

# **A Brief Summary of** ***Inspiration and Interpretation***



**By Dean John William Burgon, 1861**

***Summarized by***  
***Pastor D. A. Waite, Th.D., Ph.D.***

# ***Essays and Reviews Analyzed***

**"Secondly,–‘*Essays and Reviews*’ attracted notice because six of its authors were Ministers of the Church of England. Here were **six Clergymen openly making light of their sacred profession,** and apparently worse than regardless of their Ordination vows. . . . [A reviewer stated]: ‘there has been discarded the Word of God, the Creation, the Fall, the Redemption, Justification, Regeneration, and Salvation, Miracles, Inspiration, Prophecy, Heaven and Hell, Eternal punishment and a Day of Judgment, Creeds, Liturgies, and Articles, the truth of Jewish History and of Gospel narrative; a sense of doubt thrown over even the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and Ascension, the Divinity of the Second Person, and the personality of the Third.’” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. xi)**

# Blasphemy From Ministers

“Some respectable persons, I doubt not, will think my treatment of them harsh and uncharitable. I invite them to consider that we do not expect blasphemy from Ministers of the Gospel,—irreligion from the teachers of youth,—infidelity from the Professor’s chair; nor are we called upon to tolerate it either. . . . Let those who feel little jealousy for God's honour measure out in grains their censure of a volume, the confessed tendency of which is to sap the foundation of Faith, and to introduce a flood-tide. Such shall not, at all events, be my method. . . . If I may declare my mind freely, **punctilious courtesy in dealing with such opinions, becomes a species of treason against Him after whose Name we are called, and whom we profess to serve.**” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. xxiv)

# Free Handling of Divine Truth

**“When Critics are clamorous for the ‘free handling’ of Divine Truth, they must not be surprised to find themselves freely handled too. . . . Accordingly, I have handled them just as freely as they have handled the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists of Christ. . . . No other than an attempt to destroy Man's dearest hopes, is this infamous book: no other than an insult, the grossest imaginable, offered to the Majesty of Heaven; an attack, the more foul because it is so insidious, against the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. xxvi)**

# **Sermon #1: Study of the Bible**

**Finally, after 228 pages of refutation of the *Essays and Reviews*, Dean Burgon begins his positive 279-page advice and counsel to the young men in his Oriel College at Oxford University concerning their preparation for the ministry. Sermon #1 is the first of seven that Dean Burgon presented in this formal series. It dealt with the most important topic for anyone—the study of the Bible. All seven of these sermons are soundly grounded on the inerrant, infallible Bible.**

# Consecutive Bible Reading

“The thing I would so strenuously urge upon you, is,—that, during your undergraduate period, you should read the whole Bible consecutively through, from one end to the other, by yourself and for yourself, with consummate method, care, and attention. . . .” (Dean John William Burgon *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p.9)

## **Bible Reading = 30 Minutes Daily**

**“First, that you should deliberately apportion to this solemn duty the best and freshest and quietest half-hour in the whole day; and then, that you should determine, let what will go undone never to abridge that half-hour. [Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 9]**

# Avoid Commentaries

“And next, be persuaded to read without extraneous helps of any kind; except, of course, such help as a map, or the margin of your Bible, supplies. **Pray avoid Commentaries and notes.** First, you cannot afford time for them; and secondly, if you could, they would be as likely to mislead you as not. . . . they will do more to nullify your reading, than anything which could be imagined. Your object is to obtain an insight into Holy Scripture. . . . not to be saved trouble, and to be shown what other persons have thought about it.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 10-11)

## Less About Dull Sermons

“It becomes your turn at last to instruct others. . . . **we should hear less about dull sermons, and inattentive congregations,** and badly filled churches,—as well as about the astounding ignorance of many among the upper classes, in Divine things,—if our younger Clergy know the Bible a great deal better than they do.—Aye, and we should not have so many unsound remarks about Holy Scripture either,—so many mistaken views of doctrine,—so many crude remarks about Inspiration,—made by persons who ought to know better.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 18)

# Christian Soldier's Armament

**“It is not merely to inform the understanding, that Holy Scripture is to be read with such consummate attention, and studied with such exceeding care. . . . Its aim, and purpose, and real function, is, that the fiery hour of temptation may find the Christian soldier armed with ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:’—that the dark season of Adversity may find his soul anchored on the Rock of Ages,—which alone can prove his soul’s sufficient strength and stay.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 21-22)**

## **Sermon #2: Natural Science**

**Sermon #2 by Dean Burgon to his ministerial students concerned the battles between “natural science” and “theological science.” As there are many doubters of the scientific accuracy of the Bible today, so there were in Dean Burgon's day. He defended the accuracy of the Bible in all areas of science.”**

# Genesis-Accurate History

“There exists however a vague suspicion after all that the beginning of Genesis is a vision, or an allegory, or a parable, -or anything you please, except true History. It is hard to imagine why. If there be a book in the whole Bible which purports to be a plain historical narrative of actual events, that book is the book of Genesis. . . .” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 33)

## Literal Creation Days

**“Days are spoken of, –each made up of an evening and a morning. . . . ‘for in six days’ (It is declared,) ‘the Lord made Heaven and Earth.’ You may not play tricks with language plain as this, and elongate a week until it shall more than embrace the span of all recorded Time.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 38)**

# Accept All Miracles

**“Will you then reject one miracle and retain another? Impossible! You can make no reservation, even in favour of the Incarnation of our Lord,—the most adorable of all miracles, as it is the very keystone of our Christian hope. Either, with the best and wisest of all ages, you must believe the whole of Holy Scripture: or, with the narrow-minded infidel you must disbelieve the whole. There is no middle course open to you.”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 46)

# **Sermon #3: Bible Inspiration**

**Sermon #3 by Dean Burgon to his ministerial students argued for the inspiration of the Bible in every part. He explained the nature of the Bible's plenary, verbal inspiration and its extent. Dean Burgon believed that all the Bible, all the books, all the chapters, all the verses, all the sentences, all the words, all the syllables, and all the letters were inspired by God.**

## **The Alarm of War**

**“Look well to it, Sirs, if you care for the safety of the Ark of God. For my part,—like one of old time whose words I am not worthy to take upon my lips,—‘I cannot hold my peace: because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war!’”** [Jeremiah 4:19]

**(Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 82)**

# Inspiration Down to the Letters

“-this Day's Sermon has had for its object to remind you, that **THE BIBLE is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the Throne! Every Book of it,-every Chapter of it,-every Verse of it,-every word of it,-every syllable of it,-(where are we to stop?)-every letter of it-is the direct utterance of the Most High!-“PASA GRAPHE THEOPNEUSTOS”**. ‘Well spake the **HOLY GHOST**, by the mouth of’ the many blessed Men who wrote it.-The Bible is none other than the Word of God: not some part of it, more, some part of it, less; but all alike, the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the Throne; -absolute, -faultless, -unerring, -supreme!” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 89)

## **Sermon #4: Nature of Inspiration**

**Sermon #4 by Dean Burgon to his ministerial students outlined his belief that the Bible was given by God and is verbally inspired from beginning to end. It is as if God Himself was speaking to us from His throne in heaven. There was no doubt in Dean Burgon's mind as to this important doctrine in the Bible.**

# Every Letter Was Inspired

**“. . . Holy Scripture is inspired from the Alpha to the Omega of it;—not some parts more, some parts less, but all equally, and all to overflowing;—that we hold it to be, not generally inspired, but particularly; that we see not how with logical consistency we can avoid believing the words as well as the sentences of it; the syllables as well as the words; the letters as well as the syllables; every ‘jot’ and every ‘tittle’ of it, (to use our Lord's expression,) to be divinely inspired:— . . . .”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 93-94)

# Importance To Preachers

**“How can you pretend to expound a text, unless you hold the words of that text to be inspired? What inferences can you venture to draw from words, the Divinity of which you dare not affirm? O, to what endless, hopeless skepticism are you pointing the way! What a variety of most unanswerable questionings will you provoke! How can you hope ever to convince or convict, if you begin by acquainting your adversary that it is only for the substantial verity of Scripture that you claim Inspiration; the verbal details being quite a different matter!”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 117-18)

# The Key of Faith

**“Waste not thy precious time in cavil about the structure of the casket which contains thy treasure; but unlock it once with the Key of Faith, and make thyself rich indeed, -Already, -(as we were last week reminded), -already the Judge standeth at the door; and assuredly, thou and I (to whom God hath entrusted so much!) shall have to render a very strict account of the use we have made of the Bible, -when we shall stand face to face with its undoubted Author.”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 124-25)

# Uninspired=No Authority

**“If a writing be not inspired, it is of no absolute authority. If a part of a writing be not inspired, that part is of no absolute authority. If a single word in the text of Holy Scripture be even uncertain, –(as for example, whether we are to read HOS or THEOS in 1 Tim. iii.16,)–that word becomes without absolute authority. We cannot venture to adduce it in proof of anything.” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 134)**

## Christ Defends O.T.

**“However unworthy of scientific attention the Mosaic account of the descent of Mankind from a single pair may be deemed,—the universality of the Noachian Deluge,—the destruction of the Cities of the plain,—the fate of Lot's wife,—Jonah in the fish's belly,—and so forth,—to all these (supposed) unscientific statements our Blessed Lord commits Himself unequivocally.”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 135)

# **Sermon #5: Bible Interpretation**

**Sermon #5 begins Dean Burgon's discussion of proper interpretation of the Bible. It is not sufficient to have a Bible that has been verbally and plenarily inspired if the interpretation of it is improper. Dean Burgon offered helpful suggestions on Biblical interpretation in this sermon.**

# Like No Other Book

“...the two chief propositions concerning Holy Scripture... And first, I assert that it may be regarded as a fundamental rule, that **the Bible is not to be interpreted like any other book....**

Next, I assert without fear of contradiction that inspired Interpretation, whatever varieties of method it may exhibit, is yet uniform and unequivocal in this one result; namely, that **it proves Holy Scripture to be of far deeper significancy than at first sight appears.**” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 160)

# Old Testament Quotes

**“ . . . it is the Holy Ghost who, in the New Testament, interprets what the same Holy Ghost had delivered in the Old. This, believe me, is the true key, the only intelligible solution, to all those difficulties respecting places of the Old Testament, whether interpreted, or only quoted, in the New, which have so exercised the ingenuity of learned men. We are always to remember, in a word, that the true Author of either Testament,-the real Author of every part of the Bible, is (not Man, but) God!”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 173)

# Passing the Torch

“O let it be our great concern,—yours and mine,—to preserve with undiminished lustre the whole deposit of Heaven-descended teaching which is the Church's treasure! . . . Like runners in a certain ancient race of which we all have read, let it be our pride and joy,—yours and mine,—to grasp the torch of Truth with a strong unwavering hand; to run joyously with it as long as the days of this earthly race shall last; and dying, to hand it on to another, who, with strength renewed like the eagle's, may again,—swiftly, steadily, exultingly,—run with it, till he fails! . . . So when the Judge of quick and dead appeareth,—so let Him find you occupied,—O young men, (many of you, my friends,) who are already the hope of half the English Church!” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 180-81)

## **Sermon #6: Accommodation**

**In this sermon #6 Dean Burgon refuted the fallacy of “Scriptural Accommodation.” This error has been promulgated even today by most apostates, some neo-evangelicals, and even some who call themselves fundamentalists.**

# Old Testament Quotes

**“Human language will sometimes require to be ‘accommodated.’ Divine language, never! May not the Holy Spirit lay His finger on whatever parts of His ancient utterance He sees fit? may He not invert clauses, and (in order to bring out His meaning better) even alter words?”**  
**(Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 213)**

# The Preincarnate Christ

**“How, by the popular method,—how, by any of the new lights which have lately been let in on Holy Scripture,—was the Resurrection of the dead to have been proved by the words which the Second Person in the Trinity spake to Moses 'in the Bush?' And yet we behold that same Divine Personage in the days of His humiliation, proposing from those words, uttered by Himself 1500 years before, to establish the doctrine in dispute!” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 215)**

# The Coming Storm

“Those who watch ‘the signs of the times’ attentively, will hear me witness that unbelief is one fearful note of the coming age.... Unbelief is no less the cause why so many have forsaken the Church of their Fathers, to run after the blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits of the Church of Rome,... At intervals, hoarse sounds, from a distance, are known to smite upon the listening ear; signals of **the coming danger**,—sure harbingers of **the approaching storm**.—**Holy Scripture is the stronghold against which the Enemy will make his assault, assuredly: nor can we employ ourselves better than by building one another up in reverence for its Inspired Oracles:** opposing to the crafts of the Evil One the simplicity of a child-like faith; and resolutely refusing to see less than God, in God's Word!” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 219)

# Sermon #7: Biblical Miracles



Dean Burgon's final sermon, #7, supported all of the **Biblical miracles**. There is no reason for a Bible-believing Christian to deny any of the miracles of **Scripture**.

## Enemies of Christ

**“Not only will I not treat men with tenderness who put forth such blasphemous folly, but I will hold them up to ridicule, to the very utmost of my power. Nay, I would make them objects of unqualified reprobation to all, if I could, as they deserve to be reprobated, for they are the worst enemies of the Gospel of Christ.”** (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 249)

# The Uncharitable Man

**“My sympathy shall be reserved for those who have never so offended, but are, on the contrary, full of precious promise;—for the young and as yet inexperienced,—for you, who will have the battle of Christ and His Church to fight, when we shall be mouldering in the grave. Let those who do not know me, deem me uncharitable if they will. I care not. The uncharitable man,—mark me, Brethren!—the truly uncharitable man, is he, who shows no consideration for weak and unstable souls; who does not regard the trials and perils of the young; who beguiles unsteady feet to the edge of the precipice, and there forsakes them;**

# The Uncharitable Man

“whose destructive method, (for constructiveness is no part of that man's philosophy!)-whose destructive method leaves the young without chart and compass,-aye, without moon or stars to sail by; who labours hard to communicate the taint of his own foul leprosy to those who were before unpolluted; who dims the eye, and deadens the ear, and defiles the thoughts, and darkens the hope of as many as have the misfortune to come in his way, and feels no pity!-Yes, yes! **The man who sows his own vile doubts broadcast over two continents,-doing his very best to destroy the faith of those for whom Christ died,-he, he is the uncharitable man!**” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 250-51)

# The Celestial Armoury

**“Begin betimes to acquaint yourselves with the wealth of that celestial armoury which contains a weapon which must prove fatal to every foe; but which it depends on yourselves whether you shall have the skill to wield or not. Suffer not yourselves to be cheated of your birthright, the Bible, either by the novel fictions of unstable men, or by the exploded heresies of a bygone age, revived and recommended by living unbelievers. You, especially who aspire to the Ministerial office, and are destined hereafter to undertake the cure of souls, O do you be doubly watchful! Give to the Bible the undivided homage of a childlike heart; and bow down before its revelations with a suppliant understanding also; and let no characteristic of its method by any means escape you. . . .” (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 253)**

# As One Grows Older

**“The Bible in truth, as one grows older,–(to me at least it seems so,)–becomes almost the only thing in the world really deserving of a man's attention. . . . There is but a step between us and death (1 Samuel 20:2); and assuredly when we wake up after His likeness, we shall be satisfied with it (Psalm 17:16)! Already ‘the shadows of the evening are stretched out.’ (Jeremiah 6:4) **Be patient, O my soul, ‘until the day break, and the shadows flee away!’”** (Song of Solomon 2:17; 4:6) (Dean John William Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 255)**