

## Topic 8: The Bible

### Understanding God's Living and Active Word

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

—Hebrews 4:12

Being a disciple means being a student. And being a student means learning. At a minimum, disciples need to know certain things about the Bible, God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and the Church.

### What does a devoted follower of Jesus need to understand and believe about the Bible?

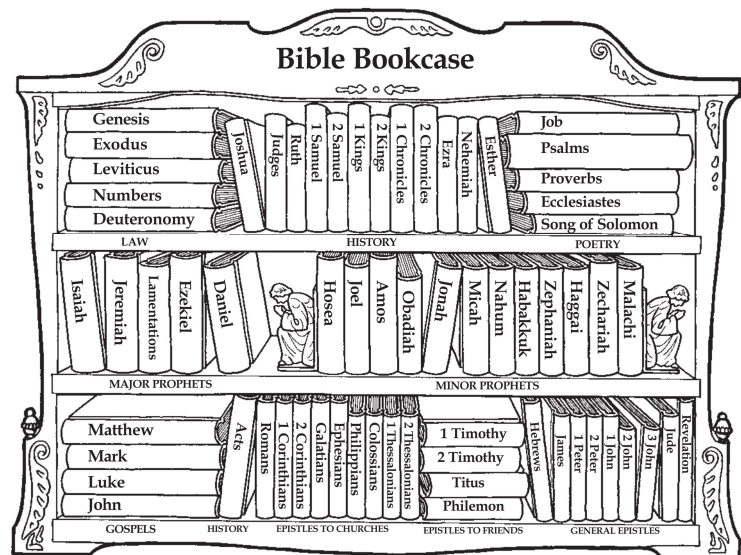
The Bible is our primary source for information about God. Another word for receiving information about God is “revelation.” Scholars speak of two kinds of revelation: *general* and *special*.

- ▶ By *general* revelation they mean God's Creation (Romans 1:18–21; Psalm 19); acts where God provides for the needs of all people (Acts 14:17; Psalm 107:9); or the conscience God gave all humans (Romans 2). All of

these point to the existence of God and his power.

- ▶ *Special* revelation refers, most commonly, to the Bible, God's written word. In the Bible, we see details about God's person and plan, and an explicit record of the teaching and actions of Christ, who is the living Word (John 1:1–18).

We will start with the Bible because it's the foundation of Judeo-Christian faith.





## What's so special about the Bible?

In this topic, we'll look at what makes the Bible special: its *influence*, its claims to be of *divine origin*, and its *reliability*. We'll also discuss two additional characteristics of the Bible, that it is *authoritative* and *transformational*.

“The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks.”  
—B. B. Warfield

## From God to Us

Term	Meaning
<b>Revelation</b>	Can mean: (a) God's act of unveiling to the world truth about himself and his eternal plan, or (b) The <i>body of truth</i> that has been revealed by God. The Bible doesn't reveal <i>everything</i> about God to us (Deuteronomy 29:29). But it reveals all we need for life and godliness (1 Peter 1).
<b>Inspiration</b>	The process by which God's Spirit supernaturally guided the human authors of the Bible. Using their own unique personalities and styles, they composed and recorded God's message to mankind.
<b>Inerrancy</b>	The belief that the original writings of Scripture were without error (and to the extent that our modern translations accurately represent the original text, we have a trustworthy Bible).
<b>Canonicity</b>	The divine quality of the Old and New Testament writings given to them through God's inspiration. The leaders of the early church used certain agreed-upon criteria to distinguish "God-breathed," or God-inspired, documents from mere human writings. They then collected those divine writings into one book, our Bible.
<b>Illumination</b>	The special ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to enable God's people to comprehend and apply the written Word of God (Luke 24:44,45; 1 Corinthians 2:11-14). Illumination occurs when we have those "Aha!" moments, when "the light goes on." With God's help, we suddenly "see" the significance of a biblical truth and desire to apply it to our lives.



## Bible Study

### First, the Bible Is Special Because of Its INFLUENCE.

It's far and away the most published book in the history of the world. Billions of copies have been printed, with millions more distributed annually. Moreover, its values of right behavior, God's love, and forgiveness have positively shaped culture—acting as the driving force behind most humanitarian efforts, much scientific research, art, music, literature, and law—as well as advances in politics, education, treatment of women and children, labor and race relations, etc. However, its influence alone is not reason to trust it.

### Second, the Bible Is Special Due to Its Claims To Be of DIVINE ORIGIN.

Some 3,800 times it features the phrases, "God said," or "Thus says the Lord." In other words, the Bible presumes to be the very Word of God! Critics protest that trying to make the case that the Bible is God's Word *by pointing to passages where the Bible claims to be God's Word* is circular reasoning. But consider this: In our courts of law, a person on trial is allowed to testify in his or her own behalf. Such testimony is then weighed in light of all the evidence. Why shouldn't the Bible be afforded this same courtesy?

1. Let's allow the Bible to speak for itself. Perhaps *the* classic statement in the Bible about the Bible is our memory verse for this session. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Jot down your initial, overall observations about this verse.

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- ▶ "Scripture" (the Greek word is *graphe*) means "that which is written." In other words, Scripture is the writings of the Old and New Testaments.
- ▶ "God-breathed" expresses the idea of exhalation by God—that the Scripture is the product of the breath of God. God didn't breathe into existing human writings; rather, he inspired the original writings of Scripture to produce works that would reveal his character, works, and will. Sometimes God told the Bible writers the exact words to say (e.g., Jeremiah 1:9). Other times, he used their unique minds,



vocabularies, cultures, and experiences—which accounts for the stylistic differences between the Bible books.

2. Another passage that boldly maintains divine authorship of Scripture is 2 Peter 1:16–21. There, Peter addressed the problem of certain false teachers who had come into the church; and charged that the apostles’ gospel message was a mere human fable. Peter responded (NLT):

<sup>16</sup>“For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes <sup>17</sup>when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” <sup>18</sup>We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

<sup>19</sup>“Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, <sup>21</sup>or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”

What do Peter’s eyewitness words tell us about Scripture and the way it came to be?

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Verses 16–18 describe the Transfiguration (see Mark 9:2–8), the glorious unveiling of Christ, the living revelation of God. Verse 19 then speaks of the written revelation of God and how it illuminates the darkness—our wrong thoughts and actions. Peter says we do well to pay close attention to it (especially in a world filled with so many bogus ideas).

In verse 20, the word “understanding” carries the idea of “unloosing.” The idea is that the Scripture is not the result of individuals saying, “Hey, I’d like to ‘unloose’ a few of my own opinions and ideas.” False prophets did that—spouting their own thoughts. But nothing the Biblical prophets wrote is the product of a human’s own creativity or opinion.

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.”  
—Martin Luther



In verse 21, the verb “moved” is interesting. It was also used to describe a ship being driven by a strong wind (Acts 27:15,17). The sailors on board, experienced though they were, could not set the ship’s course. They had to let the strong wind take the ship wherever it blew. The chapter portrays the sailors as active and involved, but the wind ultimately determined the destination of the ship.

So it was in the writing of Holy Scripture. Both God and humans were involved in the production of the Bible, but it happened in such a way that God was the ultimate author. He directed the writing and guaranteed the accuracy of it. There was human involvement, but no human agenda.

God-originated, God-breathed, and God-guided . . . *this* is what the Bible claims for itself! Like Jesus of Nazareth claiming to be God in the flesh—if this is true, it changes *everything*!

From these passages, we see that *devoted disciples of Jesus believed the Bible is divine*. It’s not just any old book. It’s God’s Word to the world! It’s not a book of rules. As someone has noted, it’s a love letter from home! No wonder disciples are drawn to the Bible and want to pay attention to it!

3. Talk about a time when you felt like you’d been pierced by the truth and beauty of God’s Word.

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## Third, the Bible Is Special Because of Its RELIABILITY

Let’s consider another factor that makes the Bible special: the overwhelming evidence for its reliability.

### **Evidence #1: The Trustworthiness of the Biblical Manuscripts**

It’s important to know that we do not have the original writings of Scripture. We have only



copies. But we have *thousands* of copies—more than 5,000 portions or fragments—and we have copies *close in date to the original writings*. And with all those copies (and thanks to the science of textual criticism) we have:

- ▶ the knowledge that the Jewish scribes who copied the Scriptures were *obsessed* with accuracy
- ▶ a very precise sense of the wording of the original documents.

As one would expect, scholars have found variations among some of the copies. Bible scholars are honest about these variations and point them out in study Bible notes. However, Princeton's Bruce Metzger, perhaps the preeminent New Testament scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concluded that after 2,000 years of being copied, only 40 of the 20,000 lines of the New Testament are debatable. More importantly, none of these variances affects the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Our modern-day Bibles are very credible—far more so than any other historical document of antiquity.

### **Evidence #2: The Unity of the Scriptures**

The Biblical writings were composed by some 40 authors in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of 1,500 years. Yet it really is one book with a flowing story and a consistent message.

- ▶ Throughout its pages, the Bible champions belief in one God in times and regions where polytheism (belief in many gods) was the norm.
- ▶ The Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament; the New completes the story of the Old.
- ▶ From start to finish, the Bible calls people to live by faith in God's grace, whereas every other religion depicts humans working to earn God's favor.

### **Evidence #3: The Preservation of the Scriptures**

The Bible has endured through the centuries despite multiple attempts to burn it, ban it, and systematically eliminate it. No other book has survived such hatred and opposition.

“Truth can and does include approximations, free quotations, language of appearances, and different accounts of the same event so long as they do not contradict.”  
—Charles Ryrie

### **Evidence #4: The Fulfilled Prophecies of the Bible**

The Bible contains almost two thousand prophecies: 1,239 prophecies are found in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies are in the New Testament, giving us a total of 1,817. Many of these prophecies are yet to be fulfilled, but hundreds pertaining to Christ's first coming—



many given in excruciating detail—happened exactly as they were foretold! Mathematicians have demonstrated the logical impossibility of that many lucky guesses.

### Evidence #5: The Archaeological Record

For most of the modern era, secular scholars have scoffed at many of the Bible's historical and geographical claims. But archaeologists continue to uncover evidence of the Bible's accuracy. At one time, the Hittites were considered an imaginary people found only in the Bible, but in the 1880s archaeological evidence of the Hittites was discovered. Skeptics have also doubted the existence of a real King David, until the Tel Dan inscription was discovered in 1993. Written by the enemies of Israel, this tablet documented the "House of David" as existing long ago.

From this and additional evidence you can research on your own, we see that *the Bible is reliable*. As disciples of Jesus, we can fully trust it—textually, historically, theologically, and spiritually.

"I would say that the essential difference between the Bible and every other book is that the other books are meant to be read, whereas the Bible is truly meant to read us."—Richard Owens Roberts

## Additional Characteristics of the Bible

### AUTHORITATIVE

Logically it follows that if the Bible is divine (from God and not humans) and true, we don't have the right to twist it to make it say what we want it to say. We need to be very careful that we've interpreted it correctly. We don't get to explain away teachings that "offend" us. Instead of us sitting in judgment of the Bible, it has the right to judge us.

In other words, the Bible is authoritative, and Jesus' disciples are commanded to submit to its teaching.

This means that for the disciple of Jesus who faces a tough moral choice, the bottom-line issue isn't his or her feelings, what the majority thinks is right according to the latest *Time* or CNN poll, what laws the government has passed, what rulings the Supreme Court has issued, the latest findings of the scientific community, what one's Uncle Louie believes, or what some expert on a talk-show said. The issue is, "What does the word of God say?"

4. Take a few minutes to read and ponder these verses that speak about God's Word. Below each verse, write down what insights you can take away from the passage.
  - ▶ "I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure" (Psalm 119:162, NLT).



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- ▶ “For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” (Hebrews 4:12, NLT)
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- ▶ “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31–32, NASB).
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## TRANSFORMATIONAL

We would be remiss to end this study without talking about the life-changing power of the Scripture. Millions of people over the centuries have pointed to the Bible as the basis for their changed lives!

The story is told of a South Sea islander during World War II who proudly showed his Bible to an American G.I.

“We’ve outgrown that sort of thing,” the soldier smirked.

“It’s a good thing we haven’t,” the native replied. “If it weren’t for this book I would have killed and eaten you by now.”

The Scripture says, and a mountain of evidence and experience shows, that the Bible is alive. Its truth can pierce the hardest heart and heal the most broken soul. No other book can renew our minds and bear supernatural fruit.



## Take-Home Reflections

For all these reasons, disciples of Jesus believe:

**The Bible is the trustworthy Word of God, the final authority for our beliefs and our behavior.**

Because it is **divine** . . .

*we listen to it.*

Because it is **reliable** . . .

*we can trust it.*

Because it is **authoritative** . . .

*we must submit to it.*

Because it is **transforming** . . .

*we, and others, are blessed when we live it.*

**To reject the historic, orthodox Christian teaching about the Word of God is . . .**

- ▶ To see the Bible as a human document on a par with other great human documents—inspiring, but *not* inspired.
- ▶ To regard the Bible as errant and fallible and *not* worthy of one's full trust.
- ▶ To consider the Bible as one more option among many sources of potential counsel and wisdom—and *not* one's final authority.

“Many who claim to believe the Bible from cover to cover have never read it from cover to cover.”  
—Rick Warren

## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, Hebrews 4:12.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”



2. Know how to answer the common questions about the Bible's reliability. Get and read the pamphlet called *Why Trust the Bible*. Find it here: [www.rose-publishing.com/Why-Trust-the-Bible-pamphlet-P263.aspx](http://www.rose-publishing.com/Why-Trust-the-Bible-pamphlet-P263.aspx)
3. Read carefully these words of an unknown writer and on another sheet of paper journal your reaction:

"This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

"Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ—yes, to glory itself, for eternity."

4. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:
  - ▶ What criticism do you hear from others about the Bible? What is their reasoning? In two thousand years of church history, Christians have found answers to almost every objective question. You may want to find someone to point you in the right direction to find answers to criticisms you or someone else has about the Bible.
  - ▶ What do we know about God from the Scripture that we could not know any other way? What about Jesus' life, death, and ministry?
  - ▶ What truth or thought from this study has had the greatest impact on you? Why?
  - ▶ Have you ever read the entire Bible? Why or why not? You can read the Bible in a year if you read three chapters a day, Monday through Saturday, and four chapters on Sundays.
  - ▶ What's your favorite book or chapter in the Bible? Why? How has it made a difference in your life?
  - ▶ What command in the Bible have you been ignoring?