

# **Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 16, Special Revelation, Holy Scripture, Seven Views on Inspiration**

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 16, Special Revelation, Holy Scripture, Seven Views of Inspiration.

Welcome to our continuing lectures on the doctrines of God's revealing himself in both general and special revelation and scripture.

That is our topic now, and to the end of the course, God's revelation in Holy Scripture.

Please pray with me. Father, how we thank you for your word. We thank you that the spirit brought forth the word through prophets and apostles of old that we might know you, love you, and serve you, and do your will. Bless us, we pray, and we give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. We have been looking at five selected texts, great inspiration texts in some detail, in preparation for turning to the systematic theology of scripture as a special revelation. We saw Jesus in Mark 12 say that David, when he wrote Psalm 110.1, did so by the Holy Spirit.

We saw Jesus quoting Psalm 82, commenting in John 10 that the scripture cannot be broken. We saw Paul regarding his words in 1 Corinthians 14 as a commandment from God. And then we saw the great 2 Timothy 3 text on inspiration.

We're up to 2 Peter 1:16 to 21, and that relies upon the transfiguration account. So, let me read the first eight verses of Matthew 17. After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, his brother, and led them up to a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here.

If you wish, I will make three tents here. Oh boy, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was still speaking when behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.

And a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying Rise and have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 2 Peter 1:16 through 21.

In context, Peter tells how God gave the promises of his word to believers so that they may avoid sin. 2 Peter 1:4. He spurs on his readers to godly virtues in verses 5 through 7. Those should be studied with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 in mind. Peter encourages Christians to pursue godliness in order to strengthen their assurance of salvation.

Verse 10, make your calling and election sure. Of course, those things are sure to God, but they become, we gain assurance of the fact that God summoned us to faith in Christ and that he chose us before the creation of the world. We gain assurance when we see God working in our lives, producing those qualities.

That was the third basis of assurance that we talked about previously. God assures us mainly by his word, also within our hearts by his spirit, and thirdly by working in our lives. It's that third basis of the assurance that Peter speaks of when he lists those Christian qualities.

Nearing death, in verse 14 of chapter 1 of 2 Peter, the Apostle writes to remind readers to live for Christ and gives them a written record of these important matters. 2 Peter 1:12 through 15. Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, speaking back to them again, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

I think it is right, as long as I am in the body, to stir you up by way of reminder since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I'll make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things. It's especially these verses, 2 Peter 1:16-21, and most especially 20 and 21 that pertain to the doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture.

1:16. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice, born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns

and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all, we must know that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Notice 21. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. Once again, the immediate context of this great inspiration text, similar to 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, is false teaching.

In the last days, the implication is not hard to reach, that God intends scripture and its exposition to be the antidote to the poison of false teaching. Peter affirms that he and the other apostles did not cleverly concoct myths when they bore witness of Jesus. Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses of Christ's divine majesty at his transfiguration.

The majestic glory of God the Father gave glory and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. That happened when Peter declared, quote, when the Father declared, excuse me, the Father declared, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, verse 17. Peter and his two fellow disciples heard that utterance when they were with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, verse 18.

Next, Peter speaks of the reliable Old Testament prophetic word. The context is, again, that which Matthew 17 reminded us of. And just before that, Jesus said, the very words at the end of Matthew 16 are, truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Then, immediately, the transfiguration account occurs. And among other sources, Darrell Bock, in his wonderful book on the four gospels, as a portrait of Jesus, says, correctly, it seems to me that the transfiguration is thus intended as a preview of the glory that Jesus will bring at his second coming. That is how some standing there will not die before they see the kingdom of God coming.

They'll see it proleptically in the transfiguration event. That is why Peter speaks of the Old Testament prophetic word. Verse 20, no prophecy of scripture comes from, he says that, and not no word of scripture, because he has prophecy in mind.

Next, Peter speaks of the reliable Old Testament prophetic word. That is agreed upon, but the views of verse 18 are not agreed upon. There are three views.

When he says, we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, verse 19. In light of the transfiguration experience, there's no question about that. In light of that, we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed.

Three views. One, the prophetic word is strongly confirmed by the experience of Christ's transfiguration. That fits Matthew 17, following the last verse in 16.

It was a foretaste, apparently, of the glory of Jesus revealed at the second, to be revealed at the second coming.

View two: I am inclined toward this one, but I'm convincing myself about that first one as I look at the context of Matthew. View two, believers have something even more reliable than the transfiguration experience, which is amazing and no doubt strengthens the apostles' faith.

But they have something more reliable than Jewish Christians: the Old Testament scriptures. So we could translate. We also have a more sure word of prophecy.

King James Version and Calvin did it that way. And somehow, more recently, I think another translation, although it eludes me as to what that is. View three, and they're all possible grammatically and syntactically.

The adjective confirmed or reliable NIV could be regarded as a comparative used as a superlative, and hence, the translation would be that the Old Testament is something completely reliable. Not many follow that view. The consensus is the first one, and it's true.

Surely it is true. So, we're not questioning theology again, but exegesis. Surely the transfiguration account strengthened the apostles' confidence in God's word.

But Peter, a first-century Jewish Christian, regards the Old Testament as a higher authority than his own experience. I think that is true, too. Still, it doesn't decide the question for us as to how to translate.

Verse 19. Of 2 Peter 1. Peter regards the Old Testament prophetic word as very reliable.

That's true. He exhorts his readers to pay careful attention to scripture. He uses a simile of a lamp shining in a dark room to show the great reliability of the Bible as a guide.

We did not follow cleverly divine myths when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses. We didn't make up these things. We were there on the Mount of Transfiguration, and we saw and we heard.

As a matter of fact, we heard the voice of God, the bath coal, the daughter of the voice, the voice of God from heaven speaking. This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. They heard those words.

Verse 18. We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain, Peter, James, and John, Jesus' inner circle. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed or even more reliable, or we have the prophetic word which is very reliable.

Obviously, the ESV takes the first view. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, and here comes the simile, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place. Similes and metaphors are similar.

Metaphors are more equations. A basic guide is not foolproof, but similes often use like or as, as it is here. Pay attention to the word of God.

Again, it is a prophetic word because of the context. The Transfiguration was a prediction, as it were, of the second coming of Christ. You will do well to pay attention to the prophetic word, and of course, the whole word, as to a lamp shining in a dark place.

The world is pictured as dark, in sin, and devoid of the knowledge of God on its own. The world is desperate, and although it doesn't realize it, it is desperately in need of revelation from God. And we're going to pay attention to that word as to a lamp shining in darkness until the day dawns.

This is the language of eschatology, of the second coming of Christ, and all that means. Until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts. That's a little difficult to understand.

Some could say, oh, the second coming business is entirely interior. It is just in your own heart that you'll come back. No, the Bible is so, so clear.

Jesus' return will be personal, visible, and, unlike his first coming, glorious. What does it mean then? It means his people will rejoice within when that day dawns when they see their Lord and Savior return. Knowing this, first of all, here's our main point about this whole deal.

We've tried to set it in context. Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture, prophecy because that is the theme of the passage, comes from its own interpretation, his own interpretation. Some translations of the NIV do this, say the prophet's own interpretation.

ESV does it more generally. No prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. It's talking about where that scripture comes from.

So, however, you understand that expression, its own or his own interpretation, you're dealing with the origin, the source of Holy Scripture, even as 2 Timothy 3 did that when it spoke of God speaking forth, breathing forth his word. No prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. That's not where it comes from.

It comes from God. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man. The meaning is alone.

Of course, Peter used his volition when he wrote these words, but he wasn't the ultimate source of these words. No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but people spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Men spoke.

Peter spoke a lot during his time. Mrs. Peter would tell you everything he said wasn't a revelation from God, including their household spats, no doubt. But when he said thus says the Lord and spoke the word of God, he spoke as a man from God.

That is, as an apostle, apostle exercising his office, the word of God came out of his mouth. He spoke revelation. No prophecy was ever produced by the will of human beings, but the biblical writer spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit here.

Specifically, unlike 2 Timothy 3, it said that scripture is breathed out by God is God breathed here specifically. And it's wonderful. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, mentions the Holy Spirit's agency in producing God's word.

We need the word of God. To which we must pay attention in that guiding capacity until the eschatological day breaks and the sun. Here is a symbol of Jesus returning and rising in believers' hearts.

Peter next says, above all, you know, this stresses the importance of what is to be followed. No prophecy of scripture comes from the prophets own interpretation. In verse 20, the prophets do not explain God's word on their own.

They are spokesmen for God. As Aaron was a spokesman for Moses and God said of Aaron to Moses, he will be God for you. He's your mouthpiece.

God will speak Moses' words through Aaron, who apparently was more articulate. I think it's just the opposite, isn't it? Moses is God and Aaron is the mouthpiece. Yes, I mixed it up.

I'm sorry. Aaron, God says Moses will be God for you. You will speak God's word for him.

No prophecy ever came by the will of man. Instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. In verse 21, Peter explains the previous verse.

The prophets do not invent their messages. God is the source of revelation. He's the source of the words that they spoke.

This was because they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They were born b-o-r-n-e along by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament writers are the Holy Spirit's instruments when they write scripture.

There's a human side to scripture. Human beings speak when they write God's word. Verse 21, men spoke.

This passage, however, does not emphasize the human side but the divine side. When the writers write, when they wrote, they spoke from God. 21, the source of their writing lies outside of themselves in God.

He speaks through them. Specifically, the Holy Spirit moves the writers of scripture as they speak from God. The Spirit so directs the writers that they speak for God.

The words of scripture are not the products of human will alone, which, of course, they are, and thus, we account for the various styles in scripture and so forth, and various emphases. We're not denying that, but ultimately, but that is not ultimate. Ultimately, God is the author of Holy Scripture.

The words of scripture are also the very words of God, for by his Spirit, he guides the writers so that they write his word. The source of the Bible, then, is ultimately God himself. Peter's words pertain, first of all, to the autographs.

The autographs are the original texts of the books of the Bible rather than copies. God inspires the autographs through human authors, and through his providence, his sovereign providence, he preserves his word so that our copies are very good. Especially through the science of textual criticism, we have a text that is very pure indeed. Because of this divine-human character, the word of God has great authority and reliability.

We are to base our faith on it. It confirms the apostles' experiences with Christ, as Peter just related. It's an essential guide as we live in a dark world until Jesus returns, as Peter just said.

By implication from the following context, scripture is also the antidote to false teaching. 2 Peter chapter 2 is a scathing denunciation of these false teachers whose words and lives belie the truth. Scripture has a Trinitarian character.

The Father spoke concerning the Son through spirit-directed writers. I'll say it again. All three Trinitarian persons are involved in the production of Holy Writ.

The Father spoke. He did so through the Son, who is the mediator of New Testament revelation, as Hebrews 1 shouts to us. And the Father spoke through the Son concerning the Son.

Both are true. He spoke through the Son. He spoke concerning the Son here through the agency of spirit-directed writers.

We thus move now to consider a systematic theology of Holy Scripture. First of all, scripture is inspired. And we want to examine views of inspiration.

They are varied. Some are terrible. Some have elements of truth.

Some have more elements of truth than others. We will try to put together our own understanding after we set forth these five views and then evaluate the five views. Only then will we take the *creme de la creme* and try to serve a good meal.

And I better stop with this restaurant imagery. We begin with five views of inspiration set forth by Millard Erickson in his, and I suppose you could call it a modern classic, Christian theology. A score of evangelical systematic theologies have followed it, but it was a trailblazer in many ways.

Like every other theologian, Erickson has strengths and weaknesses. He is a capable handler of the Bible but doesn't strike me as an active exegete. He can't be everything.

He learns historical theology from secondary sources. His forte, his fortes are areas in which I am weak, and that is modern theology and philosophy. He's a good guide.

He's always fair, representing everybody fairly, and treats other Christians the way he would like to be treated. Treats those who are liberals the way he would like to be treated. He's a model in that way.

Five theories. The intuition theory, the illumination theory, the dynamic theory, the verbal theory, and the dictation theory. To those, we will add two others that Erickson didn't mention.

The neo-orthodox view and the limited inerrancy view. Intuition theory, illumination theory, dynamic theory, verbal theory, and dictation theory, and we'll add neo-orthodox views and limited or partial inerrancy. The intuition theory holds that scripture is a matter of insight exercised by religious geniuses.



Some people are naturally endowed with great spiritual awareness. The Bible's inspiration is similar to that of other thinkers, such as Plato. The Bible is grand religious literature reflecting the religious genius of the Hebrew people.

The illumination theory holds that the Holy Spirit influences the scripture writers by heightening their natural powers. The intuition theory did not say that the natural powers of geniuses needed to be heightened. The illumination theory does say that.

Gifted people are gifted more by the Spirit. Holy Spirit influences the scripture writers by heightening their normal powers. The Spirit works in all believers in the same way.

He works in the scripture writers to a greater degree. The Spirit does not especially communicate truth or guide the writers of the Bible. He increases their sensitivity to spiritual matters when they write.

The dynamic theory holds that God works in combination with human writers to produce the scripture. As a matter of fact, that's true. Specifically, the Spirit guides the writers to have the thoughts or concepts that they desire.

God permits the writers to express his thoughts in their own words. That's where some error creeps in. In the dynamic theory, God and the human writers work together.

That is true. The Holy Spirit guides the writers in their thought processes to the concepts that he wants them to have. And he allows them to express those thoughts in their own words.

Hence, the Bible is not without error or infallible, incapable of error. It is God's word in human speech, roughly speaking. The verbal theory holds that God, the Holy Spirit, not only gives the writers the thoughts that God wants them to have but also guides their use of words.

Hence, the title verbal theory. The result is that the Bible contains the very words God wants written. This is true as far as it goes, but it doesn't say enough.

Nevertheless, it's an improvement. We're moving in, right along here. We're moving toward the truth. This differs from the dictation theory, our next view, because in the verbal theory, God actively guides the thoughts and words, but the human writer is active too, and God does not dictate all of Holy Scripture.

The dictation theory holds God dictates the very words of the Bible to the scripture writers. Sadly, this is still regarded by liberals as the historic conservative viewpoint. It's just not true.

Yes, parts of the Bible are dictated, the Ten Commandments. But my goodness, in the first four verses of his gospel, Luke says he studied everything he could get his hands on about the life of Jesus. The writings are not, in general, dictated.

God was bigger than that. He allowed Luke to write with a Lucan style in Luke and Acts, and just a different style than Paul's letters, and John's gospel, and so forth. Dictation theory holds God dictates the very words of the Bible to the scripture writers.

The writers are largely passive in the process. The emphasis here is on the divine side of scripture. The human involvement is greatly minimized.

To these five views, we add two more. The neo-Orthodox view critiques both conservative and liberal views of revelation. One proponent, John Bailey, I'm thinking of in his book, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, 1956.

One proponent censures orthodoxy for identifying revelation as biblical propositions, for defining faith as acceptance of facts instead of as trust in God, and for holding that God dictated the Bible, all three of which are somewhat or largely erroneous. We'll work through that later. We said the neo-Orthodox view wants to position itself between orthodoxy and liberalism.

As far as its critique of orthodoxy, three things come in view. Orthodoxy overemphasizes revelation as propositions. Orthodoxy errs when it defines faith as acceptance of those propositions rather than as trust in God.

Third, it holds to divine dictation of the Bible, which is simply wrong. You can find some fundamentalists who hold to divine dictation. I suppose I've never seen a systematics book written or a theology book or a book on scripture by an evangelical scholar who would hold to the dictation theory.

It's largely a fiction devised by liberals. As a matter of fact, when the Protestant Orthodox used that language and did dictation, they were not speaking of the mode of revelation. They were speaking of the resultant text as being the very words of God.

So, there's not only an error in terms of evaluating other positions but there's a historical error as to what dictation even meant when it was used by the Lutheran and Reformed Orthodox writers, that is, those who followed after Luther and Calvin in the next century after them. Now, neo-orthodoxy wants to position itself between orthodoxy, which it censors in the three ways we just said, and also it wants to oppose liberalism. The same proponent, John Bailey, censors liberalism for

overemphasizing reason and for attempting to separate the kernel and husk of scripture.

It spends too much time criticizing scripture, and that's not the point. Yes, Bailey would say scripture is not inerrant. The Orthodox are too focused on words when they talk about that.

That's a product of their dictation theory, but the liberals are, because they emphasize, they're too rationalistic, and they spend too much time criticizing the Bible. Rather, Bailey says, as the main proponent of the neo-orthodox view in writing, that revelation consists of God himself, not propositions about God, but in his mighty acts, his deeds. I'm now thinking back to our very historical introduction, in which we saw that the Australian theologian Peter Jensen correctly said that this is the neo-orthodox view.

Revelation consists of God himself, not propositions about him, but his acts. These revelatory acts occur in Israel's history and climax in Jesus Christ, God's supreme revelation. Echoes of Jensen again.

The interpretation of these acts varies based on the critical leanings of the theologian. That's just unavoidable. We're post-enlightenment.

We treat the Bible critically, Bailey says. Revelation is subjective, so without appropriation, no revelation occurs. Limited inerrancy.

We conclude this lecture with a seventh viewpoint. Limited inerrancy is set forth in contrast to, you guessed it, full inerrancy. Some scholars make a distinction between full and limited inerrancy, with the latter holding that scripture is inerrant in what pertains to faith and the Christian life but need not be regarded as inerrant, that is truthful, accurate, faithful in matters of history, science, and so on.

Some advocates of limited inerrancy hold that scripture is not inerrant but infallible. They use that word in a new way, which is defined as scriptures unfailingly accomplishing God's intended purpose of salvation. Oh, the Bible is not inerrant, they say. That's out of focus to even think like that.

No, no, it's infallible. That is, it's not that all its words are true in any kind of detail or with any scientific accuracy or even historical accuracy based on modern methods of historiography. Some of that, by the way, is true, as I just said, but scripture is infallible in the sense that it unfailingly accomplishes God's purpose.

It infallibly accomplishes his purpose of saving sinners and of instructing them in the Christian life. We are glad that those who hold this seem to be Christians who are

concerned about salvation and growth in the Christian life. It doesn't make their view right in all its particulars, however.

Those adopting full inerrancy hold to the complete truthfulness of the Bible without denying its infallibility and much more will be said, which we will begin to say in our next lecture when we evaluate the views of inspiration.

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