesus has returned then I ask, “Why will there still be ‘hope’?” As Paul says, “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?” (Romans 8:24) When the Lord has returned there will be no “hope” as



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we will have receive our reward. Paul speaks of a time before Jesus returns that prophecy will have ceased; when the perfect has come. What could it be?

## The Early Christians Speak

The early Christians knew of what Paul was speaking and spoke of “the perfect” and the ceasing of prophecy. Consider a few of their words.

“Prophecy has been fulfilled through [Jesus’] advent... For Christ is the seal of all prophets... For, since His advent and personal passion, **there is no longer vision or prophet.**” (Tertullian, c. 197. ANF 3.168)

In the late 100s, Tertullian said that there was “no longer vision or prophet.”

“Celsus [a false teacher] is not be believed when he says that he has heard such men prophesy. For **no prophets bearing any resemblance to the ancient prophets have appeared** in the time of Celsus [i.e., the second century].” (Origen, c. 248. ANF 4.615)

Speaking of Celsus, a man who lived before his own days, Origen says that no prophets were alive during the second century– and Origen lived in the third century!

“The apostles have overcome unbelief through powers, signs, portents, and mighty works. **After them, there is now given** to the same completed churches the comfort of have the prophetic Scriptures subsequently interpreted.” (Victorinus, c. 280. ANF 7.353)

Victorinus elevates the inspired Scriptures to the place that the miraculous works stood during the days of the apostles! Perhaps we should do the same!

The completed and inspired word is sufficient to give us all we need to be “adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17) It is perfect for delivering the gospel and teaching us how to serve God. By this “perfect law of liberty” we can see ourselves as we truly are before God. (1 Corinthians 13:12, James 1:22–25) Praise God for His “perfect” word!



# The Perfect

**In what “day” was prophecy to end among the Jews (Zechariah 13)?**

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**Why did Paul say “we prophesy in part”? (1 Corinthians 13:9) Was there a limitation to a prophets ability?**

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**How was Origen able to prove that Celsus did not hear prophets in his day?**

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**What is “the perfect”? What are its advantages over the prophets of the early church?**

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