

Systematic Theology Week 5 Notes

From Louis Berkhof --

1. PROOFS FOR THE INSPIRATION OF THE SECONDARY AUTHORS OF SCRIPTURE CONSIDERED APART FROM THEIR WRITING. It may be well to point out first of all that the secondary authors of Scripture were inspired as the organs of divine revelation, even apart from their activity in recording the special revelation of God. Then it will appear that inspiration was deemed necessary for the immediate purpose of revelation. We derive our proof in this respect primarily from prophecy, or what may be called the prophetic inspiration, but also in part from the apostolic inspiration.

a. Prophetic inspiration.

Several points deserve attention here: (1) *The nature of a prophet.* There are two classical passages in the Bible, which shed light on the Biblical conception of a prophet, namely, Ex. 7: 1 and Deut. 18: 18. According to these passages a prophet is simply the mouthpiece of God. He receives a message from God, and is in duty bound to transmit it to the people. In his capacity as a prophet of the Lord, he may not bring a message of his own, but only the message which he receives from the Lord. It is not left to his own discretion to determine what he shall say; this is determined for him by his Sender. For the message divinely entrusted to him He may not substitute another.

(2) *The consciousness of the prophets.* The prophets of Israel knew that they were called of the Lord at a certain moment, sometimes contrary to their own desire, Ex. 3: 1, ff.; I Sam. 3; Isa. 6; Jer. 1; Ezek. 1-3. They were conscious of the fact that the Lord had spoken to them, and in some cases even knew that He had put His words into their mouth, Num. 23: 5; Deut. 18: 18; Jer. 1: 9; 5: 14. This consciousness was so strong that they even designated the time and place when and where the Lord spoke to them, and distinguished between times in which He did, and times in which He did not, speak to them, Isa. 16: 13, 14; Jer. 3: 6; 13: 3; 26: 1; 27: 1; 33: 1; Ezek. 3: 16; 8: 1; 12: 8. Hence they also made a sharp distinction between what the Lord revealed to them and what arose out of the depths of their own hearts, Num. 16: 28; 24: 13; I Kings 12: 33; Neh. 6: 8. They accused the false prophets of speaking out of their own hearts, without being sent of the Lord, Jer. 14: 14; 23: 16, 26; 29: 9; Ezek. 13: 2, 3, 6. When they addressed the people, they knew that they were not bringing their own word, but the word of the Lord, and this because the Lord demanded it of them, Jer. 20: 7-9; Ezek. 3: 4 ff.; Amos 3: 8; Jonah 1: 2.

(3) *The prophetic formulae.* The prophetic formulae were also very significant in this respect. They were in themselves clear indications of the fact that the prophets were conscious of bringing a message that was inspired by the Lord. There is quite a variety of these formulae, but they all agree in ascribing the

initiative to the Lord. The faithful watchmen on the walls of Zion were deeply impressed with the fact that they received the word, with which they came to the people, at the mouth of the Lord. They were ever mindful of the word of the Lord to Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." Ezek. 3: 17. Moreover, they clearly wanted the people to understand this. Such formulae as the following testify to this: "Thus saith the Lord," "Hear the word of the Lord," "The word that came to . . . from the Lord," "Thus the Lord showed me," "The burden of the word of the Lord."

(4) *Failure to understand their own message.* The fact that the prophets sometimes failed to understand the message which they brought to the people, also goes to show that it came to them from without, and did not arise out of their own consciousness. Daniel brought a message which was entrusted to him, but declares that he did not understand it, Dan. 12: 8, 9. Zechariah saw several visions, which contained messages for the people, but needed the help of an angel to interpret these for him, Zech. 1: 9; 2: 3; 4: 4. And Peter informs us that the prophets, having brought their message respecting the sufferings and the following glory of Christ, often searched into the details of it, in order that they might understand it more clearly, I Pet. 1: 10, 11.

Berkhof, Louis (2011-11-08). Systematic Theology. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

The Negative Argument

The denial of God's word started very early. Satan in Garden.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 3:1-7)

Job's friends did not say what was right about God and He was sorely displeased with them –

And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.” (Job 42:7-8)

Humans think too highly of themselves and all-too-often they replace God's words with their own. For instance, Nathan encouraged David to build a temple despite the fact that God had not spoken any such thing --

And it came about, when David dwelt in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, “Behold, I am dwelling in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under curtains.” Then Nathan said to David, “Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you.”

It came about the same night that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, “Go and tell David My servant, ‘Thus says the LORD; You shall not build a house for Me to dwell in; for I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up Israel to this day, but I have gone from tent to tent and from one dwelling place to another. In all places where I have walked with all Israel, have I spoken a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, ‘Why have you not built for Me a house of cedar?’ Now, therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts; I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a name like the name of the great ones who are in the earth. I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and not be moved again; and the wicked will not waste them anymore as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My

people Israel. And I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I tell you that the LORD will build a house for you. When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.” According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. (1Chronicles 17:1-15)

We must always be cautious to only say what God has definitely said. God’s intention was to establish the house of David, leading to Christ. But, Nathan was busy encouraging David to build a temple that God restricted David from building.

And note Nathan’s assumption – just because God was with David, it did not give David the right to do whatever was in His heart. God’s word always supersedes our desires, even though we are God’s people.

Beware of people who claim to have heard from God when their words fail to comport with what God has already spoken in His God-breathed Scripture.

‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. (Ezekiel 13:3)

“Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who use their tongues and declare, ‘The Lord declares.’ “Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the LORD, “and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the LORD. Jeremiah 23:30-32)

And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to

you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Jesus said, "Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word." (John 8:43)

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."