

How the Bible Was Written



SABBATH—JANUARY 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Jeremiah 36:1–4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; Titus 1:12; 2 Peter 1:1–4, 20, 21.

MEMORY VERSE: “God has breathed life into all of Scripture [the Bible]. It is useful for teaching [helping] us what is true” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

CHRISTIANS HAVE LONG ARGUED OVER THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, What do we mean when we claim the Bible is inspired?¹ For Seventh-day Adventists, there is also another question to answer: What do we mean when we speak of the inspiration² of Ellen G. White? In 1906, Ellen G. White answered this question in a letter to an Adventist doctor. She told him she did not accept the idea that every word she wrote was as inspired as the Ten Commandments: “My brother, you have studied my writings carefully. You have never found that I have made any such claims. You will not find that the pioneers³ in our cause ever made such claims.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 24. This week we will study some questions about inspiration.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: What is the difference between inspiration and revelation?⁴ What is the difference between verbal⁵ and thought inspiration?⁶ Can prophets get help from others when they write? What are some examples of prophets quoting sources outside the Bible?

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1. inspired—influenced by God or the Holy Spirit.
 2. inspiration—the act of the Holy Spirit giving someone a certain feeling or thought.
 3. pioneers—people who are the first to do something; the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were the first Seventh-day Adventists.
 4. revelation—how God makes Himself known to us.
 5. verbal (inspiration)—the belief that God chose all the words of the Bible. He then directed (told) the authors to write down the words.
 6. thought inspiration—the belief that the thoughts, not the words, of the Bible are inspired (given or led by God).

SUNDAY—JANUARY 25**REVELATION-INSPIRATION
(2 Timothy 3:16)**

According to 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, what part did God have in making the books of the Bible?

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul says that the Bible is *theopneustos* (God-breathed). In Latin this verse reads, “*scriptura divinitus inspirata.*” From this Latin wording, we get the English word *inspired*. Paul is saying that the whole Bible was written with the Holy Spirit’s leading. Through visions⁷ and dreams, the Holy Spirit revealed (made known) truth to the prophets. This truth is known as revelation. And then through the Holy Spirit’s leading, the prophets wrote the Bible. This leading is known as inspiration. The Holy Spirit made sure that each prophet wrote the Bible according to God’s will (plan).

Second Peter 1:21 tells us that “the Holy Spirit guided the prophets as they spoke” (NIRV). The following example helps us understand this verse more fully: A ship is carried along by the wind. In the same way the Bible writers were moved by the Holy Spirit. So, revelation-inspiration means the method⁸ the Holy Spirit used to reveal (make known) to the prophets what God wanted them to know. Then the Holy Spirit guided the prophets in the preaching of that message. Some

prophets spoke the word. Others wrote it down. The written part became the inspired (God-breathed) Bible.



Just as a ship is carried along by the wind, the Bible writers were moved by the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament the apostles⁹ do not claim to be led by the Holy Spirit as often as the Old Testament writers do. But it is clear that their messages are given by God. For example, Paul writes, “We don’t [do not] use words taught to us by people. We use words taught to us by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13, NIRV). Paul also writes, “You heard it [the Word] from us. But you didn’t [did not] accept it as a human¹⁰ word. You accepted it for what it really is. It is God’s word” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NIRV).

But the Bible is also a human book. Clearly, humans wrote it. The Bible writers write about their own experi-

7. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God’s will (plan).

8. method—a way of doing something.

9. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

10. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

ences. They use personal pronouns¹¹ such as “I” and “my” when writing about themselves (Nehemiah 1:1–11; Daniel 10:1–9; Galatians 1:12–20). The customs (habits) and traditions¹² of the writers’ times are found in their writings. And some of the psalms and proverbs make note of the literature¹³ and culture¹⁴ of neighboring nations. In short, the Lord inspired the Bible. But we can tell from the Bible itself that it was written by human writers.

Which Bible writer is the most human to you? In what ways can you understand and relate to that writer as a person? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

MONDAY—JANUARY 26

VERBAL OR THOUGHT INSPIRATION

(1 Corinthians 7:10–12, 39, 40)

What do Isaiah 2:1, 2; Ezekiel 36:16; 1 Corinthians 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thessalonians 2:13 tell us about the inspiration of the Bible?

There are at least two different beliefs about how the Bible was inspired and written down: (1) verbal inspiration and (2) thought inspiration.

1. Verbal Inspiration. Verbal inspiration focuses on the words of the Bible, not

on the author. It is believed all the words are inspired (given) by God. He chooses the words from the writer’s vocabulary and education. This belief teaches that only the original (first) writings of the Bible writers are inspired. Copies of the original writings have errors. This belief is different from the idea that every word in the Bible comes from the Holy Spirit but is written down without depending on the writer’s vocabulary and education.

2. Thought Inspiration. Thought inspiration focuses on the writers, not the words. It is the thoughts, not the words of the Bible, that are inspired (1 Corinthians 7:10–12, 39, 40; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).



It is the thoughts of the writer, and not the words of the Bible, that are inspired.

From the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, Adventists believe in thought inspiration. “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired. Instead, it is the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or how he writes but on the man himself. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, the man is filled

11. pronouns—parts of speech. Pronouns take the place of a noun—a person, place, or thing. Examples of pronouns are I, he, she, it, you, we, they, this, that, and so on.

12. traditions—customs or rules made by people. Traditions usually are not written down but are taught by families to their children, generation after generation.

13. literature—written or printed materials, such as books, report papers, and so on.

14. culture—the way of life of a certain group of people.

with thoughts. But the words receive the mark of the person's mind. So, God's mind and the person's mind are joined together. God's will is combined [joined] with the human mind and will. In this way, the messages of the man are the Word of God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 21. As the last sentence makes clear, the words of the prophet become the Word of God. In the same way David writes, " 'The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me. I spoke his word with my tongue' " (2 Samuel 23:2, NIV). This verse makes clear two ideas: (1) The Holy Spirit sent thoughts to the writer. (2) The Holy Spirit made sure that the Written Word correctly carried God's thoughts.

Why is it important to have a correct understanding of how inspiration works? What are the dangers of having wrong ideas about it?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 27

VISIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE BODY

(Daniel 10:7–9, 17, 18)

According to Daniel 10:7–9, 17, 18; Acts 9:1–5; and Revelation 1:17, what happens to some Bible prophets when they have visions?

To stand before (in front of) a heavenly person can be a powerful experience. Daniel, Saul (Paul), and John all

fell to the ground when they received a heavenly vision. Daniel writes, "no strength remained in me" (NKJV). John says, "I fell at His feet as dead" (NKJV).



When John saw Jesus in vision, he says he fell at His feet like a dead man.

Ellen G. White describes her experience with these words: "Questions are often asked about my condition¹⁵ in vision, and after I come out. I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give a vision, I am taken to stand before Jesus and angels. And I am entirely lost to earthly things. I can see no farther than the angel directs me."—Adapted from *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 36.

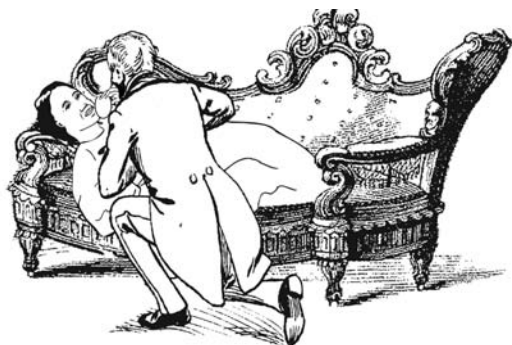
In 1868, Ellen G. White's husband, James White, described what happened to his wife while she was in vision: "1. She does not know what is going on around her. 2. She does not breathe. . . . [This] has been proved again and again by pressing upon the chest, and by closing the mouth and nose. 3. When she enters into vision, her muscles become stiff, and joints¹⁶ fixed. No outside force can influence¹⁷ them. 4. On coming out of vision, whether in the daytime or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her ability to tell the difference

15. condition—the way a person or thing is or becomes; a state of being.

16. joints—the places in the body where the bones fit together and connect to one another.

17. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

among lights returns slowly.”—Adapted from *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Stream Press, 1868), page 272.



When Ellen G. White was in vision, she gave no sign of breathing.

These miracles¹⁸ are impressive (great; amazing). But why must we not base our belief in Ellen G. White’s gift on miracles? What must be the final test of her gift of prophecy?¹⁹

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 28

INSPIRED WRITERS AND THEIR HELPERS (Jeremiah 36:1–4)

What do Jeremiah 36:1–4; Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:15–18; and 2 Thessalonians 3:17 tell us about the use of literary assistants?²⁰

Both Old Testament and New Testament writers used literary assistants or scribes²¹ to write down the messages God had given them.

From New Testament times we know that at times scribes used a wax tablet to take down what the author wanted to say. Then the scribes would copy the words from the wax tablet into a letter. Before sending it, the author would go over the letter to make sure it was correct.

Ellen G. White also used literary helpers. Here is why:

1. Her schooling ended at the age of nine. So Ellen G. White knew she was not the strongest writer. “I am not a grammarian.²² I will try, if the Lord will help me, at forty-five years old to become a scholar [expert] in the science. God will help me. I believe He will.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 90. So, some of her assistants (helpers) worked as her copy editors.

2. The great demand for her work made it necessary for her to have help making copies of her writings. “After my husband’s death, faithful helpers joined me. They worked tirelessly. They copied the testimonies.²³ And they prepared articles for printing.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 50.

18. miracles—extraordinary (amazing; great) events believed to be a sign of the power of God. Examples of miracles are Peter walking on water and Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

19. gift of prophecy—the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell future events.

20. literary assistants—people who help a writer with his or her writing. This help may include reading over the writing, correcting mistakes, doing research, or making copies of the manuscript or articles.

21. scribes—persons who knew the Bible and made copies of the Bible for other people.

22. grammarian—a person who studies the rules of a language and knows how to speak and write it correctly.

23. testimonies—the writings of Ellen G. White.

3. Most of Ellen G. White's books were not written as books. Instead, they were put together from material that she had written already. For this reason, Ellen G. White needed special help to make these books. Marian Davis was Ellen G. White's bookmaker. "Marian takes my articles which are published in the papers. She pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special subject, which may make the matter clearer. So, Marian begins to search for this article. And if she thinks that the article will make the chapter clearer, she adds it. The books are not Marian's writings. They are my own, gathered from all my writings."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 91.

How do Ellen G. White's words about her writings help us better understand how inspiration works?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 29

INSPIRATION AND THE BOOK OF LUKE (Luke 1:1–4)

What does Luke say in Luke 1:1–4 about how he wrote his Gospel? What do Luke's words tell us about inspiration?

In writing his Gospel,²⁴ Luke does not

24. Gospel—one of the first four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

25. pagan—having to do with the worship of idols (false gods) or nature instead of God.

26. Cilicia—in Bible times, a country in southeast Asia Minor (modern Turkey) that ran along the Mediterranean coast, south of the Taurus Mountains.

27. prophetic—having the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell future events.

seem to have depended on dreams or visions. He was not an eyewitness to the events he describes. Instead, he worked from what he had learned from others under the inspiration and leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made sure that what Luke wrote down was a true record of what happened and of God's will.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul received information from the spoken words of others (1 Corinthians 1:10, 11). But in a few places Paul quoted from the writings of pagan²⁵ authors. For example, in Acts 17:28 Paul quotes from the poet Aratus. Aratus was from Cilicia.²⁶ He lived around the time of 315–240 B.C. He writes, "Every one of us in every way owes his life to Zeus, for we are also his offspring."—Adapted from *Phaenonlena* 5; emphasis added. Read also 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Titus 1:12, where Paul quotes other writers to teach inspired truth.

Why do prophets use other sources? Many people find this practice to be a problem. But what does this practice tell us about how inspiration can work?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "The Inspiration of the Prophetic"²⁷ Writers," pages 15–23, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“When I send you a testimony²⁸ of warning, many of you declare it to be just the opinion of Sister White. You have insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord made Himself known through the spirit of prophecy.²⁹ Past, present, and future have passed before me. I have been shown faces that I had never seen. And years afterward I knew them when I saw them. I have been awakened from my sleep with a clear sense of subjects shown to my mind. I have written, at midnight, letters that have gone across the country, and have stopped terrible events from happening to God’s cause. This has been my work for many years. A power has driven me to correct wrongs that I had not thought of before. Is this work of the last 36 years from God or from Satan? In these letters which I write, I am presenting [giving] to you that which the Lord has presented [given] to me. I do not write one article in the paper, just to give my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision. These ideas are light shining from God’s throne.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 27.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read your answers to Sunday’s study on the prophets that you chose. Which prophets were chosen, and why?
- ② Some people believe that some parts of the Bible are more *inspired* than others. It is true that some parts might be more helpful to us today than others. But this idea is very different from the belief that some parts are more *inspired* than others. What is the great danger of this belief? As you think about it, ask yourself the following questions: Who decides which parts of the Bible are more inspired than others? How does one test³⁰ them and decide which parts are more inspired? Who has the right to decide the answers to these questions? What happens when people disagree about which parts are more inspired than others?
- ③ Think about the life and teachings of Ellen G. White during her long years of ministry (work). There has been a large amount of false information about her and her ministry. And very often her writings have been used in the wrong way. But what proof and reasons do we have for believing that her gift of prophecy is real and true?

28. testimony—the truth God makes known to us about Himself.

29. spirit of prophecy—read Revelation 19:10. The spirit of prophecy is the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7–11, 28; Ephesians 4:11–13). This gift is the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell the future. God gave the gift of prophecy to Ellen G. White.

30. test—to prove something to be true or false, good or bad, right or wrong.