

# The Bible: Inspiration And Interpretation<sup>1</sup>

By W. H. Griffith-Thomas

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## About the author:

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## I. Inspiration of the Bible

THE basis of our acceptance of the Bible is the belief that it embodies a divine revelation. But at once the question arises as to how the authority of this revelation is expressed. This brings us to the problem of Inspiration.

At the outset two things should be said: (1) If we accept the Authority of Scripture we really need not trouble about any particular theory of Inspiration, but (2) if we seek to know as fully as we can what Inspiration means we should confine ourselves strictly to facts, since Inspiration when properly understood is not a theory, but a fact. It is something we accept, whether we can explain it or not.

1. The Source of the Bible -- We believe that the Bible comes from a divine Source. The Old Testament prophets claimed to be the recipients of divine revelation. "The word of the Lord came"; "the Lord spake"; "the word of God"; "God said"; "the Lord commanded." Phrases like these are found nearly seven hundred times in the Pentateuch alone, and they are scattered throughout the Scriptures no less than three thousand times altogether. There is one verse, which, whatever else it means, certainly makes this plain: 2 Samuel 23:2, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was on my tongue."

In harmony with this, we have a claim in the New Testament, of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In some passages there is no reference to the human writer of the Scripture, but only to the divine Author. In Hebrews 3:7, we read, "The Holy Spirit saith..." This refers to Psalm 95, which was, of course, written by a man, David or someone else, and yet there is no reference at all to a human author. This use shows that the writer is concerned, not with what the Psalmist said, but with the Holy Spirit's utterances, and this means that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture.

The attitude of the New Testament to the Old Testament shows the same truth. Over fifty times in the New Testament, is the Old Testament spoken of as of divine origin and authority, and always with the deference due to this fact (Rom. 3:2; Matt. 22:29; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:25-27, 44-46).

2. The Instruments of the Bible -- The Holy Spirit used men as the instruments of divine revelation. There are a number of passages where the divine and the human are mentioned; where the distinction is drawn very clearly between the divine Author and the human instrument. Thus in Matthew 1:22, we have "Spoken of the Lord by the prophet;" in Acts 1:16, "The Holy Spirit spake by the mouth of David," and in 2 Peter 1:21, "Holy men of old spake as they were moved [carried along] by the Holy Spirit." So that as the instruments of the Spirit's work, the men were first the speakers, and then the writers of divine revelation. And yet "instrument" does not mean passivity, as "pens," but rather, the thought is expressed by the word in the case of penmen. Inspiration is a concursus of the divine and human.

3. The Media of the Bible -- I do not know any other term than this that will better express my idea. I mean the words of the men (2 Peter 1:21). The men themselves are not alive now, and if we are to be in touch with their revelation, it must be through their words; and if we are to be sure of the revelation from God, then for us today we must be sure of what the men wrote, as they are not here to speak for themselves.

Let us notice 2 Timothy 3:16. Whether we follow the Authorized Version or the Revised Version, the thought is: "Every writing is God-breathed." God, somehow or other, breathed into these writings, and therefore we are concerned with words.

Now look at 1 Corinthians 2:13. Dr. Forsyth says the chapter is classic for the apostolic view of inspiration. Mark this: "Words which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Could anything be more definite and clear than this? Not the words with man's wisdom teacheth, but the words which "the Holy Spirit teachest." And so there is an intimate, a necessary connection, between thoughts and words. Whether it be for our own thinking, or for intercourse between man and man, thoughts must be expressed in words. And this is exactly what Bishop Westcott says in his Essay on Inspiration! "Thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as soul is to body." So when we speak of the media of the Bible, we are concerned with words.

But someone says: Does not this mean "verbal inspiration"? Well, we can call it verbal inspiration if we like, or we can call it plenary inspiration, if we prefer, so long as we do not call it dictation. When a man dictates a letter to his secretary, he does not inspire her. It is mechanical dictation, and he expects her to reproduce exactly what he tells her. But in Scripture we do not have mechanical dictation, but inspiration; and whether we call it verbal or plenary, the phrase is not intended to say how God does it, but how far it had gone. It means that inspiration extends to the form as well as to the substance, that it reaches to the words as well as to the thoughts, in order that we may be sure of the thoughts; for how are we to know God's thoughts if we do not know his words? God used the natural characteristics of the writers, and through them conveyed his truth.

But does it not say "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life"? It does; but in that phrase Paul is not concerned with the letter of inspiration as opposed to the spirit. That is an entirely false idea of the passage. Again someone says: "We want the inspiration of the thoughts, not of the words: Now what do we really mean by inspiration or authority in the thoughts? Surely this must be expressed in the words, and the objections raised to the inspiration of words are just as valid against the inspiration of thoughts."

Surely inspiration cannot mean an uninspired account of inspired thoughts. How did Moses remember God's revelation found in Exodus 25 to 30, or Isaiah remember that which is found in chapters 8 to 12, or Hosea remember the contents of chapters 4 to 11? As these are evidently continuous revelations, are we to rely on the writers' memory only, and on no other faculty? As Dr. Kuyper has truly said: "You can as easily have music without notes or mathematics without figures as thoughts without words."

Let us notice 1 Corinthians 14:37, "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write are the commandments of the Lord." Here we see both the human instrument and the divine authority.

This is how Dr. A.T. Pierson has put the matter.

"There are, with regard to this question of verbal inspiration, or the oversight of the very words of Scripture, five important significant passages in the Word of God: Hebrews 12:27; Galatians 4:9; John 8:58; John 10:34-36; Galatians 3:16. If these passages are examined it will be seen that in the first instance the argument turns on one phrase, 'yet once more.' In the second, on the passive voice rather than the active voice of the verb. In the third, on the present rather than on the past tense. In the fourth, on the inviolability of a single word; and in the fifth, on the retention of the singular number of a noun, rather than the plural. Taking the five passages together, they teach us that, to alter or omit a phrase, change the voice or mood or tense of a verb, change a single word or even the number of a noun, is to break the Scriptures; and if this does not come close to verbal inspiration, then I am no judge."

The use of the Bible today is a wonderful confirmation of this view. We regard it as our authoritative court of appeal, and we rest upon its words as our warrant, and the fact that we employ a concordance, be it Greek, or Hebrew, or English, is another testimony to this belief. It points to the value, the meaning, the force, and the extent of words.

This was the view of the Apostolic Church. Bishop Westcott, in the Essay to which I have already referred, says that the doctrine of inspiration as held in the Apostolic churches was that it was supernatural in source, unerring in truthfulness, and that it comprised words as well as subject-matter. This, according to the Bishop, is the view of the earliest churches, and certainly it has also been that of a great many churches since the Apostolic days.

We notice, too, the precise form of the appeal of the New Testament to the Old: "It is written." It is not "it is thought," or "it is suggested," but, "it is written." And the Lord Himself said, in John 10:35, "The Scripture cannot be broken." So we are on perfectly safe ground when we ask attention to the words of Scripture as the media of the men who spake by the Holy Spirit.

As Dr. J.H. Brookes used to say, about Exodus 4:10-12, it is not "I will be with thy mind and teach thee what thou shalt think," but "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say," because while it does not so much matter what Moses thought, it does matter what he actually said.

4. The Substance of the Bible -- What is the outcome of this Source, these instruments and media? Truth. This is the substance of the Bible.

First of all, truth in its reality. The greatest authority we have, the Lord Jesus, once said, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). Truth in its reality is found in this book. As Dr. Denney remarks, "When a man submits his mind to the Spirit which is in the Bible, it never misleads him about the way of salvation, it brings him invariably to that knowledge of God which is eternal life. The most vital truth about it is covered by the terms inspiration and infallibility, and in virtue of this truth it is indispensable and authoritative to the mind of every age."

Secondly, Truth in its uniqueness. We can test the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Bible very simply. Take the writings of A.D. 50 to 100. Then take the writings from A.D. 100 to 150. Compare them, and, as it has been well said, between the New Testament writings of A.D. 50 to 100, and the most post-apostolic writings of A.D. 100 to 150, there is a chasm, "sheer, deep, and abysmal." The finest writings of the second century cannot compare with the writings of the first century. When the Christian faith was settling itself in the world, the Holy Spirit was working in a unique manner. He was at work as the Spirit of inspiration. But from A.D. 100 to 150 we do not have inspiration; but illumination. From that time forward and ever since, there has been constant illumination, but no new revelation. John Robinson, of Leyden, said: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to bread forth from His Word." True, but it is from His Word. We have not reached the end of it yet, but there it is, ready for the Holy Spirit to illuminate its pages. What does all this involve but the fact of a divine, unique inspiration?

## **II. Inspiration of the Bible -- (Continued)**

FORMER considerations have shown that the Bible as a revelation of divine truth occupies a unique position, and that this uniqueness is due to some action of God whereby we are assured of the reality of the

divine communication. This action is called Inspiration and in further study of it some important principles emerge.

1. Varieties of Inspiration -- It is of supreme importance to realize that Inspiration does not always mean the same thing, and for this reason it is essential to use the term with the greatest care and the strictest possible accuracy. Several vital and important distinctions must be made and kept in view.

(1) Sometimes Inspiration means a direct communication from God. When Paul said, "I have received from the Lord," he evidently claimed to have had a communication of truth direct from above. This corresponds exactly with the frequent claims made, as already seen, by prophets and others, when they said, "The Lord spake to me," etc. And such a direct revelation is obviously necessary, because many truths of the Bible are above and beyond human ken and must be revealed because they could not be discovered by man.

(2) Sometimes Inspiration means "the inspiration of selection." It is clear that the historical books of the Old Testament give mere fragments of the events out of the complete annals of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and in view of the emphasis indicated by the substance and arrangement of these books, a selection must have been made. In like manner, John selected materials out of our Lord's life to form the Fourth Gospel (John 20:31), and Luke's preface points in the same direction. Inspiration here is associated with the selection of materials.

(3) Sometimes Inspiration means only the guarantee of an accurate record. In the Bible we find the words of the Devil. They are not true, although they are found in the Bible. We find the words of Job's friends. They are not true, but they are in the Bible. We find the words of God's enemies in the Bible. They are not true. The sentiment is wrong, but the record of them is true. The sentiment may be full of imperfection, but the record is always perfect. This is the meaning of the inspiration of accurate record. We have to be very careful, therefore, that if a man preaches from a particular text, he first inquires who said it. An old Welsh preacher once gave out his text this way: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life"; and then said, "That is a lie!" Of course it was. It is the word of Satan. Although it is in God's Book, it is not true of itself, but the record of it is true. There may be, there often is, imperfection in the sentiment, but there is no imperfection in the account of it.

This aspect of the subject calls attention to the distinction between Revelation and Inspiration. Revelation is the substance of God's truth, the what; Inspiration is the expression of that truth, the how. We can see this in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, where we have revelation in verse 10, and inspiration in verse 13. And so, not all the Bible is revealed, because much of it is history and refers to all sorts of men. But all in the Bible is inspired, because the record is given at every point in words that are trustworthy.

This distinction helps us to understand how it is that the Bible, while fully inspired, is not of the same spiritual value at every point. The revelation of truth is, as we have seen, progressive, but the record is accurate throughout.

2. Inspiration and Difficulties -- How is Inspiration to be regarded in the face of Bible difficulties? People often say the Bible is so difficult. It is. But when once we have decided, on the grounds of proper evidence, that the Bible is the Word of God, then every difficulty must be judged in the light of that antecedent fact. In the words of Tregelles, the great textual critic: "No difficulty in connection with a proved fact can invalidate the fact itself."

Some difficulties are inherent in a revelation, otherwise it would not be a revelation. We cannot expect that which comes from the infinite God to finite man to be without difficulty. Revelation means to "draw back the veil," and if there were no veil to draw back, we should not have any revelation. Therefore, we are not surprised if, as Butler taught us nearly two hundred years ago, there are difficulties in revelation, for there are difficulties in nature also, and yet nature is from the same God.

Difficulties are either scientific, historical, or ethical. Scientific difficulties for the most part turn upon differences of interpretation between man's views of the Bible and man's views of science. Difficulties of history have to be tested one by one; and we have yet to find any real statement in the Bible in terms of history that has been found to be unhistorical. And with regard to ethical difficulties, what has been said about progressive revelation may be applied at this point. God has revealed more and more of his will as man could bear it. There is, therefore, such a thing as progress in the ethics of the Bible, but there is no progress beyond the ethics of Christ and his apostles. Not a single new ethic has been given to the world since Jesus Christ and his apostles lived on this earth.

Then let us remember that none of these difficulties affect any fundamental Christian doctrine. Dean Farrar, who was no slave of conservatism, once said that no demonstrable error has ever been discovered in the Bible.

We are not called upon to answer every objection. It is quite sufficient for us to prove the truth of Christianity. Why should a man take leave of his common sense when he reads the Bible? There are scores of things in life that we cannot understand. A man says, "I will not believe what I do not see." Then what about his brains? So in regard to life. No one can tell us what life is. We cannot define life, and since we cannot, we ought not to be surprised if we find difficulties in the Bible that we cannot solve.

Let us make use of the Bible as fully as we can, and see how far that will take us. A man once went to Dwight Moody and said: "Mr. Moody, I cannot accept your Bible, because there are so many difficulties in it." Moody said to him: "Do you like fish?" "Yes." "Do you find any bones in it?" "Yes." "Do you eat the bones?" "No, I put them on the side of my plate." "That is what I do with the difficulties of the Bible, and I find quite enough fish without bones." That is a good, working, practical rule, though obviously it cannot settle everything. It is called the verifying faculty, and it is worth applying. It will do much to prove the uniqueness of the Bible.

3. Inspiration and Criticism -- There are three kinds of criticism, and these should be carefully kept together. The first is what is called Lower Criticism. This is the technical word descriptive of the criticism which provides a text and a translation. We depend upon scholarship for these. Since very few know Greek and Hebrew, we take our text from scholars, and also their translation. This is the lower or the lowest criticism, and is legitimate, important, and, of course, absolutely essential. And for all practical purposes either the Authorized or Revised Version does give us a substantial idea of the original text.

Then, secondly, there is what is called the Higher Criticism. This has to do with the authorship, date, and character of the books; and again it is legitimate, vital, and essential, only it requires to be tested. Let us not call any man master, whether ancient or modern, English or German. Let us simply hold ourselves free to look at these things for ourselves. What is meant is, that we must not merely follow a fashion of scholarship, but test things for ourselves, and get the theory that best fits all the facts.

But there is a third aspect, the "Highest" Criticism. It is sometimes overlooked. Here it is: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). This is the criticism of the humble soul. To the same effect is another text: "The Word of God is a 'critic' of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrew 4:12, Greek). If the soul of man will allow God's Word to criticize it, and if we do a little more "trembling" at God's Word, this will be the highest criticism, and will provide a criterion that would settle almost everything for us. The trouble is that people take the lower and the higher criticism, but forget the third, the highest. Yet, on the other hand, there are numbers of humble souls who know far more of the truth of Scripture than the greatest scholars. As James Hamilton once said: "A Christian on his knees sees farther than a philosopher on his tiptoes." When these three are held together there need be no fear about criticism. To appreciate the pictures on stained-glass windows we must go inside a church; and to know the Bible we must go inside, and not judge from the outside. Nor with reason only, but with conscience, and heart, and soul, and will; and when the whole nature responds to the highest criticism, rationalizing critical theories will not be able to do us any serious harm.

4. Inspiration and Spiritual Work -- Our view of Inspiration will depend very largely on the use we make of the Bible. If it is employed as a mere reference book our conception of it may be low, but if it is regarded as our daily food and the instrument of our Christian service, our view of it will be correspondingly high.

What does the Bible do for spiritual life and work? The Bible is spoken of as God's seed (Luke 8:11; James 1:21). We are born of the Word (1 Peter 1:23); we grow by the Word (1 Peter 2:2); we are cleansed by the Word (John 15:3); we are sanctified by the Word (John 17:17); we are edified by the Word (Acts 20:32); we are illuminated by the Word (Psalm 119:105); we are converted by the Word (Psalm 19:11); and we are satisfied with the Word (Psalm 119:103). Surely a Word that can do all this must have divine power in it. There is a Latin phrase, *solvitur ambulando*, which is equivalent to our proverbial expression, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." The Word of God in experience is the greatest proof we can have, and if we allow the things now mentioned to become part and parcel of our life, we shall know what the power of God's Word means.

Then from the work of the Bible in our own souls will come this verification of the Bible in our efforts on behalf of others. If we wish to verify the Bible, let us go out and win souls for Christ -- do personal work. A great number of our problems are theoretical. They come from places where people spin theories absolutely remote from human life. But if we go out into the world and tell a man of the Lord Jesus Christ, and get that man to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" we shall very soon get verification of the Word of God; and when we have that, we shall not need much, if any, further testimony to its inspiration.

### **III. Interpretation of the Bible**

IT IS frequently remarked that most of our difficulties with the Bible are connected with its interpretation. For example, instead of saying, as is so often done, that Science and the Bible disagree, it would be more correct to say that interpretations of Science and interpretations of the Bible disagree, since Science and the Bible, coming from the same divine source, cannot possibly be discordant. It is, therefore, of the first importance to give the most thorough consideration to certain principles which should guide us in our interpretation of Scripture.

1. In general the supreme need of the Holy Spirit must be emphasized. As the Bible is a divine revelation it is essential that the readers should be in spiritual sympathy with its standpoint, accepting its authority and desiring to learn its meaning. An irreligious man cannot possibly obtain the true idea of Scripture or appreciate the standpoint of the writers. It is recorded of a well-known American Christian lady, Mrs. Margaret Bottome, that one Sunday afternoon she had been attending a Bible class in New York, and as she returned to her home she found a gentleman waiting for her, a professor in one of the colleges. When she expressed her regret at not having been at home on his arrival and explained that she had been attending the Bible class, a thinly veiled sneer came to her caller's face as he said: "Oh, you believe in the Bible, do you?" Her sensitive spirit at once felt the sneer and the plain inference from the words, and instantly she replied with a beautiful light on her face: "Oh, you know, I have the pleasure of a personal, intimate acquaintance with the Author of the Book!" It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this spiritual standpoint in our approach to the Bible.

2. Then follows the necessity of studying the Book like other books, because the divine revelation has been given to us in book form. This will mean that we should give careful attention to matters of grammar, of history, and of words, both in regard to their etymology and to their usage. In all this the obvious and natural meaning of the words and phrases should come first.

3. Yet, as we give attention to the Bible from beginning to end, we must always bear in mind its relation to Christ, for both Old and New Testaments are so closely associated with Him that he constitutes the key to the interpretation of many of its vital passages. In the Old Testament Christ is prepared for and anticipated in various ways, while in the New Testament he is seen to be manifested in Person, and the results of that manifestation are evident in the life and service of the Christian Church. It will be of real and constant value to keep in mind as we endeavor to interpret the Bible that its dominant note is "Christ in all the Scriptures."

4. And yet it is important to keep clear, what has already been emphasized in a former chapter, the progressiveness of the revelation of the Bible. This principle is the key which unlocks many of the difficulties, especially of the Old Testament.

5. In this connection it is also necessary to emphasize another point, which has already been considered, the differences of the dispensations which can be traced throughout Scripture. When we follow Augustine's advice to "distinguish the dispensations," many of our Bible problems find their solution.

6. Then, it is essential for us to distinguish rigidly between interpretation and application, between the primary and the secondary meanings of Scripture. It will probably be found necessary to apply this principle almost everywhere. To take one instance, perhaps the most familiar: In the Authorized Version the headings of the chapters from Isaiah 40 to 66 frequently refer to "the Church" as though the various messages found in that magnificent section had reference to the present dispensation, and to the body of Christ. But when the chapters are considered, it will be found that they have no reference to the Church at all, but to Israel, and this shows the vital necessity of the primary interpretation to Israel being distinguished from the secondary and spiritual application to the Church. The same principle obtains in the study of such passages as Isaiah 2:2 to 4 and Ezekiel 37. Whatever spiritual teaching we may derive from these passages for our life today, it is essential to keep in mind that the primary reference cannot possibly be to anything in the Gospel dispensation, but to something that is still future.

As before stated -- while all Scripture is written for us, it is not all written to us.

The New Testament affords almost constant illustration of the same distinction. Thus, when we read Matthew 10:5 to 10 we see at once that the primary reference was purely local to the Jews, especially when we compare Luke 22:36. So also with Matthew 16:28. Further, the reference to Joel, chapter 2, by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) is a striking illustration of this principle, for it is obvious that the prophecy of Joel was not by any means completely fulfilled in what happened then. See also the reference to John the Baptist in Malachi 4:5. While it is, of course, true as our Lord said, that the Baptist in relation to Christ was "Elijah the prophet" (Matt. 11:14), yet the text speaks of "a great and terrible day of the Lord," which shows that there is a further and fuller realization to come. Another illustration out of many is afforded by the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer. When Christ taught his disciples to pray to their Father in heaven, "Thy Kingdom come," it seems clear that he was referring to a time beyond the mediatorial Kingdom of the Son, even to the end of all things, when the Son shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

7. Another vital principle of interpretation is the need of distinguishing rigidly between the literal and symbolical views of passages. The Bible is an Eastern Book and as such it is full of pictures and metaphors. We must take the literal meaning whenever it is possible. One instance of this is in Luke 1:31-33, where eight statements are made concerning our Lord. As the first five of these are literally fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, it seems impossible to doubt that the other three are to be literally fulfilled when he comes again, for it is not natural to take the former literally and then to spiritualize the latter. On the other hand, there are many obvious instances of the purely symbolical meaning, so illustrative of Eastern life. Thus, in Psalm 68:16, the mountains are said to leap. In the book of Revelation we have an almost constant use of metaphor and symbol, like the "sea of glass" and many other instances. The use of allegory is found in Scripture, as in Galatians 4:22-31, though, as we know, this was based on the historical circumstances of Hagar and Ishmael. It will, no doubt, be difficult from time to time to express the distinction between what is literal and what is symbolical, and yet it is essential that the attempt be made.

8. Closely associated with the foregoing is the frequent use of figurative language in Scripture, and it is important to remember that this form of speech intensifies a fact and does not destroy it. It means, as we know, that one thing is put for another. Among the very many illustrations of this, which is peculiarly characteristic of Eastern life, may be adduced the following: "My cup runneth over" (Psalm 23:5); "My grey hairs with sorrow" (Gen. 42:38). There is also the particular form of figurative language known as personification, as "The blood that speaketh" (Hebrews 12:24); "Let not thy left hand know -- " (Matthew 6:3). The use of exaggeration is found in the well-known phrase, "hateth not . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Then, there are metaphors and parables in almost every part of the Scripture.

But the most important feature of the figurative language found in Scripture is known as type, which has long been described as "an illustration in a lower sphere of a truth belonging to a higher." A type is a pictorial or personal representation of something that is to come, and the following distinctions have been drawn. A parable is an illustration in word, while a type is an illustration in deed. A prophecy is a prediction, while a type is an anticipation. An allegory is an illustration in the form of fancy, while a type is one in the form of fact. A symbol is an illustration which gives a hint, merely suggesting a truth, while a type is an illustration which is fuller and provides a more complete view. It is also said that a parable illustrates a truth that concerns the present, while a type deals with that which is still future. The object of the type being to prepare the mind for the true idea of the coming redemption.

The following principles have been set forth for the proper interpretation of the types. (1) Each type suggests some great truth, though the resemblance is internal rather than external. (2) Each type is necessarily imperfect in the conveyance of the truth. (3) The New Testament is our best guide to the meaning of types. Beyond this it is essential to take great care, lest we regard as typical what was not intended by God so to be.

9. Not least of all in importance is the absolute necessity of studying the context when we are concerned with any particular passage. It is well known that theological students are often advised when they take a text to "study the context, lest the text become a pretext." Out of the many illustrations which show the necessity of this principle, the chapter divisions of the Authorized Version may be adduced. Thus, if we read John 3:1, only, it is probably difficult, if not impossible, to see precisely what sort of a man Nicodemus was; but if that verse is considered strictly in connection with the three preceding verses, and the particle in the Greek, which has been curiously omitted from the Authorized Version, be borne in mind, it is not difficult to understand the man's true character at that time. So, when the little word "also" in Luke 16:1 is carefully noted, it will be seen that the parable of the unjust steward is an application to the disciples of what our Lord had said to the Pharisees. He had been blamed for making friends of the poor and outcast (Luke 15:1,2), but he vindicated himself, in the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son, and then applied the lesson to his own disciples and urged them to make to themselves friends of these poor people. Other illustrations of this vital principle can be found almost everywhere, but perhaps the most familiar, as it is in some respects the most important for many, is the statement of our Lord at the institution of the Last Supper. The words, "This is my body," are often quoted in certain quarters, and yet Christ said more than this, for He did not speak of the bread but of his sacrifice on the Cross: "This is my body which is being given for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

These are not the only points to be remembered in connection with the interpretation of Scripture, but they will suffice to show how important it is to give careful attention to the circumstances of the Book, its Eastern origin, its spiritual meaning, and its practical message for daily life.

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