

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In April 1999, Tim Neugent of Mena, Arkansas was watching the TV program "THE PRACTICE." In this particular episode the mother of one of the lawyers decided she was homosexual. She wanted her son to go to court to help her get a marriage license to marry her "partner." Tim was irritated enough to write the following email to ABC:

ABC is obsessed (or should I say abscessed) with the subject of homosexuality. I will no longer watch any of your attempts to convince the world that homosexuality is OK. THE PRACTICE can be a fairly good show but last night's program was so typical of your agenda. You picked the 'dufus' of the office to be the one who was against the idea of his mother being gay and made him look like a whiner because he had convictions.

This type of mentality calls people like me "gay basher." Read the first chapter of Romans (that's in the Bible) and see what the apostle Paul had to say about it...

Tim did not expect to get a reply, but he did. The ABC online Webmaster wrote:

How about getting your nose out of the Bible (which is ONLY a book of stories compiled by MANY different writers hundreds of years ago) and read the Declaration of Independence (what our nation is built on) where it says "All Men are Created Equal" -- and try treating them that way for a change!?

Or better yet, try thinking for yourself and stop using an archaic book of stories as your crutch for your existence.

II. IMPORTANCE OF WHETHER IT'S THE WORD OF GOD

What one believes about the divine inspiration of Scripture will, to a large extent, determine the nature of one's religion. If God is the one speaking through Scripture, then it is vested with his truth and authority. All human beliefs, ideas, and philosophies are subject to its judgment. When the Creator speaks, the appropriate response of the creature is to trust and obey.

If, on the other hand, one denies the divine inspiration of the Bible, then it is only one of a countless number of human perspectives on the nature of reality. However lofty and wise its vision may be, it remains nothing more than the opinion of fellow humans. One is free to accept what one likes and to blame the unpalatable remainder on the limitations of the author. Each person is left to construct a religion in his own image.

III. A WORD ON EVIDENCE, PROOF, AND REASON

As we examine the claim that the Bible is the word of God, the question is whether there is *good reason* for believing that it is, not whether all alternative explanations of the evidence are impossible. If I asked you where you were born, I suspect most of you would respond confidently and without hesitation. When asked how you know, you'd begin listing the evidence that supports that: your parents told you, other relatives told you, you've seen your birth certificate, you've seen photographs of your mother holding you as a baby under a sign Phoenix Hospital, etc. Now, if someone said, "But is it *possible* that you were born elsewhere and that all this evidence has been fabricated as part of an elaborate ruse to conceal the fact from you?" I suspect you'd say, "Well, anything is possible, but I am sufficiently confident in this evidence that I'd stake my life on it."

In our everyday lives, we all accept as true things we have good reason to believe are true, but when we enter the religious realm, all of a sudden skeptics insist that we provide them metaphysical certainty, that we establish conclusively that all alternative explanations of the evidence are impossible. Well, this reality is not set up that way. There is evidence to persuade those who will accept it, those who have "ears to hear," but there is room for those who wish not to accept it, those who wish to justify their unbelief.

IV. MEANING OF "INSPIRATION"

When one claims that the Bible is "inspired," one means, most basically, that the sacred writers wrote precisely what God wanted written. In other words, God supernaturally directed the production of the document. That is why Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:16 that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (NIV). God himself has breathed it out by means of human authors.

2 Peter 1:20-21 speaks of the divine direction at work in the creation of Scripture. Peter makes clear that the inspiration of Scripture is not a matter of the writer being emotionally touched to produce his own high-quality creation (as we might say an artist was "inspired"); rather, the writer is a conduit for God's message. Peter's reference to "prophecy of Scripture" is broader than we might think. As Richard Bauckham has pointed out, the Jews tended to think of all Scripture as prophetic, as a proclamation of God.

1 Corinthians 2:13 and 14:37 attribute to God the very words that are used. So the inspiration of Scripture extends beyond the mere inspiration of thoughts and concepts to the words themselves. According to 1 Pet. 1:10-11, sometimes the sacred writers did not even understand the full import of the words they wrote.

V. MECHANICS OF INSPIRATION

We are not told the specifics of how the Holy Spirit supernaturally guided the sacred writers in their choice of words, but we know that he did so in the normal language of their day and consistently with their differing personalities and styles of writing. So the process

was often more complicated and subtler than a writer recording the dictated words of God. For instance, Luke investigated before he wrote his Gospel (Lk. 1:1-4); he did not sit in a trance and write. The point is that God superintends the entire process so that the end product is precisely what he wanted written.

VI. WISDOM OF INSPIRING WRITINGS

There is an undeniable wisdom in God's communicating to mankind through the written word. It provides a durable and reliable record of revelation that cannot be denied or forgotten (see, Ex. 17:14; Deut. 31:26; 2 Kings 22-23; Ps. 102:18; Isa. 30:8). It allows convenient access to a large body of revelation in that the various writings can be collected. It also allows deep access to a large body of revelation in that writings can be read repeatedly and pondered, and it allows broad access to the revelation in that the writings can be copied.

VII. ABILITY TO INSPIRE WRITINGS

The supernatural control necessary to inspire the Bible is certainly not beyond the power of the God who made all things. For those who believe God exists, the question is not whether he *could* inspire Scripture but whether he *did* inspire it. The evidence for the inspiration of Scripture consists of the fact it claims to be inspired, it has qualities of being inspired, and it has been accepted as being inspired. The NT has the additional support of the precedent of the OT's inspiration.

VIII. INSPIRATION OF THE OT

A. Claims to be inspired

The OT is replete with claims that it is the word of God. For example, in the NIV, there are over 1,000 verses identifying the Lord as the speaker: "says the Lord" (75); "the Lord says" (185); "the Sovereign Lord says" (132); "the Lord Almighty says" (47); "the Lord God Almighty says" (2); "God says" (5); "the God of Israel says" (65); "declares the Lord" (249); "the Lord declares" (7); "the sovereign Lord declares" (1); "declares the Sovereign Lord" (86); "the Lord has spoken" (17); "God has spoken" (20); "the Lord spoke through X" (3); "hear the word of the Lord" (31); "this is the word of the Lord" (7); "the word of the Lord came" (103). That's 1035, and there are many more verses of similar import.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 24-26 report the writing of the Law and indicate its sacredness and authority. This is recognized throughout the OT (Josh. 1:8; 2 Ki. 22:8-13, 23:1-3; Neh. 8:1-8, 13:1-3; Dan. 9:11-13). In at least two passages, God is spoken of as the *writer* of the Law (2 Ki. 17:37; Hos. 8:12). Joshua 24:26 and 1 Sam. 10:25 suggest that additions were made to the sacred writings, and the subsequent prophetic books were acknowledged as divinely authoritative (Dan. 9:2; Zech. 7:12).

King David specifically stated that the Spirit of the Lord spoke through him (2 Sam. 23:1-2), and King Hezekiah commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David (2 Chron. 29:30). Jeremiah 36 provides a description of one instance of inspiration.

B. Qualities support the claim to be inspired

1. Unique assertions about God. The OT has several qualities that support its claim of being inspired. First, it makes a couple of unique assertions about God. The religions of the ancient Near East were uniformly polytheistic, yet the OT boldly declares that there is only one God and that he alone may be worshiped (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10-11). Only three modern religions are monotheistic (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), and all of them are based on the OT Youngblood (1984), 731. It seems doubtful that this concept of monotheism was a human creation.

The OT also indicates that God exists outside the limits of space and time. He created space/time (Gen. 1:1) and is not bound by it (1 Ki. 8:27; Ps. 90:4, 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23-24; 2 Pet. 3:8). It is interesting that modern science currently accepts the notion of a beginning of space/time. According to one writer, no other "sacred writings" speak of a reality that is independent of the dimensions of our universe. Ross (1991), 179.

2. Fulfilled prophecies. The second quality that supports the OT's claim of inspiration is fulfilled prophecies. Isaiah, an eighth-century prophet of Jerusalem, prophesied in Isa. 44:24 - 45:7 about a future time when Judah would be in captivity and the Lord would raise up a man named Cyrus to deliver them. In 605, 597, and 586 B.C., the inhabitants of Judah were exiled to Babylon. In 539 B.C. Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and decreed that the Jews may return to their land (Ezra 1:1-4). Kaiser (1998), 399-404, 420.

In 1 Ki. 13:2 a man of God prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam, the first northern king (931-920 B.C.), that a man named Josiah would be born in the house of David and would sacrifice the priests of pagan gods on an altar in Bethel. Three hundred years later, the Judean king Josiah (640-609 B.C.) fulfilled this prophecy (2 Ki. 23:15-20).

In the third year of the reign of Babylonian King Belshazzar, whose co-reign with his father Nabonidus began around 553 B.C., Daniel was given a vision (Daniel 8) that the Greeks, led by their powerful first king, would swiftly conquer the Medes and Persians. Daniel saw that at the height of Grecian power, the first king would die and be replaced by four less powerful rulers. From one of these rulers would come a tyrannical ruler who would persecute the Jews, blaspheme God, and desecrate the Holy Temple. All of this was precisely fulfilled between 333-163 B.C. Kaiser (1998), 456-466.

Skeptics, of course, argue that these prophecies were created after the fact. This is most unlikely in the case of Daniel, since the work was probably considered canonical by the Qumran sect as early as 130 B.C. Hawthorne (1986), 27. Given that Antiochus Epiphanes, the tyrannical ruler foreseen by Daniel, did not rise to power until 175 B.C. (died 163 B.C.), a writing produced after the fact could not have gained canonical status by 130

B.C. People would not so soon after its creation generally accept it as an authentic prophecy of Daniel. In the words of R. K. Harrison, "It is now clear from the Qumran MSS that no part of the OT canonical literature was composed later than the 4th century." R. K. Harrison (1979), 862.

An after-the-fact prophecy is flat impossible in the case of Isaiah 53. This prophecy about Christ (see, Acts 8:32-35) was found at Qumran on scrolls older than the first century. VanderKam (1994), 121, 126. Of course, even without this find there was no doubt that Isaiah 53 predated Christ because there is no way that a first-century insertion would have been accepted by Jews as part of the Book of Isaiah.

The OT contains numerous examples of fulfilled prophecies about the destruction of various cities. For example, Nahum prophesied around 650 B.C. that the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, which was then in its heyday, would be destroyed. In 612 B.C. the city fell to the combined forces of the Babylonians and the Medes. Kaiser (1998), 390. Similar prophecies were fulfilled against Tyre, Sidon, Samaria, Gaza, Ashkelon, Rabbah, Edom, Memphis, Thebes, Babylon, and Jerusalem. See, Barfield (1995), 33-120, 167-176; McDowell (1990), 59-72; and MacArthur (1982), 122-145.

3. Historical accuracy. The third quality that supports the OT's claim of inspiration is its historical accuracy. Its accuracy with regard to peoples, cities, climate, customs, rulers, political situations, and battles has been confirmed during the last 150 years from a variety of extrabiblical sources.

Cities mentioned in reference to the patriarchs have been located, excavated, and shown to have been occupied during their lifetimes (e.g., Ur, Haran, Nahor, Bethel, Beer-sheba, Shechem, and Hebron). Texts discovered this century at Tell-Mardikh (Ebla tablets), Tell-Hariri (Mari tablets), Yorghun Tepe (Nuzi tablets), and Boghazkoy (Boghazkoy tablets) showed that the OT accurately reflects the social and legal background of the patriarchal age. Price (1997), 68-69, 81-107; Merrill (1996), 25-55; Free (1992), 45-75; Wiseman (1979), 315-316.

Just over a century ago, some scholars were suggesting that the Hittites, who are mentioned some 47 times in the OT, were a fictitious creation of the biblical writers. They jumped to that conclusion from the fact there was no extrabiblical evidence of the Hittites' existence. However, in 1906 the OT was proven correct when thousands of tablets from the Royal Archives of the Hittite Empire were discovered at Boghazkoy. Price (1997), 69, 82-83.

Similarly, the Assyrian king Sargon II was considered by many to be a fictional king because he was mentioned nowhere in ancient literature other than Isa. 20:1. In fact, the 8th edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* stated that no such king existed. J. Lewis (1988b). But in 1843 Sargon's palace at Khorsabad was discovered. The inscription on the door slab reads, "Sargon capturer of Samaria and of all Israel." Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 279; Pritchard (1969), 284.¹

¹ Sodom and Gomorrah were likewise unknown outside of Scripture and the writings of those who accepted the

In the 1930's the discovery at Ras Shamra of the 14th-century B.C. royal archives of Ugarit confirmed the OT portrait of Canaanite religion. Baal was a Canaanite "high god" and Asherah was his savage consort. The religion emphasized gross sexuality, sacred prostitution (imitating union of the gods to bring fertility), and general moral depravity. Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 460-461; Merrill (1992), 159-161.

The 14th-century B.C. Amarna Letters discovered in Egypt in 1887 reflect the political conditions in Palestine at the time. The presence of disorganized city-states ruled by "kinglets" fits the biblical depiction of Palestine at the time of the conquest. Free (1992), 116.

1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chron. 12:1-4 report that in the reign of the Judean king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt captured fortified cities in Judea and attacked Jerusalem. In 1825 an inscription dating from 920 B.C. was found at a Temple in Karnak, Egypt which confirms this raid by Shishak. Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 412-413.

In 2 Ki. 24:8-15 and 25:27-30, Judean king Jehoiachin is said to have been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and to have remained in captivity throughout the Babylonian reign. Babylonian records dating from 595-575 B.C. have been uncovered detailing his rations while a prisoner. Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 257.

Daniel 5 indicates that Belshazzar was the last Babylonian king. Since other sources said nothing about Belshazzar and presented Nabonidus as the last king, critics claimed this was a mistake in the Bible. In 1854 an inscription was discovered at Ur naming Belshazzar as the eldest son of Nabonidus. Subsequent discoveries suggest that Nabonidus entrusted Belshazzar the "army and the kingship" of Babylon while he himself campaigned in North and Central Arabia. Archer (1985), 84.

The biblical claim that Cyrus allowed the Jews to return from exile after he conquered the Babylonians (Ezra 1:1-4) was considered false by critics until 1879 when the Cyrus cylinder was discovered. It says that Cyrus allowed captive peoples to return to their lands. Price (1997), 249-252; Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 146.

The case of Jericho shows how much archaeology is an art rather than a science. In the early 1930's John Garstang claimed to find the destruction of a Canaanite town dating to around 1400 B.C. In the 1950's Kathleen Kenyon claimed Garstang had misdated that particular destruction and that there was nothing of significance at Jericho from the time of Joshua. Today, Dr. Bryant G. Wood, an expert in ancient ceramics, argues persuasively that Garstang's dating was correct after all. Price (1997), 152-153.

authority of Scripture. Some still believe that is the case (e.g., Mulder [1992], 102), but others are convinced that one of the Ebla tablets discovered in 1975 contains a "probable reference to Sodom." Price (1997), 120. The earlier claim that all the "cities of the plain" were named in the Ebla tablets has been retracted. See, Merrill (1996), 37; Blaiklock and Harrison (1983), 441.

4. Coherence. The fourth quality that supports the OT's claim of inspiration is its coherence. There is a harmony and continuity in the Bible despite the fact the various books were written in different literary forms in different places at different times. It is not simply a collection of literature; there is a unity that binds it together. This unity reflects the single mind inspiring the various authors.

In the words of the late F. F. Bruce, a renowned Bible scholar:

The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature -- mainly Jewish. If we inquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years. The writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the east. The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles, but belonging to the most diverse walks of life. In their ranks we have kings, herdsmen, soldiers, legislators, fishermen, statesmen, courtiers, priests and prophets, a tentmaking Rabbi and a Gentile physician, not to speak of others of whom we know nothing apart from the writings they have left us. The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic.

For all that, the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible. Bruce (1963), 88.

James Orr, late Professor of Apologetics and Theology at Theological College of United Free Church in Glasgow, in speaking of the Muslim, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist scriptures, said:

It is the simple fact that there is nothing that can be properly called history in these other sacred books of the world. They are, as every student of them knows, for the most part, jumbles of heterogeneous material, loosely placed together, without order, continuity, or unity of any kind. Quoted in MacArthur (1982), 73.

C. Accepted as inspired.

1. By Jesus. The evidence for the inspiration of the OT includes the fact the Lord Jesus viewed it as inspired. For the Christian, Jesus' word on a matter is definitive. As John Wenham writes in the beginning of his book *Christ and the Bible*:

We shall see that to Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To him the God of the Old Testament was the living God and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To him what Scripture said, God said. J. Wenham (1994), 17.

Jesus often quoted and referred to the OT, and he introduced those quotations and references with such formulas as "Scripture" (e.g., Mk. 12:10), "the Scriptures" (e.g., Mat. 22:29-32), "the Law" (e.g., Jn. 10:34), "the Prophets" (e.g., Jn. 6:45), "the Law and the Prophets" (e.g., Mat. 22:40), and "It is written" (e.g., Mat. 4:4-10). These designations presuppose the existence of a complete and sacred collection of Jewish writings that is distinct from all other literature.

Mat. 26:24, 31, 54 and Lk. 18:31, 22:37 clearly demonstrate Jesus' belief that what was written in the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. In Lk. 16:17 he said, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail," and in Jn. 10:35 he flatly declared that "the Scripture cannot be broken." This shows that he knew God was the ultimate author of Scripture.

In Mat. 19:5 Jesus attributed the words of Gen. 2:24 to the Creator, and in Mk. 12:36 he said that David was speaking by the Holy Spirit when he uttered Psalm 110. In Mk. 7:9-13 Jesus referred to what Moses said in several passages in the OT as the "word of God."

Jesus cited Scripture as completely authoritative. For instance, in Mat. 4:1-10 Jesus three times answers the temptations of Satan by citing Scripture. For him, to say "It is written" was to end the discussion.

In Mat. 22:31-32 Jesus relied on the precise words of Ex. 3:6 to refute the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection. The fact God said, "I *am* (present tense) the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," instead of "I *was* the God of . . ." is the basis of the argument that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive. See also, Mat. 22:43-45 and Jn. 10:34-36.

2. By writers of the NT It is not surprising that the NT authors share Jesus' understanding of the OT. There are approximately 300 quotations of the OT in the NT and about 1600 allusions to it. Nicole (1979), 617. Paul's statement in 2 Tim. 3:16-17 sums up the attitude of all NT writers regarding the OT: All Scripture is God-breathed in the sense of 2 Pet. 1:20-21 -- God's Spirit moved men to write what he wanted written. As Nicole says:

From beginning to end, the New Testament authors ascribe unqualified authority to Old Testament Scripture. Whenever advanced, a quotation is viewed as normative. Nowhere do we find a tendency to question, argue, or repudiate the truth of any Scripture utterance. Nicole (1958), 138.

The words of the human authors of the OT are repeatedly represented in the NT as the words of God (e.g., Mat. 1:22-23, 2:15; Lk. 1:70; Acts 1:16, 4:25, 13:35, 28:25; 1 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 3:7, 4:7, 10:15-17). Because the OT is the word of God, Paul in Gal. 3:16 bases

an argument on the grammatical form of a particular word of Scripture ("seed" instead of "seeds"). In fact, the link between God and Scripture is so close that in Rom. 9:17 and Gal. 3:8 the actions of God are ascribed to Scripture.

3. By the masses. In addition to Jesus and the NT writers, hundreds of millions of people throughout history have accepted the OT as inspired. Only in the last few centuries has skepticism about the matter become intellectually fashionable. Though pride tempts us to confuse this skepticism with "progress" or "enlightenment," it is simply part of the ongoing saga of human rebellion.

IX. INSPIRATION OF THE NT

A. Claims to be inspired. The NT claims to be inspired by God. Jesus promised that the Spirit would remind the Apostles of all things and would guide them into all truth (Jn. 14:25-26, 15:26, 16:12-15; Acts 22:12-15). He earlier had assured them that the Holy Spirit would give them *words* to say when they were persecuted (Mat. 10:19-20; Mk. 13:11; Lk. 12:11-12, 21:15).

In keeping with that promise, the Apostles claim to speak the words of God (1 Cor. 2:13, 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:2-3; Gal. 1:1, 11-12; Eph. 3:4-5; 1 Thess. 2:13, 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 3:2; Rev. 1:9-11, 1:19, 22:18-19). Accordingly, Peter refers to Paul's writings as "Scripture" (2 Pet. 3:15-16), and Jude 17-18 quotes 2 Pet. 3:3 as authority, i.e., as Scripture. The report that Peter and Paul accurately predicted future events (Acts 5:9-10, 27:22-25, 44) is another way of saying that God was speaking through them.

As for writings by non-Apostles, the gift of prophecy was given to non-Apostles in the first century (Acts 13:1, 15:32, 21:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:8-11, 12:28, 14:1-5, 14:29-31; Eph. 2:20, 3:5, 4:11-13; 1 Thess. 5:19-20). Paul, who in 2 Tim. 3:16 declared that all "Scripture" is God-breathed, quoted Lk. 10:7 (see also, Mat. 10:10) as "Scripture" in 1 Tim. 5:18. Heb. 5:12 and 6:1 seem to refer to the elementary teachings about Christ as the elementary truths of God's word. This may encompass one or more of the Gospels, the first of which is generally believed to have been Mark.

B. Qualities support the claim to be inspired.

1. Writers speak authoritatively. The NT has several qualities that support its claim of inspiration. First, the NT writers speak authoritatively (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Thess. 3:6, 3:12, 3:14; Heb. 10:26; Jas. 4:4-5). They also include commands that their writings be circulated and read in the churches, which suggests that they are normative (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; see also, Gal 1:1; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1).

2. Historical accuracy. Second, the historical accuracy of the NT is well attested. The Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 55-120) wrote his *Annals of Imperial Rome* around A.D. 110. In describing how Nero attempted to divert the blame for starting the fire in Rome in A.D. 64 that destroyed three quarters of Rome, he writes:

Consequently, to get rid of the report [that he ordered the fire], Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a deadly superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but also in the City [Rome], where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world meet and become popular. Quoted in Barnett (1986), 20.

Tacitus thus confirms the New Testament account that Jesus was executed in Judea during the period when Tiberius was Emperor (A.D. 14-37) and Pontius Pilate was procurator (A.D. 26-36), that his followers were called Christians, and that the movement spread from Judea to Rome.

Another Roman historian, Suetonius (A.D. 69-140), relates an incident in the year A.D. 49: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome." Quoted in Barnett (1986), 23. Most scholars believe "Chrestus" is a reference to "Christus" and the expulsion is the one recorded in Acts 18:2-3.

The Jewish historian Josephus (born A.D. 37 and captured by Romans in the Jewish Revolt) wrote the *Jewish Antiquities* early in A.D. 90's. He states that during a gap between Roman governors in A.D. 62, the high priest

. . . convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. Quoted in Barnett (1986), 27.

Josephus thus confirms the New Testament report that Jesus was "called Christ" and that his brother was James. He elsewhere confirms that Herod had John the Baptist executed.

An inscription at Delphi fixes Gallio's one-year appointment as proconsul in Achaia at June 51, a detail that corresponds with Acts 18:12. Finegan (1998), 391-392. An inscription discovered at Caesarea in 1961 refers to "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea." An inscription discovered at Masada in 1990 refers to "Herod, King of Judea," during whose reign Jesus was born. In 1996 an ossuary (burial bone box) containing the actual remains of Caiaphas, the high priest who handed Jesus over to Pilate, were discovered in Jerusalem. Price (1997), 295-318.

Many other references in the NT to buildings, cities, rulers, people, events, customs, geographical details, and political situations have been verified by secular sources. For a thorough presentation of archaeological discoveries (prior to 1991) that relate to the NT, see McRay (1991).

3. Coherence. The third quality that supports the NT's claim of inspiration is its coherence. The writings all fit together, and the whole group fits with the OT. In the words of Geisler and Nix, "The 'Paradise Lost' of Genesis becomes the 'Paradise Regained' of Revelation. Whereas the gate to the tree of life is closed in Genesis, it is opened forevermore in Revelation." Geisler and Nix (1986), 28. (See the above quote of Bruce regarding coherence.)

C. OT precedent. The evidence for the inspiration of the NT includes the precedent of the OT. We know from Jesus' acceptance of the inspiration of the OT (not to mention the other lines of evidence) that God previously inspired an identifiable collection of writings in conjunction with the old covenant. It would thus be consistent, even expected, for God to inspire a body of writings in conjunction with his establishment of the new covenant in Christ.

D. Circulation and impact. The final evidence for the inspiration of the NT is the circulation and impact it has had (as part of the Bible). The *Cambridge History of the Bible* says "No other book has known anything approaching [the Bible's] constant circulation." Quoted in McDowell (1972), 21. It was the first book ever published on Gutenberg's press in the 1450's, and by 1932 the London Bible Society estimated that there were 1.5 billion Bibles in print. MacArthur (1982), 73. From 1932 to 1966, at least an additional 330 million Bibles were circulated. McDowell (1972), 20.

The Bible has been translated more than any book in history. By the end of 1987, the complete Bible had been translated into 303 languages, complete Testaments had been translated into 670 languages, and a complete Gospel or a book had been translated into 1884 languages. These languages represent the languages spoken by about 97% of the world's population. Grether (1992), 843.

The Bible has had an unparalleled impact on literature. Yale historian Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote in 1953:

It is evidence of his importance, of the effect that he has had upon history, and presumably of the baffling mystery of his being, that no other life lived on this planet has evoked so huge a volume of literature among so many peoples and languages and that, far from ebbing, the flood continues to mount. Quoted in McDowell (1972), 26.

X. INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

If God is ultimately responsible for Scripture, it cannot contain errors or falsehoods. Everything in it must be true because the God who ultimately wrote it is neither ignorant nor deceitful. If we have the original text (inspiration does not extend to the thousands who copied the original inerrant writings) and correctly understand what was being affirmed (leaving room for such things as idioms, poetic expression, hyperbole, and symbolism), we can rely completely on its truthfulness.

XI. SOLA SCRIPTURA

Because the Bible is the inerrant word of God, it is the ultimate authority in all religious matters. Tradition cannot be placed on an equal footing with it. This point was perhaps made most clearly by the Lord in Mat. 15:1-9.

Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes) came from Jerusalem to visit Jesus in Galilee. They demanded an explanation for why his disciples broke “the tradition of the elders” by not washing before they ate. It was understood that Jesus was responsible for this behavior of his disciples; indeed, Lk. 11:38 shows that Jesus himself did not wash before the meal. So this question was an accusation against Jesus.

The “tradition of the elders” refers to the oral laws which had been developed by the Jewish forefathers (or attributed to them) to help explain and apply the Scriptures. The particular tradition of washing one’s hands before eating arose from the prescription in Ex. 30:17-21 requiring the priests to wash their hands and feet when they were ministering. The ritual washing was designed to remove ceremonial defilement incurred in daily life. If one’s hands touched something that was ceremonially unclean, the hands would be unclean, and that defilement would be passed to any food that was touched. Eating such defiled food would make the whole person unclean. This was considered so important that a whole section of the Mishnah (a later codification of oral laws), called “Hands,” is devoted to it.

The fact the Pharisees and scribes demanded an explanation for the failure to comply with this tradition shows that they considered it sacrosanct. In their view, to break this tradition was wrong or irreligious. Jesus took the opportunity to address the role of tradition in true religion.

One tradition followed by the Pharisees was that a person who pledged or dedicated assets to the temple (upon his death) could not give those assets to anyone else. The one pledging the assets could use them during his lifetime, but they could not be transferred to another. Jesus said that this tradition actually nullified the word of God that called for children to honor their parents. It “nullified” it in the sense it provided a religious means of not obeying that command. It was nullification of God’s word in the name of piety, and it thus constituted hypocrisy.

Jesus’ point is that tradition is not to be equated with the word of God. On the contrary, a tradition can be *wrong* in that it can be inconsistent with the word of God. This is the crucial point. The word of God must sit in judgment of all religious tradition.