

## The Authority of Scriptures

### We Believe...

...the Bible was given by inspiration of God.

Since God exists and is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present, He is capable of communicating with His creation. We see this throughout Scripture from the first chapter to the last.

In this lesson, we will consider first what the Bible says about itself. Then we will briefly explore the history of the Bible so that we can understand how it came to be what it is today. Finally, we will discuss how trusting in the truth of the Bible can change our lives.

### What the Bible Says About Itself

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (a letter written to Timothy from the Apostle Paul), we read:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This means that all of what is considered Scripture was given by God through a process called inspiration. “Inspiration of God” means “God-breathed.”

A theological term that you will encounter when studying this topic of the fidelity of Scripture is “verbal plenary inspiration.” This expresses the idea that each and every original word in Scripture was given by God. Each word is important and carries meaning and message from God.

The Old Testament scribes understood this concept. Their primary focus in life was to make manuscripts of the Word of God. They copied each tiny line in complete detail, not wanting to change in any way what was written. They believed each and every word came from God.

### Verbal Plenary Inspiration and Bible Translations

Believing that each and every original word is given by God’s inspiration means that when interpreting the Bible, honorable translators

throughout history have taken special care not to change the words or meanings of what is written.

Bibles that take the utmost care to keep the meaning of the original text are called “translations.” Some popular Bible translations are *The King James Bible*, *The New King James Bible*, *The New American Standard Bible*, the *English Standard Version Bible*, and *The Amplified Bible*

Paraphrases are versions of the Bible that seek to present a more readable or relatable version of the Bible. But these sometimes include the paraphraser’s understanding of doctrine which may or may not reflect the original meaning.

When you chose a Bible to study or to memorize, you should use a *translation* especially if you are also teaching Scripture. Reading paraphrases of the Bible can give you a better understanding of a passage, but it can also give you an inaccurate understanding and cause you to miss the point of the text in part or in whole. Always compare any paraphrase with a time-honored translation. If you do choose a paraphrase as your main Bible (which we don’t recommend) at least also own a translation, so that you can compare them from time to time. Some paraphrases are more reliably translated than others. Do your research. You might want to consider a parallel Bible that has at least one reliable *translation* and the paraphrase of your choice side by side so that comparison is easier.

Study and Reference Bibles can also be very helpful in your study of God’s Word. However, you must keep in mind that while the comments made in reference Bibles can offer valuable understanding of history, geography, and other related information, the comments are not considered to be inspired by God. You might also notice that the opinions in the commentary in one Bible differ greatly from another. Check to see who is making the commentary. This information should be available in the beginning pages of that Bible. You can search online to find out what the doctrinal inclinations are of those involved in making the comments. It is often a team of people, and some Bibles will tell you who is commenting on each book of the Bible.

So, while using a study or reference Bible can be very informative and helpful in understanding the context of passages, always separate in your mind the inspired words of God from the words of the commentator.

Of course, we do not challenge inspired Word of God, but it is perfectly acceptable to disagree with a commentator.

## **Are the Epistles/Letters in the Bible Considered Scripture?**

2 Peter 1:20-21 says:

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of*

*man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*

This is the most common Scripture used to indicate that the word of God was divinely inspired. Men of God spoke as they were moved of the Holy Spirit. This was recorded in writing. It is believed that every single word they spoke was the word of God.

What evidence do we have that the New Testament is also considered Scripture?

2 Peter 3:15-16 says:

*“—and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do **also the rest of the Scriptures.**”*

Here Peter is clearly including Paul’s writings as Scriptures. Paul wrote nearly half of the New Testament. Some theologians in history have used this passage to discount the writers of the other 50% since they are not specifically mentioned, but historically, the books currently included in the New Testament are also considered Scripture and thus inspired of God.

## **A Strong Warning**

We need to beware that some translators add to or subtract from what the Bible says. Some will want to make the word of God something it was never meant to be by adding in their own philosophy or their own religious views. Others will omit the portions of Scripture which don’t exactly fit their concepts of God.

We also observe that those seeking political influence will sometimes inaccurately apply Scripture to persuade their audience or to endear themselves to them.

The Bible gives warnings to us not to engage in these activities. Here are two Scriptures of major importance about this.

### ***Revelations 22:18-19***

*“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written*

*in this book. 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.'*"

The above verses were written near the end of the book of Revelations and most likely are referring to that book. Some have reasonably expanded the meaning to apply to all Scripture. Paul also warned about changing the message of the gospel he preached.

### ***Galatians 1:8-9***

*"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."*

We see in these two passages how seriously the original preachers of the gospel took their messages. They knew how easy it would be to add to or subtract from the true gospel. Paul was so adamant about it, that he pronounced a curse (divine judgment) even on himself if he ever strayed from the truth.

This gives us very important reasons to know what the word of God teaches so that we also will not unwittingly add or subtract from it. Without a strong foundation in the word of God, we can be deceived by both well-meaning teachers and outright false prophets. It is a significant reason to seek out a trusted *translation* of the Bible and not rely on a paraphrase.

## **Biblical Authenticity**

For many Christians, it is not important to know the history of the Bible. They accept by faith that it is the word of God, and don't feel a need for that to be proven to them. There is nothing wrong with this on a personal level. However, it is a question you will be asked by people who don't believe, and who will want evidence to support your claim that the Bible is the word of God.

1 Peter 3:15 says:

*But sanctify (make holy) the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

So, even if you don't feel a need to have it proven to you, it is good to have at least an introductory understanding of the history of the Bible so that you can give reasons for others to hope as well.

There are many books written that show why the Bible is indeed the word of God. One, which I review here is by Josh MacDowell entitled More Than a Carpenter<sup>1</sup>. In it he gives three tests of authenticity of historical documents.

## **Bibliographical Test**

The *bibliographical* test is “an examination of the textual transmission by which ancient documents reach us from the past”<sup>2</sup>. It has to do with:

- The reliability of the documents
- The number of documents
- The consistency between the documents, and
- The length of time between the original copies and the current copies.

Josh McDowell points out the vast contrast between other ancient manuscripts which are widely accepted as authentic and the New Testament manuscripts. He reports that there are over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament which are remarkably close to the original writings. No other book comes close to having so many manuscripts written so close to the first copies. The only writing that comes anywhere near to having as many manuscripts as the Bible is Homer’s Iliad with only 643 manuscripts. The point is that we consider Homer’s Iliad to be authentic with far less evidence. Certainly then the Bible passes the bibliographical test.

## **Internal Evidence Test**

The second test about which Josh writes is the internal evidence test. This has to do with the **proximity in time and geography** of the writer to the event recorded, and the **common knowledge of that event**.

Concerning the proximity of the authors, the authors of the New Testament were eyewitnesses of the things about which they wrote or based their writings on eyewitness accounts. Assuming that those recording these events had no purpose to distort the information, what they recorded can be trusted.

### **2 Peter 1:16-18**

*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup> For He*

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<sup>1</sup> We highly recommend this book. See footnote #2.

<sup>2</sup> More Than a Carpenter, Josh MacDowell, 1977, 2005, Tyndale House Publishers, pg. 42

*received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." <sup>18</sup> And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

Then to check the possibility that the writers changed facts for their own personal or group motives, we have the **common knowledge factor**. It would have been extremely easy to dispute what they wrote as there were thousands of eyewitnesses, both believers and non-believers who could testify to their authenticity or prove that what was being written was false.

### **1 John 1:1-3**

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we declare to you.*

### **Luke 1:1-4**

*Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

## **External Evidence Test**

The third principal of historiography is the *external* evidence test. This has to do with other facts apart from the document in question that either verify or deny the accuracy of the text.

Archaeology is also external evidence. It has on many occasions confirmed the words of Scripture as fact instead of fable. If you would like more detail about the three basic principles of historiography, consult with Josh McDowell's book, [More Evidences That Demand a Verdict](#). He writes,

*“After personally trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scriptures, I have been forced to conclude that they are historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as unreliable historically, then he or she must discard all the literature of antiquity. No other document has as much evidence to confirm its reliability.”<sup>3</sup>*

## How Did We Get the Bible We Use Today?

The books included in the of the Bible we use today is called the canon of Scripture. It wasn't decided by one church at one point in time. Rather, from the early church and over the centuries, certain books and letters became accepted within the Christian community as being inspired by God, and others became less accepted. By the time Scriptures were officially canonized, most of them were already accepted.

If you are interested in how the canon of the Bible was decided there are many articles on the internet including this summation: *How and when was the canon of the Bible put together?* | [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org).

The belief commonly held is that man did not decide what books would be considered as inspired by God, but rather God did. Just as He was able to inspire the Scripture, so was He able to cause men to understand of what books those were. Man, being fallible could have made a mistake, but God being infallible was capable of revealing truth to mankind.

Even though certain books are accepted as Scripture, students and teachers of the Bible are encouraged to use basic hermeneutic principles when studying and teaching. The main element of hermeneutics is understanding context. Context includes information about the author, the time and purpose of his writing. Another important aspect is to consider under what covenant the book was written. All of these things and others can help us come to a better understanding about and application of a passage.

## Progression of English Translations

It is also interesting to read about the beginnings of the English Bibles. There are many excellent resources about this top. If you are curious to know more about the timeline of the English Bible Translation History, you should visit [\*English Bible History: Timeline of How We Got the English Bible\*](#) or read other reliable resources.

An interesting fact to note is that even though one might think that over the centuries, the English translations became less reliable, the truth is that with each new version of the English Bible, the translations became more

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<sup>3</sup> [More Than a Carpenter](#), Josh McDowell, 1977, 2005, Tyndale House Publishers, pg. 55

and more based on the original Greek and Hebrew make them increasingly accurate.

## **LIFE APPLICATIONS**

When we realize that the Bible is authentic and that it contains living words, not just historical words, we understand that it is very significant in our lives. Let's look at 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### **Able to Make Us Wise for Salvation**

The words written in the Bible are able to give us the wisdom to be saved, not just initially, but as we go on through this life, and ultimately at Christ's return. The word of God will give us information and form our experience. We will learn that our salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus, and in Him alone and not by works or keeping the law.

### **Profitable for Doctrine**

Doctrine, simply stated, means "teaching" and includes the principals by which we live. Without doctrine, there are no absolutes. Without doctrine, we may all think and do whatever we believe is right. However, the Scriptures do not teach this. As we will learn, there are clearly taught concepts of God and His desire for what He has created. By doctrine, we learn how it is that a sinful man becomes a righteous man by faith and has a relationship with God that is based on faith and love and not fear or shame.

Since this is true, why are there so many Christian denominations? This is, in part, because of false doctrine. Of course, each denomination believes its own doctrine is correct. But in reality, there is only one doctrine, but we don't all understand everything perfectly. In 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 it says,

*For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

There are certain foundational truths, however, which all mainstream denominations believe, and we will discuss those in this book. Doctrines which make one denomination different from each other are called “distinctives.” All denominations have distinctives.

On the other hand, there are false doctrines which are considered heresy by all mainstream Christian denominations. One of the major doctrines considered to be false by all major denominations is the one that teaches that Jesus was only a man. Mainstream Christians believe that Jesus is God. If a church does not believe this most basic doctrine, we refer to it as a cult and its teachings as heresy.

So, the word of God can keep us from believing false doctrine. That’s why it is important to study it carefully. Deception is everywhere; but by knowing sound doctrine, you will stand firm in your faith.

## **Reproof**

Reproof has to do with conviction, evidence, and proof. The Scriptures are meant to convince us of what is true and right. They give evidence for our faith and beliefs. They also are the proof to us that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. An example of this is found in Bible prophecy (2 Peter 1:19). Hundreds of Old Testament prophecies have already been fulfilled down in minute detail. The death of Jesus was described hundreds of years before the method of crucifixion was even imagined. The Bible is evidence for itself.

## **Correction**

Even the most diligent and sincere person can go astray either in their beliefs or in their way of living. The Scriptures can solve this problem. By them, we know what God has done for us and the power He has bestowed in us. When we are discouraged or in error, the Bible can encourage us or make us know the truth. The more we know of the Scriptures, the less we will need to be concerned about being deceived. If we are full of His words, the enemy will not be successful at convincing us of his lies.

## **Instruction in Righteousness**

When we are born again, we are made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21). This is a core teaching of Christianity. Without it, we are left to our own efforts to be made right before God. Our own efforts can never be good enough. Through the Scriptures we learn that

our righteousness is from Him. The more you read the Bible, the more clearly you will see this truth. When we understand that we are righteous, we will live righteously. This cannot be reversed. Living righteously does not make us righteous. Rather being made righteous (by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ) is what causes us to live righteously. Living righteously is the result of being made righteous.

## **That the Man of God Might Be Complete**

This is a very assuring truth. God's wants us to be complete. Complete speaks of wholeness, of nothing lacking. When we understand the Scriptures, we realize we are complete in Him (Colossians 2:9). We learn that everything we need for our spirit, soul, and body, we have in Him. As we allow the Holy Spirit to apply these truths to our lives, we change. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). Our minds are renewed by understanding who we are in Christ, and that understanding comes to us by reading Scripture.

Completeness also implies that nothing is lacking. When we are complete in Him, we do not lack. If we need wisdom, He tells us in His word to ask for it (James 1:5). If we need knowledge, He says we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). If we need healing, He says that by His wounds we were healed (1 Peter 2:24).

## **Thoroughly Equipped for Every Good Work**

In the heart of every born-again Christian, there are callings and gifts from God. A calling is what He wants you to do for others. The gifts are what He gives you to fulfill your calling. The Bible also says that He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). That means he gives us the desire to work for Him, and the ability.

However, just as you would not allow a child to drive a car or a person off the street to do surgery on your brain, the Lord wants us to be equipped to do the work He has for us. If our doctrine is incomplete, we could actually lead someone astray. If we don't know the power of God that lives in us, we could become defeated. If we aren't aware of the enemy's tactics, we could be destroyed. God wants to give us the equipment to do the job He is calling us to do. How quickly we obtain this information is partially up to us. If you have enough time to study the Bible several times a day, your knowledge will increase faster than someone who can only devote shorter periods of time. It isn't a contest. There are no set rules about how much to study the Bible. However, it is obvious, the more you study the Scriptures, the more you will learn. Understand also, that knowledge apart from wisdom is of little use to someone else. Wisdom grows as our experience expands.

Let's say that God is calling you to be an evangelist. It will be especially important, then, that you thoroughly understand the gospel. Yes, God will use us right away to share the gospel with others but being fully equipped to serve as an evangelist is another thing. This will come through study, experience, and wisdom.

Experience and wisdom come as you cooperate with God in your development. Those who resist applying the word of God to their lives, usually grow much slower than those who get in the habit of saying "Yes," to Jesus.

So, you might have a sense for what God is calling you to do, you may even recognize various gifts He has given you, but through the Scriptures you will be thoroughly equipped to do that work and use those gifts. This is a very good reason to study the word of God and allowing Him to apply His truths to your life. By learning true doctrine, and applying what you learn, you will gain wisdom. This is an ongoing process throughout the Christian life. It is also a constant source of joy and strength.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW**

1. What is meant by "verbal plenary inspiration"?
2. What evidence do we have that the Bible is the Word of God?
3. True or False: Our English Bibles today are less reliable than the earlier English versions. Explain your answer.
4. What is the difference between a translation and a paraphrase of the Bible? Why is it important to study the word of God using a translation?
5. What must we always keep in mind when studying commentaries?
6. Write your own paraphrase of 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Use some of the information in the Life Applications section of this lesson to help you.