

2015 is our CWR/PTM
Year of the Bible.

In this March /April issue we offer the first in a four-part series—with each edition in this special feature appearing in consecutive issues until our final installment in our September/October 2015 issue. Of course, digital versions of all these installments will be available on our website at www.ptm.org. We have no plans nor budget allocated to print a hardcopy compilation of all four installments.

PART ONE OF FOUR

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is a tool that can be used to illuminate, teach and inspire us [the created] about God [our Creator]. The Bible is a divine gift that helps us, the fallible and mortal, look into the infallible and eternal God. The divine teaching and inspiration revealed in this book necessitates that God stoops into our world of human language. By definition, God must condescend himself, as our heavenly Father using “baby-talk” to communicate with and to us. **The Bible is somewhat like a window** through which we may gaze and come to know more of our loving heavenly Father. The object of our worship is not the window. The window itself is flawed and imperfect, with smudges, streaks and hairline cracks, but it is nonetheless a tool through which the divine Light might enter our lives.

As baby-talk, it is written not for its absolute and “holy” literary integrity, but rather to convey meaning and significance to you and me, given our limitations.

Is the Bible the Word of God?

Many within Christendom speak of the Bible as the “Word of God.” However, **Jesus alone is the Word of God**. He alone is infallible and inerrant. The Bible is a book, divinely inspired, but it is a divine-human product—for God has used humans to author, transmit, translate, copy and publish the Bible. It is a window with smudges and streaks. It is baby-

Reading and UNDERSTANDING the BIBLE SENSITIVELY and SENSIBLY

talk that condescends to our limited abilities of understanding.

The Bible is not the Word of God, but the Bible helps illuminate the one and only Word of God, whose name is Jesus (John 1:1). The message of the Bible is inspired by God, but the book itself, composed of individual words, printed in ink on paper, is not infallible or inerrant.

Many within Christendom have the habit of speaking of the Bible as “holy” (Bible publishers define and embellish the Bible as “holy” on its cover) but God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) alone is holy. All else is impure and less than holy.

Remember: God knowingly and purposefully used humans in the production of the book we call the Bible.

Is the Bible Inspired?

Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). However, some turn Paul’s comments in this passage into a circular argument: A) Scripture is God-breathed (“inspired” in some translations) so therefore Scripture is infallible and without error, and B) Scripture is infallible and without error so therefore Scripture is God-breathed! No matter which supposition comes first, then, in the minds of those who believe the Bible to be inerrant and infallible, the other follows.

The manner of “inspiration” assumed by many fundamentalists is that God caused human authors of the Bible to fall into a trance so that their fingers moved, apart from their created capacity for critical thinking. Thus God (say the dictation theory folks) bypassed the human mind, thinking and culture.

Other fundamentalist theories of “inspiration” may not be as radical, but they all assume the *breath of God* to be without error, and somehow it transcends the fallible human authors and their own imperfections.

There is a huge debate about what the Bible means by saying that it is inspired by God, but we should remember that God *breathed* life into Adam, and Adam was far from perfect.

For fundamentalists, the next supposition in their view of the “inspiration of the Bible” follows closely on the heels of this circular argument: because God breathed the Bible and therefore it is without error all biblical passages are literally true.

Given this mindset, any interpretation of the Bible which is not “literal” is deemed to be inadequate. No interpretation of the Bible is necessary or desired because it must all be understood literally.

The Bible is inspired, but God inspired human authors, and he used those human authors, warts and all, to record a message and a story. **The Bible did not drop out of heaven—it was written by people**. God could have, of course, bypassed humanity and parachuted the Bible out of heaven, but he did not. As a divine-human document of paper and ink, the Bible is not holy nor is it inerrant or infallible. It is inspired in that God inspired the central teaching and focus of the Bible—and his name is Jesus. Jesus, the theme of the Bible, is inspired. Jesus is infallible and without error, he is the Word of God. □

—Greg Albrecht