

How inspiration works

1. What is inspiration?

- a. Understanding *how* God speaks to a prophet is just as important as understanding *that* He has spoken to the prophet. The greatest misunderstandings about the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy come from a misunderstanding of inspiration. Inspiration is the process by which the Holy Spirit enables the prophet to correctly receive and communicate the Word of God. There are three steps by which God communicates through prophets.
 - i. **Revelation** – From God to the prophet (often through angels)
 1. **Revelation 1:1**: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John"
 2. **Daniel 9:21-22**: "while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.""
 3. **Galatians 1:12**: "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."
 - ii. **Inspiration** – From the prophet to the paper/listeners
 1. **2 Timothy 3:16**: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"
 2. **2 Peter 1:21**: "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
 - iii. **Illumination** – From the paper/verbal communication to the listener's heart
 1. **Ephesians 1:17-18 (NIV)**: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you..."
 2. **2 Corinthians 4:6**: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
- b. There are three major theories concerning inspiration:
 - i. **Verbal/mechanical dictation** – God dictates information to the prophet, word for word.
 - ii. **Plenary/thought inspiration** – God reveals the information to the prophet through visions and dreams, but the prophet uses his/her own limited modes of expression when he/she communicates the message. One could say, what is meant is inspired, not the exact choice of words.
 - iii. **Existential experience** – Revelation is a personal experience or an encounter, not a message. The received message might be true for the prophet, even though it is false as far as reality is concerned. This is a post-modern view.

2. Inspiration according to the Bible

- a. The Bible teaches that thought inspiration is God's mode of inspiration.
 - i. **2 Peter 1:21**: "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

- ii. **Matthew 22:43:** "He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'LORD,' ...""
 - iii. **1 Thessalonians 2:13:** "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."
 - iv. **1 Corinthians 7:40:** "But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God"
 - v. **1 Corinthians 14:32:** "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."
- b. Though God is said to be the originator of the Scriptures, it is still written by men. The Spirit of Prophecy does not take away the free will of the prophet during inspiration. The Spirit of God chooses the message, but most of the time, the prophet chooses the wording. The message from Jesus is subjected to the prophets limited vocabulary and mode of expression. Still the words of the prophet is the Word of God. One could say that what is meant is inspired, not necessarily the exact wording.
- i. **Revelation 1:11, 19:** "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. ... Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."
 - ii. **Great Controversy, p. v-vii:** "The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14 ... God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God;"
 - iii. **1 Selected Messages, p. 21:** "The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers. It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."
- c. Some examples of this can be seen in the prophets' different descriptions of the same thing. Take for instance Daniel, Ezekiel and John's descriptions of Jesus:
- i. **Ezekiel 1:26-27:** "And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber

with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around.”

- ii. **Daniel 10:5-6:** "I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude."
 - iii. **Revelation 1:13-16:** "and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."
- d. Without doubt these three people see the same thing. But in the Revelation John says that Jesus' face was like the sun, while Daniel says it was like a lightning. Daniel said the feet were the colour of burnished bronze, whereas John said they were like fine brass and Ezekiel said they had the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Jesus' voice was like the sound of many waters, according to John. But according to Daniel it was like the voice of a multitude. Daniel said Jesus was clothed in linen, while John does not specify the material. John mentions some details about Jesus' hair colour. Who was right? If we wanted to we could find contradictions in these verses. But, in spite of the fact that the prophets describe the same thing using different words, the revelations are all true if we understand that the Bible teaches thought inspiration and not verbal dictation.
- e. Ellen White, herself, did not claim verbal inspiration:
- i. **Selected Messages 1, p. 24:** "In your letter you speak of your early training to have implicit faith in the testimonies and say, "I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments." My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause ever made such claims."
 - ii. **W.C. White, Selected Messages 3, p. 437:** "Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration, and I do not find that my father, or elder Bates, Andrews, Smith, or Waggoner, put forth this claim. If there were verbal inspiration in writing her manuscripts, why should there be on her part the work of addition or adaptation? It is a fact that mother often takes one of her manuscripts, and goes over it thoughtfully, making additions that develop the thought still further."

3. Secretaries and assistants

- a. Since it is the thought that is inspired and not the exact wording, it is in its full right for a prophet to use secretaries or assistants.
 - i. **Jeremiah 36:4:** "Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah, all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him."

- ii. **1 Peter 5:12:** "By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand."
 - iii. **Romans 16:22:** "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord."
 - iv. **2 Thessalonians 3:17:** "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write."
- b. The fact that someone else has written Paul's and Peter's epistles could make a ready skeptic to doubt if some parts of it were really inspired. In spite, however, of the fact that things were written by another, the prophet always had to approve the text before it was published.
- c. Ellen White also used secretaries and some critics have accused her for this and claimed that some of her books were not written by her. She responds herself to this type of criticism.
 - i. **Selected Messages 3, p. 91:** "She [her secretary Marian Davis] takes my articles which are published in the papers, and 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 point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it. The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do."
- d. If we correctly understand what the Bible says about inspiration, there is no danger to our faith if this fact.

4. Plagiarism or literary borrowing?

- a. At times in the Bible the prophet borrowed expressions, language, phrases or thoughts from other inspired or uninspired authors. Even though some of these authors were not inspired, the thought is inspired by the fact that the prophet, under the guidance of God, chooses to use them. All truth belongs to God. The Preacher says that there is nothing new under the sun. Therefore originality is not a test of inspiration.
 - i. **Ecclesiastes 12:9-11:** "And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright--words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd."
 - ii. **Luke 1:1-3:** "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus"
- b. Without giving any credit to the original author, both Solomon and Luke used previously written proverbs and documents and presented them under their own name. There was nothing unethical or false in this since all truth belongs to God.
- c. Ellen White was also led to use previously written expressions and thoughts.
 - i. "In her early experience, when she was sorely distressed over the difficulty of putting into human language the revelations of truths that had been

imparted to her, she was reminded of the fact that all wisdom and knowledge comes from God; and she was assured that God would bestow grace and guidance. She was told that, in the reading of religious books and journals, she would find precious gems of truth, expressed in acceptable language, and that she would be given help from heaven to recognize these, and to separate them from the rubbish of error with which she would sometimes find them associated.” (Willie White, *A brief statement*, p. 5)

- d. It is estimated that out of Ellen White’s written sentences about 31% of them contained at least one or more words from other authors without giving them credit (Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, p. 457), something which was fully normal and acceptable by 19th Century standards. Nevertheless, critics have in later years accused her for plagiarism again and again. In order to silence this accusation once and for all the General Conference hired an independent law firm, with private money, which specialized in patents and copyrights, to investigate if Ellen White could be charged with plagiarism or if she had done anything unethical. The lawyer who took up the challenge was Vincent Ramik, who had a Catholic background. Afterwards he admitted that before taking the case he had received a very unfavorable impression of Ellen White and thought that she was “guilty of plagiarism”. After 300 hours of work, he accepted an interview with *Adventist Review* on September 17, 1981, to tell them of his findings.
 - i. “I gradually turned 180 degrees in the other direction. I found that the charges simply were not true. But I had to get that from her writings; I did not get that from either the people who said she was a plagiarist, or the people who said she was not.... It was reading her messages in her writings that changed my mind. ... I believe that the critics have missed the boat badly by focusing upon Mrs. White’s writings, instead of focusing upon the messages in Mrs. White’s writings.” (p. 2)
 - ii. “Mrs. White moved me! In all candor, she moved me. I am a Roman Catholic; but, Catholic, Protestant, whatever— she moved me. And I think her writings should move anyone, unless he is permanently biased and is unswayable. ... I think I know a little more today about the real Vince Ramik than I did before I started reading the message of Ellen White, not simply her writings. ... I think I’m a better person today than when I started this project.” (p. 2-3)
 - iii. “Considering all factors necessary in reaching a just conclusion on this issue, it is submitted that the writings of Ellen G. White were conclusively unplagiaristic.” (p. 2)
 - i. “If I had to be involved in such a legal case, I would much rather appear as defense counsel than for the prosecution. There simply is no case!” (p. 5)

5. Are there contradictions and discrepancies in the Bible?

- a. Critics attempt to get people to criticize and question all or parts of the Bible. They claim that the Bible is contradictory and that it cannot be trusted. Most so called contradictions are nothing but complementing facts that together gives a complete picture (*e.g.* major differences in the four gospels). He who wants to find errors will find many opportunities to do so. God has not removed the possibility of doubt. But those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. And there is an abundance of it, if we are willing to listen.
 - i. **John 7:17:** “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.”

- ii. **Luke 8:15:** "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."
- b. Understanding the Bible is not primarily a matter of intellectual ability, but rather on our willingness to understand and follow God's will. The most learned philosopher can miss the plainest truths in God's Word if he comes to the Bible with a wrong attitude. It is only through the Spirit of God that we can receive a clearer understanding of Bible truth:
 - i. **1 Corinthians 2:13-14:** "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."
 - ii. **John 16:13:** "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;"
 - iii. **Ephesians 1:17:** "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"
 - iv. **Martin Luther:** "We cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture either by study or by the intellect. Your first duty is to begin by prayer. Entreat the Lord to grant you, of His great mercy, the true understanding of His word. There is no other interpreter of the word of God than the Author of this word." (J.H. D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, vol 3, ch. 7)
 - v. **Great Controversy, p. vi:** "As several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony."
 - vi. **Steps to Christ, p. 12:** "Disguise it as they may, the real cause of doubt and skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin. The teachings and restrictions of God's word are not welcome to the proud, sin-loving heart, and those who are unwilling to obey its requirements are ready to doubt its authority. In order to arrive at truth, we must have a sincere desire to know the truth and a willingness of heart to obey it. ... Instead of questioning and caviling concerning that which you do not understand, give heed to the light that already shines upon you, and you will receive greater light. By the grace of Christ, perform every duty that has been made plain to your understanding, and you will be enabled to understand and perform those of which you are now in doubt."
- c. We must humbly wait for God to reveal things for us instead of thinking that we are intelligent enough to understand the problem at first try.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 29:29:** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."
 - ii. **2 Peter 3:16:** "as also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."
- d. Many sceptics claim that these difficult Bible texts are proof that the Bible is not credible, but in fact they prove the opposite. If the Bible did not contain anything except that which is easy for us to grasp, we would have reason to doubt the divine origin of the Bible. The difficulty lies solely in the limitations of humanity.
- e. On the other hand, a prophet is not a perfect being. David committed murder and adultery. Abraham lied and took multiple wives. Jacob deceived his father. Peter

compromised with Judaizing Christians. In spite of this, their inspired messages were still infallible. God does not teach error. In the same way, Ellen White was not infallible either.

- i. **Selected Messages 1, p. 37:** "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true, and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning."
 - ii. Many times she confessed that she had done wrong (**1 Testimonies, p. 562-562, 678, 2 Testimonies p. 16**).
- f. Some critics confuse the prophet with God and claim that because the prophet had faulty characters, they cannot be inspired by God. This position is absurd. Prophets still have a free will, and they can therefore even decide to say the wrong thing. But if a prophet would say something in the name of the Lord that he/she was not supposed to, God would correct it before the damage was done. The prophet Nathan got the idea that David should build the Lord's temple (**2 Samuel 7:3**). But this was not something that God had revealed to him. Therefore God reproved the prophet and the prophet went back and corrected the error (**v.4-17**). This did not mean that Nathan was a false prophet. God would not allow errors that seriously contradicted His revealed messages.
- g. Since the Spirit of prophecy (the Holy Spirit) makes itself subject to the prophet's own mind in terms of expression, there is the possibility for imperfection.
- i. **Selected Messages 1, p. 20:** "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea."
 - ii. **Selected Messages 1, p. 16:** "Some look to us gravely and say, "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. ... All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth."
- h. Is it therefore possible that there might be insignificant discrepancies that do not disturb the message that the Bible author tries to convey? The answer must be that it is fully possible. Consider the following examples:
- i. How many demoniacs did Jesus cure in Gergesenes?
 1. Luke 8:27 says one and Matthew 8:28 says two.
 - ii. Who wrote the prophecy of the 30 pieces of silver?
 1. Matthew 27:9 says Jeremiah. But the quote is from Zechariah.
 - iii. Did Jesus heal Batimaeus on the way in or on the way out of Jericho?
 1. Mark 10:46 says on the way out and Luke 18:35 says on the way in.
 - iv. How many of Jacob's family came to Egypt in the story of Joseph?
 1. Genesis 46:27 says 70 and Acts 7:14 says 75.
 - v. Was David the eighth or the seventh of Jesse's sons?
 1. 1 Samuel 16:10-11 says the 8th and 1 Chronicles 2:15 says the 7th.
- i. There might well be different attempts to reconcile these minor inconsistencies. But if we understand that the Bible authors were not verbally inspired we don't need to. The details do not affect the meaning of the text in the least. It could well have been a slight misinformation on the prophet's part that God did not see necessary to correct, since it did not affect the message He was trying to communicate. This does not take away from the inspiration of the Bible. It does not mean that some parts of

the Bible were less inspired than others. It does not mean that we are at liberty to choose what parts of the Bible to believe or not believe. It does not mean that Bible authors were mistaken in the messages they were conveying. It simply means that what was meant is infallible, not necessary the exact wording and every insignificant detail.

- j. In Ellen White's writings one may find similar, inconsequential inaccuracies. This does in no way make her a false prophet, assuming one does not have an unsound view on inspiration.
 - i. **Selected Messages 1, p. 38:** "I am troubled in regard to Brother A... He has made some strange statements, and I am pained to see him denying the testimonies as a whole because of what seems to him an inconsistency--a statement made by me in regard to the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium. Brother A says that in a letter written to one of the brethren in southern California, the statement was made by me that the sanitarium contained forty rooms, when there were really only thirty-eight. This, Brother A gives to me as the reason why he has lost confidence in the testimonies. ... The information given concerning the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium was given, not as a revelation from the Lord, but simply as a human opinion. There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know. In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord and am stating it as such."
 - ii. **Selected Messages 1, p. 277:** "Satan flattered our first parents that eating of the fruit of the tree of life of which God had forbidden them would bring to them great good, and would ensure them against death, the very opposite of the truth which God had declared to them."
 - iii. **Roger W. Coon, Inspiration/Revelation, What is it and how does it work?:** "When writing about the St. Bartholomew Massacre in the 1888 edition of The Great Controversy, Mrs. White mentioned in passing that it was the ringing of the bell in the palace of King Charles IX in Paris that was a signal to begin the wanton destruction that cost the lives of tens of thousands of French Huguenot Protestants on August 24, 1572. After that volume was in print someone questioned the accuracy of her statement, suggesting instead that it may have been the bell in the church of St. Germain, across the street from the palace. Still another said no, it was the bell in the Palace of Justice around the corner from the royal palace! Ellen White, in the revised 1911 edition of the book, redrafted the statement to read simply, "A bell, tolling in the dead of night, was a signal for the slaughter." The identity of the bell was not the issue; it was the events of that night that were important."