

SCRIPTURE—GOD-BREATHED AND PROFITABLE

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In any study of the nature of Biblical inspiration one naturally turns to 2 Timothy 3:16. The passage is clear cut and constitutes a ringing declaration of the Divine authorship of Scripture. Hence it is easy to understand why this verse is greatly loved by Christians and why they turn to it when they desire again to be reminded that the Book which brings so much blessing to them is a gift of God Himself.

If we turn to this passage, however, a charge may very well be laid against us. It will be said that we are paying attention to the teaching of Scripture at the expense of its phenomena or characteristics. "You listen only to the doctrine which Scripture teaches about itself," so the charge runs, "but you pay no heed to the facts or the phenomena of Scripture. If you would begin your study with the phenomena of the Bible you would obtain a very different picture from that which you receive when you pay attention only to what the Bible says about itself." This charge is often raised in our day against those who are concerned to defend the full and complete authority of Scripture. It is, of course, not a recent charge. It was made even in the days of Benjamin B. Warfield, and he regarded it necessary even in his day to refute it.

At first glance, it might appear that there is some justification for the position that the teaching of the Bible and its phenomena are to be placed upon a par each with the other, and that the phenomena of Scripture should be just as regulative of an acceptable doctrine of Scripture as the express teaching thereof. A little reflection, however, should make clear how untenable and unjustified such a position really is.

On the airplane I fall into conversation with the man in the seat next to me. He introduces himself as a Mr. Smith from New York, and tells me that he is on his way to San Francisco. Why should I not accept his testimony to himself? Normally, we assume that a person is telling the truth unless there be convincing reason to the contrary. But, for the sake of the argument, I am unwilling to accept Mr. Smith's testimony. For one thing he speaks with a Southern accent; again I notice that the last initial on his briefcase is not S, but B, and finally I happen to note that he holds an airline ticket between New York and Chicago, not between New York and San Francisco. I have been studying the "phenomena" of Mr. Smith and from them conclude that he is not from New York, nor is he on his way to San Francisco, nor for that matter is his name Smith. Prudence, however, dictates that I keep my findings to myself. But I am quite convinced that a study of the "phenomena" has given me the truth about Mr. Smith or whatever his name is, and I am sure that I have been far more scientific and scholarly in my procedure than a poor extreme fundamentalist who naively accepts Mr. Smith's words at

face value. A study of the phenomena has contradicted the testimony of Mr. Smith. His statements about himself are not to be trusted. The "phenomena" have disproved them. It is a comfortable feeling to be so up to date.

As our flight progresses, however, Mr. Smith speaks further. I learn that he has only lived in New York for three years, but that he was born in Georgia. He shows me pictures of his birthplace and tells me that he has recently visited it. There was, it seems, a family reunion, and there is Mr. Smith in the midst of it. There are photographs of himself, and these bear his name. The mystery is beginning to clear. As we talk I learn that he is meeting a friend in Chicago and that the two of them plan to make a leisurely business trip from Chicago to San Francisco. Furthermore, I learn that the briefcase belongs not to Mr. Smith but to the friend, and that Mr. Smith is carrying it to Chicago to give to his friend.

Thus, my study of the "phenomena," interesting and "objective" as it was, led to wholly wrong conclusions. And the reason why it led to such wrong conclusions was that I did not know enough to judge the "phenomena" correctly. By my study of the "phenomena" I had concluded that Mr. Smith was not telling the truth, and this was an utterly unjustified procedure. By my study of the "phenomena" I did Mr. Smith a grave injustice.

It may be well to note that certain assumptions underlie the position that man by a study of the phenomena of Scripture is capable of passing judgment upon these phenomena and so upon Scripture itself. And the fundamental assumption, often uncritically adopted, is that the mind of man, without the assistance of divine revelation, can make pronouncements as to whether certain parts of the Bible are from God or not. Even the study of textual questions can only be ultimately fruitful if it be based upon theistic presuppositions. And a philosophy of error can only have meaning if it be grounded upon the truth. Man of himself does not know enough to assert that there are errors in Scripture. If we assume that we may set ourselves up as judges of the Bible, what we are in reality doing is declaring ourselves wiser than God. Scripture speaks of itself as "God-breathed;" we assert that we know enough to belie its claim.

And this brings us to the heart of the matter. The idea that a study of the phenomena of Scripture as opposed to mere acceptance of the teaching of Scripture can bring us to a true view of the Bible leads inevitably to the conclusion that the teaching of the Bible concerning itself is in error and must be corrected. It produces the conclusion that the Bible is at bottom wrong about itself, and that we must revise its teaching on this point. This can hardly be regarded as a satisfactory conclusion, for if Scripture is fundamentally mistaken about itself, how do we know that it is correct in anything else that it teaches? The Bible asserts that it is "God-breathed," but we have checked up on it and we find that that characterization will not apply. The Bible has deceived us in telling us about itself, and our study of the phenomena has compelled us to modify the teaching which the Bible gives us as to its own nature. Such is the sad conclusion to which one must inevitably come if he engages in a study of the "phenomena" of the Bible instead of willingly accepting the Bible's claims concerning itself.

There is of course a proper method of examining the "phenomena" of Scripture and that is to study them in the light of Scripture's doctrine of itself. If we do this we shall see that the so-called phenomena, when properly interpreted, simply support the doctrine of Scripture about itself. It is this procedure which devout exegetes and apologists are constantly

engaged in. It is a procedure which leads one to see how the phenomena of the Bible are to be understood and how they really support the claims of Scripture. We are far from being opposed to a study of the Scriptural phenomena, but we insist that such study must build upon a right foundation. To build upon a wrong foundation, as so many do, can lead only to a rejection of Scripture's doctrine about itself. The result is a Bible that is untrustworthy as a teacher of doctrine.

The Structure of 2 Timothy 3:16

We make no apology, therefore, for turning to the teaching of Scripture, and when we know what this teaching is we can in its light examine the Scriptural phenomena to our heart's content. Our attention at present, however, is to be limited to one particular passage, which has often been studied. There is, however, need for a reconsideration of this passage, for it has recently become the object of strange interpretations.

The King James Version renders 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." The English Revised Version gives: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." A footnote, however, suggests the reading as an alternative, "Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable . . ." The American Standard Version is the same as the English even to the point of giving an identical footnote. The Revised Standard Version is closer to the King James, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." The New English Bible gives, "Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living." The New American Standard Bible renders, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." To this translation there are three interesting marginal notes appended; 1. "Or possibly, Every Scripture inspired by God is also . . .;" 2. "Lit., God-breathed;" 3. "Lit., "training which is in . . ."

Perhaps it will not be out of place to note a few more translations. Phillips gives, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living." Weymouth has: "Every Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in right doing." The version authorized by the Hierarchy of England and Wales and the Hierarchy of Scotland renders: "Everything in the Scripture has been divinely inspired, and has its uses; to instruct us, to expose our errors, to correct our faults, to educate us in holy living." Goodspeed, in the American translation, gives, "All Scripture is divinely inspired, and useful in teaching, in reproof, in correcting faults, and in training in uprightness." Lastly, we may note the rendering of the Berkeley version, "All Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

Here, indeed, is considerable variety in translation. At the same time, it is interesting to note that each of these translations uses the English word "scripture." None of them

renders the word graphē as "writing," but each is apparently convinced that the apostle is speaking of Scripture. It will be well then to examine the grammatical structure of the verse somewhat carefully in order that we may more clearly understand what it is that Paul asserts concerning the Scripture.

The first question which calls for attention revolves about the point whether theopneustos is an attributive adjective modifying graphē or whether it is a predicative adjective. In other words, is Paul saying, "All Scripture inspired of God is also profitable," or is his meaning, "All Scripture is inspired of God and is also profitable." Of the translations given above we may note that the English Revised Version, the American Standard Version, and the New English Bible take theopneustos as an attributive adjective, although the two revisions do offer footnotes in which the word is construed as a predicative. The New English Bible is very free.¹

If the word kai be omitted from the text then it would seem that theopneustos is to be construed as an attributive; although we might in that case expect it to precede the noun. In that case the text might be translated, "All inspired Scripture is profitable." Luther seems to have taken it in this sense, "all Scripture inspired by God is." But is there good textual warrant for thus omitting the conjunction? Kai is lacking in the Syriac² and in some of the Church Fathers. Nestle does not mention any manuscripts in which it is missing. Textual evidence then would argue for the presence of kai and there is no sufficient reason for not retaining it.

Now, it is the presence of this word kai which renders difficult the construction of theopneustos as an attributive, for if theopneustos is an attributive then kai must be rendered in English as "also." The whole must then be translated, "All scripture inspired of God is also profitable," or conceivably, if kai be given ascensive sense, "All scripture inspired of God is even profitable." It cannot be denied that these translations create difficulty for they appear to be saying something that is practically pointless. Why (to note the ascensive use of kai) should Paul say that all inspired Scripture is even profitable? Is not the word "even" superfluous? What does it contribute to the thought? Is not the simple declaration "All Scripture inspired of God is profitable" far stronger and more effective than the statement "All scripture inspired of God is even profitable"?

Suppose, however, we give to the word kai the force of "also" which is what we really must do if we regard theopneustos as a predicate. Does not the sentence then become somewhat pointless?³ "Also" suggests an addition to something just mentioned. If Scripture is "also profitable," in addition to what else is Scripture profitable? Paul might conceivably have said "All Scripture inspired of God is holy and also profitable." This would yield good sense, but merely to assert that "Scripture is also profitable" is really pointless. For these reasons we feel compelled to construe theopneustos as a predicative adjective. Paul is then making two assertions concerning the Scripture. In the first place he declares that Scripture is theopneustos and secondly that it is profitable.

The question now arises whether we should render the introductory words, "every Scripture" or "all Scripture." And in seeking to answer this question we must also ask in what sense the word graphē is to be understood? Does it refer to individual passages of the Scrip-

ture, as when our Lord says, "Today is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21), or does it refer to the entirety of Scripture? The preceding verse, in which Paul is speaking of the "holy Scriptures," would seem to show that he here has in mind all Scripture. Yet one cannot be dogmatic upon this point. If Paul has in mind each individual passage of Scripture he is then considering the Scripture distributively. He is then saying in effect that whatever passage of Scripture one consider, that Scripture is inspired of God. If, on the other hand, as is more likely, it is all Scripture of which he speaks, he is then declaring that the entirety of Scripture is inspired of God. The definite article is missing and this is a factor which would argue in favor of 'every.' At the same time this consideration is not decisive, for there are cases where pas is used without the definite article and the meaning 'every' is not acceptable.

Happily, it does not essentially affect the thought. In either case Paul is asserting the inspiration of the Scripture. Whether we consider Scripture piece by piece or whether we look at it in its entirety the Scripture is inspired by God and it is profitable. These two predicates apply to all that can be denominated "Scripture."

God-Breathed and Profitable Scripture

It is necessary now to consider the two predicates which Paul attributes to the Scriptures. In the first place we have the word theopneustos about which there is much discussion. Since the learned studies of the late Benjamin B. Warfield, however, there can be little serious question as to the actual meaning of the word.⁴ To say that Scripture is theopneustos is to assert that it is God-breathed. This, of course, is not universally acknowledged. The recent lexicon of Bauer, translated into English by Arndt and Gingrich merely gives the translation, "inspired by God," and shows no evidence of having used Warfield's work. This is truly disappointing, for it is misleading.

The word "inspiration" has entered the English language, it would seem, through the French, and ultimately derives from the Latin. In Latin the infinitive spirare means "to breathe" or "to blow." From this basic meaning there are certain connotations, such as, for example, the usage in Horace, quod spiro, et placeo, si placeo, tuum est, where the word seems to mean "to be poetically inspired." In combination with the preposition "in," the infinitive means "to breathe into," and it is precisely this thought which the English word "inspiration" denotes.

To speak of the inspiration of the Bible then, is to speak of a book into which something has been breathed or, if we wish to make the genitive subjective, a book which breathes something into someone else. Let us examine these two views briefly. If the phrase, the inspiration of the Bible designates inspiration which the Bible produces in others, it is tantamount to saying that the Bible is an inspiring book. The Bible, on this view, in one way or another inspires men. This, of course, is true, the Bible does inspire men as perhaps nothing else can do or has done. There is much that can be said about the inspiration which men have received from the Bible.

Suppose, however, that in the phrase, "the inspiration of the Bible," the genitive is objective? This would mean that the Bible is a body of writings into which something had been

breathed. Some quality of divinity, we may suppose, had been breathed by God into these writings which rendered them distinct from other writings. On this interpretation of the phrase, we are apparently to understand that the Scriptures are writings produced by men just as other writings are, but that somehow God breathed into them something which renders them different. These are the alternatives which appear to be open to us if we render the word theopneustos by "inspiration."

Which of these alternatives should we adopt? The answer is that we should adopt neither, for the word "inspiration" does not accurately represent Paul's thought. That the Arndt-Gingrich lexicon should so cavalierly treat the subject is a disservice to those who may use the lexicon. There is no point in repeating or in rehearsing the arguments which Dr. Warfield has adduced to support the correct meaning of the word, but we may confidently assert that the word means "God-breathed," and this is something quite different from what is meant by the English word "inspiration."

Paul is not asserting that Scripture is inspiring, true as that may be, nor is he declaring that something has been breathed into Scripture. What he is saying is something quite different; what Paul is maintaining is that the Scripture itself is God-breathed. That which God breathed forth from His mouth is Scripture. To put the matter in slightly different terms, Scripture is the Word, which God has spoken, the product of the Divine breath.

What Paul is declaring is the Divine origin of Scripture. Some apparently think that there is no need to make such an assertion at this point, but it is precisely this truth which undergirds the following truth, namely, that all Scripture is profitable. If the Bible is not divine, then we cannot be sure that all of it is profitable.

We must, however, examine this thought of the Divine origin of Scripture more closely. In Genesis 1:3 God said, "Let there be light," and these words originated in the Divine mouth. They were spoken of God, and it is just this thought which Paul is expressing to Timothy. By way of illustration we may also note the preface to the Ten Commandments, "And God spoke all these words saying." Here the commandments are clearly attributed to God as their author. He spoke them, and it is in this divine speaking that they found their origin.

Isaiah uses a phrase--indeed it is a characteristic of his prophecy, which sets forth the same truth, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." We might go on through the Old Testament, pointing out how in passage after passage the content of Scripture is attributed to God's speech.

How different Paul's emphasis is from much that is stressed today! At the present time there is much stress placed upon the so-called human side of the Bible. It is being asserted, for example, that if one is to understand a passage of Scripture, he must know the life situation in which the events recorded arose. This is to concentrate attention upon the human side. Little is said today about Scripture as a Divine revelation, and that little often presents a faulty picture of revelation.

As over against this modern emphasis the great Apostle turns all his attention to what modern man would minimize, namely, the divine origin of Scripture. Having once established

this point he can go on, but this point must be established: All Scripture is God-breathed, the product of the Divine breath, issuing from the mouth of God Himself.

Having ascertained the meaning of Paul's first predicate, we may proceed to notice the second. All too often discussion restricts itself to the word theopneustos with the result that the profound truth expressed by the second predicate is either neglected or minimized. Not only is the Scripture God-breathed, but it is also ophelimos which may be translated "profitable, useful, advantageous." The usage of the verb opheleō is well known, as is also that of the noun opheleia.

When Paul asks (Rom. 3:1) "What is the use of circumcision?" he simply means, "How can circumcision aid or benefit you?" And so in this present passage he is speaking of the fact that the Scripture brings benefit or profit to those who read it. Doubtless the second predicate stands as a consequence to the first, and it would not be incorrect to reason, "Inasmuch as Scripture is God-breathed, it is also profitable." The usefulness of the Bible, in other words, derives from the fact that it is the Word of God. Were that not the case, it would be just an ordinary human book, whose usefulness could well be questioned.

What is now particularly significant to note is Paul's affirmative that all Scripture is profitable. The implications of this assertion are often overlooked or ignored but they are of far-reaching significance. The predicate which Paul employs, like the first predicate, applies to the entirety of Scripture. There is nothing which can rightly be designated Scripture which is not also profitable in the respects stated in this verse.

This truth strikes hard at the practical use which many of us make of the Bible. Our reading and study of Scripture, all too often, is merely piece-meal. We have favorite passages which we read over and over again, but large portions of the Scriptures are neglected by us. Although we may pay lip-service to the teaching of Paul we do not carry it out into practice.

Far more serious, however, is another aspect of the question. It is one thing in practice to neglect certain portions of Scripture. That is bad. Far worse, however, is it when we deliberately assert that not all of Scripture is profitable. Question has been raised, for example, with respect to the book of Esther: Why is the book of Esther in the canon? Did God place it in the canon in order to teach divine providence, or inasmuch as they find it in the canon, and the question of its canonicity seems to be somewhat of a dead letter nowadays, do Christians simply assert that because the book teaches divine providence, it therefore has a right to a place in the canon? Recently Professor Dewey Beegle has suggested that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel quite clearly teach the fact of God's providential care and asks whether it is "--really necessary, therefore, to contend for the unique inspiration of every word of Esther?"⁵

This type of objection requires comment with respect to several points, which we shall consider in a practical, if not necessarily a logical order. In the first place, there is the question of canonicity, and this question is not immediately germane to our purpose. That which determines the canonicity of a book is the fact that it is God-breathed. If a book is the Word of God, it is ipso facto canonical. In the course of the collection of the canonical books questions have naturally arisen concerning some books, and Esther is one of these. But is not

the fact that the debate about Esther has largely died down an argument in favor of the book's inclusion in the canon?

We are fully aware of the difficulties involved in the Scriptural doctrine of the canon and have sought to discuss them elsewhere. But we believe that the church has been right in placing its approval upon this book and accepting it as a portion of the Old Testament. Despite the rabbinical discussions concerning this book, there is no sufficient warrant for not believing that when our Lord placed His approval upon the Old Testament canon of His day, the book of Esther was included in that canon.

The question of the canon is not the immediate point involved, however. What is involved is simply whether all Scripture is profitable or not. It is sometimes assumed that, if all Scripture is profitable, we should therefore at a glance be able to tell precisely how this is so. Professor Beegle mentions certain passages which he calls Trivialities. Among these are listed the "Shibboleth" incident of Judges 12:5, 6; the case of Ibzan, Judges 12:8-10; and Abdon, Judges 12:14. Are not these mere trivialities which have no particular value for us today? Apparently Professor Beegle would answer this question in the affirmative, and doubtless others would agree with him.⁶

It is well to notice, however, that the human mind, apart from God's revelation, is in no position to judge as to whether each particular passage of Scripture is profitable or not. God has declared that all Scripture is profitable. Shall we believe Him or not? This is the heart of the issue. Who is to decide whether Scripture in its entirety is for our profit? This is a question which man alone cannot resolve. Professor Beegle might restrict his questions to a few passages such as those mentioned above. There are others, however, who are not as concerned about Christ's work as is Professor Beegle, and they would not hesitate to enlarge greatly the list of passages which are to be dismissed as supposedly non-profitable.

The position of faith is the only possible position for the man who wishes to be true to his Lord. To deny that all Scripture is profitable is to deny that God has spoken the truth. We are not called upon to point out in what respect every passage of the Bible is profitable for us any more than we are required to give a final interpretation of every verse of the Bible or a final explanation of every difficulty in Scripture.

A man might conceivably list every verse of the Bible which he did not fully understand and then reject it as of little or no profit. "If we do not understand something," it might be argued, "how shall we benefit from it?" If we were to follow this procedure, it would mean the casting aside of a great deal of Scripture. Yet few would want to engage in a procedure such as this. Why then should we regard as unprofitable or why should we deny profitability to certain passages of Scripture on the grounds that we do not see how such passages can be of profit?

There is one point about the Shibboleth incident that is deserving of notice in this connection. The Ephraimites had grossly insulted the Gileadites and were severely beaten in battle. The Gileadites then took the fords of the Jordan to cut off the Ephraimites' retreat and, if possible, to prevent their return to their homes. Inasmuch as the Gileadites had control of the river they tested each man who sought to cross to discover whether he was an Ephraimite

or not. Apparently the Ephraimites were unable to pronounce "sh," and so, when the word "Shibboleth" was set before them, they pronounced "sibboleth" instead, thus giving themselves away. The result was that during the war some 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell.

That the Ephraimites pronounced "sh" like "s" is quite interesting, but the incident is instructive also. It simply is illustrative of the difficulty which the people of God had in establishing themselves in the land of promise. The great lesson which God's people at that time had to learn--indeed, the lesson which they need at all times to learn--is that the promise of salvation is to be received as a gift of grace and not a reward of merit. To obtain the promise the people of God are not to employ the wisdom of the world. More specifically, to establish themselves in the holy land, the people were not to employ the methods and practices of the world. When Jephthah had appealed to the Ephraimites to fight against the Ammonites, for some reason they did not heed that appeal. They had no warrant, as far as we can tell, for rising against the Gileadites, and now their actions rebound upon them. "They that live by the sword shall die by the sword." The Shibboleth incident resulted in a great destruction for the Ephraimites.

Ephraim had used worldly wisdom--or at least she had not relied upon God, and her actions had backfired. She had not become a blessing to those round about her; she acted as the people of the covenant should not act. Her reliance was not placed in the promises of God but in herself. Her defiance and haughtiness toward Gilead were anything but becoming to the chosen people. Hence, she suffered, and the Shibboleth incident is the mark of her ignominious defeat.

Without this episode at the crossing we should not realize the disgrace that fell at that time upon Ephraim. In the total picture the incident has its place, and it is a significant place. Like many other details it goes to fill out the picture and contributes its share toward making clear that at that time the covenant people had not learned their need wholly to trust in their God.

This Shibboleth incident contributes to our understanding of the period and thus plays its part in making clear that the events recorded in the Old Testament are historical. Here there is further evidence that we are dealing with historical matters. This is an emphasis sorely needed at present when men are seeking to retain the content of Christianity and yet divorce it from its historical roots.

Perhaps we may not be able in every instance to discern wherein Scripture is profitable. Further study on our part, however, will clear up many difficulties. May our lives be devoted to the study of the Scriptures for they in their entirety are God-breathed and they are profitable.

DOCUMENTATION

1. This translation rests upon the text pasa graphē theopneustos ophelimos, etc. R. V. G. Tasker: The Greek New Testament, Oxford, Cambridge, 1964.
2. We may transliterate: kul k^etob dab^eruho' 'etk^eteb, maut^erona' (h)w etc.
3. Huther seems to suggest that kai is confirmative. On this view it would be rendered "indeed" or something similar. Cf. J. E. Huther: Critical and Exegetical Handbook of the Epistles of St. Paul, in Meyer's Commentary. Edinburgh, MDCCCLXXXI, p. 307.
4. Benjamin B. Warfield: "God-inspired Scripture" in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, Philadelphia, 1948, pp. 245-296.
5. Dewey M. Beegle: The Inspiration of Scripture. Philadelphia, 1963, p. 93.
6. Op. cit., p. 88.