

Two Models of Inspiration? The Challenge of the Old Testament Narratives

Bernard White
Sahmyook University
Seoul, Korea

Scholarly disagreements in the effort to explicate a doctrine of biblical inspiration are legion. Within the wider Christian communion, such disagreements over the last century and more have been characterized as Bible wars. They are ongoing, and periods of apparent lull should probably be seen as times of quiet rearmament. A sober reflection on the current state of the conflict within the more conservative branches of Christianity is unlikely to produce unbounded optimism that disputing theologians will soon lay down their pens. Quite the contrary. For whereas the earlier skirmishes in the modern Bible wars saw evangelicals and fundamentalists squaring off against liberals, evangelicals have now turned on each other, having come to the disquieting discovery that, on this doctrine, their own theological platform is less secure than previously imagined.

Seventh-day Adventists, too, know something of these internecine tensions. For Adventists, the inspiration discussions—at least, those that are “in-house”—proceed within a unique context, even while sharing with evangelicals the same essential concerns. The unique Adventist context, of course, is Ellen White. Having a near-contemporary prophet within the community brings an interest (and challenges!) of its own while also influencing discussions on *biblical* inspiration.¹

¹ Alden Thompson is one who has noted the interplay between Scripture and the writings of Ellen White in Adventist discussions on inspiration. He goes so far as to suggest that a willingness to allow a moderated use of some historical-critical methods of Bible study has occurred only as historical research has exposed challenges in the Ellen White writings. Such challenges impelled the White Estate (official custodians of the Ellen White writings) to employ source-critical methods to explain what research had exposed, thereby

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This unique context explains, in part, why the *prophetic* aspect of inspiration has attracted attention from Adventist scholars. In this respect, two books in particular stand out: George Rice's *Luke, a Plagiarist?* and Alden Thompson's *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*.² Published eight years apart, both books adopt the position that, while all Scripture is inspired, it was not all inspired in the same manner. The basic argument is that the Holy Spirit breathed out the prophetic books through prophets who had visions and dreams, while the writers or compilers of the other biblical books were inspired to do research, gather materials, write counsel, and pen their spiritual musings. There are, then, two *models* of inspiration: the prophetic model and the research model.³ By understanding inspiration in this way, it is thought to account for many of the inconsistencies that are to be found in the pages of Scripture—and, of course, in the writings of Ellen White.⁴

Both books contain much that is of value. For me as a new Adventist in the early 1980s, Rice's volume was an eyeopener. What I learned about the way in which the gospel writers chose their material and shaped it for a particular purpose has never left me. The book grounded me: as my knowledge of Scripture grew, I was never greatly bothered by the differences I discovered between one biblical writer and another. A decade later, Thompson's book also found its way onto my bookshelf. His pastoral, irenic tone (evident in all his books) impressed me, as did his insights regarding the variety that so characterizes the biblical material.

With the passage of time, however, some shortcomings of the two-model idea have emerged (at least, in my mind). Is it really possible to account for inconsistencies in the biblical narratives by applying to them a non-prophetic model of inspiration? A prophetic model of inspiration, by

weakening grounds for resistance to using similar methods in biblical studies. See Thompson, "Are Adventists Afraid of Bible Study?" *Spectrum* 16, no. 1 (April, 1985): 58.

² George E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1983); Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991).

³ The terminology for the second of these models sometimes differs, as will be seen below.

⁴ The applicability of the "Lucan" (i.e., non-prophetic) model to Ellen White is specifically stated on the final page of Rice's publication (*Luke*, 110, cf. 28). Indeed, a careful reading of Rice's final two paragraphs might easily excite the suspicion that the driving purpose behind the entire book was to provide a new paradigm for understanding the process of inspiration in Ellen White. Something along these lines is noted also by Thompson in his review of Rice ("Are Adventists Afraid of Bible Study?" 56, 57, 59).

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some assessments, has difficulty with inconsistencies, since it is assumed that any vision or dream given directly by God would be free of such blemishes.⁵ The alternative model understands that the human authors, even though inspired, had considerable freedom to mold their materials, to use existing materials that themselves might not be free of error or inconsistency, and to express their ideas from the strictures of their cultural and idiosyncratic thought patterns.

But is it so? Can the biblical materials be so neatly divided as to assign some to one model and the remainder to the other? Is the prophetic model to be confined to the prophetic books? Does a non-prophetic model account for the totality of the biblical narratives? This article will seek to demonstrate that none of these questions can be answered with an unqualified “yes.”

The thesis I will defend here is that the attempt to divide Scripture into that which was produced under a prophetic model of inspiration and that which was produced under a non-prophetic model fails to account for the biblical text as it now exists. I will first briefly state the genesis of the two-model view of inspiration, then present and analyze the arguments of Rice and Thompson regarding this view. A number of narratives from the Old Testament will then be examined in order to demonstrate the difficulty of applying a non-prophetic model of inspiration to their origin.⁶ Some implications and conclusions will round out this study.

⁵ Certainly this is the implication of Rice, who writes: “The prophetic model of inspiration (dreams and visions) is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait [of Jesus]. If the prophetic model is claimed as the source for the gospel account of Jesus’ ministry, the reader can only conclude that God was inconsistent with the information He gave to the gospel writers. Knowing that God is not inconsistent, the only other conclusion the reader can come to is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John worked under a model of inspiration that was different from the prophetic model” (*Luke*, 19).

⁶ The two-model view of inspiration pertains to the whole of Scripture, as will be shown below. It would, of course, be useful to examine narratives from both testaments in order to test the two-model view, particularly since it is from the *Gospels* that Rice develops his thesis. Yet the OT contains the bulk of Scripture’s narrative material and furnishes the simplest examples by which the Rice-Thompson thesis can be tested. The Gospel narratives are complicated by issues relating to the Synoptic problem and the fact that there are, in many instances, two or more versions of the same event. An appropriately nuanced treatment is not possible here. The procedure in the present survey will be to examine selected OT narratives that are recorded only once.

The “Prophetic Model” of Inspiration

The genesis and development of a “prophetic model” of inspiration has been traced by New Testament scholar Paul Achtemeier.⁷ The prophet Jeremiah, he suggests, exemplifies the essence of the prophetic role: God puts his words in the prophet’s mouth (Jer 1:9; 2:1). At one point the prophet is commanded to write down the words dictated to him by God (Jer 36:1-4, 32). According to Achtemeier, this model was by and by applied *as a model of inspiration* to all of the books of Scripture.⁸ Moreover, further study of the OT prophets revealed that they were evidently not always in control of themselves; that is, they were possessed by “an alien, albeit divine, force.”⁹

Inspiration, then, was deemed to be prophetic in the sense that the inspired writers were acted upon by the “Spirit of prophecy”: controlled by this alien power, they were spokesmen for God, since he had placed his very words into their mouths. According to Achtemeier, understanding inspiration on the analogy of prophecy explains why conservative theologians came to adopt the “plenary verbal” concept of inspiration. This view of inspiration “asserts that God so guided the writers of Scripture by his Holy Spirit that they were incapable of writing anything contrary to his will, or even of writing anything that in any way could be considered untrue.”¹⁰ The inerrancy doctrine is, according to Achtemeier, a product of the prophetic model of inspiration.¹¹ Rejection of the inerrancy doctrine would therefore seem to require rejecting the prophetic model as being applicable to Scripture as a whole.

⁷ Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 30-32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-33. Additionally, understanding that all Scripture was produced by “prophets” under the control of a divine power led logically to the point that “the differentiation between canonical and apocryphal books was attributed... to authorship: those books written by a prophet or an apostle were canonical, while all others were not” (*Ibid.*, 32).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35. The commitment to understanding Scripture as inerrant is a characteristic of fundamentalists and some evangelicals. For an understanding of how evangelicalism relates to fundamentalism on the issue of inerrancy, one could profitably consult Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 1998) and Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

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Whether Achtemeier's analysis well explains the genesis of the inerrancy view is open to question.¹² But it hardly matters for the discussion here. More relevant are the observations that (1) there is an understanding held by some scholars that a very significant percentage of inspired Scripture is not to be accounted for by any type of prophetic activity; and (2) non-inerrantists are likely to seek alternative models of inspiration for these non-prophetic portions of Scripture. As we shall see, however, applying a non-prophetic model to many parts of Scripture that are *not* considered prophetic is problematic.

Adventist Alternatives to the "Prophetic Model"

Adventist theologian George Rice has picked up on Achtemeier's term and redefined "prophetic model" as "divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams, visions, thought illumination as seen in the psalms and the wisdom literature, and the recording of these theophanies (divine manifestations) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."¹³ And what of the narratives and gospels that comprise so much of the biblical material? For them, according to Rice, another model is needed.

Rice finds the clue to such a model in the introductory verses of Luke's Gospel. There Luke indicates that he researched materials for inclusion in his gospel (Luke 1:1-4; especially vs. 2). Available to him were earlier Gospel materials, the reports of eyewitnesses, and "ministers of the word" (*huperetai*), the latter comprising individuals of the early church "specially chosen to memorize the sermons, parables, and deeds of Jesus."¹⁴ Rice's "Lucan" model is applied to all the Gospels, as well as to most of the rest of the New Testament¹⁵—indeed, to the "many books in the Bible" that "did

¹² For one thing, strict verbal inerrancy need not be seen as a necessary correlate of prophecy. See n. 64, below.

¹³ Rice, *Luke*, 11-12. Rice acknowledges that he has borrowed the term "prophetic model" from Achtemeier (p. 11).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-23. Rice acknowledges his indebtedness to Willard Swartley for this interpretation of *huperetai*.

¹⁵ Rice states: "Of all the New Testament writers only Paul and John are known to have had visions, and thus fit into the prophetic model. Paul only appeals to his visions in a limited way; and of the five New Testament books written by John only one originated from visions" (*Luke*, 13).

not result from dreams and visions,” and which therefore “do not fit within the ‘prophetic model.’”¹⁶

Alden Thompson is another Adventist scholar who has distinguished between those portions of Scripture that had their genesis in prophetic revelation, and those that did not. Thompson essentially follows Rice in setting forth *revelation* (in this context meaning the prophetic model) and *research* as the two means by which the biblical writings were produced.¹⁷ For Thompson, revelation is what comes through visions, dreams, and voices from heaven.¹⁸ However, “much of Scripture”—“historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles”—makes no claim to being based on “supernatural revelation.”¹⁹

The Rice-Thompson Proposal: Teasing Out the Details

Considering Rice’s and Thompson’s definitions together, some ambiguity emerges. Rice, as already noted, defines the model as “divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams, visions, thought illumination as seen in the psalms and the wisdom literature, and the recording of these theophanies (divine manifestations) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” The punctuation, unfortunately, renders the definition unclear:

1. Is Rice suggesting **three** aspects to the prophetic model: (1) “divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams [and] visions,” (2)

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Eminent evangelical theologian James I. Packer, though an inerrantist, likewise differentiates between the manner in which the biblical writers received and produced their work. Packer speaks of the different “psychological forms”—“dualistic inspiration,” where the prophets had “a sustained awareness of the distinction between their own thoughts and the visions and specific messages that God gave them;” “didactic inspiration,” (similar to Rice’s Lucan model); and “lyric inspiration,” responsive celebrations as found in the Psalms and Song of Songs. Packer is careful to point out that “the theological reality of inspiration is the same in each case” (see his “The Adequacy of Human Language,” in Norman L. Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980], 198).

¹⁷ Thompson, *Inspiration*, 47-48. Thompson acknowledges that he follows Rice in understanding that there are these “two basic ways in which Scripture came into being” (48). Thompson’s essential agreement with Rice’s understanding is evident in his review of the latter’s work in “Are Adventists Afraid of Bible Study?” *Spectrum* 16, no. 1 (April, 1985): 56-59.

¹⁸ *Inspiration*, 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

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“thought illumination as seen in the psalms and wisdom literature,” (3) “and the recording of these theophanies [whether the dreams and visions of the prophet or the thought illumination of the psalmists and wisdom writers]... under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”?

2. Or is he suggesting just **two** aspects: (1) “divine revelation coming to the prophet through [a] dreams, [b] visions, [and, [c]] thought illumination as seen [= similar to what is seen?] in the psalms and wisdom literature, and (2) the recording of these theophanies... under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”?

In the first interpretation of Rice’s definition, there would be an implied dichotomy between “divine revelation” that comes (through dreams and visions) to prophets and the “thought illumination” that comes to psalmists and writers of wisdom literature, even though the writings of the latter belong to the prophetic model. At the same time, Rice’s definition would also suggest that the thought illumination of the psalmists is, like prophetic dreams and visions, a form of theophany. A further implication would be that all that the prophets wrote was the product of revelation that came to them through dreams and visions.

The second interpretation of Rice’s definition would clearly include thought illumination as an additional means by which divine revelation came to the *prophets*. The prophets, then, had visions and dreams, but they also penned messages that were the result of thought illumination and *not* of visions and dreams.²⁰

Further questions arise. First, does thought illumination in a prophet essentially equate to the LORD putting his words in the prophet’s mouth (Jer 1:9)? If so, does thought illumination in other biblical writers such as the psalmists and wisdom writers also involve the LORD putting his words in the writer’s mouth? If it does not so equate, is the prophet still functioning with prophetic authority when “only” receiving thought illumination rather than dreams or visions or having words put in his mouth? That is, would the prophet then be functioning not as a prophet but as an “ordinary” inspired writer? In either case, is thought illumination in a prophet more susceptible

²⁰ Earlier in *Luke: A Plagiarist?* Rice implies that the prophetic model indicates *only* visions and dreams: “The prophetic model of inspiration (dreams and visions) is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait” (19).

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of “error” than that which his mind receives by visions and dreams? Is thought illumination in a *prophet* less susceptible of error—more authoritative, perhaps—than thought illumination in a biblical writer who is *not* considered a prophet?

Besides all this, what exactly is “thought illumination” supposed to indicate? A sense that something read or conceived is true? Specific ideas brought to mind? Actual *words* placed in the mind? The impulse to express an idea in a particular way or with a particular emphasis?

It may seem pedantic to ask such questions. But if we take up the task of attempting to define inspiration, and especially to demarcate different models of inspiration in the Scriptures, we necessarily embark upon an undertaking that cannot get far without pondering such questions. Without them—and potentially, even with them!—our models are in danger of becoming little more than unsupported assertions.

In Thompson’s understanding of the prophetic model, divine revelations came through dreams, visions, and voices from heaven. Does “voices from heaven” correspond in any way to Rice’s “thought illumination”? If it does not, (as would seem to be the case²¹) does Thompson allow for some kind of thought illumination in the non-prophetic writers of Scripture, and would such belong to the “research” model of inspiration or to a third model between research and prophecy?

Rice, for his part, does not seem to allow for a third model of inspiration. He states that the Lucan (research) model is the “companion,” “the complement to and companion of the prophetic model.”²² Passages of Scripture that “did not result from dreams and visions,” that “do not fit within the ‘prophetic model’ . . . fit under *the* second, and neglected model of inspiration.”²³ Furthermore, his language at one point strongly implies that the prophetic model has a supernatural element while the alternative does not.²⁴

²¹ Thompson cites Abraham and Jesus as examples of biblical characters who heard “voices from heaven” (*Inspiration*, 47). In the same chapter, he defines revelation as “a visible or audible intervention by God (‘a vision’)” (57). This would suggest something different from “thought illumination.”

²² Rice, *Luke*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13 (emphasis added). Compare also p. 16, where Rice refers to the Lucan model as “the missing link . . . without [which] our teaching on inspiration is not presented ‘in its entirety.’”

²⁴ Note the implication in his concluding chapter: “But this phenomenon [of inspired writers borrowing or copying from sources] has always been addressed under the umbrella of the prophetic model, and it has always been subordinated to the supernatural—dreams and

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Practical Ramifications of Alternative Models of Inspiration²⁵

But does it really matter what model of inspiration we propound? Why might it be important to seek to understand how Scripture came about? Should we not be more concerned with *doing* what God in Scripture has bidden us do? We may reply that the *practice* of Christianity is certainly enormously important. But we shall not be inclined consistently to obey Scripture's commands, accept its injunctions, follow its counsel, or embrace its teachings unless we are convinced that it is really the words of God that we find in all its pages.²⁶

It is easy to make broad statements affirming that all Scripture is inspired. But the fine print is not without meaning. Does our doctrine of inspiration allow us to receive every part of Scripture "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13)? Can that which comes from non-supernatural processes be equally "the word of God" as that which comes from supernatural processes? If so, why? If we grant that God guided Luke's mind in the selection of sources, how is this to be understood as a "breathing out"? "Guiding" and "breathing out" may not be the same thing. How would guiding the biblical writer's mind be anything more than "illumination"? And if it *is* nothing more than illumination, how would we distinguish illumination from inspiration?

Both Rice's Lucan model and Thompson's "casebook" incarnational model, as expounded throughout their respective publications, provide insights into the kind of Bible that we possess. We do need to appreciate the different ways in which Scripture may at one time or another function for us. We do need to apply Scripture with wisdom and pastoral understanding both to our own lives and to others. We do need to allow the text (the "phenomena") of Scripture to speak to us as it appears, without

visions. Without question, writers on the topic of inspiration would much rather explore and expound the supernatural. The unexciting, mundane work of research, which resulted in 'copying' and 'borrowing' from sources, is dealt with in a secondary way. Thus the impression is given that this element in the experience we call inspiration is unimportant ...—something to be noted briefly... and then back to the supernatural—the real business of inspiration" (109).

²⁵ By using the appellative "alternative," I do not wish to prejudice the case against these models. I simply mean that theologians have sought alternatives to a more traditional understanding of inspiration which, they believe, is in some ways deficient.

²⁶ Indeed, inspiration has been defined as "a divine act that creates an identity between a divine word and a human word." John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 140.

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automatically seeking to harmonize the text with our preconceived views.²⁷ We should even recognize that not all Scripture speaks to us with equal urgency or relevance at any particular time.

Yet, as hinted above and as will be shown below, the two-model idea does not succeed in allowing us to see clearly how *all* the parts of Scripture might have been produced. Perhaps it was not intended to. What is more troubling, however, is that it seems to result in a hierarchical text: all Scripture is inspired, but it is not all *equally* inspired.

Consider, for example, the distinction that Thompson makes between inspired Scripture and revealed Scripture. While acknowledging that all Scripture is inspired, he nevertheless asserts that not all Scripture came by *revelation*.²⁸ Technically, this seems correct; who is likely to argue that the biblical genealogies—all or most of them—were revealed in visions and dreams, or even by “thought illumination”? Yet the proposed dichotomy between inspiration and revelation (here, the “prophetic model”) is problematic, on at least three counts.

First, the distinction leaves room for the suggestion, if it does not actually imply, that the level of inspiration is not equal throughout Scripture. This is starkly evidenced in the reasoning that Rice provides for his Lucan (“research”) model. In Rice’s schema, the prophetic model of inspiration may or may not embrace the psalms. It certainly does not embrace Kings and Chronicles “and other Old Testament books” nor the

²⁷ This is a point that Thompson particularly emphasizes (*Inspiration*, 175, 177, 210, 225).

²⁸ On this, Thompson is unambiguous: “Where Scripture claims revelation, let’s accept it. But much of Scripture makes no such claim. We need to remember that when we study historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles. Inspiration? Always. Revelation? Sometimes—and most certainly when the Bible tells us so” (*Inspiration*, 49). But what does it mean, practically, to accept that some parts of the Bible are revelation while other parts are not? Even if there were value in such an approach, one is left with the stark fact that we often cannot know which parts of Scripture *are* based on revelation. For even in the prophetic books, the vast majority of the material is not directly pointed as being based on visions (see n. 37, below). Of this, Thompson is aware; for in the same paragraph, he notes that “prophetic messages can have full authority without necessarily being based on a specific supernatural revelation” (*Ibid.*, 49). Furthermore, Thompson has himself suggested that the prophets likely augmented their visions with research, “when appropriate” (*Inspiration*, 61). Is Thompson suggesting the reader should automatically accept the entirety of every prophetic book as revelation, even while harboring the disquieting suspicion that some of the material might have been based on mere research?

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Gospels.²⁹ Why not? Because of inconsistencies in these narratives. Such inconsistencies, Rice believes, could not have come through the prophetic process of inspiration, since God is not inconsistent.³⁰ Hence the need for an additional model of inspiration, one in which (presumably) inconsistencies may be expected and allowed. But to suggest that some portions of Scripture are without “inconsistencies” while other portions, *by dint of having originated through a different means of inspiration*, do not

²⁹ *Luke*, 19. It could be objected that it is invalid to fault Thompson’s distinction between revealed and inspired Scripture by citing a statement from *Rice’s* book. But the point is simply to demonstrate how the *concept* of a prophetic model of inspiration over and against the alternative—a concept that both Thompson and Rice have ably propounded, though sometimes using different language—leads in a certain direction.

³⁰ *Ibid.* The implication of Rice’s claim would appear to be that the psalms and prophetic literature are free of such inconsistencies. That would not be an easy position to defend while at the same time endeavoring to maintain the position that the inconsistencies of the Gospels and OT narratives are real. Thompson’s schema likewise leads, seemingly inevitably, to a similar outcome: those portions of Scripture that are (merely) inspired but not the product of direct revelation, are prone to error or inconsistency of some kind. This is evident in numerous examples Thompson provides in Part Three of *Inspiration* (Chapter 9, “Law—Acts 15: Changing Times, Changing Laws;” Chapter 10, “Hymns and Prayers—Prayers of Hatred, Innocence, and Godforsakenness;” Chapter 11, “Words of the Wise—The Optimist and the Pessimist;” Chapter 12, “In the Archives—Research;” Chapter 13, “In the Study—Secretaries, Scribes, and Assistants;” Chapter 14, “At the Publishers—Editing and Compiling;” Chapter 15, “Old Testament Parallel Passages—Samuel—Kings and Chronicles: Same Story, Different Message;” Chapter 16, “New Testament Parallel Passages—One Story, Three Lessons;” Chapter 17, “Visions—Documentaries or Animations?” Chapter 18, “Inspired Writers Quoting Inspired Writers—Let the Writers Speak for Themselves;” Chapter 19, “Numbers, Genealogies, Dates—Amram’s Brothers Were Really Prolific”). Much of what Thompson offers in these chapters is eminently helpful. But the material is a mixed bag. Thompson explicitly prefers to avoid using words such as “error,” “mistake,” and “contradiction” (*Inspiration*, 144). But it is not necessary to use these words in order to imply that what Scripture says, at a certain point, is simply incorrect. This is particularly evident in Thompson’s treatment of biblical numbers (Chapter 19). Thompson is justified in noting the very real difficulties that many of the numbers present us with. The issues are complex and cannot be considered in detail here. It is clear, however, that Thompson simply does not accept that many of the numbers Scripture gives in connection with the Exodus event are believable. He suggests, “Perhaps it would help if we could see numbers, genealogies, and dates as interesting (even fascinating) rather than crucial—and leave it at that” (*Ibid.*, 214). It would not be right to discount Thompson’s conclusions out of hand. The point being made here is simply that it is POSSIBLE that dividing Scripture into that which is revealed and that which is not is a hermeneutic that allows a too easy dismissal of data that might, with further consideration, turn out to be believable.

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contain similar inconsistencies is tantamount to suggesting that one form of inspiration is superior to the other.³¹

A second problem with the suggested dichotomy between inspiration and revelation is revealed in the actual content of numerous biblical narratives: these contain material that is not easily accounted for by a non-prophetic model of inspiration. Similarly, a third problem becomes evident when we consider the biblical prophecies themselves: these, for their part, contain a good deal of material that is not easily accounted for by visions and dreams.

The second and third “problems” are clearly complementary: the inspired narratives seem often dependent upon revelation, while the revealed prophecies seem often dependent, in their inscripturation, upon a more “ordinary” form of inspiration.³² There is space here to consider in

³¹ It is well known that Ellen G. White directly refuted the idea that there are levels of inspiration in Scripture. Her unambiguous disapproval of then-GC President G. I. Butler's 1884 *Review and Herald* articles (“Inspiration: Its Nature and Manner of Communication,” Nos. 1-10, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 8-June 3, 1884) has largely settled the issue for the SDA academic community: “This concept,” writes van Bemmelen, “though for a short time enjoying some popularity, did not find permanent acceptance among Seventh-day Adventists” (Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12 of *Commentary Reference Series*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 52).

³² A feeling for a closer connection between revelation and inspiration seems to be reflected in Fernando Canale's preference for the term “revelation-inspiration.” Canale uses this term throughout *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Canale [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005]). Warfield, while not employing the same term, certainly recognizes their close connection. For him, though the two ideas are to be distinguished, inspiration should be thought of as a “mode” of revelation; through inspiration the being, will, operation, and purposes of God are made known, thus performing the same office that revelation performs (Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig [London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1951], 160-61). It is, of course, legitimate to distinguish theologically between revelation and inspiration, the one referring to the *content* of what God communicates (see Frame, *Doctrine of the Word*, 15) and the latter referring to the action of God in making that content known to human minds. In practice, however, it is not always easy to maintain this distinction. The difficulty may be seen in one OT description of a prophet: “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deut. 18:18). Is it really possible to clearly identify and distinguish revelation and inspiration in God's activity as described in this verse? We may begin with the clause, “[I] will put my words in his mouth.” Unless we accept that God placed his words directly into the mouth of the prophet, bypassing the mind in the manner of a Delphic oracle, then the clause indicates revelation: God communicated *content*, whether in visual or verbal form, to the mind of the prophet. Even so, the words *were* ultimately placed (by

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detail only the second of these three issues; it perhaps offers the greatest potential to illuminate the wider discussion relating to prophetic models.

Biblical Narratives and the “Prophetic Model”

Alden Thompson moots the idea that examining parallel narratives to observe their differences in detail is a most fruitful exercise for understanding how inspiration sometimes works.³³ He may be right. He is certainly not alone in taking that view, as Rice’s thesis demonstrates. Yet “stand alone” narratives also harbor details that, on analysis, yield important conclusions relevant to this topic. Some of these conclusions are quite contrary to those emphasized by these two theologians. We shall here consider but a few of the many examples that could be offered.

I The Balaam Narratives

In the story of Balaam, several conversations are recorded: “Moab” (the king of Moab? or the people?) with the elders of Midian, Balak with his servants (the princes), the princes of Moab with Balaam, Balaam with God, Balaam with the “donkey,” Balaam with the angel, and Balaam with Balak. Who recorded these conversations? One possibility is that the story was recorded by the Moabite chroniclers and placed among the royal records. But how would they have known what happened to Balaam en route to Moab? Was Balaam’s humility such that he decided to write down for posterity his conversation with a donkey and turned over the text to the Moabites? Did a Moabite scribe faithfully write down Balaam’s four oracles as he uttered them? How would these records have made it into the hands of the Israelites? It is true, the Israelites later attacked and nearly wiped out the Midianites, burning all their cities to the ground (Num 31:1-12). Were

God, via the mind) into the prophet’s mouth, and this placing would cause him to “speak to them all that I command him.” Is there inspiration in this process? If it is anywhere, it is in the speaking; for, to use Frame’s definition of inspiration, it is at this point that one sees “the relation between the divine and human authors of Scripture,” and where there is created “an identity between a divine word and a human word (Frame, *Doctrine of the Word*, 140). But, again, is there much difference between the two phases of divine activity here described—placing his words into the prophet’s mind and mouth and then causing him to speak those very words? In terms of divine activity and purpose, they are not easily separable.

³³ *Inspiration*, 15, 173.

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the Israelites in the habit of retrieving royal records from the courts of their enemies before consigning the palace (and its occupants) to the torch?

Perhaps Balaam himself recorded the entire story? Only he was familiar with all its details. The exceptions would be the brief conversations between Moab and the elders of Midian (Num 22:4) and between the princes of Moab and Balak (vs. 14), though it is possible these were reported to Balaam by the king's delegation. Again, however, why did Balaam record the embarrassing incident with the donkey? Indeed, the entire story was a humiliation to him; the very prophecies he uttered bore testimony against his own duplicitous purpose. Why would he have recorded any of it? Was he inspired to recall exactly the prophecies he had uttered? And were these personal documents plucked from the fire by a particularly thoughtful Israelite soldier during the raid that resulted in Balaam's sorry departure from life?

Both scenarios are possible (the first less than the second), but they do strain credulity. If neither scenario is accepted, then one must lean toward the possibility that the whole account was revealed supernaturally to the Bible writer.³⁴ For since the action happened beyond Israel's borders, the action unknown to them as the drama unfolded, the Israelites were dependent on *some* kind of external source or revelation for their knowledge of the events.

II Samson

The stories involving Samson provide another example of the same difficulty regarding sources. We will begin with the generous assumption that Samson kept a diary. Of the details of his birth, his parents made him aware. The unhappy details of his wedding feast, the vengeful torching of a wheat field, various other escapades with the Philistines—all were carefully journaled by the muscleman, revealing, perhaps, a more thoughtful side to

³⁴ There is, of course, the possibility that the story is simply fiction, even if the main protagonists (Balaam and Balak) were historical figures: not just that the biblical writer used some creative license to flesh out the basic details, but that the storyline itself is the product of literary imagination. Absent extra-biblical sources to confirm the story, the claim that it is fiction cannot be disproved. Yet those kinds of claims, more common among liberal theologians, form no part of the discussions found in Rice and Thompson and, furthermore, render discussion of inspiration, in any orthodox sense, quite meaningless in this context. For this reason, further examples offered here will assume the "fiction" theory as a given option, doubtless attractive to some, but without giving it further consideration.

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his nature. When he paid his last visit to the land of the Philistines—to a certain Delilah in the Valley of Sorek—did he take his diary with him? If so, did the Philistines kindly return it to his home in Israel after his decease? If not, how were the details available to the writer of Judges? In any case, we must consider more carefully the story of Delilah and its sequel.

We would be taking generosity too far to imagine that Samson was making diary entries as the Delilah incident unfolded. With a huge effort, however, we might imagine that Delilah related, to someone, the intimate details following the death of her suitor, and that the details found their way into the hands of the Bible writer. But we are still left with the final scene of Samson's life. Blind, he is led by a boy into the temple to "perform" for the people. He leans on the pillars, ostensibly for support, and, with a prayer on his lips—the words of which, remarkably, are recounted in the biblical record—pushes with all his might. The building collapses and everyone inside is killed, Samson included. Presumably the little boy also. Which is important, because only the boy knew that Samson had asked him to guide his hands to the pillars. Short of some very special pleading—that the boy miraculously survived—the only possible sources for the final scene of Samson's life disappeared when the temple collapsed.

That the broad outline of Samson's life would have been known to his contemporaries and compatriots need not be disputed. In all seriousness, we need not even insist that Samson ended each day with "Dear Diary..." He may well have shared significant incidents with friends or family. The resulting oral tradition at some point became (we might imagine) a written history. But the temple scene resists any attempt to be traceable to either written or oral sources. How was it made known to the writer of Judges?

III The Capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines

Similar difficulties accompany the attempt to imagine sources for the story of the ark of God after it was captured by the Philistines in the early days of Samuel's judgeship. The account (1 Sam 5:1-6:12) is complex, the amount of detail completely excluding the possibility that the Bible writer might have been able to guess what likely happened.³⁵ Then either there

³⁵ There are details in other biblical narratives the substance of which could conceivably be guessed without the need for sources. One example could be the reaction of Pharaoh and his servants after the Israelites' departure from Egypt: "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us" (Ex 14:5). Certainly, no source existed: it is hard to imagine the words were contemporaneously recorded; moreover, there was no subsequent contact between the Egyptians and the Israelites of that generation. Yet the fact that the

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were sources, or the story was revealed supernaturally to the Bible writer. It is, again, very difficult to imagine how the details of the story became known to the Israelites.

Obviously, the saga was enormously humiliating to the Philistines. This is evidenced by their reluctance, in the face of enormous evidence, to accept the obvious fact that the LORD was punishing them (1 Sam 6:9). Consequently, if they recorded it at all, they would surely not have been inclined to feed the triumphalism of the Israelites by informing *them* of the embarrassing recent events in their land. There is no suggestion in the biblical text that the Philistines had thoughtfully pinned a lengthy note to the ox cart explaining why they were sending the ark back! Nor are we justified in believing that there existed among the Philistines an exquisite sensitivity to Israel's need to be kept informed of any such events as might contribute to the latter's national religious history.

IV The Lepers of Samaria

Finally, we may consider the account of the four lepers dwelling outside the besieged city of Samaria. They had decided to give themselves up to the Syrians in the hope that they might thereby save their lives from famine. Upon entering the Syrian camp, they found it deserted. After satiating their own hunger (and plundering the silver and gold and clothing!), their consciences compelled them to share the "good news" with their fellows inside the city.

It is easy to imagine that the story was recounted on many occasions by the lepers. Eventually, their account may have found its way into the official annals of Israelite history, and from there into the sacred record.³⁶ But what do we do with the explanation for the Syrians' departure? The

Egyptians pursued the Israelites subsequent to granting them leave implies that they had a change of heart, as expressed in this verse. We need not demand a source for this particular comment. Yet the very admission of an example such as this highlights the sober fact that it is somewhat singular. The vast majority of narrative details and dialogues, unless they are to be regarded as fiction, cannot be explained minus a source.

³⁶ What did constitute Israel's "annals"? Scripture mentions several: the books of Nathan, Gad, Iddo, and Shemaiah (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 2 Chron 12:15; 2 Chron 13:22), all of whom were prophets; also from the monarchical period were the Annals of King David (1 Chron 27:24) and the Acts of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41). Two earlier works were the book of Jasher (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18) and the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num 21:14). Several other works mentioned in Scripture might simply be ancient names for extant biblical books (ex. the Acts of the Kings of Israel may be identical to the biblical books of 1 and 2 Kings).

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record states: “For the LORD had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, ‘Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!’ Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact—their tents, their horses, and their donkeys—and they fled for their lives” (2 Kings 7:6-7).

How were these details known? Neither those inside the city nor the lepers knew that the Syrians had fled. If the starving inhabitants of the city had known, they would have immediately descended upon the Syrian camp. The lepers had not known; the Scripture specifically tells us that they were surprised to find the camp abandoned (vs. 5). So except for the Syrians, who had fled the scene, nobody knew the time of the Syrians’ departure (“at twilight”), nor the reason for it (hearing “the noise of a great army”), nor their supposition regarding the Hittites and the Egyptians.

Once again, even if some broad details of the story were known by normal means, there are other details that simply cannot be so explained. Nor are these “other” details insignificant glosses added for literary effect; nor, again, are they details that the narrator might have assumed as likely to have happened. One imaginative solution would be that there was subsequent contact, much later, between one or more Syrians and an Israelite, during which contact the Syrian(s) helpfully related the missing details! It is an extraordinary, though not quite impossible, scenario. Such a solution to the problem would be a Pyrrhic victory, for one would have to imagine similarly unlikely scenarios to account for the sources of many other of the biblical narratives.

Some Implications of these Observations

I The “Research” Model Fails to Account for a Significant Portion of the Biblical Narrative

The four examples canvassed here suggest that the biblical narratives contain a good deal of material that is not to be accounted for by a “research” or “Lucan” model of inspiration. But if the research model is unable to account for many of the narratives, to what should we ascribe their origin? If sources are ruled out, there is no research; one must then move in the direction of either revelation or imagination.

If we choose the latter, particular questions arise: (1) are we prepared to accept that stories such as the Balaam story, the Samson and Delilah story, the story of the lepers, etc., are fiction—that is, they did not happen? (2) how much else of the narrative material, even that for which sources are

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plausible, might be fiction? (3) how might imagination be thought to fit into a “research” model? (4) is imagination—that is, imagination that produces fiction masquerading as history—compatible with the concept of “God-breathed”? (5) if imagination in the biblical literature is “God-breathed,” should it be considered revelation (since it does not spring from sources), and if not, how does it differ in quality, accuracy, or authority from the imaginings of a non-inspired writer?

If, on the other hand, we incline to the view that certain narratives are the product of revelation rather than imagination, one question to consider is, Should revelation be considered an element of the “research” model or should the “prophetic” model be applied to the narratives? Or is there a third model, a *via media*? However these questions are answered, the simple idea that the prophetic books are the product of prophetic inspiration while the remainder are the product of research of some kind needs to be revised.

II The Two-model View Falsely Differentiates Inspiration in the Biblical Books on the Basis of Genre

The narratives already examined here demonstrate the point. It is certain that some, perhaps most, of the non-autobiographical biblical narratives were derived from source material, whether royal annals or various books prepared by prophets and seers. But within these narratives are to be found accounts that seem *not* to have had a pre-existence in any written or oral source. Nor do the prophetic books reveal a simple pattern of consistent revelation, although it has not been possible to examine those materials here. In brief, a close consideration of the prophetic materials reveals that it is often impossible to determine whether the prophet is describing exactly what he has seen or heard in vision, or is applying to a particular situation what he saw or heard at some time in the past, or whether his words are even based on visionary material at all. Indeed, explicit references to dreams and visions are surprisingly scarce in almost all of the prophetic books.³⁷ It is possible that the “prophetic” model cannot be applied

³⁷ A preliminary examination of the Old Testament prophetic books reveals the following. In the entire book of Isaiah there is only one explicit vision (Isa 6:1-13). In Jeremiah there is also only one certain vision (24:1-3), with a very few “possibles” (14:2-6; 25:15-38; 30:6f; 31:3, 36). Ezekiel contains three lengthy visions (1:4-3:14; 8:1-11:4[?]; 40-48 [the vision possibly finishes at 47:12]) plus one shorter vision (37:1-14). Explicit visionary material in the minor prophets is likewise sparse. There is throughout Hosea’s book no hint of a visual origin of his revelations. Exactly the same is true of Joel, Jonah, and Haggai. Amos contains a few very brief visions (7:1-3, 4-6, 7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4[1-15?]), Habakkuk at least one (3:3-7; is this the vision that is referred to in 2:2-3?). Nahum

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wholesale even to these, just as the research model cannot be applied consistently to the narratives.

To be fair, Thompson himself recognizes that revelation and research may come together in the one writer, when he suggests that the biblical messenger might “augment *revelation* with *research* when appropriate.”³⁸ The crucial question that he has not attempted to answer is, How can we know consistently which portions are the result of revelation and which of research? It no longer seems advisable to attempt any differentiation on the basis of genre.³⁹

III The Relationship Between Inspiration and Prophecy Is Not Well Explained by the “Two-model” View

In Rice’s and Thompson’s schema, prophecy is a subset of inspiration, so that all prophecy is an example of inspiration while not all that is inspired involves prophecy. But if what the prophets sometimes spoke came not by a dream or vision but by “thought illumination,” we are justified in

describes his book as “the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite” (1:1), but, excepting 1:15 and 2:2-3, the material gives little evidence of being depictions of what was seen. Similarly for the “vision” of Obadiah (1:1), which has even less indication of visionary material than Nahum: it is very much a verbal message prefaced by the words, “Thus says the LORD GOD” (1:1). In Malachi there is but one verse that *might* be regarded as visionary (3:16), but the indication is very weak. Zechariah is exceptional, containing no fewer than eight brief visions in the first six chapters. There are none subsequently, unless the message of chapter 14 is so regarded; but in that case, why does it not have the verbal markers of “seeing” and “looking” so characteristic of Zechariah’s eight earlier visions?

³⁸ *Inspiration*, 61 (emphases in the original).

³⁹ Rice criticizes an earlier Adventist author (Frederick E. J. Harder) for failing to recognize the “second” model of inspiration, instead lumping together all of Scripture under the prophetic model. Harder writes, “Beginning with events related to the Exodus and continuing to the close of the apostolic age, inspired revelations were committed to writing and ‘embodied’ in an inspired book” (“Divine Revelation: A Review of Some of Ellen G. White’s Concepts,” *Spectrum* 2 [Autumn 1970]: 39). Rice points out that Harder’s statement paraphrased from Ellen White who, in her original statement, was “preparing her readers to understand that she has seen in vision (prophetic model) scenes from the great controversy between Christ and Satan” (Rice, *Luke*, 13). Harder, Rice claims, is incorrect to apply that concept, applicable only to prophetic material, to the entirety of Scripture (*Ibid.*, 13). Rice, however, has overlooked the fact that much of what White subsequently wrote, based on her great controversy visions, reads not as prophecy but as historical narrative. If one accepts that the broad outlines, and certain details, of White’s voluminous historical writings were based on visions (supplemented by research—cf. Thompson, see previous footnote), one can more easily see that the biblical narratives, too, were likely produced through a combination of revelation and research.

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asking how the latter differs from the special “illumination” that prompted Luke, for example, to change Christ’s word from “Spirit” to “finger” (Lk 11:20 cf. Matt 12:28)⁴⁰ or that allowed him to know precisely the content of the prayer of Zacharias.⁴¹ Or that allowed the writer of Judges to know the details of the final moments of Samson’s life. What happens when an inspired writer composing a gospel or epistle or OT narrative moves from research to revelation, so to speak, as when the writer of 2 Kings moves from consulting royal annals to writing that of which no Israelite had any knowledge?⁴² Does he slip in and out of a prophetic state, moving from being “just” inspired to being a prophet and then being just inspired again?

This is not to deny that those called to the prophetic office differed from other Bible writers. With the prophets, the voice of God seems to have come to them with such clarity that they could even hold converse with him as two human beings would hold converse with each other.⁴³ But were they constantly in this state when writing or speaking that which ultimately became Scripture? When the prophet Jonah prayed to the LORD from the fish’s belly, was he “in the Spirit”—in the prophetic state—as when the word of the LORD came to him at the beginning (Jon 1:1-2)? Are the words recorded in 2:2-9 a word-for-word account of what he actually prayed? He certainly did not write his prayer while in the fish’s belly! So when he subsequently wrote out the prayer, was he *then* in the prophetic state or merely inspired? If the latter, was he inspired in any *different* way from the psalmists—again, we must remember that David is styled a “prophet” in Acts 2:30—or from Paul or Jude when they wrote their doxologies?

⁴⁰ The change might have been made by Matthew, rather than by Luke. I am not qualified to offer an opinion as to which of the two gospels were written first. Some ninety years after Streeter’s “two-document” and “four-document” theories, debate continues on possible sources of the gospels and their relative dates. A leading authority on the Synoptic problem, William R. Farmer, has noted that “the problem of determining which [of the Synoptic Gospels] was written first, which second, and which third, persists” (see his “The Case for the Two-Gospel Hypothesis,” in David Alan Black and David R. Beck (eds.), *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 99. In respect to Matt 12:28 and Lk 11:20, the direction of the change of wording is of no importance to the present discussion.

⁴¹ Or—and this is probably the more important point—to know the prayer *as God wanted us to know it*.

⁴² Recall the example of the lepers of Samaria, as given above.

⁴³ Jer 1:4-19; Ezek 4:13-17; Hab 1:1-2:3; etc. It is not always clear if these conversations occurred while the prophets were actually in vision or not.

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It is well understood that the prophets did not only predict future events; they also described current events and, in particular, revealed God's involvement in all such events. Is this not what Paul was doing when he "interpreted" for the early believers the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? When Paul spoke in detail of the resurrection body and of the order in which translation and resurrection would occur (1 Cor 15:35-53; 1 Thess 4:13-17), was he simply demonstrating theological insight into Old Testament revelations?⁴⁴ The Old Testament actually provides no such material as would allow the apostle to speak on that matter with such confidence and in such detail. And where Paul, or any other apostle, does comment on that which the OT reveals, how would his supposed "theologizing" differ from the Spirit-given illumination that is the common birthright of all NT believers? Were there no new *revelations* given to the NT writers outside of the Apocalypse? Indeed, Paul claimed that he certainly did receive revelations (2 Cor 12:1-7), though, as so often with the OT prophets also, it is not clear when such revelations might have informed what he wrote.

All this is to say that there is an intimate connection between prophecy and inspiration, in both testaments. This connection is easily lost sight of when speaking of a "prophetic" or "revelation" model of inspiration as against a "non-prophetic" or "research" model. Admittedly, the interrelatedness of inspiration and the prophetic state is not easily demonstrated from biblical terminology, since the word "inspiration" is not itself used in Scripture. As we have already seen, however, the biblical *data* are suggestive of such a connection.

Adding weight to this suggestion is the observation that the biblical books, whether prophetic or not, all stem from a special activity of the Holy Spirit upon the human author. While 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20-21 differ in some respects, their common ground is seen in two crucial aspects: (1) inspiration (2 Timothy) and the prophetic impulse (2 Peter) are both the

⁴⁴ The same may be asked of Peter's comments regarding the end of the world, at which time "scoffers will come . . . walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Pet 3:3-4). The apostle adds that such would "willfully forget" the Scriptural descriptions of the Creation and Flood (vv. 5-6). Was Peter simply exercising a sanctified imagination for homiletical purposes? Or did God reveal to his mind a precise thought that He wanted to be recorded for posterity?

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work of the Holy Spirit in the production of Scripture,⁴⁵ and (2) in both cases the activity is God-initiated. If prophecy came not by human impulse, neither did the “mundane” work of research. Regardless of the human-ness of the writing process—locating sources, sifting through them, deciding what and what not to include—the authors of gospel and narrative were being moved upon at all stages by the Holy Spirit.

To claim this brings us close to saying that the human authors of the narratives were “moved” or “carried along” by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), which provokes the question: Are 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20-21 describing the same process? Even if we understand Peter to be referring specifically to the prophetic books,⁴⁶ it does not mean our question should be answered in the negative, since the apostle may simply be making a particular application of a process that Paul describes as applying to the whole of Scripture. Nor would we expect the two authors to describe the same process with the same words.

IV The Facticity or Historicity of Biblical Narratives Is Not Related to Sources

This point may be illustrated by the assessment made by Old Testament scholar Peter Enns. Enns reckons that biblical history prior to the monarchical period is suspect simply because the formal maintaining of historical records did not occur during that earlier period.⁴⁷ Yet even during the monarchical period, as the above discussion has revealed, Scripture records events that were almost certainly not derived from records either formal or informal. If we are to accord them any historical value at all, we can do so only on the basis of faith, not on the fact that they occurred in this particular time period. Certainly, there were written sources, particularly during the period of the monarchy. Enns is correct to point out that historical sources for the earlier periods are scant and less reliable. But what

⁴⁵ The Pauline text makes no specific mention of the Holy Spirit, but the idea that Scripture is *breathed out* by God should certainly be understood as referring to an activity of the Spirit (Ez 37:5f, 9f, 14; Jn 20:22).

⁴⁶ Rice believes the Petrine statement does not *not* apply to the non-prophetic portions of Scripture (“How to Write a Bible,” *Ministry* [June 1986]: 8). Taking that stand is actually important for his overall thesis, which is to differentiate between the modes of production of one set of biblical books and the remainder.

⁴⁷ *Inspiration & Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 43-44.

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he has not acknowledged is that inspiration has a prophetic component that may operate independent of human sources.

In any case, Enns's point is somewhat irrelevant; for even during the monarchical period where sources apparently abounded, there remain significant problems of historicity. To provide just one example, the account of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem includes the detail that "the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead" (2 Kings 19:35). One may well accept the historicity of the broad event—Jerusalem was besieged by the Assyrian army under Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah—yet deny the biblical writer's explanation of how the invading army was defeated. If one is disinclined to believe certain supernatural events or explanations contained in Scripture, it is of no use to suggest that the event in question occurred during a period where sources abounded. Indeed, Enns's entire argument regarding Old Testament historiography—whether the biblical writers were writing an "objective" or "biased" history—is made precisely in respect to the monarchical period!⁴⁸

Whatever merit lies in the scholarly pursuit of determining sources, of tracing their development, and of assessing their impact on the biblical text, the pursuit has limited value in determining the historicity and facticity of the biblical narratives. Ultimately, the trustworthiness of these portions of Scripture, as much as of the poetic, prophetic and pedagogical portions, must rest on the basis of simple faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 43-45.

⁴⁹ This is not to deny the existence of difficulties, nor to discourage attempts to resolve discrepancies. There is, for example, the "problem" of large numbers in the Bible; indeed, not only of large numbers, but of discrepancies of numerical detail in parallel accounts, in genealogies, and involving dates. Some of these difficulties may stem from the use of different sources (as in parallel accounts) or from a corruption of the text (1 Sam 6:19, perhaps). In some cases, the constitution of the numbers might have been on a basis, or involve factors, that we do not yet understand; the issue of the surprisingly small number of Israelite firstborns at the time of the Exodus (Num 3:43 cf. 1:46) could conceivably be one such case. Thompson deals candidly and, one must assume, honestly with a number of such difficulties (see especially *Inspiration*, 214-236). What is troubling about his overall analysis, however, is a complete absence of acknowledgment that some data—numerical and genealogical—might have been made known to the biblical writer through revelation. In this Thompson is, of course, simply making method of his thesis: whatever is not in the prophetic books came from sources ("research"), and certainly not by revelation. Thus, the writer of Genesis assigns a period of 400 years to the period of Israel's affliction in a strange land (Gen 15:13) based on the only available source documents, namely, a genealogy that

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V The Gift of Prophecy Was Not Confined to the Writers of the Prophetic Books

It bears repeating that where history is written without sources (or personal memory), we have only fiction or revelation. The faith position taken in this paper is that no detail of the biblical narratives is fictional.⁵⁰ But if the analyses suggested here are in essence correct, there is no alternative but to accept that some of the biblical narratives, either in whole or in part, were made known to the biblical writer by revelation and not obtained from sources. Such entails a prophetic gift, whether or not the writer claimed it.

provides only four names from Levi through Moses (Ex 6:16-20). The biblical writer simply multiplies each generation by 100, counting each generation as lasting 100 years (*Ibid.*, 232). But one has to ask where the prophetic information given by God to Abraham was recorded. Did Abraham write it down? If he did, we can assume he wrote just what God told him in his vision, including mention of “four hundred years” and “four generations” (Gen 15:12). But why would Abraham write it down at all? And if he did, did he also write down the preceding conversation with God (15:1-9)? If he did not, did oral tradition preserve these words (and others in the Abraham story) accurately for hundreds of years? To belabor the point already made here, the details and conversations connected with Abraham’s life are either the work of fiction, or they were revealed by the Spirit to the writer of Genesis. That there were no sources is, indeed, the tacit admission Thompson makes when he states, in this particular case, that the writer “only had access to a genealogical list” (*Ibid.*, 232). By suggesting the writer then obtained the figure of 400 years by arbitrary numerology, Thompson is really opting for the “fiction” solution.

⁵⁰ I mean, by this, that the biblical writers at no time either ‘made up’ a story or embellished an historical account with imaginary details. John’s confession at the end of his Gospel may be understood as representative: “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (Jn 21:24). The Gospels (and similarly Kings/Chronicles) furnish us with many examples of divergent details in parallel accounts of an event. But these differences do not represent fictional embellishments. The Gospel writers may have shaped their material—omitting details, rearranging the order, etc.—to make a theological point, but they did not invent it. In some cases, it may indeed appear that the Gospel writer added a word or an idea that did not actually occur in the historical event. We have already considered the case of Luke having Christ use the word “finger” where Matthew has “Spirit” (Lk 11:20; Matt 12:28). Even though Matthew and Luke are clearly describing the same account, it is possible that Jesus made similar statements (following similar accusations against his work) on different occasions. Were that the case, and one of the writers imported Christ’s words from a different occasion to the event being described, this would simply be a case of conflation, not fiction. The alternative explanation for this particular event is that the Lord inspired one of the writers to change the word, for theological purposes. That, surely, is “thought illumination,” which, by Rice’s own definition of the prophetic model, is a form of revelation.

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The apostle Paul never styled himself a prophet and wrote little that could be considered prophetic.⁵¹ But he did claim to have received “visions and revelations of the Lord” (2 Cor 12:1), and these in abundance (vs. 7). It is impossible to know how much of what he was shown in vision found its way into his epistles. But it is not unreasonable to assume that his unwavering confidence in his authority as one sent by God stemmed, in large part, from having received these revelations.

Similarly, it is impossible to know how much of the Old Testament narratives were written from sources.⁵² The writers were not at pains to distinguish which details were found in sources and which were received by revelation. Again, as with Paul, that these writers did not claim the office of prophet has no bearing on the reality that what they wrote might have been received directly from the Lord.

Wayne Grudem has argued that the apostles were, in some important ways, the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament prophets. In several New Testament passages the two offices are linked linguistically and conceptually (Grudem cites Heb 1:1-2a cf. Heb 3:1; 2 Pet 3:2; Lk 11:49).⁵³ More especially, the words the apostles proclaimed and wrote came directly from Christ (Gal 1:11-12; 2 Pet 3:2; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 4:8, 15; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 2 Pet 3:15-16; etc.).⁵⁴ Referring to Paul, Grudem avers that “such an insistence on the divine origin of his message is clearly in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets.”⁵⁵

Indeed it is. For our purposes here, the apostle John is the crux interpretum. His Apocalypse is the only New Testament book that may be termed a prophecy. In truth, the content of his Revelation is more overtly dependent upon visions than any of the major Old Testament prophetic books; on that criterion, John is a prophet *par excellence*. He was also one of the Gospel writers. This would mean, according to the Rice-Thompson schema, that his Gospel was penned under the model of research, in contrast

⁵¹ There are occasional exceptions such as 1 Cor 15:22-28; Phil 3:20-21; 2 Tim 3:1-4.

⁵² During the monarchical period, mention was occasionally made of written sources that lay behind parts of the books of Kings and Chronicles. It is worth noting that these sources were mostly associated with prophets, namely, Nathan, Gad, Iddo, and Shemaiah (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 2 Chron 12:15; 2 Chron 13:22). See also n. 36, above.

⁵³ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1988), 26-27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

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to his Revelation, which was produced under the prophetic model of inspiration.

One wonders if John would have been surprised to learn this. True, when he penned the Revelation he was “recalling” (by what process?) visions that he had received from God; while his writing out of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ involved recollecting the things he had heard and seen and touched (1 John 1:1). For the latter, his own memory was the source. Yet not for all that he wrote in his Gospel. What of his opening lines: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...” (John 1:1-3)? Those are not truths that can be researched; they can only be revealed. Was John any less the prophet when he wrote his Gospel than when he committed to writing the book of Revelation?⁵⁶

Furthermore, did the process of inspiration in John differ from that in Matthew? Matthew wrote no book of prophecy, but he was, like John, an apostle. Matthew therefore wrote with prophetic authority, if Grudem’s analysis is correct. This leads to the idea that at least two of the Gospels were written (according to Rice and Thompson) by the research model of inspiration while yet having prophetic authority. In other words, we have non-prophetic books with prophetic authority!

Moreover, if the Gospels of both John and Matthew have prophetic authority by dint of their having been written by apostles, what shall we say of the other two Gospels? For neither Mark nor Luke were apostles.⁵⁷ Rice (again following Swartley) considers that Mark was one of the *huperetai*, hardly the role of an apostle.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ This is a question that Rice does not confront directly, even while acknowledging that both John and Paul had visions. Paul, he states, “only appeals to his visions in a limited way; and of the five New Testament books written by John only one originated from visions” (*Luke*, 13). From this he concludes: “it would seem that neither Paul’s nor John’s visions are the norm for New Testament books” (*Ibid.*, 14).

⁵⁷ There are hints in the New Testament that the term apostle was not always confined to the disciples of Jesus (including Paul). Barnabas is named as an apostle along with Paul in Acts 14:14. “James the Lord’s brother” (not one of the Twelve) is another (Gal 1:19). The witness of Rom 16:7 is unclear, as reflected in the variant renderings in the English translations. The final New Testament reference to apostles refers to the foundations of the Holy City (Revelation 21:14): that there should be only 12 lends weight to the idea that *apostle* was not a general term for leaders in the early church (cf. Acts 11:2; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 33; 16:4).

⁵⁸ Rice finds some confirmation of Swartley’s hypothesis in Acts 13:5, where Luke identifies Mark with the term “huperetai” (*Luke, a Plagiarist?*, 22).

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In summary, it is evident that the New Testament writers spoke and wrote with an authority somewhat akin to that of the Old Testament prophets. There may be some significance in the fact that the Scriptural confirmation of David's prophetic gift was not given until many centuries after his death (Acts 2:30). It is as though Scripture wishes to impress us with the fact that those whom we might never have considered to be prophets—who themselves had never been aware of a formal prophetic calling—were, in fact, prophets. They were such because they had received the gift of inspiration and had contributed to Scripture.

Conclusion

In the two-model view of inspiration, as propounded by Rice and Thompson, a very large portion of Scripture—more than half of the Old Testament and almost all of the New—is deemed to have sprung from largely non-supernatural (that is, non-revelatory) means. At the same time, all Scripture is acknowledged to be inspired. There is some tension between these two ideas, since a dichotomy is consequently created between a 'breathing out' that has a strong supernatural element and a 'breathing out' where the supernatural element is much less evident.⁵⁹ Such an understanding can easily lead to the position, expressed or implied, that there are degrees of inspiration, that there is, perhaps, an unevenness in that mysterious divine quality that orthodox Christianity has always thought to pervade Scripture.

Yet the Rice-Thompson thesis is not to be discounted in its entirety. Certainly, much of what we have in the Scriptures is not to be accounted for by dreams and visions: sources were used. The "research" or "Lucan" model of inspiration, however, seems to imply that the biblical narratives, *like any history, must* be based on sources.⁶⁰ The above analysis exposes the

⁵⁹ While Rice and Thompson both clearly accept that the Holy Spirit was active in both forms of inspiration, that one involves a more strongly supernatural element than the other is clearly stated or implied. See, respectively, *Luke*, 109, and *Inspiration*, 49.

⁶⁰ It is not a large step from this position to that of Old Testament scholar Peter Enns, who reckons that biblical history prior to the monarchical period is suspect simply because the formal maintaining of historical records did not occur during that earlier period (*Inspiration & Incarnation* [see n. 47, above], 43-44). Yet even during the monarchical period, as the above discussion has revealed, Scripture records events that were almost certainly *not* derived from records either formal or informal. If we are to accord them any historical value at all, we can do so only on the basis of faith, not on the fact that they occurred in this particular time period. Certainly, there were written sources, particularly during the period of the monarchy. Enns is correct to point out that historical sources for the

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strong possibility that sources never existed for significant portions of the biblical narrative material. This leads to the conclusion that some of these narratives were revealed supernaturally to the Bible writers—or that these narratives are simply fiction.

The problem of sources becomes more acute the further back in history we look. The intimate conversations between Ruth and Boaz, between Ruth and Naomi, between Ehud and Eglon, Rachel and Leah, Rebekah and Jacob, Jacob and Esau, Abraham and Isaac, God and Cain—all beg the question of sources. Are we to imagine that Israel was a nation of eavesdroppers and fanatical jotters? That ordinary people everywhere wrote down conversations as they occurred, subsequently turning them over to an official recorder?

There is no doubt that royal annals were maintained during the period of the monarchy. The court had its recorders, of which we know very little. But the biro had not been invented; writing was not a simple matter of whipping out a pen from a shirt pocket and scribbling in a notebook. The fact that Zacharias, when asked what his firstborn child was to be named, had to ask for a writing tablet suggests that one was not readily at hand: someone had to fetch one. And it is possible that it was only because Zacharias was at that time in the temple that a writing tablet was to be had at all.⁶¹ This incident shows that even in New Testament times writing was

earlier periods are scant and less reliable. But what he has not acknowledged (in this context) is that inspiration has a prophetic component that may operate independent of human sources.

⁶¹ The prayer of Zacharias is an example of a *New Testament* narrative the existence of which poses a problem for the research model of inspiration. What was Luke's 'source' for this prayer? It is not difficult to accept that the shepherds relayed to the parents of Jesus (among others) their experience with the angelic host. Indeed, Scripture suggests as much (Lk 2:17). Remembering the essence of an event, and of the few words associated with it, is one thing. But were the exact words of Zacharias' prayer recorded—or remembered for decades? Robert K. McIver has explored aspects of eyewitness memory as they relate to the Gospel accounts. See his "Eyewitnesses as Guarantors of the Gospel Traditions in the Light of Psychological Research," *JBL* 131, no. 3 (2012): 529-546; the same author's fuller study is found in *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011]). McIver cites Rainer Riesner's hypothesis that Jesus taught his disciples to "learn by heart some of his carefully formulated teaching summaries" (Riesner, in McIver, "Eyewitness," 543). Others, notably Richard Bauckham, claim that there were certain "named and known eyewitnesses" who memorized not only the sayings, but also the deeds of Jesus and various events associated with his ministry (*Ibid.*, 544). The Spirit-inspired prayer of Zacharias clearly falls outside that field.

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done on cumbersome tablets—not the kind of object that ordinary people would carry about in the folds of their tunics.

May we appeal to oral tradition? This is a complex question, as attested by scholarly discussions on the Synoptic problem and Gospel sources. We may grant that trained *huperetai* were able to recite the words and works of Jesus, and that these oral, memorized accounts constituted, at least in part, sources for the Gospels.⁶² But it hardly follows that similar individuals crisscrossed the countryside of Canaan in OT times, and with deep insight and prescience were able to recognize the need to memorize conversations between ordinary people such as Rachel and Leah, Ruth and Boaz, Elkanah and Hannah, and others, and subsequently to rehearse these rather non-momentous conversations to—whom?⁶³ By contrast, Jesus attracted unusual attention; crowds followed him as they had followed no other. They

⁶² I have not here sought to challenge directly the notion of *huperetai* as mooted originally by Swartley; those with expertise in New Testament studies are much more equipped to do so than I. I do note, however, that the crucial verse upon which the idea is based (Lk 1:2) is remarkably similar to 1 Jn 1:1. The two verses share three elements: (1) the notion of *eyewitnesses* (John does not use the word; instead he writes of that “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon”); (2) the phrase “from the beginning”; and (3) the idea of ministering and delivering the word to others. Perhaps Lk 1:2 is simply speaking of the apostles; who else were there from the beginning? One may also note that Peter, too, claims to be an eyewitness (2 Pet 1:16, cf. 1:18), although the Greek word he uses (*epoptai*) is not identical to that which Luke employs (*autoptai*). Both words are used nowhere else in the New Testament. It is the apostles, not some subsequently trained memorizers, who were eyewitnesses to all the events of Christ’s ministry. Rice finds “seeming confirmation” of Swartley’s proposed interpretation of *huperetai* in Acts 13:5, where the term is used (by Luke) of John Mark. But the Greek word, in its various declensions, is used twenty times in the New Testament, and is in most cases translated “officer,” “servant,” “assistant,” or “attendant.” Is it possible to build a case from this verse that Mark was specially employed because of his training as a reciter of the deeds and speeches of Jesus, as Swartley contends (Rice, *Luke*, 22)? Perhaps better confirmation as to the meaning of Luke 1:2 is found in Acts 26:16, where Paul recounts his divine calling. He relates the words of the Lord to him on the Damascus road: “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister (*hupereten*) and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.” This is an apostolic calling. Paul, in a special sense, could claim to be an eyewitness of the Lord; by special revelation he was brought into the presence of Jesus in as real a way as the Twelve. John, Peter, Paul. All eyewitnesses to the Christ, and specially commissioned to deliver the word of his grace to others. Should Luke 1:2 be seen in this light rather than in the light of Acts 13:5?

⁶³ Such people as Boaz and Ruth, etc., and their conversations appear now to us as significant only in retrospect. For example, not until three generations later—more, if one posits gaps in the genealogy of Ruth 4:18-22—did the life of the young David provide the first glimpse of Boaz’ and Ruth’s special place in salvation history.

watched his deeds and hung on to his words. This fact alone suggests extreme caution in seeking to apply a “Lukan” model, based as it is on the Gospel event, to the very different circumstances behind the OT narratives.

Thus, it is not that the “two-model” view is *wrong* in seeking to show that inspiration was not always functioning in the same way in the biblical authors. It is simply that it is inadequate: the research model cannot be applied wholesale to the non-prophetic books, even to narratives alone. Short of declaring many of the OT narratives to be fiction, it therefore seems necessary to posit that certain of them, or sections of them, were supernaturally revealed to the authors. The prophetic model, in other words, is far more widespread a phenomenon of Scripture than the “two-model” view would suggest. More than that, it may not be improper to understand that most, if not all, of the biblical writers can be understood to have exercised the prophetic gift.

Understanding inspiration this way does not constitute a return to a more inerrantist view of Scripture, despite Achtemeier. But if conversations such as those in the Samson story were *revealed*, do we not have something close to verbal inspiration? Perhaps we do, and if so, we must learn to live with that. In this respect, more work needs to be done in demonstrating how inerrancy is not a necessary corollary of verbal inspiration.⁶⁴ Much more work also needs to be done to show that fallibility in the biblical authors has limits, since the processes of thought and of writing are under the supervision of One who is able to say, “This far you may come, but no

⁶⁴ Verbal inspiration is not to be equated with inerrancy. The revelations that the prophets received were, of course, verbal, even when visual visionary material was involved: it was the “*word* of the LORD” that came to the prophets. This concept of verbal inspiration necessarily recognizes a close connection between revelation and inspiration (see n. 32, above), since it concerns the manner in which the Holy Spirit moved upon the minds of the biblical writers. Inerrancy, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the *text*. For the inerrantist, it is the *text* that is inerrant. I explore these concepts further in the fourth chapter of my doctoral dissertation “Evangelical Tensions Over Biblical Inspiration in the Twenty-first Century: A Case Study on the Views of Peter Enns and John Frame” (Cooranbong, Australia: Avondale College, due for completion in 2018). Nor am I suggesting that *all* of Scripture is verbally inspired. But it seems clear that only some kind of verbal inspiration is able to account for significant portions of Scripture, both of the narrative and the prophetic portions. Again, by verbal inspiration I do not mean “dictation.” I do mean that God is able to implant verbal messages, even conversations, inside a person’s mind. It is a form of revelation. We may expect that the implanted conversations will be perceived, and subsequently written or spoken, in the vocabulary and peculiar thought patterns of the inspired individual. But the actual process by which God accomplishes this accommodated revelation in the human mind is a mystery that we are not able to penetrate.

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farther” (Job 38:11). That the Spirit of God might allow a biblical author to incorrectly recall a reference or a number does not demand the corresponding idea that he may also allow the author to err in more significant matters relating to, for example, salvation history, doctrine, and—dare we admit it?—creation and the early history of our world.

Finally, when dealing with the question of inspiration we must tread with humility. Like the wind, the Spirit blows where he wishes; we may catch the breath, but be uncertain as to where it came from and where it is going. There is the suggestion in Scripture that even the biblical writers did not comprehend all that was happening to them when under the control of the Spirit (2 Cor 12:2-3; 1 Pet 1:11); how much less can we, the outside “observers,” know. Where we may have certainty, however, is in knowing that God’s word, whatever its mysteries, is true. All would do well to hear the voice of the wise man:

Have I not written to you excellent things
Of counsels and knowledge,
That I may make you know
the certainty of the words of truth
That you may answer words of truth
To those who send to you? (Prov 22:21)

Bernard White is an assistant professor at Sahmyook University in Seoul, South Korea. A New Zealander by birth, he received both his undergraduate and postgraduate theological training at Avondale College, Australia. His doctoral dissertation, due for completion in 2018, examines contemporary issues relating to biblical inspiration. Three previously published articles in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (2015 and 2016) explore issues relating to the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 7 and their connection with creation-evolution matters. His “Mercy and a Meatless Diet” (*Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry*, vol. 14 [Aug. 2016]) reflects his deep passion to bring the issue of animal welfare and a theology of animals to the attention of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. bernardsda@hotmail.com