

What is the Bible?

What do we believe (confess) about the Bible?

Baptist Faith and Message 2000

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

What is the Bible?¹

The Bible is a collection of writings that Christians consider uniquely inspired and authoritative. - Robert Plummer

The Bible is one book, and a collection of 66 smaller books (39 OT, 27 NT).

The Bible is broken up into two larger sections: The Old Testament and The New Testament. The word *testament* comes from the latin word *testament*, meaning “covenant” or “agreement”.

- 39 Old Testament books, mainly concerned with the covenant made with Moses and Israel.
- 27 New Testament books, mainly concerned with the New Covenant made with Jesus and the Church.
 - Note: Since this is how the Bible is laid out, the relationship between the two testaments is of the upmost importance.

We will answer this question over the next few weeks: The Bible is...

- God's Revealed Word
- God's Inspired Word
- God's Authoritative Word
- God's Innerant Word
- God's Infallible Word
- God's Preserved Word

¹ This section is based on the first chapter of Robert Plummer's book *40 Questions on Interpreting the Bible*

God's Revealed Word²

The Bible itself is evidence of one its main claims - that is, that the God who made the heavens, earth, and sea, and everything in them is a communicator who delights to reveal himself to wayward humans. - Robert Plummer

Revelation is “the disclosure or communication of knowledge, instructions, etc., by divine or supernatural means” (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

In theology Revelation takes on a more specific meaning: *making known previously hidden truths, especially regarding the nature of God and his eternal plan.* (Stephen Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, p. 173)

God must reveal Himself. *In God's kindness* He has revealed himself in two different ways: General and Special Revelation

First let's answer the question of *why* God has to reveal Himself

Why the need for revelation?

God is infinite and we are finite.

God is the infinite Creator, and we are his finite creatures. By infinite we mean that God is unlimited. Scripture points to this reality, specifically mentioning his power and understanding: “Our Lord is great, vast in power; his understanding is infinite” (Ps 147:5). Isaiah says, “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding” (Isa 40:28). This infinite God is great beyond comparison. He alone is “the High and Exalted One” (57:15), and there is no one like him. Compared to this great, infinite God, we are very limited. We would never learn knowledge of God or know him apart from his taking the initiative to communicate who he is to us. Thankfully, our infinite God generously reveals himself to us, his weak, finite creatures.³

God is Holy and we are sinful.

In addition to being limited by finitude, we humans are sinful...Limited by our finiteness and blinded by our sin, we would never succeed in knowing God or truth about him. Apart from God's revelation, all human beings have misconceptions of him. But, amazingly, he graciously makes himself known to Adam and Eve and to every human

² From *Christian Theology* by Christopher Morgan

³ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 44.

being since. Although we are lost and have distorted knowledge of him, God in grace reveals himself. Revelation is therefore gracious.⁴

General Revelation

General Revelation: *God's self-disclosure to all people at all times and places, showing who he is and making all people accountable.* (Morgan, 43)

3 main forms of General Revelation:

1. **Creation** (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-20)
2. **Humanity** (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Rom. 1:32; 2:12-16)
3. **Providence** (Acts 14:14-18; 17: 22-29)

General Revelation is enough to give knowledge of God's existence, but it isn't enough to save. We need specific knowledge for that. We need special revelation.

Special Revelation

Special Revelation: God's self-disclosure to particular people at specific times and places, enabling them to enter into a redemptive relationship with him. (Morgan, 43)

Hebrews 1:1–2 (CSB) Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways.² In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.

- Two things we can see in this text:
 - *God's revelation is unified:* God reveals himself in the Old and New Testaments. He is the author of biblical revelation. He is the revealer, the speaking God. Old and New Testament revelation is unified because it is all God's speech.
 - Matthew 5:17–18 (CSB) ¹⁷“Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.
 - Jesus does not abolish but *fulfills* the Law and Prophets (OT revelation)
 - The permanence of the Law and the Prophets
 - All of the OT will be accomplished
 - *God's revelation is progressive:* He gradually reveals himself to his people over time.

Means of Special Revelation:

- Direct Acts/Speech/Theophanies
- Dreams and Visions
- Christ's Incarnation
- Scripture

⁴ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 44.

Incarnation

The Incarnation of the Son of God is God's fullest revelation to date.

Hebrews 1:1–2 (CSB) Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ² In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.

The invisible God makes Himself visible in the incarnation.

John 1:18 (CSB) No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him.

Other Relevant Texts:

Colossians 1:15 (CSB)

Hebrews 1:3 (CSB)

John 14:8–9 (CSB)

How can we know the greatest revelation of God in the incarnation? Through Scripture.

Knowing God Through Scripture

...the Scriptures are not of the same category as the revelation of God's Son. The Scriptures serve to point to the Son, not to themselves (John 5:36–40). On the other hand, the revelation of God's Son can be authoritatively known today only through the Bible. Thus, while the writer of Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the climax of God's revelatory activity (Heb. 1:1–3), he then proceeds to admonish his readers to "pay much closer attention to what we have heard" (Heb. 2:1)—that is, to the apostolic witness concerning this Son of God. This witness is captured in the pages of Scripture. Without Scripture, Jesus could not be truly known

- John MacArthur (*Essential Doctrine* p. 54)

An indispensable form of special revelation is Holy Scripture. It is the source of our knowledge of the other forms of revelation, records the history of special revelation, and—most importantly—tells us of Jesus's love, life, death, resurrection, and return.

- Christopher Morgan

The Purpose of Scripture (Revelation)

The purpose of the Bible... is "to make [a person] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). The Bible is not an end in itself. As Jesus said to the religious experts in his day, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). So, under divine superintendence, the goal of the Bible is to bring its readers to

receive the forgiveness of God in Christ and thus to possession of eternal life in relationship with the triune God (John 17:3).⁵

Under the overarching purpose of revealing God and bringing people into a saving relationship with him through Jesus Christ, there are a number of related functions of the Bible, including the following:

Conviction of Sin. The Holy Spirit applies God's Word to the human heart, convicting people of having failed to meet God's holy standard and convincing them of their just condemnation and need for a Savior (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:22–25; Heb. 4:12–13).

Correction and Instruction. The Bible corrects and instructs God's people, teaching them who God is, who they are, and what God expects of them. Both through a believer's individual study and through the church's gifted teachers, God edifies and corrects his people (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 119:98–99; Matt. 7:24–27; 1 Cor. 10:11; Eph. 4:11–12; 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:1–4).

Spiritual Fruitfulness. As the Word of God takes deep root in true believers, it produces a harvest of righteousness—a genuine manifestation of love for God and love for others (Mark 4:1–20; James 1:22–25).

Perseverance. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers hold fast to the saving message of the Scriptures through the trials and temptations of life. Through this perseverance, they gain increasing confidence in God's promise to keep them until the end (John 10:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 3:1–5; Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:13; 1 John 2:14).

Joy and Delight. To those who know God, the Bible is a source of unending joy and delight. As Psalm 19:9–10 attests, "The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."

Ultimate Authority in Doctrine and Deed. The Bible is the ultimate authority for the Christian in terms of behavior and belief (Luke 10:26; 24:44–45; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:1–4; 2 Peter 3:16). The correctness of all preaching, creeds, doctrines, or opinions is decisively settled by this question: What does the Bible say? As John Stott notes, "Scripture is the royal scepter by which King Jesus governs his church."⁶

⁵ Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 18.

⁶ Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 19–20.

Things to Remember:

- God doesn't owe us anything, but he graciously revealed Himself so that we could know what He is like, and how to be right with Him.
- God makes the first move in a relationship.
- God has revealed himself in many ways, leaving none with an excuse.

How did God *reveal* Himself in Scripture? The answer to this is the doctrine of **Inspiration**.

Inspiration

Inspiration is the translation of theopneustos in 2 Tim. 3:16, which means - "God-breathed."

- All Scripture is *inspired* by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness **2 Timothy 3:16 (CSB)**
- All Scripture is *breathed out* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness **2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)**

Dr. Stephen Wellum points out that the word is used "to refer to God's mighty action of "breathing out" the text (Scripture) so that the human author's text is God's word."⁷

Dr. Wellum defines **inspiration** as:

"the extraordinary or supernatural work of the triune God in and through the Holy Spirit on the human authors of Scripture so that their freely composed writings are what God intended them to write in order to communicate his truth, and as such, they are completely authoritative and trustworthy."⁸

5 Theories of Inspiration:

1. Intuition Theory: Inspiration is a matter of insight exercised by religious geniuses.
2. Illumination Theory: The Holy Spirit influences the Scripture writers by heightening their normal powers.
3. Dynamic Theory: This view asserts that God gave definite, specific impressions or concepts to the biblical authors but that allowed the writers to communicate those concepts in their own words.
4. Dictation Theory: This view holds that God dictated the exact words to the human authors. Like court stenographers, the authors of Scripture exercised no human volition in the composition of their writings.
5. Verbal Plenary Theory: This view holds that there is a dual authorship of Scripture. While the authors of the Bible wrote as thinking, feeling human beings, God so

⁷ *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept* by Stephen Wellum. p.290

⁸ Ibid. 290

mysteriously superintended the process that every word written was also the exact word he wanted to be written - free from all error.

MacArthur on the Verbal-Plenary View: This view contends that God inspired every word recorded by the human writers in each of the sixty-six books of the Bible in their original form. As such, any text of Scripture is at once the true, authoritative Word of God and the intended word of the biblical writer. No distinction can be made in any text between the divine and human components.

This view affirms that both the general concepts and the specific expressions are divinely authoritative and inerrant, that the process of inspiration preserved both God's ultimate agency in the writing of Scripture and the human writers' personal involvement. Such inspiration is described as verbal (Lat. *verbum*, "word") in that the influence of the Holy Spirit extends to the very choice of words and grammar. It is also described as plenary (Lat. *plenus*, "full") in that it is characteristic of every part and kind of literature found in the Bible—to historical works like Genesis just as much as to doctrinal treatises like Romans.⁹

Zechariah 7:12 (CSB)

¹² They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the Lord of Armies had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. Therefore intense anger came from the Lord of Armies.

2 Peter 1:20–21 (CSB) Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

When and Who

"the Bible was written by approximately 40 men of diverse backgrounds over the course of 1500 years" - Got Questions

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy = Moses - 1400 BC

Joshua = Joshua - 1350 BC

Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel = Samuel/Nathan/Gad - 1000 - 900 BC

1 Kings, 2 Kings = Jeremiah - 600 BC

1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah = Ezra - 450 BC

Esther = Mordecai - 400 BC

Job = Moses - 1400 BC

Psalms = several different authors, mostly David - 1000 - 400 BC

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon = Solomon - 900 BC

Isaiah = Isaiah - 700 BC

⁹ John MacArthur, ed., *Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 56–57.

Jeremiah, Lamentations = Jeremiah - 600 BC
 Ezekiel = Ezekiel - 550 BC
 Daniel = Daniel - 550 BC
 Hosea = Hosea - 750 BC
 Joel = Joel - 850 BC
 Amos = Amos - 750 BC
 Obadiah = Obadiah - 600 BC
 Jonah = Jonah - 700 BC
 Micah = Micah - 700 BC
 Nahum = Nahum - 650 BC
 Habakkuk = Habakkuk - 600 BC
 Zephaniah = Zephaniah - 650 BC
 Haggai = Haggai - 520 BC
 Zechariah = Zechariah - 500 BC
 Malachi = Malachi - 430 BC
 Matthew = Matthew - AD 55
 Mark = John Mark - AD 50
 Luke = Luke - AD 60
 John = John - AD 90
 Acts = Luke - AD 65
 Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon = Paul - AD 50-70
 Hebrews = unknown, mostly likely Paul, Luke, Barnabas, or Apollos - AD 65
 James = James - AD 45
 1 Peter, 2 Peter = Peter - AD 60
 1 John, 2 John, 3 John = John - AD 90
 Jude = Jude - AD 60
 Revelation = John - AD 90

Things to Know/Remember:

- We know that the human authors couldn't *get in the way* of what God wanted to communicate.
- We know that when the human authors speak, God is speaking.
- Not only does God graciously reveal Himself to fallen humanity, but He allows fallen humans to be his agents of revelation in Scripture.

How might this comfort you in your reading of the Bible?

Authority

Baptist Faith and Message 2000

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

The Bible claims to be *inspired revelation* from God and therefore claims to be in line with his nature and character. There are a few doctrines that follow from this claim.

Authority
Inerrancy
Infallibility
Clarity
Preservation

Biblical Authority

Authority may be defined as the “power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command or give a final decision.”¹⁰

When we speak of the Bible’s authority, we refer to its property as the Word of God to obligate its readers or hearers to entire submission. The Bible has authority as the rule for faith (what man is to believe) and behavior (what man is to do). Where the Bible teaches a doctrine or reports an event, it binds our consciences to hold it for truth. When it commands an attitude, affection, or action, it binds our consciences to obey.¹¹

Authority answers the question: How do I come to know the Bible is the Word of God?

¹⁰ John MacArthur, ed., *Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 68.

¹¹ Beeke, Joel, and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1 : Revelation and God*, Crossway, 2019.

How does this play out in society?

- Abortion is wrong because the Bible teaches that human life begins at conception, and any wrongful taking of human life is murder. *Well I don't accept the Bible as an authority!*
- Marriage is between one woman and one man because the Bible says so. *The Bible is wrong, and has no place in this conversation.*
- A woman can be a pastor.
- Humans are no more important than pigs or mice because they are all evolved mammals.
- Religion should have no say in the affairs of the government.

There are three ways people have come to answer that question¹²

1. Rational Evidences - Those who appeal to rational evidences believe the trustworthiness of the Bible must be supported by rationalistic or scientific evidences. Proponents believe that it is their responsibility to prove (or disprove) that the historical narratives of Scripture are consistent with the clear and self-evident dictates of human reason and scientific method.
 1. If we were not to be able to find archaeological or scientific proofs of specific parts of Scripture, would that mean its untrue?
 2. Could you see how this would put everything on the docket until proven true?
 3. Does this mean that proofs are useless?
2. Church Tradition - “the declarations made by church councils, historical theologians, and other ecclesiastical bodies. The authority of all or some of these sources are claimed as necessary for justifying belief in the contents of Scripture.
 1. Can the Church err?
 2. Which Church?
 3. *The Bible is true because we said its true and we said its true because we think it is.*
3. Personal Intuition: Whenever a text of Scripture evokes a desired experience or feeling, it is believed as true and authoritative. Whenever a text creates discomfort or offense, it is viewed with skepticism or denial
 1. Can my feelings be wrong?
 2. Whose feelings?

So where do we turn?

If one can prove that the Bible is God's *inspired* Word, then the next obvious conclusion is that it is authoritative. For, if the God of the universe is its author (remember dual-authorship) then it carries his authority.

Step 1: Is there a God?

¹² John MacArthur, ed., *Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 69.

- Many proofs come into play here: the impossibility of the contrary, theistic arguments, evidences, etc.
- Example of the Impossibility of the contrary: “our overall defense of Scripture is that without the entire “package” (i.e., specific view of God, self, and the world and the metaphysic, epistemology, and ethic it assumes), we could not account for what we must assume to reason at all. In other words, without the entire worldview, the preconditions for knowledge, truth, logic, morality, human dignity, and so on, would be unwarranted.”¹³
- In other words: only the world the Bible describes could account for everything we know and see. All other proofs reaffirm and uphold this truth.

Step 2: Has He spoken in the Bible?

Scripture claims to be the Word of God, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Not once does the Bible work from any other understanding.

- *Thus saith the Lord* (400 times). Or the book assumes a place of presenting authoritative teaching on history or theology.
- *Have you not read the Scripture?*: Jesus constantly pointed back to the OT as God’s Word.
- Some Relevant Texts:
 - John 1:1-4
 - John 6:63
 - Acts 4:8-32
 - 2 Tim. 3:16-17
 - Heb. 1:1-2
 - 2 Pet. 3:16

Scripture makes good on its factual claims. Meaning it does not make mistakes. More on this in our lesson in Infallibility and Inerrancy.

The Bible almost assumes you will want to know about Israel’s God, and His Son. And that you will recognize that it’s a book written by God when **illuminated**.

- ***This is the greatest proof of the divine origin of Scripture.***
 - This also proves why some don’t see the same thing.
 - Joel Beeke says that “Faith in the Holy Scriptures arises from the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, by which God enables sinners to perceive the divine qualities of the Word of God, which is to be received as such.”¹⁴
 - Biblical Examples:
 - *Luke 24:31–32 (ESV)* ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our

¹³ Wellum, Stephen J.. *Systematic Theology, Volume One : From Canon to Concept*, B&H Publishing Group, 2024.

¹⁴ Beeke, Joel, and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1 : Revelation and God*, Crossway, 2019.

hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

- *1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 (ESV)* ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.
- *Macarthur on the Testimony of the Spirit:* The authority of Scripture is recognized by the believer as a result of the Spirit's internal testimony. This ministry of the Spirit is not the communication of new revelation, as if the Spirit uses Scripture as a springboard to reveal new knowledge from God not already present in the text. Nor does this ministry of the Spirit remove the need for study by mystically granting to the believer instant absolute comprehension of the biblical text. Rather, the Spirit works alongside the text of Scripture to confirm its divine nature, authority, necessity, and truthfulness, giving the believer a certainty that it is the Word of God...In light of this affirming ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is important to note that the believer himself does not grant authority to the Bible. Such authority is not his to bestow.¹⁵
- This is all that is required. Everything else is a bonus!
- For those whose eyes are opened, the Bible's authority is no blind leap of faith, but as plain a fact to them as knowing that the sun shines. For this reason, philosophical and evidential arguments are not necessary for faith (though they can be helpful in answering enemies of the faith), for the least educated person illuminated by the Spirit can see the glory and authority of God in his Word.¹⁶

Step 3: If yes, then the Bible is authoritative.

SO WHAT!?

- The Bible is God speaking to us.
 - We don't need to seek a word from God. If he gives one through his means then we should be thankful. But it's not necessary.
- The Bible is judge over us, not the other way around.
 - We submit to the Word as the Word of God our creator.
 - We don't get to pick and choose which parts of the Bible we want to obey.
- The Bible shows us how to love and obey God.
- The Bible is the only objective source of truth available to the Church for its beliefs and practices.
 - How do we know how to run the church? How do we know about baptism and worship?

¹⁵ *Essential Christian Doctrine : A Handbook on Biblical Truth*, edited by John MacArthur, Crossway, 2021.

¹⁶ Beeke, Joel, and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1 : Revelation and God*, Crossway, 2019.

What are some examples of christian traditions who have strayed from the authority of Scripture?

What are some ways that the Bible's authority can play out in your daily life?

What about your prayer life?

Doxology

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 24–25 (ESV)

Inerrancy

Robert Plummer's definitions of Inerrancy: "the Bible is completely truthful in all things that the biblical authors assert—whether in geographic, chronological, or theological details. Advocates of inerrancy affirm a verbal plenary view of inspiration. That is, although the human authors of Scripture were thinking composers, God so superintended the writing process such that every word written was according to his will. The words were divinely guarded from all error"¹⁷

3 Biblical Texts speaking on the issue:

1. Numbers 23:19 God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?
 - If God is completely truthful and the Bible is God's communication to humanity (Heb. 1:1–3), then it follows that the Bible, as God's Word, is completely truthful.¹⁸
2. 2 Peter 1:21: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."
 - Again, this verse reminds us that each word written in the Bible is the exact word God intended to be written.
 - **EVERY WORD IS INERRANT, NOT JUST THE RED LETTERS:** "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." "Jesus never said anything about abortion or capital punishment."
3. John 10:35: "The Scripture cannot be broken."

¹⁷ Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 38.

¹⁸Ibid, 39.

- In his teachings and debates, Jesus repeatedly appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures, with the clear assumption that those texts were completely true in all they reported. Jesus referenced many persons and incidents of the Old Testament, assuming the factuality of all details. While Jesus frequently criticized distorted understandings of the Bible, he never questioned the veracity of the Scriptures themselves. Like Jesus (as recorded in the Gospels), all the New Testament authors are unified in their citation of the Old Testament as a historically accurate work

Christopher Morgan writes: Inerrancy relates to hermeneutics (approach to interpretation). A commitment to inerrancy involves not only appreciating the Bible's diversity but also recognizing its unity and doctrinal consistency. This also leads us to the hermeneutical analogy (rule) of faith, whereby we compare Scripture with Scripture and interpret it in harmony with its overall message.¹⁹

Robert Plummer's Clarifications on Inerrancy:

1. *Inerrancy applies only to the autographs (original copies of Scripture).* No one denies that there are some copying errors in every Hebrew and Greek manuscript of the Bible (particularly with numbers, for example). Yet, with the vast number of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts and their careful transmission, we are able to reconstruct the original wording of the Old and New Testament with extreme accuracy. For more detail on manuscript accuracy, see question 5 ("Were the ancient manuscripts of the Bible transmitted accurately?").

2. *Inerrancy respects the authorial intent of the passage and the literary conventions under which the author wrote.* If the author intended an assertion literally, we should understand it so. If the passage is figurative, likewise, we should interpret it accordingly. We must respect the level of precision intended, as well as the writing conventions of that day. For example, in Mark 1:2–3, Mark cites three different Old

¹⁹ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 78.

Testament texts (Exod. 23:30; Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1) with the introductory phrase, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet.” Assuming our modern conventions of citation, this is an error because part of the quotation is from Exodus and Malachi. But, as early Jews sometimes cited only one prophetic spokesman when quoting amalgamated texts, we should respect the literary conventions of Mark’s day.

3. As another example we can consider the order of events in the Synoptic Gospels. It is clear that the Gospel authors are not intending to give a strict chronological account of Jesus’ ministry. The material is frequently arranged topically. Thus, it should not surprise us to find a different order to Jesus’ temptations in Luke 4:1–13 and Matthew 4:1–11. As the temple is a motif in Luke (e.g., Luke 1:9; 18:10; 23:45; 24:53; Acts 2:46; 5:20; 26:21), it appears that Luke has rearranged Jesus’ temptations to place the pinnacle of the temple as the climactic temptation. Or, possibly, as mountains are often of symbolic value in the Gospel of Matthew (5:1; 8:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1; 28:16), Matthew has done the rearranging. Part of faithful interpretation is respecting the individual emphases and purposes of the different authors and faithfully allowing those original emphases to come through in our teaching and preaching.

4. *Inerrancy allows for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.* The words of a speaker, for example, might be summarized or paraphrased rather than given verbatim. As long as the meaning of the speaker is accurately conveyed, this reporting is completely truthful. Also, just as modern writers may choose to leave out certain details or emphasize other points, biblical writers did the same as they reported on the same events from different vantage points. For example, John reports more of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem, while Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on his itinerant Galilean ministry.

5. *Inerrancy allows for phenomenological language (that is, the description of phenomena as they are observed and experienced).* Humans often report events they see from their experiential vantage point rather than providing an objective scientific explanation. Thus, we would no more charge a biblical author with error when speaking

of the sun rising (Ps. 19:6) than we would chastise a modern meteorologist for speaking of the anticipated time of tomorrow's sunrise. Neither the psalmist nor the meteorologist is intending to deny a heliocentric (sun-centered) solar system.

6. *Inerrancy allows the reporting of speech without the endorsement of the truthfulness of that speech (or the implication that everything else said by that person is truthful).* Psalm 14:1 says, "There is no God." Of course, in broader context, the passage reads, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' " Obviously, in reporting the speech of "the fool," the psalmist does not agree with him. Similarly, in quoting from pagan authors in his speech before the Athenians (Acts 17:22–31), Paul (and by extension, Luke, who records the speech) is not intending to endorse the truthfulness of everything written by Epimenides or Aratus (Acts 17:28).

7. *Inerrancy does not mean that the Bible provides definitive or exhaustive information on every topic.* No author in the Bible, for example, attempts a classification of mollusks or lessons in subatomic physics. The Bible tangentially touches on these subjects in asserting that God is the creator of all things, marine or subatomic, but one must not press the Scriptures to say more than they offer. If you want to learn how to bake French pastries, for example, there is no biblical text I can suggest. I can, however, exhort you to do all things diligently for God's glory (Col. 3:17) and not to engage in gluttony (Prov. 23:20). And I would be happy to sample any of the pastries you make.

8. *Inerrancy is not invalidated by colloquial or nonstandard grammar or spelling.* Spelling and grammar vary within various linguistic, cultural, geographical, and economic groups without impinging on the truthfulness of the actual communication. As Wayne Grudem notes, "An uneducated backwoodsman in some rural area may be the most trusted man in the country even though his grammar is poor, because he has earned a reputation for never telling a lie. Similarly, there are a few statements in Scripture (in the original languages) that are ungrammatical (according to current

standards of proper grammar at that time) but still inerrant because they are completely true. The issue is truthfulness of speech.”²⁰

Historically Orthodox Christians have viewed inerrancy as something self-evident. But recently some more liberal (theologically not politically) theologians have questioned inerrancy. They claim the Bible must contain error since its authored by imperfect humans. This is called accommodation.

John MacArthur responds in three ways:

1. It doesn’t *necessarily follow* that since humans authored Scripture (alongside the Holy Spirit) that it *must* contain errors.
2. “the unanimous witness of Scripture affirms its total veracity. It claims repeatedly to be truthful (Pss. 12:6; 18:30; 119:142, 160; John 17:17; 2 Cor. 6:7; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18). God’s commands to leave it unaltered demonstrate that what was written is precisely what he intended it to say (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5–6; Rev. 22:18–19). God takes ownership of this Word in its written form, and he is a God who cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).”
3. “This modern view of accommodation directly casts a shadow on the character of God. To insist that God used inadequate and corrupted means to communicate his knowledge questions not only God’s power but also his wisdom and his love. Moreover, it casts a shadow on the very doctrine of the incarnation itself. If human language always necessarily bears the stain of corruption, then what is to be made of the teachings of the God-man Jesus Christ?”²¹

Inerrancy is under attack all the time. What are some ways you have heard the doctrine attacked?

Plummer’s Recommendations for Dealing with Difficult Texts in the Bible:

1. *Be sure that you are interacting with real texts.* Do not allow another person’s uninformed skepticism to poison your own intellect.
2. *Approach the text in trust, not as a skeptic.* Investigating the truthfulness of Christianity is to be encouraged. Christianity has nothing to fear from the facts. However, there comes a point when one realizes that the Bible is internally consistent and its claims are frequently confirmed by externally verifiable data (that is, by other

²⁰ Ibid, 41–44.

²¹ John MacArthur, ed., *Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 74.

ancient sources, archeology, etc.). Just as in a healthy marriage one trusts his or her spouse and does not live in constant doubt or suspicion, likewise a Christian trusts the biblical text in areas that cannot be confirmed by external criteria. For example, we have no external records confirming the visit of the magi to Herod (Matt. 2:1–12). Yet the jealous, distrustful behavior of Herod the Great in the Gospel of Matthew certainly agrees with extrabiblical accounts of his character (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.6.5).

3. *Pray about a difficult text.* God is a loving Father who cares for his children. Jesus taught,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:7–11)

4. *Keep in mind the “Qualifications of Inerrancy” when dealing with difficult texts (see above).* Don’t demand that ancient writers conform to your expected standards (demanding perfectly parallel, verbatim quotations, for example).

5. *Seek counsel when dealing with difficult texts.* Tell a Christian friend, pastor, or professor about your question. Sometimes the serpent of apparent error is defanged in articulating one’s question. Consult the best evangelical commentaries on the subject.

6. *Be willing to set a text aside for further consideration rather than force harmonization.* Augustine (A.D. 354–430) speaks of his trusting and patient approach to the canonical Scriptures:

I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were

completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the [manuscript] is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.²²

How can inerrancy be seen as a “dividing line” in today’s debates?

How can inerrancy bolster your prayer life?

How can inerrancy encourage you to study more?

What’s the best argument you’ve heard against inerrancy?

Do we need to “prove” every word before we can assert inerrancy?

²² Plummer, 44-45

Transmission/Preservation

- The Old Testament originally was written in Hebrew (with a few Aramaic portions) between 1400 and 430 b.c.
- The New Testament was written in Greek between a.d. 45 and 90.
- The original copies of ancient documents are called the **autographs** (or *autographa*). All autographs of biblical books have been lost or destroyed, though we have thousands of ancient copies.
- The process of comparing and studying these copies to reconstruct the wording of the originals is called **textual criticism**.²³
 - Textual criticism grew during the 16th century in Europe because of the printing press, the enlightenment and the reformation.
 - Since the 18th and 19th century many manuscripts have been found, refining the science of textual criticism.

Speaking of the accuracy of the task Plummer writes, “most scholars, both liberal and conservative, agree that text criticism has served to confirm the reliable transmission of the Old and New Testament manuscripts. A leading biblical scholar, D. A. Carson, notes that the New Testament autographs can be reconstructed with roughly 96–97 percent accuracy. Furthermore, no text in question affects Christian doctrine. That is, all Christian doctrines are firmly established without appealing to debated texts. Most unsolved textual issues have little or no doctrinal significance.”²⁴

Old Testament:

- Dead Sea Scrolls
 - First discovered in 1947
 - Originally compiled by a Jewish sect named the Essenes.
 - They were written from 250 BC-50AD
 - Was left behind during the escape from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD
 - Contains portions of all OT books outside of Esther and Nehemiah.
 - The Old Testament preserved in the Leningrad Codex (a.d. 1008) and Dead Sea Scrolls (250 b.c.–a.d. 50) is fundamentally the same Hebrew base text used for modern English translations today.²⁵

²³ Robert L. Plummer, [*40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*](#), ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 47.

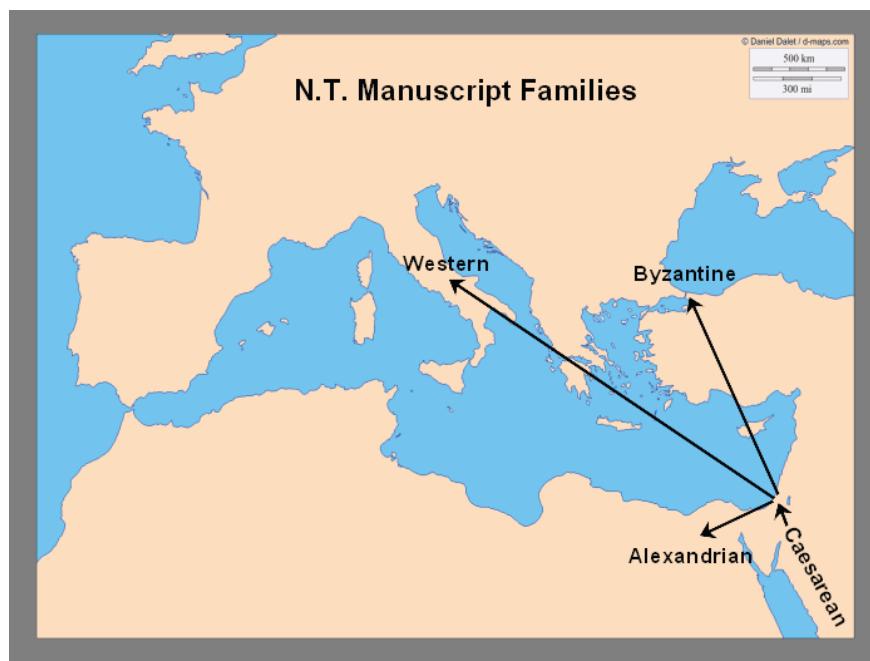
²⁴ Ibid, 48.

²⁵ Ibid, 49.

- In addition to ancient Hebrew texts, we also have ancient copies of the Old Testament translated into several other languages—Greek, Latin, Syriac, etc. Ancient translations of the Old Testament sometimes can help in the deciphering of a difficult Hebrew word or phrase. More importantly, these texts sometimes can serve as helpful witnesses to variant readings in the ancient Hebrew (that is, they were translated from a Hebrew text that varied from the one we currently know). If translators suspect that an early translation may best preserve the original Hebrew wording, they may follow that wording in their English translation or footnote the variant.²⁶

New Testament:

- The New Testament itself points to its being hand copied and circulated (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Pet. 3:15-16)
- Manuscript Families: copies continued to increase and copies were made of copies, certain uniform scribal tendencies came to be embodied in various text families, usually classified according to geographic provenance—Western, Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Caesarean. The Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire was a region that continued to need and produce more Greek copies of the New Testament, so the Byzantine text family was copied the most. Yet most scholars agree that the Byzantine text family usually does not represent the oldest or most reliable reading. *By comparing ancient witnesses within the various text traditions, we can approach with amazing accuracy the wording of the autographs.*²⁷



²⁶ Ibid, 49.

²⁷ Ibid, 50.

- We have nearly six thousand ancient manuscripts or portions of manuscripts of the New Testament. The oldest extant fragment of the New Testament comes from about a.d. 130. *No other ancient text comes even close to having this amount of early textual evidence.*



Unintentional Errors

According to one reckoning, 95 percent of textual variants are accidental—the unintentional variations introduced by tired or incompetent scribes. Such variants include the following:

1. *Errors of Sight.* Scribes sometimes copied texts by looking back and forth to the originals. By this method, they inevitably made a number of errors of sight. For example, they confused letters that looked similar in appearance, divided words wrongly (the oldest Greek manuscripts of the Bible have no spaces between words), repeated words or sections (that is, copied the same thing twice), accidentally skipped letters, words, or sections, or changed the order of letters in a word or words in a sentence.
2. *Errors of Hearing.* When scribes copied manuscripts through dictation (that is, scribes wrote as a manuscript was being read), errors of hearing were made. For example, vowels, diphthongs, or other sounds were misheard. (We make similar mistakes in English, for example, writing “night” when someone says “knight.”)
3. *Errors of Writing.* Sometimes scribes introduced errors into texts simply by writing the wrong thing. For example, a scribe might accidentally add an additional letter to the end of a word, resulting in a different meaning.

4. *Errors of Judgment.* Sometimes scribes exercised poor judgment through incorporating marginal glosses (ancient footnotes) into the body of the text or similar unintentional corrupting influences.

Intentional Errors

The remaining 5 percent of textual variants resulted from intentional activity on the part of scribes. Such changes included:

1. *Revising Grammar and Spelling.* In an attempt to standardize grammar or spelling, scribes sometimes corrected what they perceived as orthographic or grammatical errors in the text they were copying.

2. *Harmonizing Similar Passages.* Scribes had a tendency to harmonize parallel passages and introduce uniformity to stylized expressions. For example, details from the same incident in multiple Gospels might be included when copying any one Gospel. As a professor of intermediate Greek, I have found it interesting that students sometimes unintentionally insert *Lord* or *Christ* when translating a passage with the name *Jesus*. Students, of course, are not intending to promote a higher Christology; they are simply conforming their speech to a stylized reference to the Savior. Ancient scribes behaved in a similar way.

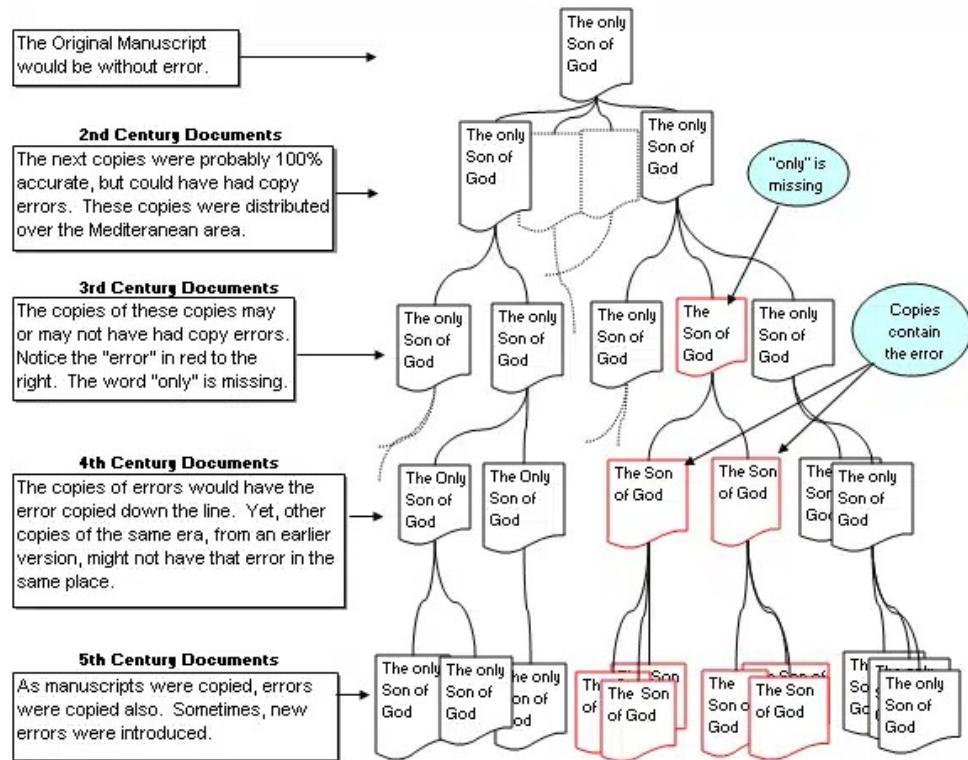
3. *Eliminating Apparent Discrepancies and Difficulties.* Scribes sometimes fix what they perceived as a problem in the text. For example, in Mark 1:2–3, some manuscripts cite the amalgamated text as from “the prophets” rather than “Isaiah,” as Mark wrote. See question 4 (“Does the Bible contain error?”) for a further discussion of this text and the issue of discrepancies.

4. *Conflating the Text.* Sometimes when a scribe knew of variant readings in the manuscript base from which he was copying, he would include both variants within his copy, conflating them together.

5. *Adapting Different Liturgical Traditions.* In a few isolated places, it is possible that church liturgy (that is, stylized prayers or praises) influenced some textual additions or wording changes (for example, Matthew 6:13, “For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen”).

6. *Making Theological or Doctrinal Changes.* Sometimes scribes made theological or doctrinal changes—either omitting something they saw as wrong or making clarifying additions. For example, in Matthew 24:36, some manuscripts omit the reference to the Son’s ignorance of the day of his return—a passage that is obviously difficult to understand.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid, 52–53.



Clarity

London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): Some things in Scripture are clearer than others, and some people understand the teachings more clearly than others.¹² However, the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures.¹³

¹² 2 Peter 3:16.

¹³ Psalm 19:7; Psalm 119:130.

Protestantism and Clarity

This issue is a dividing line for protestantism and catholicism. Mark Thompson writes

“At the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture stood against both the Catholic claim that the authorized interpretation of the church was necessary in order for the Bible to be understood properly, but also the claim of the radicals that we stand in need of a new voice from God that is more direct and clearer than what we have in Scripture.”

The idea of the clarity of Scripture was a radical idea. Beeke points out that “In a time of widespread illiteracy, and before the invention of the moveable-type printing press (c. 1439), the Scriptures were in the hands of comparatively few members of the pre-reformation church.”

He also points that the knowledge of the original languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) were lost and the only translations available were in latin. A language that the average person in the pew would not understand. In fact the term “hocus hocus” comes from a misunderstanding of the words “hoc eat corpus meum” for “this is my body” as recited in the Roman Catholic Mass. The listeners were left out. Only the educated and the clergy really understood latin. This was by design.

The state of preaching was pitiful in their day. They would preach well known texts over and over. And if they weren’t doing that they would allegorize texts to teach what they wanted. It was time of spiritual poverty. Beeke goes on:

“when translations of the Bible into the vernacular were made and began to circulate, the authorities of church and state took violent measures to suppress them. It was argued that putting the Bible in the hands of the unlearned laity would do great harm to all concerned. Only the most learned of men, and then only with the approval of the authorities, could read and interpret the Scriptures profitably. Much to the dismay of the pope and his adherents, the Reformers brought the whole Bible back into the church, translated it into the language of the people, and made it the sum and substance of their preaching, and central

in public worship. In doing so, they were acting on their conviction that God's Word is for all of God's people."²⁹

This does not mean that this doctrine was invented by the Reformers. It was a view held by many of these early church Fathers.

So what is it?

The doctrine of clarity is also known as *perspicuity*, which is derived from a latin word meaning *to see through* .

It simply means that “not in everything in Scripture is easy to understand, but what we must understand in order to be saved is clear.” (Burk Parsons)

The basic themes of law and gospel, while profound in depth, are simple and clear enough for children to learn, understand, and personally appropriate. The Bible has been compared to a river deep enough for an elephant to swim and shallow enough at its shores for a lamb to safely wade. - Joel Beeke

Some, such as John Macarthur, add a wrinkle to the definition. It can be seen in the ministry of *Got Questions*. They write that “the doctrine of perspicuity means that the central message of the Bible is clear and understandable *and that the Bible itself can be properly interpreted in a normal, literal sense.*”

Even if that is the case that might not be the historic meaning of the doctrine, as it adds to the definition

What isn't it?

It doesn't mean that everything is equally clear. Or that we will easily understand all things.

2 Peter 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

²⁹ Beeke, Joel, and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1 : Revelation and God*, Crossway, 2019.

Note: This next section comes from Wayne Grudem's chapter on the doctrine, and I encourage you to get that book and read it as it's a great resource for every believer.

Old Testament Case

Some texts seem to imply that the Bible can be understood by the simple. There are more than these below.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (ESV)

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

- It must be understandable since it's to be taught to children.

Psalm 19:7 (ESV)

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
 reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
 making wise the simple;

Psalm 119:130 (ESV)

¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light;
 it imparts understanding to the simple.

New Testament Case

Grudem makes the argument that Jesus “in his teachings, his conversations, and his disputes, never responds to any questions with a hint of blaming the Old Testament Scriptures for being unclear...[he] assumes that people are able to read and to understand rightly the Old Testament Scriptures.”³⁰

Also, think of all the times Jesus says in the Gospels “have you not read?”.

Matthew 12:5 - Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?

Matthew 19:4 - He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

Mark 12:10 - Have you not read this Scripture: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

³⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition Zondervan, 2020. 111.

Mark 12:26 - And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?

Luke 6:3 - And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

- How could they held accountable if it was hard to understand?

Also, most letters of the New Testament contain instructions to have them read aloud.

Colossians 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

When the NT authors quote or allude to the OT they assume it's discernible how they are reading the OT. Don't take that to mean that's its always equally clear.

How do we understand it?

1. Time: The Bible commands us to *meditate* on it. (Psalm. 1:2)
 1. 2 Tim. 2:7 "7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."
2. Effort: Ezra 7:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.
3. The Use of Ordinary Means: A good translation that is easy to understand, Listening to good Bible teachers, study bibles, commentaries, Seeking out what those in history have said, Bible fellowship, language tools, etc.
4. Willingness to obey: James 1:22–25 (ESV) ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.
5. The Help of the Holy Spirit: Psalm 119:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.
6. Humility: Clarity is a property of Scripture, not a property of its readers. The clarity of Scripture affirms that Scripture is able to be understood rightly, not that it will always be understood rightly. Every believer in this age retains some measure of sin, which distorts our understanding.

God's Character Provides the Basis for Scripture's Clarity

"The theological reason for affirming the clarity of Scripture is found in the nature of God. He is the omnipotent God who created the marvelous gift of human language so that he could use it to communicate clearly with us. He is the infinitely wise God who

knows the most effective way to communicate with us. He is the infinitely loving God who cares for his people and desires to communicate clearly with us. He is the truly personal God who delights in interpersonal communication. He is the omnipresent God who remains ever near us." - Wayne Grudem

So what?

1. Scripture can be understood.
2. Disagreements should keep this in mind.
 1. If something is plain, then it's settled.
 2. If something is difficult, be humble, but seek conviction.
3. It should be reflected in our view of God.
 1. He wants to speak to us to be near us.
 2. He wants to speak to us to tell us how to live.
4. It should encourage us to read our Bibles with confidence.

Sufficiency

1. The Holy Scriptures are the only **sufficient**, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.¹ The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse; however, **these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation.**² Therefore, **the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church.**³ To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.⁴

12 Timothy 3:15–17; Isaiah 8:20; Luke 16:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20. 2Romans 1:19–21; Romans 2:14,15; Psalm 19:1–3. 3Hebrews 1:1. 4Proverbs 22:19–21; Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 1:19, 20.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 3

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Isaiah 55:10-11, ESV

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it

- God can accomplish His will through His word.

2 Peter 1:3-4, ESV

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

- We have “all things” we need to living a godly life.
- **This has implications for Biblical Counseling. The Bible is sufficient to deal with any issues of the soul.**
- Scripture is sufficient to save and sanctify those who believe it.³¹

2 Peter 1:19, ESV

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

- God’s word is sufficient to guide us

2 Timothy 3:13-17 ESV

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

³¹ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 80.

correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- Complete and equipped for *every good work*.
- Scripture contains “all the knowledge needed to bring a person to saving faith.”

Carl Trueman points out that Scripture is sufficient as a base for theological knowledge.³²

- Scripture is sufficient to provide the basis for the knowledge of the Trinity even if the word isn’t found (the concept is clear).
- Scripture is sufficient to show us that the claim that the Roman Catholic claim that Mary was conceived without original sin (Immaculate Conception) is not based on Scripture.

Also, he says that Scripture is sufficient for the ordering of the Church.

- Informs us on how to worship
- Informs us on who runs the Church and their qualifications.

The Insufficiency of Scripture

- **What car should I buy?**
- **What job should I take?**
- **What was the temperature in what would become North Carolina on the day of the Resurrection?**
- **Should our church have a second service?**
- **Should we sing a specific song in Worship?**
- Scripture doesn’t intend or claim to be exhaustive. Its sufficiency is relegated to “regulating the doctrinal content of the Christian faith and the life of the church at a principal level”

Matthew Barrett points out two reasons for the relevance of the topic of sufficiency today.

- Christians elevate experience over Scripture.
 - “In faith and practice, too many Christians nod at what the Bible says, but politely set it aside to live their life how they think or feel is best.”
 - “Too many pastors and their churches have adopted the culture’s consumeristic mentality. The Bible is not the priority but pragmatics. Who the church is and what the church does are not decided according to the Word of God but are determined according to the felt needs of the surrounding culture. Whatever will keep visitors coming back for more, whatever will give the appearance that the church remains relevant, these become the rule for worship and ministry. As a result, the church sells its soul to the culture, desperately trying to entertain to give those in the pew the experience they want.”
 - *Pragmatism, Attractional Church, Seeker Sensitive*
 - He goes on, “This is all upside down. We gather each week because we are summoned by God himself and he has a word to share with us. Since this is God himself speaking to us in this word, his inscripturated, inspired speech takes center

³² <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalsufficiency-scripture/>

stage. It becomes the agenda of every song and sermon. Is this not why Paul could also command Timothy, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and instruction” ([2 Tim. 4:2](#))? Without the Word, the church will not only starve but it will have nothing of lasting, saving value to offer the world anyway. God’s Word is a lamp in a dark world, lighting the path ahead ([Ps. 119:93, 105](#)), so that the Christian and the church alike know God and know how to live in his ways as his covenant people.”

- *In what ways have you seen the American Church fall into this line of thinking?*

A Word (Impression) from the Lord

Some have felt strong impressions from the Lord (not the same as the gift of Prophecy). Some guidelines for interpreting these *impressions*.

- Not authoritative for others
- Not Scripture
- Can be misinterpreted
- Cannot go against Scripture

Spurgeon: Others, too, judge of their duty by impressions. “If I feel it impressed upon my mind,” says one, “I shall do, it.” Does God command you to do it? This is the proper question. If he does, you should make haste, whether it is impressed upon your mind or not; but if there be no command to that effect, or rather, if it diverges from the line of God’s statutes, and needs apology or explanation, hold your hand, for though you have ten thousand impressions, yet must you never dare to go by them. It is a dangerous thing for us to make the whims of our brain instead of the clear precepts of God, the guide of our moral actions. ” To the law and to the testimony,”—this is the lamp that shows the Christian true light; be this your chart, be this your compass; but as to impressions, and whims, and fancies, and I know not what beside which some have taken,—these are more wreckers lights that will entice you on the rocks. Hold fast to the Word of God, and nothing else; whoever he shall be that shall guide you otherwise, close your ears to him.³³

Scripture *alone* is sufficient.

Morgan writes: Reason, experience, and tradition all have a place in theological study, but they are subordinate to Holy Scripture, which alone is sufficient. In Jesus’s parable, when a rich man in hell asks father Abraham (who speaks for God) to send someone from the dead to warn his unrepentant brothers, “Abraham [says], ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said. ‘But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ But he told him, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead’ ” (Luke 16:29–31).³⁴

³³ As quoted in “<https://thecripplegate.com/spurgeon-impressions-and-prophecy/>”

³⁴ Ibid, 80.

The Sufficiency of Scripture and the Reformation

“The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture lies at the heart of what it means to be a Protestant.” - Carl Trueman

“Ever since the Reformation, Rome challenged Scripture’s sufficiency in claiming that an infallible tradition and papal magisterium was necessary to provide the correct interpretation of Scripture. In response, the Reformers asserted that Scripture is a sufficient authority for all things pertaining to faith and godliness, not needing to appeal to another authority.” - Matthew Barrett

This Week:

Reflect upon Psalm 19:7–14

Thank God that he gave you everything you need to be saved, to be sanctified (made more like Jesus), and everything we need to operate as the Church.

Canon

Definition: the closed list of books that Christians view as uniquely authoritative and inspired.³⁵

Kruger helpfully breaks down the discussion into two categories, the historical and the theological.

HISTORICAL

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

- Josephus (AD 37-100) offers up a list of 22 books that matches the Christian 39 book canon.
 - The difference is due to combining multiple books into one.
- Josephus also claims that the OT canon was fixed from the time of Artaxerxes (465-423 BC)
- Philo (20 BC - 40 AD) breaks down the OT in the same way Christ did (Luke 24:44). He says “the laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets ... and psalms”³⁶
- The NT authors never mention a debate over the OT canon.
- The NT authors never cite a book as Scripture that is not included in the OT.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

- Kruger writes that “there appears to be a core collection of scriptural books—approximately 22 out of 27—functioning as Scripture by the middle of the second century. Generally speaking, this core would have included the four gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. Books that were “disputed” tended to be the smaller books such as 2 Peter, Jude, James, and 2-3 John.”³⁷
- The NT writers viewed their own writings as scripture (2 Peter 3:16 speaks of Paul’s writings as *scripture*; 1 Tim. 5:18 cited Luke 10:7)
- Kruger points out that “In the second century...Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, appears to receive at least the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, as well as 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, and maybe some of Paul’s epistles (see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15–16). By the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr has an established fourfold Gospel collection that is read in worship alongside OT books (see his *1 Apology*, 47.3). And by the time of Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in the late second-century, we

³⁵ Robert L. Plummer, [40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible](#), ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 57.

³⁶ As quoted in Kruger, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-biblical-canonical/>

³⁷ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-biblical-canonical/>

see a nearly complete NT corpus. His canon consists of about twenty-two out of twenty-seven NT books which he regards as Scripture and cites over one thousand times.

If someone was asked what your authority is, what would they say?

Helpful timeline from Plummer

- The New Testament books were written during the period a.d. 45–100.
- They were collected and read in the churches a.d. 100–200.
- They were carefully examined and compared with spurious writings a.d. 200–300.
- Complete agreement was obtained a.d. 300–400.³⁸

THEOLOGICAL

What is the criteria for canonicity?

Plummer's criteria:

- *Apostolic*: written by or tied closely to an apostle (an authorized eyewitness of Jesus).
- *Catholic*: widely, if not universally, recognized by the churches.
- *Orthodox*: not in contradiction to any recognized apostolic book or doctrine.³⁹

Michael Kruger argues for three criteria

1. Divine Qualities: books from God would contain within themselves evidence of their divine origin.
 1. The qualities of Scripture reflect the qualities of God. Examples: beauty and excellency ([Ps. 19:8; 119:103](#)), power and efficacy ([Ps. 119:50; Heb. 4:12–13](#)), and unity and harmony ([Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18](#)).
 2. It's through these divine qualities that Christians recognize the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:27). **Note:** This is such a big point that MacArthur makes it one of his three criteria (apostolic authorization/authorship, doesn't contradict previous revelation, testimony of the Spirit to the Church).
2. Corporate Reception: there are good reasons to think that God's collective, covenantal people would eventually recognize the books that are from him.
3. Authoritative Authors: Not just anyone can speak for God, they must be commissioned (like prophets in the OT, apostles and prophets in the NT as well)
 1. Every NT book is written by an apostle, or to a situation where an apostle's teaching would be found (Mark/Peter, Luke/apostles/Paul)

Who gets to decide what's Canon?

For Rome, it's Rome.

³⁸ Robert L. Plummer, [40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible](#), ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 61.

³⁹ Robert L. Plummer, [40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible](#), ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 59–60.

But for “Protestant Christians, the canon is not an authorized collection of writings (in that the church conferred its authority or approval upon a list of books). Rather, the canon is a collection of authoritative writings. The biblical writings have an inherent authority as works uniquely inspired by God. Canonization is the process of recognizing that inherent authority, not bestowing it from an outside source.”⁴⁰

- This goes against many urban myths when it comes to the canon.

What are some stories you've heard about how the canon came to be?

Athanasius' list of 367

This was the first complete list of the canon that we have (note that qualifier, “that we have”). Plummer speaks to the reasoning for this not being a big deal

1. All the New Testament documents were viewed as authoritative and were circulating among the churches by a.d. 90 or 100 (Col. 4:16; 2 Peter 3:16).
2. From the earliest post-New Testament Christian writings (the apostolic fathers), it is clear that an implicit canon existed. By their frequency of citation, the apostolic fathers attribute unique authority to what came to be called the New Testament.
3. In the absence of a unified ecclesiastical hierarchy and in a situation where documents were copied by hand, it is not surprising that we find churches debating what writings were truly apostolic. Eusebius (ca. a.d. 260–340) mentions three categories of books in his day—the universally confessed, the debated, and the spurious.
4. One must keep in mind the large geographic distances between some early Christian communities, as well as the persecutions that made communication and gatherings of decision-making bodies virtually impossible until the conversion of the Roman emperor in the fourth century a.d.⁴¹

What about the Apocrypha?

1. The Jews who authored the books never accepted them into their canon.
2. The Apocrypha contains clear factual errors and, from the standpoint of Protestants, theological errors (such as praying for the dead, see 2 Macc. 12:43–45).
3. The Roman Catholic Church did not officially recognize the books in the Apocrypha as canonical until the Council of Trent in 1546. In fact, Jerome (a.d. 340–420), the translator of the Vulgate (the official Roman Catholic Latin Bible for more than a millennium), claimed the books of the Apocrypha were edifying for Christians but were “not for the establishing of the authority of the doctrines of the church.”
4. While there are some debatable allusions to the Apocrypha in the New Testament, New Testament authors nowhere cite the Apocrypha as Scripture (that is, with a

⁴⁰ Plummer , 57.

⁴¹ Plummer, 61.

formula such as “The Scripture says”). Almost every book in the Old Testament is cited as Scripture.⁴²

Is the Canon Closed?

According to the early church’s categories for canonicity (apostolic, catholic, orthodox – see above), it would be impossible to have any additions to the canon. For example, even if a genuine and orthodox letter of the apostle Paul were discovered, that letter would not have had widespread usage in the early church (that is, it could never claim catholicity). The canon of Scripture is closed.⁴³

Wrongly adding to Scripture is serious, (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18–19).

MacArthur’s argument for a closed canon:

- the book of Revelation is unique to Scripture in that it describes with unparalleled detail the end-time events that precede eternity future. As Genesis began Scripture by describing the beginning of time (Genesis 1–2), the book of Revelation ends Scripture by explaining the end of this age and the age to come (Revelation 20–22). By their contents, Genesis and Revelation are the perfectly matched bookends to Scripture.
- Paul asserted that the New Testament church was built on the foundation of the New Testament apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). The apostles and prophets were those instruments of divine revelation while the New Testament was being composed. Once the foundation of revelation had been laid in the completed canon, there was no need for additional revelation from God in this life.
- The early church—those who lived closest in time to the apostles and were their disciples—believed that, with the composition of the book of Revelation and the death of John, the canon had closed.⁴⁴

Does knowing that God has given us every word we need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3) in his completed canon comfort you?

How can knowing the whole story of the universe be an apologetic tool? How about for your devotional life, is it important?

⁴² Plummer, 63–65.

⁴³ Plummer, 66.

⁴⁴John MacArthur, ed., Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 82.