

1-2018

## The Three-Fold Formation of the Bible

Harold Willmington

*Liberty University*, [hwillmington@liberty.edu](mailto:hwillmington@liberty.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/owners\\_manual](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/owners_manual)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "The Three-Fold Formation of the Bible" (2018). *The Owner's Manual File*. 75.  
[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/owners\\_manual/75](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/owners_manual/75)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Owner's Manual File by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

## ARTICLE TWO

### THE THREE-FOLD FORMATION OF THE BIBLE

These are:

- Revelation: From God to man (man hears that which God wants written)
- Inspiration: From man to paper (man writes that which God wants written)
- Illumination: From paper to heart (man receives that which God has written)

We now consider each one:

I. Revelation – We know God spoke to man, but how did he speak? Hebrews 1:1 informs us he spoke to the fathers and prophets in many ways. A careful examination of the Bible reveals at least 11 different modes of communication. These are:

A. He often spoke to men through angels. Consider:

1. Angels reassured Abraham of the birth of Isaac and informed him of God's decision to destroy Sodom (Gen. 18).
2. Angels warned Lot to flee Sodom before that awful destruction took place (Gen. 19).
3. The angel Gabriel explained the nature of the tribulation to Daniel (Dan. 9:21-27).
4. Gabriel informed Zacharias he would have a son who would become the forerunner of Christ (Luke 1:11-20).
5. Gabriel informed Mary that God had chosen her as his vessel for Christ's birth (Luke 1:26-37).
6. Angels announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14).
7. An angel announced the resurrection of Christ to some women (Matt. 28:5-7).
8. An angel directed Philip to the seeking eunuch (Acts 8:26).
9. An angel directed Peter out of a Roman prison (Acts 12:7-10).

B. He spoke to men through a loud voice.

1. He spoke directly to Adam (Gen. 3:9-19).
2. He spoke directly to Noah (Gen. 6:13-21).
3. He spoke directly to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
4. He spoke directly to Moses (Exod. 20:1-17).
5. He spoke directly to Joshua (Josh. 1:1-9).
6. He spoke directly to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:1-14).
7. He spoke directly to Nathan, about David (2 Sam. 7:4-16),
8. He spoke directly to Elijah (1 Kings 17:2-4).
9. He spoke directly to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-5).

C. He spoke to men through a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12; Psa. 32:8).

D. He spoke to men through nature (Psa. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:18-20; Acts 14:15-17).

- E. He spoke to one man through the mouth of an ass (Num. 22:28) – This simply has to be one of the funniest moments in the Bible!
- F. He spoke to men through dreams – On a number of occasions God chose this method.
1. Jacob received the confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant in a dream (Gen. 28:12).
  2. Solomon received both wisdom and a warning in a dream (1 Kings 3:5; 9:2).
  3. Joseph in the New Testament received three messages in three dreams.
    - a. Assuring him of Mary’s purity (Matt. 1:20)
    - b. Commanding him to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13)
    - c. Ordering him to return to Palestine (Matt. 2:19-22)
  4. The wise men were warned of Herod’s evil intentions in a dream (Matt. 2:12).
- G. He spoke to men through visions – *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* defines a vision as: “A supernatural presentation of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person while awake.” It may be noted that many great truths in the Scriptures were related to men through this unique method:
1. Jacob was instructed in a vision to go to Egypt (Gen. 46:2).
  2. David was warned of judgment in a vision (1 Chron. 21:16).
  3. Isaiah saw God’s holiness in a vision (Isa. 6:1-8).
  4. Daniel saw the great Gentile powers in a vision (Dan. 7 – 8).
  5. Daniel saw the glories of Christ in a vision (Dan. 10:5-9).
  6. Daniel saw the rise and fall of Alexander the Great in a vision (Dan. 8).
  7. Ezekiel saw the regathering of Israel in a vision (Ezek. 37),
  8. Ananias was ordered to minister to Saul in a vision (Acts 9:10).
  9. Cornelius was instructed to send for Peter in a vision (Acts 10:3-6).
  10. Peter was ordered to minister to Cornelius in a vision (Acts 10:10-16).
  11. Paul was ordered to Macedonia in a vision (Acts 16:9).
  12. Paul was comforted at Corinth in a vision (Acts 18:9).
  13. Paul was comforted at Jerusalem in a vision (Acts 23:11).
  14. Paul viewed the glories of the third heaven in a vision (2 Cor. 12:1-4).
  15. The Apostle John received the book of Revelation in a vision.
- H. He spoke to men through the Urim and Thummin (Exod. 28:30; Num. 27:21).
- I. He spoke to men through the casting of lots.
1. To select a scapegoat (Lev. 16:8)
  2. To divide the land of Canaan among the 12 tribes (Num. 26:55; Josh. 18:10)
  3. To determine who would live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1)
  4. To replace Judas (Acts 1:26)
- J. He spoke to men through the Old Testament Christophanies – A Christophany is a pre-Bethlehem appearance of Christ. Some theologians have seen a number of these appearances in the Old Testament, believing that the term “the Angel of the Lord” is actually another name of Christ. If this is true, the following examples of Christophany communication could be submitted.

1. The Angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob (Gen. 32:24-30).
2. The Angel of the Lord redeemed Jacob from all evil (Gen. 48:16).
3. The Angel of the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exod. 3:2).
4. The Angel of the Lord protected Israel at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:19).
5. The Angel of the Lord prepared Israel for the Promised Land (Exod. 23:20-23; Psa. 34:7; Isa. 63:9; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).
6. The Angel of the Lord commissioned Gideon (Judg. 6:11).
7. The Angel of the Lord ministered to Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-7).
8. The Angel of the Lord reassured Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15).
9. The Angel of the Lord saved Jerusalem (Isa. 37:36).
10. The Angel of the Lord preserved three godly Hebrew men (Dan. 3:25).

K. He spoke to men through the New Testament incarnation of Christ

## II. Inspiration

- A. The definition of inspiration – “Inspiration may be defined as the Holy Spirit’s superintending over the writers so that while writing according to their own styles and personalities, the result was God’s Word written – authoritative, trustworthy, and free from error in the original autographs.” The term inspiration is found but once in the New Testament. This occurs in 2 Timothy 3:16. Here Paul says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The Greek word is *theopneustos*, and literally means “God-breathed.”
- B. Scripture texts on inerrancy and inspiration (Psa. 12:6; 18:30; 19:8; 119:89; Exod. 31:18; Deut. 18:18; Jer. 30:1; Mt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20, 21)
- C. The early church and inspiration – The early church fathers, having lived during the time of, or in the few centuries following, the New Testament era, would doubtless have been greatly influenced by those beliefs held by the original apostles (Peter, Paul, John, etc.). These men would include:
  1. Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35-107)
  2. Polycarp (69-155)
  3. Justin Martyr (100 -165)
  4. Tertullian (160-220)
  5. Eusebius of Caesarea (263-340)
  6. Athanasius (295-373)
  7. Augustine (354-430)
- D. A bottom line summary of inspiration:  
 During the third, fourth, and fifth centuries the church held no less than 184 councils, not to deal with civil rights, ecology problems, or political ills, but to deal with any and all heresy that would dare tamper with the pure Word of God. In summary, the early church fathers would surely have agreed with that conclusion drawn by Charles Wesley centuries later concerning the inspiration of the Bible:

The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.
2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration."

Well said, John Wesley, well said!

III. Illumination – We have already stated that without inspiration, no Scripture would have ever been written. We may now claim that without illumination, no sinner would have ever been saved! Illumination, then, is that method used by the Holy Spirit to shed divine light upon all seeking men as they look into the Word of God. Illumination is from the written word to the human heart. Consider:

A. The reasons for illumination – Why is this third step necessary? Why cannot sinful man simply read and heed the biblical message without divine aid?

1. It is necessary because of natural blindness (1 Cor. 2:14; Matt. 16:16-17).
2. It is necessary because of satanic blindness (2 Cor. 4:3-4).
3. It is necessary because of carnal blindness (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3; 2 Peter 1).

B. Results of illumination

1. Sinners are saved (Psa. 146:8; Psa. 119:130).
2. Christians are strengthened (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 2:10; 2 Cor. 4:6; Psa. 119:105).

C. Implications of illumination

1. The Holy Spirit looks for a certain amount of sincerity before he illuminates any human heart (Heb. 11:6; John 4:24; Matt. 4:4; John 20:31; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:2).
2. The Holy Spirit often seeks out the aid of a believer in performing his task of illuminating the hearts of others – This is seen:
  - a. In the ministry of Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-31, 35).
  - b. In the ministry of Paul, to the Jews at Thessalonica (Acts 17:2).
  - c. In the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla to Apollos (Acts 18:26).
  - d. In the ministry of Apollos to the Jews at Corinth (Acts 18:28).