One
Its Origin

There are two definitive passages in the New Testament on the subject of inspiration. One is 2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (NRSV). The phrase "inspired by God" is all one word in Greek, *theopneustos*—literally, God-breathed, as the NIV has it. Sacred Scripture was breathed out by God and into human minds by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Bible is "the 'Spirit-breathed' expression of God's Word" to us.[1] Clement of Alexandria (second century) and Origen (third century) use this term to describe the Scriptures.

The second passage is 2 Peter 1:21—"Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Literally the second half of this verse reads, "But being borne along by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God" The Holy Spirit lifted human writers of the Bible to a higher level of spiritual understanding. From this level they could receive divine truth and communicate it to believers.

On the basis of these two passages and others, we can clearly see with H. Ray Dunning that "the idea of the 'inspiredness' of Scripture is a biblical truth."[2]

James Arminius was a Dutch theologian who was born in 1560 and died in 1609. Regarding the Bible, he wrote, "We now have the infallible word of God in no other place than in the Scriptures."[3]

He goes on to make this helpful statement:

> The primary cause of these books is God, in his Son, through the Holy Spirit. The instrumental causes are holy men of God, who, not at their own will and pleasure, but as they were actuated and inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote these books, whether the words were inspired into them, dictated to them, or administered by them under divine direction.[4]

This passage suggests three degrees of inspiration for different parts of the Bible. First there is eternal truth—which could not otherwise be known by the human intellect—"inspired into"; that is, breathed out of God and into the hearts and minds of the writers. In the second place, some parts of the Scripture seem actually to have been dictated, as in the case of the law given to Moses at Sinai. But other parts of the Bible were simply "administered to them under divine direction." These would include the genealogical tables, as in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles,

and other historical documents that the authors were led by the Spirit to incorporate into their writings.

It was John Wesley in the eighteenth century who took the theology of James Arminius, making it a powerful force, bringing the great spiritual revival to England. In the preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* he says of sacred Scripture, "Every part thereof is worthy of God; and all together are one entire body, wherein is no defect, no excess."[5]

In the same connection he writes, "The language of His messengers, also, is exact in the highest degree: for the words which were given them accurately answered to the impressions made upon their minds."[6]

Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, Wesley writes, "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it [the Scriptures] but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those who read it with earnest prayer."[7] Frank Moore, a contemporary Wesleyan theologian, expands on this thought when he writes, "The Bible lives because the Holy Spirit of God empowers it with His presence. We read words on a page, but we hear the voice of God speaking to our hearts through His Spirit."[8]

An important Wesleyan theologian of the past, W. B. Pope, in his three-volume *Compendium of Christian Theology* (first published in 1875-76), devotes thirty-seven pages to the subject of the inspiration of the Bible. He writes of the Bible—

> Its plenary inspiration makes Holy Scripture the absolute and final authority, all-sufficient as the Supreme Standard of Faith, Directory of Morals, and Charter of Privileges to the Church of God. Of course, the Book of Divine revelations cannot contain anything untrue; but its infallibility is by itself especially connected with religious truth. . . . It is after all, a Divine-human collection of documents: the precise relation of the human to the Divine is a problem which has engaged

> much attention, and has not yet been, though it may yet be, adequately solved. But in the domain of religious truth, and the kingdom of God among men, its claim to authority and sufficiency is absolute.[9]

Nazarenes regard H. Orton Wiley as the outstanding Arminian theologian of the twentieth century. His definition of inspiration follows: "By Inspiration we mean the actuating energy of the Holy Spirit by which holy men were qualified to receive religious truth and to communicate it to others without error."[10]

Wiley believed the Bible was fully inspired. He says the Scriptures were "given by plenary inspiration, embracing throughout the elements of superintendence, elevation and suggestion, in that manner and to that degree that the Bible becomes the infallible word of God, the authoritative Rule of Faith and Practice in the Church."[11]

A contemporary Wesleyan theologian, J. Kenneth Grider, articulates this perspective as follows: "Wesleyan-Holiness Evangelicals understand that God inspired prophets and apostles and others with thoughts that they were to write down, but He left to them, in their intelligent and redeemed freedom, the choices of words with which to write down the inspired thoughts."[12]

A Divine-Human Book

The Bible is a divine-human Book, as Christ is the divine-human Person. This is the key that unlocks the door to understanding the true nature of the Scriptures.

God could have sent His Son in adult human form without a human birth. Jesus' body would then have been simply a shell in which the divine nature was encased.

God in His wisdom did not choose to do it this way. He caused His Son to be born of a woman. Jesus shared the personality characteristics of His mother—psychologically as well as

physically. He not only bore physical resemblance to her but also was influenced by all the environmental factors of His home. He was the son of Mary as well as the Son of God.

So it is with the Bible. God could have sent down the Book all inscribed with the complete revelation. He could have bound it in black leather, with gold edges, silk-sewn on India paper. But He did not choose to do so. Instead, the light of divine revelation broke in on the soul of Moses, David, Paul, John, and many others. The result is a divinely inspired, humanly written revelation of God's truth for humanity.

Scripture writers wrote on sheepskin, goatskin, papyrus, and parchment. They wrote the thoughts of God as they understood them with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As sunlight is conducted through a prism and is broken into various rays, so the light of God's truth, filtered through prisms of human personality, takes on varying slants and interests. This appears in the language used—both vocabulary and style—and in the thought forms they use. Different approaches and diversity of emphasis also appear. The Holy Spirit uses these varying interests and emphases to bring the total of divine revelation in the Bible.

It is unfortunate that too often we see only one side of truth, and so we actually have only a half-truth. Ask Evangelicals, "Was Jesus divine or human?" They will answer emphatically, "Divine!" Ask humanists the same question, and the reply will be "Human." Both are right, and both are wrong. The opposition between Jesus' deity and humanity exists only in false theological thinking. Jesus was, and is, both human and divine.

The same situation occurs when Evangelicals emphasize the divine source of the Bible at the neglect of its human origin. Liberals stress the latter and forget the former. The Bible did have a human origin; it came from the hands of the men who wrote

it. Its ultimate source, however, was divine. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers. It is this inspiration that gives it its unique authority as the Word of God.

One man sees only the scribe sitting at a desk, pen in hand, writing the words of scripture, and he declares, "The Bible is a human book." Another sees only the inspiring Spirit hovering overhead, and he cries, "It is divine!" What we need is to see the whole picture, not just one part of it. The Bible is a divine-human book.

In the Preface to his sermons John Wesley wrote these beautiful words:

> I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one Book].[13]

The Pages Appear

Morning dawned over the camp of Israel. Suddenly the silence of the disappearing night was shattered. Rumbling thunder roared overhead.

Nervously the people pulled aside their tent flaps and looked out just in time to see another blinding light streak across the sky. Now the lightning was flashing and the thunder crashing. Out of the thick cloud that covered the top of Mount Sinai a trum-

pet blast came, loud and long. All the people stood in their tent openings, trembling with fear.

As they looked up at the sacred mountain, smoke billowed from its peak as if from a giant smokestack, "because the LORD descended on it in fire" (Exodus 19:18). It seemed now the hill was one big, smoldering furnace. To add to the people's terror, the whole mountain shook with a violent earthquake.

One man was unafraid. He had met God at the burning bush, right in this same place (3:2). So he called out, and God answered him (19:19). Moses was called to the top of Mount Sinai. That day the Ten Commandments were given (chapter 20). Israel was to be the people of the covenant, the people of the Book. Moses was God's scribe, to give them the Book of the Law.

Traditionally the first five books of our Bible are assigned to Moses. For the material recorded in Genesis, Moses would have had to depend on oral traditions, handed down from generation to generation and on the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As far as the Genesis record of the creation of the world and of human life is concerned, this would all have had to be given by divine revelation, for no person was present to see these events and tell about them.

When it came to the materials of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, Moses was the man most involved. No one could have written this down better than he.

It should be noted, however, that Moses obviously did not write the last chapter of Deuteronomy. Here we find an account of Moses' death and burial, with the added statement "But to this day no one knows where his grave is" (34:6). A further observation is made: "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (verse 10). To say Moses himself wrote these words beforehand by divine inspiration—as some have claimed—is unrealistic. The whole tenor of the terminology used here clearly points to a later generation, when the monumental work of Moses was edited in its final form.

The Books Multiply

Joshua was Moses' successor, and the sixth book of our Old Testament is named for him. It records his great achievements in leading the Israelites across the Jordan River. They conquered the land of Canaan, and each tribe was assigned its territory. The book naturally divides at the middle into two parts. The first (chapters 1–12) tells of the conquest of Canaan. The second (chapters 13–24) records the partition of the land.

The fact that Joshua's name is attached to the book does not mean he wrote it. In the last chapter we find the record of the death and burial of God's great warrior (24:29-30). Then comes the statement "Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel" (verse 31). It is clear, at least in its finished form, the Book of Joshua was written in a later generation. We do not know who wrote it.

The same is said of the Book of **Judges**, which fills in the time from Joshua to Samuel. The keynote of this book is—"In

those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (17:6; 21:25). With no central government, the Israelites too often lived in chaotic confusion. The recurring sequence in Judges is disobedience, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. The so-called judges were for the most part sent by God to deliver the people from their oppressors.

The little love story called **Ruth** gives a brief picture of life in that period (1:1). Its purpose may have been to fill in one point in the ancestry of King David (4:17-22).

The two books of **Samuel** cover the period of the great prophet by the same name. They also cover the reigns of Saul and David, the first two kings of Israel—both of whom were anointed by Samuel. The narrative begins with the birth of this man (1 Samuel 1) and his call to the prophetic ministry (chapter 3). Samuel devoted a long lifetime to ruling Israel as a judge. Unfortunately, he failed to train his own children to follow in his footsteps (8:1-5). And so the people asked for a king. In answer to their plea, God instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king over Israel. Saul became stubborn and disobedient, and his life ended in disaster. His successor was David, the importance of whose reign is shown by the fact the entire book of 2 Samuel is devoted to it.

The two books of **Kings** describe the reign of Solomon over the United Kingdom of Israel—which had been carved out by his father, David. They also cover the period of the divided monarchy. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was ruled by several dynasties, beginning with Jeroboam. It came to an end in 722/21 B.C. with the capture of its capital city, Samaria, by the Assyrians, and the deportation of the people to Mesopotamia (2 Kings 17:6). To fill the vacancy, the king of Assyria brought people from the East and settled them in the cities of Samaria (verse 24). The result was a group known as the Samaritans of Jesus' day.

An interesting feature of the history of northern Israel is the appearance of the two prophets, Elijah and Elisha. They sought to call the idolatrous Israelites back to the worship of the true God but with limited results.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah was ruled by the dynasty of David. It came to an end in 586/87 B.C. with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Except for the eighty years of Maccabean independence (142 to 63), there was no independent nation of Israel from 586/87 B.C. to A.D. 1948, when the new state of Israel was set up.

The observant reader may have noted two things in our discussion so far. First we have given no dates prior to 1000 B.C. This is for the simple reason that archaeologists are not in universal agreement about the chronology of events before the time of David. The second feature is the use of double dating, such as 722/21 B.C. This is because events in ancient time are usually dated in a certain year of some king's reign. So often we cannot be sure within a year as to the exact date.

Who wrote the books of Samuel and Kings cannot be determined. The fact that they bring the history of Israel down to the time of the exile suggests their composition came at that time. However, this does not mean the stories in them were written down only then. These books were likely the product of a growing collection of materials that came together over several centuries of the Israelite monarchy.

The two books of **Chronicles** cover a much wider period than the books of Kings. In fact, the genealogical tables in the first nine chapters go back to Adam (1 Chronicles 1:1). The historical narrative begins with the death of Saul (chapter 10). The rest of 1 Chronicles is taken up with the reign of David. Second Chronicles describes the rule of Solomon and carries us down through the period of the divided kingdom. The last two verses

(2 Chronicles 36:22-23) give the decree of Cyrus (538 B.C.) for the return of the captives to Judah. It is obvious the Chronicles were not written until after the Babylonian captivity. They reflect in their opening chapters the greatly increased interest in genealogies characteristic of the postexilic period. To be accepted, the returning captives had to prove their Jewish ancestry. The same feature is prominent in the two following books, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra begins at the point where 2 Chronicles ends—with the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4), which was followed soon (536 B.C.) by the first return from Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel (chapter 2). Ezra's main interest described here is the rebuilding of the Temple (chapters 3–6). Another group returned (458 B.C.) under Ezra himself (chapters 7–8). His primary concern was to restore the true worship of God (chapters 9–10).

The Book of **Nehemiah** is written in the first person, as are parts of **Ezra** (chapters 8–9). Nehemiah went to Jerusalem (around 444 B.C.) for the express purpose of rebuilding its walls, which still lay in ruins.

The personalities of these two men are a study in contrasts. When Ezra heard some of the returned captives were disobeying the Lord's commands, "I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled" (Ezra 9:3). When Nehemiah met the same situation, he says, "I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair" (Nehemiah 13:25). Of course, Nehemiah was the king's appointed governor, while Ezra was a priest and scribe. God could use both of these very different men to do an important work in His kingdom.

The Book of **Esther** belongs to the Persian (postexilic) period, in company with Ezra and Nehemiah. Its purpose is perhaps to explain the origin of the Jewish Feast of Purim (Esther 9:26).

According to 9:20, Mordecai may be responsible for at least the first edition of this book.

There is no way of knowing just when the Book of **Job** was written. Its setting is "in the land of Uz" (1:1), which probably means the great Syrian desert east and northeast of Palestine. It deals with the timeless, universal problem of human suffering. In literary form it is a majestic drama, discussing the lofty subject of God's dealings with people. As in the case of all devotional classics, its time of writing is unimportant. Along with the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, it belongs to the "Wisdom Literature" of the Old Testament. It shares striking resemblances in some points with the wisdom literature of ancient Egypt and Babylonia.

The **Psalms** were a hymnal for the Israelites. About half the one hundred fifty psalms are attributed to David. Most of the others are anonymous. Their dates probably stretch from the time of David to the Exile.

The Book of **Proverbs** is stated (1:1; 10:1) as consisting largely of wise sayings written or collected by Solomon. Some two hundred years later, the scribes of Hezekiah reportedly copied chapters 25-29 (25:1). The last two chapters are attributed respectively to Agur and King Lemuel. It is obvious that Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings, gathered over a considerable period of time.

Ecclesiastes (or "The Preacher") is credited to the "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Its main theme is sounded at once: "'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless'" (verse 2). Such is all life lived "under the sun" (verse 3), without reference to God above. "Meaningless" or "vanity" (KJV and NRSV) literally means emptiness.

The **Song of Songs** is sometimes called Canticles. It is also attributed to King Solomon (1:1). In typical Oriental language it

describes the joys of marital love. There is a difference of opinion among commentators as to whether this is to be taken as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and His Bride.

The rest of the Old Testament consists of books of prophecy. The ministry of **Isaiah** is dated from about 740 to 700 B.C. He prophesied in the Southern Kingdom of Judah and presumably wrote near the close of this period. It should be noted that many scholars argue a second Isaiah wrote chapters 40–66 during the Babylonian captivity. There is no manuscript evidence for this division. The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, discovered in 1947 and dated at about 125 B.C., has the whole book as a unit.

Contemporary with Isaiah was **Hosea** (750 to 736 B.C.), who prophesied in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He made a dramatic plea to the Lord's wayward wife, Israel, to return to her rightful husband, leaving the false gods. But it was in vain.

Amos may be the earliest of the writing prophets. He is perhaps to be dated around 760 B.C. His emphasis is on social righteousness. He preached in the northern Israel, especially at Bethel (only twelve miles north of Jerusalem).

The dates for the ministry of **Micah** are the same as those for Isaiah (740 to 700 B.C.). He, too, prophesied in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In common with Amos, he struck out vigorously against the oppression of the poor.

These are the four prophets of the greatest prophetic age, the eighth century B.C. Some also include Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah in this period.

Joel (dated in either the eighth or fourth century) vividly describes a terrifying plague of locusts. Then he makes a twofold application: to the coming punishment of Judah and to "the day of the Lord." The latter expression is the key phrase of this book.

Obadiah may also belong to the eighth century, though many date him in the sixth century. This little book of a single chapter

has one theme: the destruction of Edom, to be followed by the restoration of Israel.

According to 2 Kings 14:25, the prophet **Jonah** ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (787 to 747 B.C.). Told to warn Nineveh of its impending doom, he tried to run away. When Nineveh repented, he complained. The book shows the folly of racial pride and also communicates God's love for all humanity.

Four prophets ministered during the seventh century: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. **Nahum** is generally dated between 663 and 612 B.C. He predicted the destruction of Nineveh, which took place in the latter year. Israel's ancient foe, Assyria, was finally punished for its sins when the capital city fell.

Habakkuk prophesied in the same seventh century B.C., near its end (603 B.C.). He foretold the coming punishment of Judah by the Babylonians. The third chapter of his book is a prayer poem, much like those found in the Book of Psalms.

Zephaniah (about 625 B.C.) blasted out against idolatry in Judah. He pronounced judgment on Judah and foreign nations but held out hope for the salvation of a remnant.

Jeremiah prophesied during the last 40 years of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (626 to 587/86 B.C.). It was his sad task to warn the nation of its impending doom, only to see the warning go unheeded. He is called "the weeping prophet" (see 9:1). The Book of **Lamentations,** a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem, is attributed to him.

Ezekiel was the Lord's prophet to the Jewish people in Babylonian captivity. Taken in an early deportation, he apparently ministered twenty-two years (593 to 571 B.C.). In common with Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel prophesied not only to the Judeans but also to foreign nations. (These are the three longest prophetic books.) He also described a future ideal state of Israel.

As in the case of Ezekiel, **Daniel** prophesied in Babylonia (606 to 536 B.C.). The first six chapters give the history of Daniel, with visions seen by others. The last six chapters describe the visions Daniel saw. The Book of Daniel is the apocalypse of the Old Testament, though there are apocalyptic elements in other books (for example, Ezekiel).

Haggai and **Zechariah** both began their ministry at the same time (520 B.C.). The former delivered four messages in that year, all with the same theme: rebuild the Temple. Zechariah was also interested in this, as we know from Ezra 6:14. His prophecies extend from 520 to 518 B.C. A notable feature of his book is the eight visions he saw (1:7–6:15). Like most of the other prophets, he emphasized righteousness rather than ritualism.

Malachi (around 450 B.C.) is the last book of the Old Testament. The name means "my messenger." Looking across the four centuries ahead, he predicted the coming of the Messiah (3:1).

Some prophets undoubtedly wrote down their own words, while others used scribes (Jeremiah 36:4). It seems likely that, in some cases, disciples of the prophets put the books into their final forms. This could occur either during or after the lifetime of the prophet.

The New Testament Is Written

a. Paul's Letters. On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas founded several churches in the Roman province of Galatia (in modern Turkey). Later Paul heard of Judaizers confusing his new Gentile converts by telling them they had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Greatly disturbed, the apostle wrote a strong letter to these churches, warning them against falling from the grace of Christ into the pit of legalistic Judaism. If **Galatians** was written about the time of the Council of Jerusalem (A.D. 48), described in the fifteenth chapter

of Acts, it is probably the first book of the New Testament to be written. Many scholars would date it a few years later.

On his second missionary journey Paul established a good church in Thessalonica. When he arrived at Corinth, he wrote **1 Thessalonians**, with its twin emphases on sanctification and the Second Coming. This was in A.D. 50. It has been commonly held that this was the first book of the New Testament. **2 Thessalonians** was written just a few months later (A.D. 51), dealing with further problems these people had about the Second Coming.

On his third missionary journey Paul spent three years at Ephesus. While there he wrote **1 Corinthians** (A.D. 54 or 55). In it he deals with three problems occurring in the church at Corinth (chapters 1–6) and six other problems about which they had written him (chapters 7–16). These were all practical concerns with crucial implications.

After he left Ephesus, Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** in Macedonia, probably at Philippi (A.D. 55). He was forced to defend both his ministry and his personal integrity in the face of cruel criticism from opponents in Corinth. It was the Corinthian church that gave Paul the most headaches and heartache.

It is interesting to note these first books of the New Testament are not compendiums of systematic theology. They are missionary letters, written by a missionary to churches founded on missionary journeys. They are "living letters," dealing with life among the people of God.

Sometime after his letter arrived, the busy apostle took time to visit Corinth for three months (Acts 20:3). He wanted to go on west to Rome but was collecting an offering from the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. He felt he must return to the mother church there, to make sure this offering was received in a good spirit. Paul's main concern at

this point was to weld the Jewish and Gentile churches into one Church of Jesus Christ.

In lieu of a visit, he wrote a letter to the **Romans** (A.D. 56). In this he gave the fullest exposition yet written of the great doctrines of sin, justification, and sanctification. He wanted to make sure this church in the capital of the Roman Empire was well established in the central truths of Christianity.

During Paul's two years' imprisonment at Rome (A.D. 59 to 61), he wrote the four Prison Letters. **Philemon** is a short personal note to this Christian slave owner about his runaway slave, Onesimus. **Colossians** was sent to the church meeting in this same man's house. It deals with the nature and person of Christ, a crucial question of the times. **Ephesians** was probably a circular letter. In the three oldest Greek manuscripts the words "at Ephesus" are omitted in 1:1. The letter was first sent to the mother church at Ephesus and was intended also for the other congregations in the province of Asia. **Philippians** was sent to the church in Macedonia that Paul had founded on his second journey. It is a spontaneous outpouring of joy and thanksgiving. Even in prison Paul kept in touch with his churches.

Paul probably wrote **1 Timothy** and **Titus** about A.D. 62 to 64, soon after he was released from his first Roman imprisonment. Arrested again and placed in a dungeon, the apostle wrote **2 Timothy,** warning of the apostasy of the last days. These three are called the Pastoral Letters, because they deal with pastoral problems.

b. The General Letters. Seven letters of the New Testament fall into the category of the General Letters, because they are not addressed to any particular church or individual. Unlike Paul's Letters, which are named for their destination, these are named after the writer.

James is probably the earliest. Some, in fact, would date it as early as A.D. 45, thus making it the first book of the New Testament. It probably appeared in the early 60s, with **Hebrews** appearing at about this same time (middle 60s). Hebrews is not, however, classified as a General Letter, because it is clearly addressed to specific Jewish Christians tempted to return to their old life. This great letter reminds its recipients that Jesus provides better access to God than angels, Moses, or even the old sacrificial system of Judaism.

1 Peter came in the same period, apparently written from Rome. The apostle sought to encourage the believers in times of persecution.

The genuineness of **2 Peter** has been sharply debated. Assuming the apostle as author, it would have had to have been written before A.D. 68, the year of Nero's death. Early Church tradition strongly asserts both Peter and Paul died under Nero. Second Peter speaks of the second coming of Christ.

The three letters by John will be reserved for later discussion. **Jude** is much like the second chapter of 2 Peter.

c. The Synoptic Gospels and Acts. The four Gospels are properly placed first in the New Testament. They give us the foundations of our faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were not, however, the first books to be written. In fact, John's Gospel was one of the last. All the Gospels were likely written sometime during the last half of the first century.

John Mark apparently wrote the Gospel of **Mark** in Rome, either in the late 50s or in A.D. 65 to 70. **Matthew** appeared a little later, perhaps about A.D. 60, or, as some prefer, in the 70s. **Luke** may be dated in the early 60s but has also been placed at about A.D. 80. **Acts,** the sequel to Luke, then appeared either about A.D. 62 or 90.

d. The Johannine Writings. It is now generally believed that the Gospel of **John**, the three letters of **John**, and **Revelation** were all written in the last decade of the first century. We do not know whether the Gospel of John or the letters of John appeared first. The Book of **Revelation**, with its picture of the new heaven and the new earth, forms a perfect conclusion to the entire divine revelation contained in the Bible.

The Gospel of John was written that readers might believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and as a result of believing they might have life in Him (20:31). The First Letter of John was written to believers that they might know they have eternal life (5:13). The Book of Revelation gives a vision of the glorified Christ in the middle of His Church (chapter 1), messages to the seven churches of Asia (chapters 2-3), and a preview of the future (chapters 4–22).

Questions

1. Why is it important to believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible?

2. In what ways is the Bible a divine-human Book?

3. Why does the Bible give so much space to the history of Israel?

4. What books are included in the "Wisdom Literature" of the Old Testament?

5. What were the earliest books of the New Testament, and for what purpose were they written?

6. Why was the Bible written as a Book of Life rather than a Book of theology?