

# Bibliology—Doctrine of the Bible

## God's Word or Religious Fables?

*Is the Bible accurate?*

*Can the Bible be trusted?*

*Is the Bible a reliable guide to life?*

### I. Historical perspectives

#### A. The early church

- The understanding that the Bible came from God and is errorless has been held since the early days of the church.
- Early Church Fathers such as Clement, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine contended that the Bible had a divine origin as the Word of God

#### B. Classical liberal view

- Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834): The starting point for religion is inner experience, not propositions and dogmas
- F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and David F. Strauss (1808–1874) assert that human reason is sole guide to reliability of NT and therefore rule out the possibility of the miraculous
- Historical criticism of the Bible rules out any supernatural element to the text of Scripture

#### C. Neo-orthodox view

- The social gospel and moralistic kingdom of God advocated by classic liberals was shattered by the horrors of WWI.
- Karl Barth (1886–1968) and others reacted against the errors of liberalism by claiming that God's revelation entails an encounter of Christ through the Word of God; revelation is an experience rather than a set of propositions  
Problem: Still denied the historical
- Distinguished between Christ known reliability of Scripture by faith and the Christ of history

#### D. The "inspired but errant" view

- Proponents believe that the Bible is trustworthy and infallible *when dealing with matters of major importance* such as faith in Christ and the nature of Christian living. However, in peripheral matters dealing with science, history, chronology, or geography, the Bible is not only liable to error, but does in fact occasionally make mistakes

- Contemporary evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock accuses those who hold to an infallible Bible as guilty of "Bibliolatry." He urges believers to recognize that there are "inconsequential errors" in the text of the Bible.

### II. Crucial concepts in Bibliology

#### A. Revelation

##### 1. Definition:

- The divine act of communicating to humanity what otherwise we could not know but what must be learned in order for us to be rightly related to God.

##### 2. It is progressive (Heb 1:1)

##### 3. It involves an awareness and knowledge of God (1 Jn 5:20)

##### 4. It is propositional (1 Cor 2:13)

- God's revelation is given in propositions, that is, truth statements, ideas, concepts, thoughts and words.

#### B. Types of revelation

##### 1. General revelation

###### i. Definition:

- God's witness of himself to all men. It is given to mankind in general and gives a general knowledge of God (Ps 19:1–3).
- It is a universal witness to His existence and reveals something of His character. There is nothing in general revelation about the love of God, the character of sin, the need for faith and repentance, the person and work of Jesus Christ, or the promise of forgiveness. Therefore, it is not salvific.

###### ii. The purpose

- General revelation is the background and preparation for special revelation (i.e. to direct individuals to the fact that the God of special

revelation is the same God known broadly through general revelation.

- For the just condemnation of those who suppress the truth of general revelation (Rom 1:20–21).

### iii. The channels

- Creation (Acts 14:17)
- Mankind a) the image of God (Gen 1:26); b) conscience (Rom 2:15)

## 2. Special revelation

### i. Definition:

- God’s personal disclosure of himself to humanity through the Living and Written Word so that we may come to know him in salvation and glorify Him with our lives.
- It is the knowledge of God given to special/specific person or a particular community (Ps 19:1–3).

### ii. The channels

#### a. Direct revelation

- “The LORD/God said” is used 3,000x in the OT)

#### b. God’s mighty acts

- **Miracles (Heb 2:3–4):** a miracle is an unusually powerful work of God that amazes people, reveals God, and authenticates His revelation and revelation bearer (Matt 9:33).
- **Providence (1 Sam 12:17–18):**
- **The Bible (Heb 1:1)**
- **Jesus Christ (Heb 1:2)**

## C. Inspiration

### 1. Definition:

- The divine act by which the Holy Spirit of God superintended the human writers of Scripture so that what they produced was exactly what God wanted written—the very Word of God.

## 2. Vital components of inspiration

- **Inerrancy:** signifies that, owing ultimately to the character of God, the original documents of Scripture are without error in everything they affirm.
- **Verbal, plenary inspiration:** means that the inspiration of Scripture extends to all of the very words, not just the concepts or ideas (2 Tim 3:16).
- **Infallibility:** signifies that due to the inspiration of Scripture, it is incapable of teaching deception or of failing in its purpose (Rom 3:4, Is 55:11).
- **Trustworthiness:** means that the Scripture is credible, reliable in all its pronouncements, and therefore deserves to be believed (Num 23:19).

## 3. Summary

- Inspiration entails a dual authorship of Scripture. Although the Word originated from God, He employed finite humans to write down His Word and to recognize it as His Word.
- The Holy Spirit was the divine author of Scripture, who superintended the human authors as they wrote, keeping them from all error and omission. While the authors used their individual personalities and skills, the Spirit of God so controlled and guided the human authors that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted written.

## D. Authority

- The authority of Scripture means that the Bible is God’s absolute standard of truth in everything that it affirms (Jn 10:35).

# Bibliology—Doctrine of the Bible

## Inerrancy—Why is it so significant?

This book contains: the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and 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 charter. Here heaven is open, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is the 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, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its contents (excerpt from *The MacArthur Study Bible*)

### I. Inerrancy—the character of Scripture

Inerrancy means that, owing ultimately to the character of a holy, truthful God, the original documents of Scripture are without error in everything they affirm.

### II. Inerrancy—Modern evangelicalism and the Bible

- The Bible is inspired but not completely accurate in all it affirms—Clark Pinnock (professor of Systematic Theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, ON)
- “This leaves us with the question, does the New Testament, did Jesus, teach the perfect errorlessness of the Scriptures? No, not in plain terms” (Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, p. 57).
- “Once we recall how complex a hypothesis inerrancy is, it is obvious that the Bible teaches no such thing explicitly. What it claims, as we have seen, is divine inspiration and a *general reliability*” (*Scripture Principles*, p. 58).
- “Why, then, do scholars insist that the Bible does claim total inerrancy? I can only answer for myself, as one who argued in this way a few years ago. I claimed that the Bible taught total

inerrancy because I hoped that it did—I wanted it to” (*Scripture Principles*, p. 58).

### III. Inerrancy's opponents—the “inspired but errant” view

- The Bible contains errors in peripheral matters but is truthful in its central teachings relating to faith and life.
- “Inconsequential errors” in history, geography, and physical science are present in the Bible.
- The Bible is to be viewed as a source of spiritual strength, not a battlefield over details.

### IV. Inerrancy—the necessity of an inerrant Bible

- Rejection of what God says in His word calls into question the character of God.
- An errant Bible cannot be divinely authoritative and completely trustworthy.
- An errant yet God-breathed Bible is a meaningless designation. A fallible Bible which at the same time claims to be God's Word is philosophically indefensible.
- To deny total inerrancy is to surrender to the philosophy of relativism, which asserts that absolute truth cannot be communicated in a feasible way.

### V. Inerrancy—the biblical reasons for total inerrancy

#### A. The teaching of Christ concerning the Old Testament

- “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17).
- “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (Luke 24:44).
- “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17).
- “How then can we, the disciples of Jesus, possibly have a lower view of Scripture than our Teacher himself had?” (John Stott, *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 16)..

#### B. The teaching of Christ concerning the Future New Testament

- “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

- “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26–27).
- “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John, who then testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1–2).

#### VI. Inerrancy—crucial terms to understand: illumination

*Illumination* describes the work of the Holy Spirit whereby he brings understanding and enables reception of the Word. It entails a divine enlightening by the Holy Spirit to enable a person to grasp the significance of the Word of God. Illumination pertains to the human mind and not to the biblical text (1 Cor 2:14).

## Bibliology—Doctrine of the Bible

### Canonization—The Process of Recognizing The Breadth of Scripture

Is the Bible simply the by-product of an early, agenda-driven church council? How do we know that we got the right books and didn’t leave out others that were supposed to have been included?

#### I. The canon of the Scriptures

##### A. The term “canon”

- The term canon comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning a measuring rod or rule
- The canon signifies that which is measured by the rule or norm
- In the fourth century Greek Christians gave the word a religious meaning and applied it to the Scriptures

##### B. The concept of canonization

- The canon is the list of biblical books regarded as inspired and accepted as authoritative for all Christians
- Canonicity presupposes revelation, inspiration, and authority
- Each of the 66 books of the Bible has been recognized as inspired revelation from God, as teaching with normative authority, and therefore as canonical
- The books of the Bible were inspired when they were written, and when they were received as inspired they became part of the canon, the collection of inspired writings

#### II. The canonization of the Old Testament

##### A. The 5 tests of Old Testament canonization

1. Divine authorship: Is the book recognized and revered as being inspired by God?
2. Human authorship: Is the book written, edited, or endorsed by a prophet or spokesman from God?
3. Authorial integrity: Can the book be traced back to the time and writer from whom it claimed to originate?
4. Authenticity: Is the book an authentic record of actual facts?

5. Early tradition: Is the book attested and received by the testimony of Jews from an early date?

## **B. The 3-fold division of the Old Testament**

1. Law
2. Prophets
3. Writings

- The 3-fold division relates to the special position or status of the writer

## **C. The Old Testament Apocrypha**

### **1. The term**

- The term apocrypha signifies that which is hidden. The term came to mean that which was obscure or mysterious, and eventually was applied to books deemed to be spurious. The Reformers used the term to describe books they viewed as not canonical.

### **2. The time**

- The 400 silent years: Between the writing of Malachi (approx. 430 B.C.) and the coming of John the Baptist (approx. A.D. 26) both revelation and therefore inspiration were inoperative.
- Although conservative scholars view this period as a time when God did not speak as previously through His prophets, a number of books were composed.

### **3. The text—the 15 Apocryphal books**

- 1) 1 Esdras (= Roman Catholic 3 Esdras or Greek Ezra)
- 2) 2 Esdras (= Roman Catholic 4 Esdras or Ezra Apocalypse)
- 3) Tobit
- 4) Judith
- 5) Additions to the Book of Esther
- 6) Wisdom of Solomon
- 7) Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach
- 8) Baruch
- 9) Letter of Jeremiah

- 10) Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
- 11) Susanna
- 12) Bel and the Dragon
- 13) Prayer of Manasseh
- 14) 1 Maccabees
- 15) 2 Maccabees

### **4. The dispute**

- Evangelical Protestantism recognizes the value of the Old Testament apocryphal books from an historical, political, and literary standpoint and for their reflection of the religious life of Israel between the testaments. However, Evangelical Protestantism rejects these books from the canon for the following reasons:
  - (1) None of the books claims to be inspired.
  - (2) None is quoted in the New Testament or was part of the canon Christ accepted.
  - (3) These books contain historical, geographical, and chronological errors, and at times they contradict the known canonical books.
  - (4) Except for 1 and 2 Esdras and The Prayer of Manasseh, the apocryphal books were only officially acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church over 15 centuries after their composition at the Council of Trent in 1546 (largely in response to the inroads of the Protestant Reformation in Europe)
- For these reasons the Protestant canon omits these books, affirming instead 39 Old Testament books

### **5. The problems—an illustration from “Bel and the Dragon”**

- (1) The old Greek translation introduces the book by claiming that Daniel was a priest, which stands opposed to the canonical book of Daniel, which does not designate him as a priest.
- (2) Daniel’s interaction with the king is problematic: “A response of laughter at the king’s comment is a bit surprising given the risk and danger that were involved in a subordinate possibly upsetting an ancient oriental despot. In v. 19 Daniel not only laughs at the king’s praise of Bel but also physically restrains the king from entering the temple.

Such physical contact with a monarch would have been unusual.” (NET Bible notes)

(3) The episode of the pitch, fat, and hair destroying the dragon (i.e. snake) is obscure. How this would have killed the snake is uncertain. The difficulty of the tale is probably due to the legendary nature of the material.

### III. The canonization of the New Testament

#### A. Transmission

- The New Testament consists of 27 books written by 8–10 human authors over a period of about two generations.
- The New Testament opens with the book of James (approx. 45 A.D.) and closes with the book of Revelation (approx. 90–95 A.D.)
- The books existed by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. throughout a territory spanning Babylon in the east to Rome in the west.

#### B. Preservation

- Although God in His providence did not see fit to preserve the original autographs of Scripture, thousands of extant New Testament manuscripts and fragments date back to within about 50 years of the originals
- Through the science of textual criticism, we can be reasonably certain of reproducing the exact text of the original autographs

#### C. Collection

##### 1. Several factors led to the collection of the canonical writings

- a) Recognition of the OT canon produced a desire for a parallel collection of New Testament writings
- b) The words of Christ and the apostles were regarded as very precious by the early church; thus, an effort was sustained to preserve them.
- c) At least one New Testament book, 1 Thessalonians, admonished believers to read the text aloud during public worship (“I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers” 1 Thess 5:27).
- d) The development of a canon by the Gnostic heretic Marcion in the second century compelled the early

Christians to compile their own collection of authoritative writings.

- e) Severe persecutions under the Roman emperors motivated believers to ascertain the bounds of the New Testament inspired writings

##### 2. The process of collecting the books of the New Testament canon

- a) The New Testament itself encouraged the collection of written works (“After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea” Col 4:16)
- b) The New Testament put its writings on par with OT inspired works (“As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you... which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” 2 Pet 3:15 – 16)
- c) Paul classified passages from Deuteronomy and Luke equally as Scripture (“For the scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The worker deserves his pay" 1 Tim 5:18)
- d) Three Periods of Canonical Collection Ensued:
  - The Period of Separate Circulation (A.D. 70 – 170)
  - The Period of Separation between Canonical and Noncanonical Writings (A.D. 170 – 303)
  - The Period of Ratification of the NT Canon (Council of Laodicea [367] and Council of Carthage [397] (A.D. 303 - 590)

##### 3. The tests of New Testament canonicity

- Authoritative content: Did the work reflect accurately in particular the person and work of Christ?
- Self-claims of the book: Did the work claim to be inspired by a reliable source and did the book have agreement with the other recognized books?
- Moral and spiritual aspects: Did the book have the inherent power to influence and transform people’s lives?
- Reputation of the book in its own provenance: Did those closest to the writing of the book geographically as well as the recipients of the book receive it as authoritative?

- Authorship: Was the book written by a recognized apostle, apostolic associate, or NT prophet? (e.g., Mark wrote under the direction of Peter; Luke was closely associated with Paul)

#### **4. The close of the canon**

- Jesus recognized the bounds of the OT canon in his day (Luke 11:51)
- The New Testament itself signaled the approaching close of NT revelation and inscripturation (see Jude 3; Rev 22:18–19)
- It is necessary to formulate this understanding theologically, as encompassing the nature and scope of God's self-revelation
- The early church took great care in selecting and collecting the NT books
- The New Testament apostles and prophets, who were the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), have passed off the scene. No similarly authoritative spokesman for God equipped with the same special gifts and abilities is alive today.
- The Bible we have today, consisting of 66 books, is the all-sufficient, inspired Word of God.