

Chapter Five: “Biblical Inspiration”

Community, Messengers and Canon

Unexamined, taken-for-granted, mental concepts can be, and very often are, extraordinarily powerful. In the last chapter we noted that Ian Michael is very likely to assume that Genesis 1 is answering his questions—not the questions of Moshe He’eb. He will inevitably make this assumption unless he consciously thinks about it, rejects it, and asks himself what Moshe He’eb’s questions might have been—all of which requires a good deal of mental effort from Ian Michael. He is going to have to invest a similar amount of effort in exploring his mental concepts when he hears the words “Biblical Inspiration” for those concepts are also likely to be unexamined and they will be extraordinarily powerful. His mental concepts will affect how he understands everything he reads in the Bible.

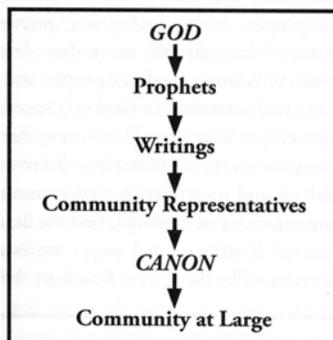
So what mental concepts might Ian Michael be likely to attach to “Biblical Inspiration”?

- The original writer, typically a prophet, was given the words to write by God (“**verbal inspiration**”) or, alternatively, God gave him the ideas which he expressed with his own choice of words (“**thought inspiration**”).
- Subsequent editing (if any) took place under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit to ensure that errors did not creep in.
- The Holy Spirit oversaw the copying process down through the centuries, again to ensure that no errors crept in. Furthermore, copyists were extremely careful and hence made very few errors—or none at all.
- Translators were likewise overshadowed by the Holy Spirit such that the English (or French or Latin) text faithfully re-created in the minds of the readers the images that were conveyed to the original audience—those who first heard it,

So let us explore how “Scripture” originated and achieved an “Inspired” status

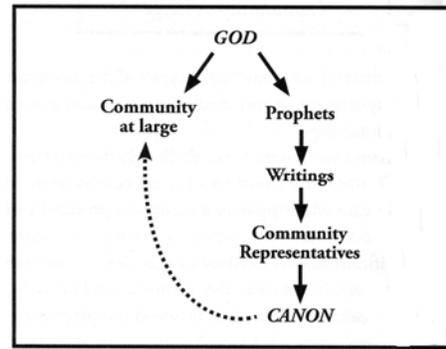
One suggestion is that Scripture came via a direct one-way, three-step, linear sequence: God-to-author-to-writings-to Canon. Let’s call this the linear stream concept

In flow-chart form this idea is very similar to that outlined in Ian Michael’s mental concepts bulleted above—concepts which are activated whenever he hears the descriptive term “Inspired” Scripture. However, several significant issues arise. It suggests verbal inspiration or something very much like it where God is dictating and the prophet is writing it down. The community plays a minor (though very important) role – the preservation of the writings – but it plays no part in their creation. Finally, the flow-chart seems to take for granted that what God communicated to the prophets for the edification of Moshe will answer Ian Michael’s questions 3,000 years later.



Perhaps a more nuanced and more complicated description would be helpful; let's refer to this as the meandering stream concept:

The majority of Inspired Scripture is made up of *nonprophetic* utterances. Prophetic utterances are the only material accounted for in the linear-stream flow chart. Some of the Bible, however, is best described as narrative—the story of Araham and Isaac; the story of Jacob and Joseph; and, of course, the account of the Exodus from Egypt, that epochal event that transformed a group of escaping slaves into a nation. Elsewhere in Scripture there are collections of wise sayings such as those in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.



There are songs. There are poems. All of these components of “Inspired Scripture”, consist of contributions from members of the believing community – the same community that collected, preserved and copied what the prophets said and/or wrote. Any adequate concept of “Inspiration” must account for these portions of the Bible too.

Textual Issues to be addressed by any comprehensive definition of “Inspiration”

In the first four chapters of *God, Sky and Land* we have, on several occasions, noted situations that make each of Ian Michael’s “Inspiration” concepts problematic. Let us begin with his last concept: translators who faithfully utilize words that re-create in the minds of the readers the mental images that the inspired author conveyed to the original audience. We have already seen that this may well not be the case with the Hebrew words *‘erets*, *shemayim*, and *raqia*. In the modern world when *‘erets* is translated as “earth” it will inevitably conjure up Planet Earth; *shemayim* translated as “heavens” will conjure up Universe. And *raqia* (since a modern translator knows that no such thing as a sky-vault exists), when it is translated “expanse” or “atmosphere” will produce a picture in the English reader’s mind that could not conceivably have been envisioned by the original hearers of the Genesis text.

Inspiration is as inspiration does



Scripture itself makes no attempt at a definition of “Inspiration”. Perhaps it would be best to follow Paul’s example in 1 Timothy 3:16. There he describes how “Inspired Scripture “ is to be used—not the manner in which “Inspiration” is constituted. This series began with the commitment that we would be looking for the answers to three questions in the the Old Testament Book of Genesis—Who God is, What God Does and What God Wants (mainly what God wants for us). A robust definition of “Inspired” (in our opinion) is material (written or spoken) which throws light on these three pivotal questions. Those prophetic utterances along with those songs, those poems and those wise sayings all contributed to Moshe’s understanding of Who God is, What God Does, and What God Wants. That is why the material was chosen in the first place and was then laboriously copied and re-copied through the centuries. Because of this “cloud of witnesses” Ian Michael is able to read in English the material that Moshe read (in Hebrew and Aramaic) and found helpful in answing—Who God is, What God Does, and What God Wants. **Inspired Scripture.**