

## **The Bible is inspired!**

### **2 Peter 1:16-21**

I want you to imagine that you have a new job. Your new line of work is with the government and it's your role to investigate paranormal activity. Do you remember the X-files? Mulder and Scully, that's you!

And so on your first day in this job the red phone on your desk starts ringing (this is the top secret line along which classified information is communicated), and you're told to head out to a very remote area and when you arrive you make your way past the military check point and there in front of you is a deep gouge in the ground, the grass is all burnt, and at one end of the gouge is a strange metallic object – A UFO has crashed! And so you put on your protective suit and you approach the craft, the hatch has been forced open by the impact and so you look inside.

What do you see? A very strange humanlike creature who's been knocked unconscious; you're face to face with an alien! And so you pull him out (or her, it's hard to tell, maybe it's an 'it') and take them back to your top secret laboratory that's been set up to deal with situations like this, and it's your job to care for this creature and to write the report detailing exactly what or who it is that you've found.

Now how would you go completing this task? I think you've got a couple of different methods to work with. You could start with a series of investigations. You get out the tape measure and you measure from the head to the toe, you could observe behavior as it comes to terms with its new environment. That's one thing that you would probably do.

But if that's all you did, you'd still be left with a lot of questions. You might be able to describe *what* it is that's there in front of you, but *why* this alien has visited us would still be a bit of a mystery. To answer that question you'd need to work out how to talk with the alien. To understand the alien fully you need to do more than make observations; to get the full picture you need the alien to reveal something of themselves.

Now in some respects I think God is like an alien! He exists on a different plane to us. We each have a beginning; but God's been there for all eternity. We humans have limited knowledge but God sees and understands all things. We live here on earth; but God's home, the Bible says, is in heaven. So how can we ever hope to understand a being who is so different to us? There's nothing on earth to compare him to, so how can we understand him? Well, just like what might happen if we were studying an alien, to understand God we need to choose a method.

Some people will use their *investigative* skills to come up with a description of God. They might look at the world and say "God is very imaginative, because look at all the diversity in the world". Or they might look at the world and come up with a very

different conclusion “God is obviously very cruel”, they might say, “because of all the suffering”! Another imperfect method would be to simply *imagine* what God is like. People imagine God in all sorts of ways, John Lennon even encouraged us to imagine God’s non-existence: “Imagine there’s no heaven”, he sang in his famous song about non-belief. Or, some people rely on their religious *inheritance* when it comes to knowing God. They believe because their parents believed before them or because it’s what they’ve inherited from their culture.

But all these ways are problematic. It’s not as if there is no value in your inheritance or in your imagination or in your investigative skills, it’s just that they’re all methods which move in one direction from us to God. It’s like asking the alien to remain silent while trying to write a report on him. And so I think the key method in trying to understand who God is to make sure we are listening to God’s *self-revelation*. Just like the full picture regarding the alien would only be available after he or she speaks with us, so the full picture of who God is can only come to us after he himself shows us what he is like.

Now we Christians believe that God has spoken. We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ, God revealed himself to humanity. The memory verse that I am teaching my Scripture classes at the moment is John 1:18 The only son who is truly God has shown us what the father is like. Jesus has shown us what God is like. The problem for us is that Jesus has returned to the Father’s side, so while he was observable for a time, we can no longer see him. But Jesus the man isn’t the only way in which God has revealed himself.

In fact, the ongoing method that God uses to reveal himself is through the Bible. In the Old Testament days God sometimes revealed himself through physical manifestations, but these manifestations were irregular and it was the Bible that became the constant place of revelation. The same is true for the New Testament; Christ appeared at a certain point in history but it’s the Bible that is the ongoing source for our knowledge of God.

And so over the next few weeks I’d like to speak with you about the Bible. Every week we open this book but over the next 6 weeks we’re going to take a few steps back and ask ourselves why it is that we are so obsessed with this book. Theologians would say that we are doing a series on the *Doctrine of Scripture*. What is the Bible? How are we to approach it? Why is it so valuable? My prayer is that we will all grow in our confidence in handling the Bible and that we will also grow to love what it has to say to us; that we might become excited at the prospect of opening up its pages,

The passage we are beginning our series with today is 2 Peter 1:16-21; a passage all about the Bible’s authorship. So this is our first question: Who wrote the Bible?

I remember when I was a university student walking with a non-believing friend of mine. I was a Christian, a very shy Christian, and walking in the opposite direction was my Bible study leader. The Bible study leader called out to me “Marty, are you

coming to Bible study this afternoon?" To which I replied "...yes...". My non-believing friend looked at me with utter disgust "Don't tell me you go to Bible study!" I replied "Well, yes, indeed I do!" And then we sat down on the grass had a conversation about it. At one point he asked "So who wrote the Bible anyway?" Just goes to show he didn't really know much about that which he had dismissed! It's a good question, and, as my friend demonstrated, it's a question that people might be asking despite any uninterested persona they might be wearing. It's a question that we ought to know the answer to, and it's a question answered by our New Testament passage this week.

Peter gives us a fairly complete answer in three parts, with the first part there in verse 16. Peter writes: For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. Who wrote the Bible? The first part of the answer is that the Apostles did!

Who were the Apostles? Well, they were the 12 guys who Jesus chose to be with him as he conducted his ministry. They were the 12 guys who Jesus sent out to establish churches as he was taken back up into heaven. And as they went about establishing these churches they wrote letters and Gospels to help those churches grow in their faith, and these are the documents that we have in the New Testament.

What was the qualification to be an apostle? There was one key qualification: you had to be an eyewitness to Jesus. Peter refers to one particular event that he witnessed in verse 17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain Peter is referring to that scene in the Gospels when Jesus is on the mountain and he is transfigured before 3 of the apostles: John, James and Peter. And so to be an apostle is to be an eyewitness to Jesus. We can add Paul to this list even though he wasn't one of the original twelve because he saw the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9.

And the point that Peter is making is that there is no conspiracy behind the writing of the New Testament. We did not follow cleverly devised stories he says in verse 16. It's not as if the apostles all sat around and said "Let's get this Jesus guy and create a new religion, that sounds like fun!" What they are doing is simply acting upon what they've seen. They saw Jesus do wonderful acts, they heard Jesus teach like no-one else, they saw Jesus die, and then they saw him alive again and they thought "this changes everything, we're going to talk about this!"

And the remarkable thing is that were not just talking about one witness. We're talking about Peter, Matthew, John, the apostle Paul, Jude, as well as others who were closely associated with the apostles: Mark, Luke, James the brother of Jesus. They all put pen to paper in response to what they have seen.

This is one thing that sets Christianity apart from other religions of the book. The New Testament is the product of multiple witnesses. In contrast, the Koran is really the product of one individual; the Muslim prophet Muhammad. Likewise the book of Mormon originates with one person, Joseph Smith. But the New Testament sees a group of writers all agreeing together about what they saw. The Apostolic nature of the New Testament ought to give us confidence in what we read.

Likewise we can also be confident when we open the pages of the Old Testament. Let's revisit our question: Who wrote the Bible? Well, if the New Testament is a product of the Apostles, then the Old Testament was given to us by *the prophets*. Look at what Peter says in verse 19: We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable. Before Jesus and his Apostles it was the prophets who related God's message to his people. People like Moses who is the figure behind the first 5 books of the Bible. King David, who the New Testament also calls a prophet, he wrote many of the Psalms. Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, even the little guys like Haggai and Obadiah, all contributing to God's word, all prophets who Peter encourages us to read.

And Peter is convinced that reading the OT is something that will benefit us. Verse 20 and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Darkness can be a very scary thing to experience. You know that feeling when you're lying in bed at night and you hear a really strange sound? What happens? Your heart skips a beat; you start wondering about all the terrible things lurking in the darkness that could be making that sound. I was in bed the other night and I heard the most unusual sound; like a jar of coins tipping over. "Did you hear that?" I asked Jas. She said "Yes! What was it?" And so what do you do? You flip on the light, and you jump up and flip on every light in the house, making lots of noise so the bad guy knows you're coming. It turned out that a key rack had come unstuck from the wall and all the keys had fallen to the floor. But, until light illuminated the problem fear was well and truly reigning!

This world can be a scary place. We can feel lonely, afraid, worried about the future And so while we wait for Jesus to return where can we find comfort? What light can we switch on to ease our fears? Peter says "Here is your light! Open this book up and be comforted. Open this book up, and find a light to your path so that you don't stumble."

Notice that Peter declares that these prophets as completely reliable. Why is he so confident we can trust them as sources for knowing God? Well, even though he can say the apostles wrote the New Testament, and even though he can say the prophets wrote the Old, there is another author who is behind both. Verse 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.  
<sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The words of the Bible are not just the words of Godly people; we believe they are words authored by God himself, the Holy Spirit. This is what we mean when we say that the Bible is *inspired*. When we say that we are inspired to do something we usually mean we are energized or prompted to do something. “I was inspired to take up painting”. But theologically the word means something a little different, When we say the Bible is inspired we mean it has come to us by the influence of the Holy Spirit. When Moses wrote down the events of the Exodus when he led Israel out of Egypt, that wasn’t just a great leader writing down his memoirs, that was the Holy Spirit getting to work. The books of Moses in the Old Testament are inspired pieces of writing When King David was running for his life it wasn’t just a downcast exile who was pouring out his emotions, it was the Holy Spirit writing those Psalms. When Luke gathered up his evidence to piece together the life of Christ, that wasn’t just a judicious bit of investigation from a learned doctor, it was the Holy Spirit who put together that Gospel. When Paul was locked up in prison and he wrote letters to the church in Philippi and Ephesus, when he wrote his letters to young apprentice Timothy, the Holy Spirit was right there in that cell with him, working through his pen.

What does this mean for the Bible? It means the Bible isn’t just the opinions of ancient men and women, It means that the Bible reveals the very mind of God. 1 Corinthians 2.11 says that no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. I heard a story once of a group of scientists who were into collecting the brains of famously intelligent people. When a famous genius died they’d try to collect the brain in order to study it and catch a glimpse of what made a genius. When they managed to get Einstein’s brain someone commented that surely this was the gold standard of brains. They responded that in fact, they wished they had Aristotle’s brain who they thought was the greatest mind to ever exist.

Now it’s one thing to know the mind of an Einstein or Aristotle, but here in this book we have access to the mind of God. If you want to know the truth about the world, if you want to know the truth about the one who made us and put us here, if you want to know the depths of his love for us, and how he is preparing an eternal future that he wants us to enjoy, then this is the light that will illuminate the darkness. Will you read it? We will do well to pay attention to it.