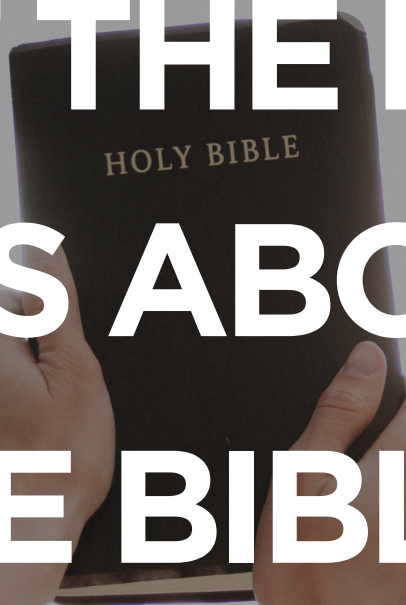


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# WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE BIBLE





## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE BIBLE

By: Matt Smethurst

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There are only two options when it comes to knowledge of a divine creator: revelation or speculation. Either he speaks, or we guess. Christians believe that, thankfully, he has spoken. The God of heaven and earth has “forfeited his own personal privacy” to reveal himself to us—to befriend us—through a book.<sup>1</sup> Scripture is like an all-access pass into the revealed [mind and will of God](#).

By virtually any account [the Bible is the most influential book of all time](#). No shortage of ink has been spilled on writings about it, against it, and in favor of it. But what does the Bible say about itself?

### The Bible Is Inspired

When people claim the Bible is “inspired,” what do they really mean? Are they just saying it’s inspiring? Well, not quite. Sure, the Bible may inspire some of its readers, but the concept of “inspired” as used here has to do with the relationship between God and the Bible’s authors.

Now, the Bible’s human authors weren’t inspired in the way we typically use the word today. It’s not as if the Apostle Paul saw a gorgeous sunset, felt moved by its beauty, and then wrote Galatians. Nor does it mean he would enter some catatonic state, recite a bunch of words to a friend, then pick up the parchment and say, “Let’s see what God wrote!”

First and foremost, inspiration has to do with the fact that the Bible’s ultimate author is God. In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Paul writes: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”<sup>2</sup> Notice how it says the entirety of the Bible is “God-breathed”—exhaled from God. No wonder, then, that the Bible is commonly referred to as God’s Word.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Mohler, “Has Any People Heard the Voice of God Speaking . . . and Survived? Part Two,” AlbertMohler.com, September 12, 2006, <https://albertmohler.com/2006/09/12/has-any-people-heard-the-voice-of-god-speaking-and-survived-part-two>, accessed July 3, 2013. The full quote reads: “There can be no pride in the knowledge of God, because everything we know about him, we know by mercy. Carl F. H. Henry describes this so beautifully when he speaks of revelation as God’s willful disclosure, wherein he forfeits his own personal

privacy so that his creatures might know him.”

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible*, New International Version © 2011, 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

<sup>3</sup> Phrases like “Thus says the Lord” or “The word of the Lord came to me” are found thousands of times in the Old Testament (see, for example, Jeremiah 1:9). A similar idea in the New Testament is evidenced by passages such as John 14:25–26; 16:12–16; 1 Corinthians 2:13, 14:37; and Galatians 1:11–12.



But if God was the author, then what were Moses and David and Paul and John and all those others doing? Weren't they writing Scripture, too? Indeed. You see, the Bible was written by God and humans—or, more precisely, by God through humans.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Peter explained it this way: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, God made sure the human authors wrote exactly what he wanted them to write—no more, no less.

However, these authors weren't passive robots. God didn't erase their personalities or take over their minds. They wrote as [thinking, feeling human beings](#). God simply worked sovereignly through their unique personalities and educations and backgrounds and experiences<sup>6</sup> to enable—to inspire—they to write divine truth.<sup>7</sup> “Each word in the Bible is the word of a conscious human author and at the same time the exact word that God intends for the revelation of himself.”<sup>8</sup>

The Creator of the universe has spoken—in human history, in human language, through human beings. That's what inspiration is all about. In answer to the question of who wrote the Bible—humans or God—the Bible itself answers simply: “Yes.”

## The Bible Is True

OK, so Scripture is completely inspired, but is it completely true?

The Bible says that God's Word is true because [God's character is true](#); God is not a liar.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the God of truth cannot speak words that are false. To doubt the truthfulness of God's Word is to doubt the truthfulness of God himself.<sup>10</sup>

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**WHEN PROPERLY INTERPRETED,  
THE BIBLE WILL NEVER  
MISLEAD YOU.**

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Some people think that while the Bible's “spiritual” concepts are true enough, much of the other content (such as historical and geographical details) probably isn't. But Scripture doesn't make “any restriction on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks truthfully.”<sup>11</sup> Besides, if the Bible isn't [fully reliable at every point](#), how could we be certain that it's fully reliable at any point?

<sup>4</sup> This “dual” (divine and human) authorship can be seen by comparing a few passages: Genesis 2:24 with Matthew 19:4–5; Psalm 95:7b–8 with Hebrews 3:7; and Psalm 2:1–2 with Acts 4:24–26.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible*, 2 Peter 1:20–21.

<sup>6</sup> It's important to remember that the Bible didn't fall from the sky all at once. Rather, it's an unfolding story written over the course of centuries to specific persons facing specific historical situations. Every single word was written by a particular person, at a particular time, in a particular place, for a particular reason.

<sup>7</sup> Though Christians commonly speak of “inspired writers,” technically it is not the writers but the writings that are inspired.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 32.

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28; Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2.

<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, “Encountering Present-Day Views of Scripture,” *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 61. “When you encounter a present-day view of Holy Scripture, you encounter more than a view of Scripture. . . . Every view of Scripture, in particular, proves on analysis to be bound up with an overall view of God and man.”

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 93.

When we look at Scripture itself, we see that it is filled with claims to pervasive truthfulness.<sup>12</sup> Every word it contains is described as flawless,<sup>13</sup> eternal,<sup>14</sup> unbreakable,<sup>15</sup> boundless in perfection,<sup>16</sup> and completely reliable.<sup>17</sup> As Jesus concisely stated, “[God’s] word is truth.”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, Scripture’s truthfulness is so comprehensively assumed that entire arguments can hinge on appeals to a single word,<sup>19</sup> the number of a noun,<sup>20</sup> even the tense of a verb.<sup>21</sup> When properly interpreted, the Bible will never mislead you. What it says, God says.<sup>22</sup>

## The Bible Is Authoritative

God owns the universe he spoke into existence. He rules as king over his creation—and that creation includes you and me. His loving authority, intended for our good, is exercised through his Word. In fact, God has so identified himself with Scripture that to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey him.

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**A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO  
HEARS THE VOICE OF JESUS  
IN SCRIPTURE AND GLADLY  
FOLLOWS HIM.**

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True, the Bible isn’t the only authority in our lives. There are other rightful authorities, such as parents,<sup>23</sup> pastors,<sup>24</sup> and members of the government.<sup>25</sup> None, however, is above God’s Word. The Bible is the highest authority. This means the correctness of every belief, value, opinion, statement, and sermon is decisively settled by the question: What does the Bible say?<sup>26</sup>

Regarding Christ’s own view of the Bible, it’s been observed that “[Jesus] appeals to Scripture, to each part of Scripture, and to each element of Scripture as to an unimpeachable authority.”<sup>27</sup> Kings don’t give advice; they give orders. Obedience to the Word of God, therefore, is not optional. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves,” the Apostle James writes. “Do what it says.”<sup>28</sup>

As J. I. Packer observes, “True Christians are people who acknowledge and live under the word of God. They submit without reserve to [it], believing the teaching, trusting the promises, following the commands. Their eyes are upon the God of the Bible as their Father and the Christ of the Bible as their Savior.”<sup>29</sup> A Christian, in other words, is one who **hears the voice of Jesus in Scripture and gladly follows him.**<sup>30</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Psalm 12:6, 19:7–9, 119:160; Proverbs 30:5–6; John 10:35, 17:17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, John 10:35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Psalm 119:96.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Peter 1:19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, John 17:17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Matthew 22:45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Galatians 3:16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Matthew 22:32.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority Volume IV: God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Three* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 177. “Say what one will about [the Bible]; the fundamental issue remains its truthfulness.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Ephesians 6:1–2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–14.

<sup>26</sup> Note how the Christians from Berea in Acts 17:11 are commended for examining spiritual teaching in light of Scripture.

<sup>27</sup> Paul King Jewett, *Emil Brunner’s Concept of Revelation* (London: Clarke, 1954), 168.

<sup>28</sup> *The Holy Bible*, James 1:22. See also 1 John 2:4–5.

<sup>29</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 116.

<sup>30</sup> *The Holy Bible*, John 10:27. As John Stott writes, “We can recognize God’s Word because God’s people listen to it, and we can recognize God’s people because they listen to God’s Word.” John Stott, *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 161.

J. C. Ryle remarked, “Happy is the man who possesses a Bible! Happier still is he who reads it! Happiest of all is he who not only reads it but obeys it.”<sup>31</sup> As countercultural and counterintuitive as it may feel, [Christians believe](#) submission to God’s Word is where true life and freedom are found.

## The Bible Is Clear

The Bible is an ancient document. It can feel foreign, and some parts are certainly confusing.<sup>32</sup> However, as the psalmist states, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”<sup>33</sup> God even commands parents to teach the Bible to their children.<sup>34</sup>

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**OFTEN IT’S NOT THAT THE BIBLE  
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UNRECEPTIVE.**

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I’ve heard it said that Scripture is shallow enough for a child to wade, but deep enough for an elephant to swim. I think that’s profoundly right. The Bible is “written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes Scripture is difficult to understand because it’s talking about complicated things. At these times, [extended, prayerful study](#) may be necessary. Often, however, it’s hard to grasp because we simply don’t like what it says. As Mark Twain famously quipped, “It ain’t those parts of the Bible I can’t understand that bother me; it’s the parts I do understand.” Often it’s not that the Bible is unclear but that we’re unreceptive.

## The Bible Is Sufficient

Scripture contains all the words from God that we need in order to [know him truly](#), trust him fully, obey him perfectly, and enjoy him abundantly. Peter says God has given us “everything we need for a godly life” through the knowledge available in the Scriptures.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Paul says, the Bible is so complete that through it we can be “thoroughly equipped for every good work”—“thoroughly” and “every,” not “partly” and “most.”<sup>37</sup> It doesn’t get more comprehensive than that.

While the Bible may not tell us everything we want to know, it does tell us everything we need to know. Its truth isn’t exhaustive but it’s enough.<sup>38</sup> It contains all we need to know in order to be saved<sup>39</sup> and to obey God in faith<sup>40</sup>—no wonder such severe warnings accompany adding to or removing any of its words.<sup>41</sup>

“The case can be made that every corruption of biblical Christianity begins by compromising the principle of sufficiency,” one author observed. “Every deviation from Christianity established by Christ and the apostles begins by adding to the Bible or by taking away from it. Every deviation is the Bible plus or minus something.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>31</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1970), 97.

<sup>32</sup> In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter even confesses that some things in Paul’s letters are “hard to understand.”

<sup>33</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Psalm 119:130.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Deuteronomy 6:6–7.

<sup>35</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108.

<sup>36</sup> *The Holy Bible*, 2 Peter 1:3, emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 25:2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:18, 21; 1 Peter 1:23.

<sup>40</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3–4, 19–21.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *The Holy Bible*, Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5–6.

<sup>42</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 38.

## The Bible Is Powerful

Since [the Bible's ultimate author is God](#), it is a book of unparalleled power. Its words are strong enough to melt hearts<sup>43</sup> and change lives.<sup>44</sup> The book of Hebrews states, "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."<sup>45</sup>

Saying the Bible is powerful is another way of saying it's effective. The [Holy Spirit](#) uses it to accomplish his plans.<sup>46</sup> The book is an instrument of action in God's all-powerful hand. "Do not put yourself at odds with the Word of God," Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli once remarked. "One can perhaps dam it up for awhile, but it is impossible to stop it."<sup>47</sup>

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**GOD INTENDS HIS WORD NOT  
SIMPLY TO ENGAGE OUR MINDS,  
BUT TO CHANGE OUR HEARTS.**

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It is crucial to realize that God intends his Word not simply to engage our minds, but to change our hearts. As one person put it, "The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life."<sup>48</sup>

## The Bible Is Christ-Centered

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible is not simply a collection of ethical principles, moral platitudes, or abstract life lessons. It is a thrilling story.

Ultimately, that story is not about you and me. It's about Jesus. In Luke 24, the resurrected Savior appears to two followers on the road to Emmaus. Luke recounts what happened:

"[Jesus] said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."<sup>49</sup>

Later, after appearing to his eleven disciples, Jesus says to them: "'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."<sup>50</sup>

It wasn't just after [his resurrection](#) that Jesus spoke this way, however. During his earthly ministry he explained to the "Bible experts" of the day his central place in the great story: "'You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. . . . If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.'"<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Jeremiah 23:29.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, John 17:17. See also 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 and Romans 1:16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Isaiah 55:10–11.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, eds., *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2000), 218.

<sup>48</sup> Howard D. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living By the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, rev. ed., (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 290.

<sup>49</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Luke 24:25–27.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Luke 24:44–45.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, John 5:39–40, 46.

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**THE PLOTLINE OF SCRIPTURE  
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It's been rightly noted that the Old Testament is "Jesus Christ concealed" and the New Testament is "Jesus Christ revealed." From beginning to end—Genesis to Revelation—the plotline of Scripture anticipates, spotlights, and finds its ultimate resolution in God's redeeming Son.<sup>52</sup> And perhaps the most stunning thing about this story is that the central character loves us back.

## The Bible Is Precious

The Bible is the most valuable treasure in the universe. It's our food,<sup>53</sup> our life,<sup>54</sup> our comfort,<sup>55</sup> our strength,<sup>56</sup> our guidance,<sup>57</sup> our desire,<sup>58</sup> our hope,<sup>59</sup> our love,<sup>60</sup> our joy,<sup>61</sup> and our treasure.<sup>62</sup>

Did you know that even [the books](#) of Leviticus and Chronicles and Obadiah were written to encourage you? That's what the Bible says, anyway: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."<sup>63</sup> Everything. What a sweeping word! Paul is going so far as to claim the entirety of the Old Testament was written for you—to instruct you, to encourage you, to help you endure, and to flood your heart with hope.<sup>64</sup>

And while we must avoid "bibliolatry"—treasuring Scripture more than its Author—it's striking to note how inseparably connected God's Word is with God himself.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, to abandon it is to abandon him.<sup>66</sup> Until Jesus returns and our faith becomes sight, we must live in the "age of the ear."<sup>67</sup> "For now," Augustine said, "treat the Scripture of God as the face of God. Melt in its presence."<sup>68</sup> As one great preacher remarked, "To me the Bible is not God, but it is God's voice, and I do not hear it without awe."<sup>69</sup>

The Bible is a bottomless treasure chest of beauty and wonder. It claims to be inspired, true, authoritative, clear, sufficient, powerful, Christ-centered, and precious. May God help us to treat it as such.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., John 1:45, 8:56, 12:16; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Peter 1:10–12 (cf. Luke 10:24); Acts 13:27, 13:29, 28:23.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Jeremiah 15:16.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Deuteronomy 32:46–47.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:50, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:28.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:105.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:20, 40, 131.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:43, 74, 81, 114, 137; 130:5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:97, 127, 140, 159, 167.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Jeremiah 15:16; Psalm 1:1–2; Psalm 119:14, 16, 47–48; John 15:11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Psalm 119:72.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Romans 15:4.

<sup>64</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 9:10; 10:6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>65</sup> The psalmist speaks of both praising (Psalm 56:4) and

lifting up his hands toward God's Word (Psalm 119:48).

<sup>66</sup> Compare 2 Chronicles 12:1 and 12:5. See also 2 Chronicles 20:20 rev. ed., (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 290.

<sup>67</sup> I first heard this distinction between the "age of the ear" (this present age) and the "age of the eye" (the age to come) from Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and founder of 9Marks (<https://www.9marks.org/>).

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>69</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Word a Sword," May 17, 1887, <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2010.htm>, accessed July 3, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Photo Credit: [Priscilla Du Preez](#) | [Unsplash](#)