

# Guidelines: Part 3 What Do You Mean by Revelation? Inspiration? Illumination? Interpretation?

by J. Vernon McGee

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*The Bible is the Word of God, and its meaning can only be understood through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Joshua 1:2, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:5, Luke 24:45, John 1:1, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:1, 2 Peter 1:21

**Topics:** "Biblical Inspiration", "Holy Scripture"

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## Description

J. Vernon McGee delves into the meanings of Revelation, Inspiration, Illumination, and Interpretation in the Bible. Revelation emphasizes God's communication to humanity through the prophets in the Old Testament and through Christ in the New Testament. Inspiration highlights the belief in the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture, where every word is considered the Word of God. Illumination stresses the necessity of the Holy Spirit to teach and help believers understand the spiritual truths in the Bible. Interpretation involves the various interpretations individuals give to the Word of God, emphasizing the importance of considering the overall purpose, audience, context, original language, and literal interpretation of Scripture.

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## Transcript

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY REVELATION? INSPIRATION? ILLUMINATION? INTERPRETATION?

Revelation means that God has spoken and that God has communicated to man. Inspiration guarantees the revelation of God. Illumination has to do with the Spirit of God being the Teacher--He communicates. Interpretation has to do with the interpretation that you and I give to the Word of God.

REVELATION

Revelation means that God has spoken. "Thus saith the Lord," and its equivalent, occurs over twenty-five hundred times. The Lord didn't want you to misunderstand that He had spoken. Notice Hebrews 1:1, 2:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he

made the worlds.

Wherever you will find two persons, endowed with a reasonable degree of intelligence, who harbor the same feelings and desires, who are attracted to each other more or less, you will find communication between them. Persons of like propensities, separated from each other, delight in getting in touch with each other and rejoice in receiving communication from each other. This innate characteristic of the human heart explains the post office department, the telephone, and the telegraph.

Friends communicate with friends. A husband away from home writes to his wife. A boy or girl at school will write home to dad and mom. And ever and anon there travels the scented epistle of a girl to a boy, and then the boy returns an epistle to the girl. All of this is called communication. It is the expression of the heart. The Scripture says, "Deep calls to deep." You will recall the story of Helen Keller. I remember the thrill that came to me when I read the account of this woman, shut out from the world by blindness and deafness, without means of communication; and then a way was opened up so she could communicate--probably better than many of us who can see and hear.

Now, on the basis of all this, I would like to ask you what I believe is a reasonable and certainly an intelligent question: Isn't it reasonable to conclude that God has communicated with His creatures to whom He has committed a certain degree of intelligence and whom He created in His likeness? May I say to you, if we did not have a revelation from God, right now I think that you and I could just wait and He would be speaking to us, because we could expect God to speak to us. You will notice that the writer to the Hebrews says that God in the Old Testament spoke through the prophets, and He now has spoken through Christ. Both the revelation to the prophets in the Old Testament and the revelation of Christ in the New Testament are in the Word of God, of course, and that is the only way we would know about the communication from either one. The Bible has sixty-six books, and God has spoken to us through them.

This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good is its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is given you in life and will be opened in the judgment and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

--Author Unknown

## INSPIRATION

This brings us to the second great subject which is inspiration. I personally believe in what is known as the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, which means that the Bible is an authoritative statement and that every word of it is the Word of God to us and for us in this day in which we live. Inspiration guarantees the revelation of God. And that is exactly what this Book says. Two men, Paul writing his last epistle to Timothy and Peter writing his last epistle, both had something pretty definite to say about the Bible:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Notice that all scripture is given by inspiration. The word inspiration means God breathed. God said through these men, as He said here through Paul, exactly what He wanted to say. He hasn't anything else to add. Peter expresses it this way:

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21)

It is very important to see that these men were moved, as it were, carried along, by the Holy Spirit of God. It was Bishop Westcott who said: "The thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as the soul is to the body." And Dr. Keiper said, "You can as easily have music without notes, or mathematics without figures, as thoughts without words." It is not the thoughts that are inspired; it's the words that are inspired.

There is a little whimsical story of a girl who had taken singing lessons from a very famous teacher. He was present at her recital, and after it was over she was anxious to know his reaction. He didn't come back to congratulate her, and she asked a friend, "What did he say?" Her loyal friend answered, "He said that you sang heavenly," She couldn't quite believe that her teacher had said that; so she probed, "Is that exactly what he said?" "Well, no, but that is what he meant." The girl insisted, "Tell me the exact words that he used." "Well, his exact words were, 'That was an unearthly noise!'" May I say to you, there is a difference between unearthly noise and heavenly sound. Exact words are important.

Believe me, it is the words of Scripture that are inspired--not the thoughts, but the words. For instance, Satan was not inspired to tell a lie, but the Bible records that he told a lie. It's the words that are inspired. And the Lord Jesus said, "It is written," quoting the Word of God in the Old Testament--the men who wrote gave out what God had to say. In Exodus 20:1 Moses wrote: "And God spoke all these words, saying . . . ." It was God who did the speaking, and Moses wrote what He said.

Over the years there have been discovered many very excellent manuscripts of the Scriptures. Speaking of the manuscripts in Britain, Sir George Kenyon, the late director and principal librarian of the British Museum, made this statement: "Thanks to these manuscripts, the ordinary reader of the Bible may feel comfortable about the soundness of the text. Apart from a few unimportant verbal alterations, natural in books transcribed by hand, the New Testament, we now feel assured, has come down intact." We can be sure today that we have that which is as close to the autographs as anything possibly can be, and I believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the autographs--that is, the original manuscripts.

Way back yonder in the second century Irenaeus, one of the church fathers, wrote: "The Scriptures indeed are perfect, forasmuch as they are spoken by the Word of God and by His Spirit," Augustine, living in the fifth century, made this statement, "Let us therefore yield ourselves and bow to the authority of the Holy Scriptures which can neither err nor deceive." And Spurgeon commented, "I can never doubt the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration; since I so constantly see, in actual practice, how the very words that God has been pleased to use--a plural instead of a singular--are blessed to the souls of men." God speaks in this Book to our hearts and to our lives.

ILLUMINATION

Illumination means that since you and I have a Book, a God-Book and a human Book, written by men who were expressing their thoughts and while doing this they were writing down the Word of God, only the Spirit of God can teach it to us. Although we can get the facts of the Bible on our own, the Spirit of God will have to open our minds and hearts if we are to understand the spiritual truth that is there.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages unto our glory; which none of the princes of this age knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:7-9 NSRB)

Now you and I get most of what we know through the eye gate and the ear gate or by reason. Paul tells us here that there are certain things that eye has not seen nor ear heard, certain things that you can't get into your mind at all. Then how in the world are you going to get them?

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10 NSRB)

Verse 9 sometimes goes to a funeral. The minister implies that the one who has died didn't know too much down here, but now he will know things he did not know before. While that probably is true (we will get quite an education in heaven), that is not what the verse says. Long before you get to the undertaker, there are a lot of things down here that you and I can't learn through natural means. The Holy Spirit has to be our Teacher.

You remember that our Lord inquired of His disciples, "What are men saying about Me?" They said that some were saying one thing and some another. (And today you can get a different answer from almost every person you happen to ask. There are many viewpoints of Him.) Then He asked His disciples:

. . . But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-17)

God is the One who revealed the truth to Simon Peter. And today only God can open up the Word of God for us to really understand it.

On the day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He walked down the Emmaus road and joined a couple of men as they walked along. Entering into their conversation, He asked them:

. . . What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. (Luke 24:17-20)

As you will recall, Jesus had predicted that. And it is interesting to see that written prophecy had been saying it for years. Then they expressed the hope that had been theirs:

But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done. (Luke 24:21)

And they went on to tell about what they knew and what the women had reported. "Those who were with us went to the sepulcher . . . but Him they saw not." Their hopes had dimmed, and darkness had entered their hearts. Now listen to the Lord Jesus:

. . . O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Friend, wouldn't you have loved to have been there that day and heard Him go back in the Old Testament and lift out the Scriptures concerning Himself? And after He finally made Himself known to them as they sat at the evening meal, this is their comment:

. . . Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? (Luke 24:32)

You see, we are studying a Book that is different from any other book. It is not that I just believe in the inspiration of the Bible, I believe that it is a closed Book to you unless the Spirit of God will open your heart and make it real. When Jesus returned to Jerusalem at that time, He continued teaching the disciples:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. (Luke 24:44)

Notice that He believed Moses wrote the Pentateuch; He believed the prophets spoke of Him and that the Psalms pointed to Him. Now here is the important verse:

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. (Luke 24:45)

And, friend, if He doesn't open your understanding, you're just not going to get it, that's all. That is the reason we ought to approach this Book with great humility of mind, regardless of how high our IQ is or the extent of our education.

Referring back to 1 Corinthians, Paul goes on to say:

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:13, 14 NSRB)

I am never disturbed when one of these unbelievers, even if he's a preacher, comes along and says he no longer believes the Bible is the Word of God (he never did believe it, to tell the truth) because that's the way he should talk. After all, if he is not a believer, he cannot understand it. Mark Twain, who was no believer, said that he was not disturbed by what he did not understand in the Bible. What worried him were the things he did understand. There are things an unbeliever can understand, and it's those which cause many to reject the Word of God. It was Pascal who said, "Human knowledge must be understood to be loved, but Divine knowledge must be loved to be understood."

As I leave the subject of illumination let me add this: Only the Spirit of God can open your mind and heart to see and to accept Christ and to trust Him as your Saviour. How wonderful! I have always felt as I entered the pulpit how helpless I am because, believe me, Vernon McGee can't convert anyone. But I not only feel weak, I also feel mighty--not mighty in myself, but in the knowledge that the Spirit of God can take my dead words and make them real and living.

## INTERPRETATION

Interpretation has to do with the interpretation that you and I give to the Word of God. And this is the reason there are Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians, this kind of teacher and that kind of teacher--we all have our interpretations. And where there is disagreement, somebody is evidently wrong.

There are several rules that should be followed as we attempt to interpret the Bible.

1. The overall purpose of the Bible should first be considered. And that is the reason I teach all of it--because I believe you need to have it all before you can come to any dogmatic conclusion concerning any particular verse of Scripture. It is important to take into consideration all verses that are related to that subject.

2. To whom the Scripture is addressed should next be considered. For instance, way back yonder God said to Joshua, "Arise, go over this Jordan" (Joshua 1:2). When I was over in that land, I crossed the Jordan River, but I didn't cross it to fulfill that Scripture. And I didn't say, "At last I've obeyed the Lord and have crossed over Jordan." No. When I read that verse I know the Lord is talking to Joshua--but I believe there is a tremendous lesson there for me. All Scripture is not to me, but all Scripture is for me. That is a good rule to keep in mind.

3. The immediate context before and after a Scripture should be observed. What is the passage talking about? And what other passages of Scripture deal with the same thing?

4. Discover what the original says. If you do not read Hebrew or Greek, when you read the American Standard Version you're right close to what the Lord said. Frankly, I cannot recommend the modern translations, although there are good things in them. I have found that because we are so divided doctrinally, every group that attempts to translate the Bible just naturally injects into the translation their particular viewpoint. Therefore, if the liberal is going to do the translating, you may get a taste of liberalism. If the fundamentalist is going to do the translating, you'll get his bias in certain places. However, the men who did the original English translations were men who believed that the Bible was the Word of God and handled it accordingly. When there were words they could not translate, they simply transliterated them (for instance, Abba and baptizo). The danger in modern translations is that translation is done in a dogmatic fashion. When you translate, you have to take something out of one language and put it into another language in comparable terms--identical terms if possible. The thing that most of our modern translators are trying to do is to get it into modern speech. And in doing so, they really miss what the original is saying. Personally, I stick by the Authorized (King James) Version. I feel that The New Scofield Reference Bible has made a tremendous step forward in making certain distinctions and corrections that needed to be made in the Authorized Version. I recommend that also, although I still use my old Scofield Reference Bible. I know my way around through the Book, and, after all, the old scout will follow the old trail. However, the important thing is to attempt to determine the exact words of the original.

5. Interpret the Bible literally. The late Dr. David Cooper has stated it well: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-vernon-mcgee/guidelines-part-3-what-do-you-mean-by-revelation-inspiration-illumination-interp/>

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