

Bibliology: What the Bible Teaches about Itself**God's Self-Revelation**

Because God is so gracious, he has not left us in the dark. There are seven avenues through which he has revealed himself to mankind.

1. He has revealed himself in nature.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:

- Job 12:7-9

- Psalm 19:1-4

- Acts 14:17

- Romans 1:19-20

- The value of this form of revelation:

- It is clear to any rational, intelligent observer.

- It's limited by the quantity of information and by the obscuring effects of sin.

2. He has revealed himself in man.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:

- Isaiah 29:16

- Genesis 1:26-27

- Ecclesiastes 3:11

- Acts 17:28-29

- The value of this form of revelation:

- It suggests that man is different from the animals.

- It raises important questions, such as:

- If man is created in God's image, what is the implication of our sin?

- Aren't we forbidden to think that God is like us?

3. God has revealed himself in direct communication.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:
 - Genesis 6:13
 - Genesis 9:1, 8
 - Genesis 12:1-4
 - Jeremiah 1:4
 - Jonah 1:1
- The limitations of this form of revelation:
 - God hasn't spoken to everyone directly.
 - Those who read stories of God's direct communication may distort or disbelieve the message.

4. God has revealed himself in miracles and providence.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:
 - Joshua 4:23-24
 - John 10:38
 - Ezekiel 11:9-10
- Limitations of this form of revelation:
 - It's clear only to those who see God's wondrous works or read of them in the Bible.
 - The observer may misinterpret or disbelieve God's wondrous works.

5. God has revealed himself through changed lives.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:
 - Matthew 5:13-16
 - 2nd Corinthians 3:2-3
 - John 14:21
- Limitations of this form of revelation:
 - Christians often misrepresent God.
 - Unbelievers may misinterpret the changes they see in us.

6. God has revealed himself in the Bible.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:
 - Hebrews 1:1
 - John 5:39
 - 2nd Timothy 3:15
- Limitations to this form of revelation:
 - The inadequacy of human language
 - The illiteracy of men
 - The delay in translating and distributing the Scriptures worldwide

7. God has revealed himself in his Son.

- Scriptures reminding us of this fact:
 - John 1:14, 18
 - John 12:45

- Hebrews 1:2-3
- Teachings derived from this truth:
 - This revelation is complete (Colossians 2:9-10)
 - This revelation is perfect (Hebrews 1:2-3)
 - This revelation is final (John 14:8-9)
- Limitations of this revelation:
 - We are hampered by our own finiteness
 - In our desire to know about Christ, we are limited to the Word that speaks of him

All of human history, since man first fell into sin and hid himself from God, has been the story of God attempting to restore contact with us. Nature, human personality, voices from heaven, miracles of unexplainable origin, radically changed lives, the written and abiding Word, the life and character of Jesus Christ: The first five of these avenues of communication are incomplete and subject to distortion. The written Word and the Living Word, however, have filled every gap and have told us everything God longs for us to know about him. The only remaining limitation is this: Some will be introduced to God, yet will turn away from him.

The challenge to us, then, is to know him and to make him known.¹

“From everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:48).

¹ The motto of the Navigators (www.Navigators.org).

What Jesus Said About the Bible

Although there are many lines of proof for the authority of the Bible, the crowning evidence is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus and the Old Testament

- Jesus displays perfect familiarity with the Old Testament.
 - Matthew 6:29
 - Matthew 11:23
 - Matthew 12:3
 - Matthew 12:42
 - Matthew 19:4-5
 - Mark 7:10
 - Mark 12:26
 - John 6:49
 - John 8:56
- He continually quotes from the Old Testament. (“It is written.” “Have you not read?”)
- Jesus always assumes that Scripture is of God and has final authority.
 - John 10:35
- Christ always assumes that Old Testament prophecy must be fulfilled.
 - Mark 14:49 with Isaiah 53:7
 - John 13:18 with Psalm 41:9
- Christ always assumes that the miracles of the Old Testament really took place.
 - Matthew 12:40-41

- Matthew 19:3-6
 - Luke 4:25
 - Luke 4:27
 - Luke 17:26-27
 - Luke 17:28-29
 - Luke 20:37
 - John 3:14
 - John 6:49
 - Jesus Christ displays trust in the Old Testament by leaning upon its statements in moments of spiritual conflict. Note: Of all the books of the Old Testament which have been maligned by critics, Deuteronomy has taken the worst beating. Yet Jesus quoted from it freely and with highest regard for its authenticity.
 - Matthew 4:1-10
 - Jesus makes no distinction between parts of the Old Testament.
 - Matthew 5:18
 - Luke 24:25-27
 - John 10:35
2. Jesus and the New Testament
- When Christ went to his death, he declared that he was leaving revelation unfinished.
 - John 13:7
 - John 16:12
 - He promised that this revelation would be completed at a certain time.

- John 16:13, 25
- He chose certain men through whom he would make this revelation.
 - John 15:27-27
 - John 16:13
 - Acts 9:4-6, 15
- He outlined in advance the general content of this revelation.
 - John 14:26
 - John 16:13a
 - John 16:13b
 - John 16:14-15
- Knowing in advance what would be spoken and written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he gave to these future words the same authority as his own words.
 - John 17:18-20
- Problem: What about those New Testament writers not of the Twelve Apostles (Mark, Luke, Paul, James, Jude, the writer of Hebrews)?
 - The early Church had prophets (Ephesian 4:11)
 - These prophets received new information from God (Ephesians 3:5)
 - Paul (and others) were chosen after Jesus had already gone to heaven (1st Corinthians 12:28)
 - The writings of these men were accepted by the early Church as equal in authority to the writings of the Old Testament and of the Apostles.

“By the early third century only a handful of books continued to create any question. Hebrews faced some opposition in the western regions of the empire and Revelation was unpopular in the east.... The first complete list of books, as we have them today, came in an Easter letter written in 367 by Bishop Athanasius from Alexandria. Shortly thereafter councils in North Africa at Hippo (393) and at Carthage (397) published the same list.”²

² Shelley, Bruce L., *Church History in Plain Language* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), pp. 81-83.

3. The Value of Christ's Testimony

You can't read the New Testament without admitting that Jesus put his stamp of approval on the Old Testament. The only alternative, then, is for critics to advance certain theories intended to throw Jesus' testimony out of court.

- The Agnostic Theory: "How do we know that Jesus really said these things about the Old Testament?"

Answer: How do we know anything in history? To take this attitude is a dodge, without any intellectual basis.

- The Accommodation Theory: "Jesus knew the Scriptures contained many errors, but because the people to whom he spoke believed otherwise, he accommodated his teaching to their mistaken ideas in order not to offend."

Answer: Such a theory destroys the moral character of Christ. He often corrected errors of his hearers instead of acquiescing to them (Matthew 22:29 – "You are mistaken, because you do not understand the Scripture..."). Again, consider his attitude toward Deuteronomy during his temptation in the wilderness. If this was accommodation, whom was he accommodating?

- The Kenosis Theory: "On the basis of Philippians 2:7, Jesus emptied himself of his godly infinite knowledge, and was therefore capable of making errors just like anybody else."

Answer: He did empty himself of the independent use of his "incommunicable attributes."³ However, he claimed to be absolutely infallible in his own utterances (Luke 9:26). Everything he said was at the direction of his Father (John 12:48-49). Besides, after the resurrection, he gave the same, full endorsement to the infallibility and authority of the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45; Revelation 22:16).

³ Terminology of Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 156 ff., although note that Grudem himself does not allow for this interpretation of the kenosis, pp. 549-552. But see Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 703-704.

What the Authors of Scriptures Said about the Bible

Did the writers of Scriptures display any consciousness of special authority from God when they wrote?

1. The Old Testament writers claimed divine inspiration.

- In general, the authoritative formulas, “Thus says the LORD,” and “The word of the LORD came,” and “The LORD spoke to...” occur over 2,000 times in the Old Testament.
- Moses: The first five books of the Old Testament assert repeatedly that they are the work of Moses as inspired by God.
 - Exodus 24:4
 - Exodus 34:27
 - Numbers 33:2
- Isaiah 20 times declares that his writings are “the word of the LORD.”
 - Isaiah 1:10
- Jeremiah almost 100 times says, “The word of the LORD came unto me.”
 - Jeremiah 1:1
- Ezekiel makes the same claim 60 times.
 - Ezekiel 3:16
- Daniel claims his writings are a record of words and visions from God.
 - Daniel 9:21-23
 - Daniel 10:10-11
- Check the opening verses of every one of the minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Malachi alone uses the phrase, “says the LORD,” 25 times.

- While such claims are not so clear in the historical books and poetical books, the New Testament gives ample testimony to their divine inspiration.
2. The New Testament writers claimed divine inspiration.
 - See the opening verses of each of the four Gospels
 - John (John 20:31; 21:24-25; Revelation 1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)
 - Paul (1st Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; 1st Thessalonians 2:13; 5:27; 2nd Thessalonians 3:14)
 - James 1:1
 - Peter (2nd Peter 3:1-2)
 - Jude 1-4
 3. The New Testament writers recognized other New Testament writings as Scripture.
 - 1st Timothy 5:18 with Luke 10:7
 - 2nd Peter 3:15-16

The Doctrine of Inspiration

What makes the Bible “the Word of God” in a way that is true of no other book? In what sense is it “inspired”? The key text on this issue is 2nd Timothy 3:16-17.

1. The technical meaning of “inspiration”
 - The word translated “inspired” in 2nd Timothy 3:16 literally means “God-breathed.”
 - The significance of God’s “breath”
 - His breath created the heavens (Psalm 33:6)
 - His breath created man (Genesis 2:7)
 - The implication is that anything God-breathed is the direct product of Almighty God.
 - More literally, then, 2nd Timothy 3:16 is telling us that the Scriptures are “out-spired.”

The Bible is not something written by men into which God breathed some divine property, but rather something that God “breathed out” – the very Word of God.

2. The technical problem of 2nd Timothy 3:16

- The problem arises out of a faulty translation of the verse (the American Standard Version, 1900): “Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable...” – leading countless theologians of the last century to the false conclusion that “portions of Scripture not inspired by God are unprofitable.”
- The problem is answered by a logical look at what the rest of the Bible says about itself: All Scripture claims to be the product of God’s own breath.

3. The practical implications of the doctrine of inspiration

- Inspiration is different from discernment
 - The nature of discernment
 - All Christians possess discernment (1st Corinthians 2:12-16)
 - It varies by degree, as determined by spiritual purity, maturity, and/or giftedness (1st Corinthians chapters 2-3; 12:10)
 - The nature of inspiration
 - It came only to a few
 - It was absolute where pertaining to the transcription of God’s Word
 - It was limited to the transcription of God’s Word
- Inspiration is more than revelation
 - Definitions
 - Revelation: God communicating truth to the human mind (the “inflow” to God’s chosen agent) – see the next segment, page 22 below
 - Inspiration: God producing a visible, readable record of the revelation (the “outflow” to readers)
 - God has many avenues of revelation
 - The material creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20)

- The nature and constitution of man (Genesis 1:26)
 - Direct revelation (Genesis 6:13; 12:1-4)
 - Miraculous and providential works (Deuteronomy 4:33-35; John 10:38)
 - The experience of his people (1st Peter 2:9; Philippians 2:10)
 - The written Scriptures (Hebrews 1:1; 2nd Timothy 3:16)
 - His own Son (John 1:18; 14:8-9; Hebrews 1:2-3)
- Inspiration, then, is the process by which God moves his agent to select the *right* material and to record it *accurately* in *permanent* form.
- It is not the *writer* who is the object of inspiration, but the *written message*.
 - Inspiration refers not to infallible writers, but to an infallible Book
 - Inspiration refers not to a process, but to a product
 - Inspiration refers not to how the message was given, but to its result
 - Inspiration refers not to how God did it, but to what he did

“Every Christian should wear the title ‘man of God’ humbly but appropriately. Though it was usually reserved for prophets in the Old Testament, it belongs to all Christians. Such a title places great responsibility on the Christian. To fulfill it he needs to be equipped – yes, fully equipped for the life before him. Such complete equipment is found in the Word of God.”⁴

The Doctrine of Revelation

How did the Bible get from the mind of God to the Book you hold in your hand? 2nd Peter 1:21 is the key passage dealing with God’s method of transmitting his written message to us.

1. He superseded the will of his chosen agent.
 - What sort of prophetic Scripture is given by this method?
 - Prophecy in the narrow sense: “foretelling God’s actions” (Revelation 22:18-19)
 - Prophecy in the broader sense: “forth-telling God’s message” (2nd Timothy 3:16)

⁴ Kent, Homer A., Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 291.

- How much prophetic Scripture is excluded from this method?
 - None! Ever!
 - How much human will is exercised in this process?
 - None! Ever!
2. He carried his chosen agent.
- Implies total control.
 - Implies gentle guidance (see Acts 27:15)
3. He gave words to his chosen agent.
- The nature of the writer's speech: a simple movement of the tongue or pen (see 1st Corinthians 13:1)
 - The Source of the writer's speech: God himself (see Matthew 1:22; Luke 1:70; 1st Thessalonians 2:13)
4. Conclusions
- Did the writers of Scripture realize they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit?
 - Jeremiah 20:9
 - Ezekiel 3:4, 12, 14, 16, 22, 24-27
 - The value of this knowledge (2nd Peter 1:20): The same Spirit who was there to *inspire* the Bible is also available to help us correctly *interpret* the Bible.
 - This assures me that, though God used imperfect creatures to record his thoughts, they were for those moments mere instruments in his hands as they passed along God's message to me.
 - Praise God that he satisfies our curiosity! But this bit of knowledge (God's method of revelation) is like every other kind of knowledge: It's no good at all unless we do something with it.



Verbal, Plenary Inspiration

How extensive is the inspiration of the Bible? Is it really necessary to believe that there's not a single error in the whole Book? Matthew 5:14-18 is the key passage on this topic.

1. What is “the Law”?

- The Two Commandments
- The Ten Commandments
- The 613 Regulations of Israelite Conduct
- The Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses)
- The whole Old Testament
- The entire Bible

2. What are the “jot” and “tittle”?

- The smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet: *yodh* 
- The smallest stroke of the writer's pen: *yohd* becomes *vav* 

3. What is Jesus saying about the level of Scripture inspiration?

- “Verbal” inspiration: It extends to the smallest letter and stroke recorded by the divine agents.
- “Plenary” inspiration: All will be fulfilled. It encompasses all that can be defined as “God’s Law” – the 66 Books of the Old and New Testaments.
- Inerrancy: “Wholly without error as originally given of God.”⁵ The autographs were without error because they were “God-breathed.” We can trust the Bible as translated by godly men through the ages, because of the related doctrine of God’s preservation of his Word.

⁵ *Statement of Faith of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches*, paragraph 1, “The Bible.”

The Reliability of the Bible

A major obstacle to belief in the Bible is often a person's intellectual difficulty with some of its apparent "mistakes." In fact, there are three basic areas where the reliability of Scripture is under attack today.

1. "The Bible is unreliable because we can't be certain that we have it as originally given."
 - The problem: When you compare one copy of the original ("Autograph") with another copy, the copies often disagree.
 - The nature of manuscript evidence
 - Numbers

There are at least 8,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in early Latin versions; over 4,000 copies of early translations into other languages; and over 13,000 manuscripts of various portions of the original Greek version.
 - Age

Earliest fragment of a copy of the Gospel of John: 130 a.d.
Copies of major portions of New Testament books: 200 a.d.
 - Compared to other ancient Greek literature

Plato: Wrote in 400 b.c. / Earliest known copies: 900 a.d. / 7 copies
Aristotle: Wrote in 350 b.c. / Earliest known copies: 1100 a.d. / 5 copies
Tacitus: Wrote in 100 a.d. / Earliest known copy: 1000 a.d. / 1 copy
 - Other support for the reliability of the New Testament
 - Translations into Latin: More than 9,000
 - Quotations by Church Fathers: More than 36,000
 - Quotations in Lectionaries: More than 3,000
 - Conclusions
 - Concerning the New Testament: There aren't as many variants as the critics would have us believe; and no variant affects any major doctrine (example: 2nd Peter 3:9).

- Concerning the Old Testament: The Talmudists were so careful to make exact duplicates of the Old Testament, that they gave each new copy the same authority as the original.
2. “The Bible is unreliable because it makes untrue statements.”
- Questionable statements of doctrine
 - Examples
 - The words of Job’s three friends
 - The negativism of Ecclesiastes
 - Answer: The Bible is often a record of what people have said, whether good or bad, angel or demon, etc.
 - Questionable statements of history and geography
 - Examples
 - Existence of the Horites (Genesis 36:20)
 - Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:20)
 - Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-3)
 - Answer: With the passing of time, every detail of Bible history and geography is being vindicated.
 - Questionable statements of science
 - Examples
 - Literal 6-day Creation
 - Literal worldwide Flood
 - Miracles
 - Unscientific language: “four corners of the earth,” “sun rises and sets,” etc.
 - Answers
 - Sinful man willfully disbelieves whatever makes him uncomfortable (2nd Peter 3:3-7)
 - Even scientists use the “language of appearance” when describing visible nature

3. “The Bible is unreliable because it contradicts itself.”

- The problem of inexact quotations
 - Example: Isaiah 40:3 with Matthew 3:3
 - Answers:
 - Verbal inspiration doesn’t require one Bible writer to quote another word for word.
 - It’s possible that the New Testament writer didn’t intend to quote verbatim, but merely to use Old Testament language to illustrate a New Testament truth.
 - Some apparent discrepancies are due to the difficulty of translating Hebrew into Greek.
 - The principle of “literary license” – any author may quote freely from his own works.
- The problem of conflicting reports
 - Examples:
 - Parable of the sower
 - Account of Christ’s temptation in the wilderness
 - Inscription over the cross
 - Answers:
 - The description of any event depends on the viewpoint of the witness
 - It’s unreasonable to conclude that Jesus spoke each parable only once
 - The cross inscriptions convey the same message in every case
- The problem of doctrinal disagreement
 - Examples:
 - The unity of God vs. the trinity of God
 - Election vs. freewill

-- Answers:

- We are limited by finite minds and by our sin-infected perception
- We walk by faith; there are numerous biblical truths that we are required to accept by faith
- What we do not understand now, we shall perhaps understand in Glory (1st Corinthians 13:12)
- It isn't necessary for us to know everything; it's only necessary for us to trust and obey Someone who does

Recommended Reading

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_____. *The Genesis Flood*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961.

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Assignments for Next Segment (“Theology Proper, Part 1”)

1. Read Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chs. 9-11.
2. Answer one or more of the “Questions for Personal Application” at the end of each chapter, and be prepared to share and discuss your answers in class.