

A Rebellious Son

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

¹⁸“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, ²⁰ and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ ²¹ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

If you believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God, how do you deal with the above? Do you really believe those were the actual words of God to the nation of Israel? Do you believe they were the words of man written under the inspiration of God? Or do you believe they were the misinformed words of a religious community who believed that killing a rebellious son was acceptable to God?

Should all the words of Scripture be regarded as “inspired” by God? I myself have frequently used the term “inspired by God” with reference to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Although the Scriptures contain many genuine truths of God, they also contain many factual and theological errors. Are “all” of the Scriptures inspired by God, or only those portions that we would regard as the “good stuff?”

I would say that individual portions of Scripture, such as Deuteronomy 21:18-21, were inspired by God only in the sense that they were included in the biblical narrative for a good purpose. The entire biblical narrative, which contains much truth and error, I believe, was intended by God to reveal a progression of thought. It is a story of how a nation, through a very painful process of trial and error, gradually transformed its theology from one based on the strict rule of law to one based on the rule of love.

The best way to learn spiritual truths is through actual positive and negative human experience. God doesn’t just hand us all the truth on a silver platter in a “second-hand” fashion. He wants us to learn these truths “first-hand” by allowing us to learn from our mistakes. This crucible that we call life purifies and cleanses our thinking through a painful, yet gratifying, process of trial and error.