

The Bible - Inspiration, Preservation & Application

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From John Piper to Joel Osteen, anyone claiming an orthodox Christianity has, at the front of their affirmation of faith, belief in the Bible. Creation is sufficient to convince us of God, but it is not sufficient to give us the knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ.

Without the Bible, we might have heard exaggerated fables about the man-God who walked in Galilee, or else those legends might have faded away like the myths of so many conquered nations. But because of the Bible, we have a firsthand, eyewitness account of the life and ministry of Jesus from the testimony of those who knew Him well and saw Him after His resurrection. Because of the Bible, we have a history of God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the nation of Israel and kings like David and Solomon. We read about freedom fighters Gideon, Samson, reformers like Ezra, and prophets like Samuel and Elijah. Because of the Bible, we even have an eye witness account of creation, which God Himself gave to Moses.

The Inspiration, Preservation & Application of The Bible

The Bible is a collection of 66 separate but interlinking works which all tell one story. But where did this book come from? Has it been passed down reliably? And if so, what should we do about it?

Inspiration

The Bible was written by 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years, but all of it was '*breathed out by God.*'

When Moses came down the mountain, in his hand were two tablets, '*The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.*' The first words of Scripture are literally written by God, and to these words God instructed Moses to add others, which became

the first 5 books of the Bible. Joshua wrote next, then Samuel, and so forth. Different authors, each with their own voice, but with a unity that points to one overall Author.

Throughout the Bible, God speaks. Even in the histories, God's voice is woven in, showing how it is normal for God to be part of proceedings. Some 3800 times, the Bible says, '*God said,*' or '*Thus says the Lord*'. With claims like these, if the Bible was not breathed out by God, then it is not just 'another book' – it is a terrible deception, full of lies!

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As the famous preacher, John Wesley said, 'This book had to be written by one of three people: good men, bad men or God. It couldn't have been written by good men because they said it was inspired by the revelation of God. Good men don't lie and deceive. It couldn't have been written by bad men because bad men would not write something that would condemn themselves. It leaves only one conclusion. It was given by divine inspiration of God.'

The Old Testament was already completed before the time of Christ. This was the Bible of Jesus, of Peter and Paul. Jesus recognised the Old Testament as Scripture, from which He and the apostles taught. But Jesus came with authority greater than the scribes and teachers who had taught and interpreted the Old Testament before Him. He taught things like '*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*' (Matthew 5:38-39)

The 27 books of the New Testament were recognised as Scripture within the first two hundred years of the early church.

Jesus was rewriting the Scriptures, and so it follows that these new commands and new teachings would need to be recorded in a New Testament. The disciples received a clear mandate from Jesus to pass on what He had taught. But Jesus Himself said there would be additional material, beyond what He had taught. '*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes ... he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*' (John 16:12-14)

In this, Jesus spoke of Paul and other apostles, who not only recorded the words and works of Jesus but wrote what Jesus gave them, by the Holy Spirit, after His return to the Father. Paul recognised the authority of what he wrote, '*If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*' (1 Corinthians 14:37) Peter also recognised the authority of Paul's writings, and considered them comparable with the '*other scriptures*'.

The 27 books of the New Testament were passed around and had become well known and recognised as Scripture within the first two hundred years of the early church.

Preservation

None of the Bible's original manuscripts have survived, which is quite normal for ancient texts. What we have are mountains of copies, the quantity and quality of which are remarkable.

Consider Julius Caesar, who conquered Gaul during the 50s BC. We know this because he published a memoir. It's also mentioned in the Asterix comics! The original manuscript for Caesar's memoir is, typically, lost, but the surviving ancient copies have been catalogued. There are 12 good sources, and the oldest are from the 9th and 11th Century.

To put this in perspective, there is roughly the same amount of time between Caesar's original manuscript and the oldest sources, as there is between the oldest sources and a first edition Asterix comic!



By contrast, the oldest Old Testament sources date from before the time of Jesus. Less than 500 years after the Old Testament was completed.

The New Testament is supported by not 12, but over 24,000 sources. Including nearly 6,000 complete New Testaments. The earliest copies date from only 100 years after it was written.



Because we have such a wealth of sources, dating from so close to the originals, we are able to know, without doubt, that the Bible we have received is authentic. It has been faithfully preserved.

Application

If we believe the Bible was breathed out by God. If we believe we have received it accurately through the ages. Then, what should we do about it?

A good way to answer this is to see **why the Bible was written**:

1) '**...so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.' Those who receive Jesus, and only those, are given the right to be called children of God. That is the beginning of the journey. For your sake and mine, God put all our sin on Jesus. Every wrong thing we ever did, and every good thing we neglected to do, that was what Jesus paid for in His death. Even though He had never sinned, He paid for our sin so that we could be in right-standing with God. God appeals to you, through the Bible, to be reconciled to Him. And the Bible shows you how that can happen.

2) '**...that you may have certainty** concerning the things you have been taught.' Reading the Scriptures familiarises us with the promises and expectations of God towards us. How does God want me to behave? What do I get in return? The answers are in the Bible.

3) '**...so that you may not sin.**' Jesus already paid for our sin, let us not now add to the list! Bury the treasure of God's word in your heart and you will not sin against Him. The Holy Spirit can use the Scriptures to turn our hearts towards the Father and away from sin.

4) '...so that you will **know how each one must conduct himself** in God's household.' How church happens. How leaders are recognised and appointed. How the gifts of the spirit are used. How we challenge and correct sin. All this and more is explained plainly in the Scriptures.

5) '...so **that you may know that you have eternal life**'. We can know we are saved. Not because we said a prayer once or wrote a date in our Bible, but because we know we have abided in Him and endured to the end. The Bible shows us what that looks like.

Read the Bible

If you have never read the Bible cover to cover. If you have neglected to pick it up each day and hide it in your heart. If you don't read it at all, pick it up today.

'Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever."' (1 Peter 1: 23-25)