

The Doctrine of Scripture

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Introduction

What sort of questions are we addressing?

- What does the Bible say about itself?
- What kind of book is the Bible? Does it contain errors?
- How does the Bible fit with the work of God's Spirit?
- How is reading the Bible connected to our relationship with God?
- What authority does the Bible have? Why?
- Do we need anything apart from the Bible?
- How does the Bible fit with church traditions and personal experience?
- How should we read the Bible?

What does the Bible say about itself?

- The Bible doesn't say much about itself explicitly
- The Bible says *lots* about itself implicitly

The importance of divine authorship

'What Scripture says, God says.'¹

The divine inspiration of Scripture

The words of the Bible are the words of God

Clarifications

- 'Inspired', not merely 'inspirational'
- Scripture exhibits both divine and human authorship

2 Peter 1:21 ... men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- The *very words* of Scripture are inspired
- Both the *words* and the *substance* of Scripture are inspired

¹ B. B. Warfield.

- The meaning of what God says is found in the meaning of what Scripture says

Evidence for the divine inspiration of Scripture

Step 1: The Old Testament contains prophetic teaching identified as 'the word of the LORD'

- 'Thus says the LORD!'

Exodus 4:22; 5:1; 7:17; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 11:4; 32:27; **Joshua** 7:13; 24:2; **Judges** 6:8; **1 Samuel** 10:18; 15:2; **2 Samuel** 7:5, 8; 12:7, 11; 24:12; **1 Kings** 11:31; 12:24; 13:2, 21; 14:7; 17:14; 20:13f, 28, 42; 21:19; 22:11; **2 Kings** 1:4, 6, 16; 2:21; 3:16f; 4:43; 7:1; 9:3, 6, 12; 19:6, 20, 32; 20:1, 5; 21:12; 22:15f, 18; **1 Chronicles** 17:4, 7; 21:10f; **2 Chronicles** 11:4; 12:5; 18:10; 20:15; 21:12; 34:23f, 26; **Isaiah** 7:7; 10:24; 22:15; 28:16; 29:22; 37:6, 21, 33; 38:1, 5; 43:1, 14, 16; 44:2, 6, 24; 45:1, 11, 14, 18; 48:17; 49:7f, 22, 25; 50:1; 52:3f; 56:1, 4; 65:8, 13; 66:1, 12; **Jeremiah** 2:2, 5; 4:3, 27; 5:14; 6:6, 9, 16, 21f; 7:3, 20f; 8:4; 9:7, 15, 17, 23; 10:2, 18; 11:3, 11, 21f; 12:14; 13:1, 9, 12f; 14:10, 15; 15:2, 19; 16:3, 5, 9; 17:5, 21; 18:11, 13; 19:1, 3, 11, 15; 20:4; 21:4, 8, 12; 22:1, 3, 6, 11, 18, 30; 23:2, 15f, 38; 24:5, 8; 25:8, 27f, 32; 26:2, 4, 18; 27:4, 16, 19, 21; 28:2, 11, 13f, 16; 29:4, 8, 10, 16f, 21, 25, 31f; 30:2, 5, 12, 18; 31:2, 7, 15f, 23, 35, 37; 32:3, 14f, 28, 36, 42; 33:2, 4, 10, 12, 17, 20, 25; 34:2, 4, 13, 17; 35:13, 17ff; 36:29f; 37:7, 9; 38:2f, 17; 39:16; 42:9, 15, 18; 43:10; 44:2, 7, 11, 25, 30; 45:2, 4; 47:2; 48:1, 40; 49:1, 7, 12, 28, 35; 50:18, 33; 51:1, 33, 36, 58; **Ezekiel** 2:4; 3:11, 27; 5:5, 7f; 6:3, 11; 7:2, 5; 11:5, 7, 16f; 12:10, 19, 23, 28; 13:3, 8, 13, 18, 20; 14:4, 6, 21; 15:6; 16:3, 36, 59; 17:3, 9, 19, 22; 20:3, 5, 27, 30, 39, 47; 21:3, 9, 24, 26, 28; 22:3, 19, 28; 23:22, 28, 32, 35, 46; 24:3, 6, 9, 21; 25:3, 6, 8, 12f, 15f; 26:3, 7, 15, 19; 27:3; 28:2, 6, 12, 22, 25; 29:3, 8, 13, 19; 30:2, 6, 10, 13, 22; 31:10, 15; 32:3, 11; 33:25, 27; 34:2, 10f, 17, 20; 35:3, 14; 36:2ff, 13, 22, 33, 37; 37:5, 9, 12, 19, 21; 38:3, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17, 25; 43:18; 44:6, 9; 45:9, 18; 46:1, 16; 47:13; **Amos** 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; 3:11f; 5:3f, 16; 7:17; **Obadiah** 1:1; **Micah** 2:3; 3:5; **Nahum** 1:12; **Haggai** 1:2, 5, 7; 2:6, 11; **Zechariah** 1:4, 14, 16f; 3:7; 6:12; 7:9; 8:2ff, 6f, 9, 14, 19f, 23

- God speaks *to* and *through* his prophets

Deuteronomy 18:18-20 ¹⁸ I will raise up for them *a prophet like you* from among their brothers. And *I will put my words in his mouth*, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. ²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.

1 Samuel 15:1-2 ¹And Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore *listen to the words of the LORD*. ²*Thus says the LORD* of hosts...'

1 Kings 14:17-18 ¹⁷Then Jeroboam's wife arose and departed and came to Tirzah. And as she came to the threshold of the house, the child died. ¹⁸And all Israel buried him and mourned for him, according to *the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the prophet*.

1 Kings 16:12 Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to *the word of the LORD, which he spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet*.

1 Kings 16:34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to *the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun*.

2 Kings 9:36 When they came back and told him, he said, 'This is *the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite ...*'

2 Kings 14:25 He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to *the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher*.

Jeremiah 1:9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, 'Behold, *I have put my words in your mouth.*'

Jeremiah 37:2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to *the words of the LORD that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet*.

Ezekiel 2:7-8 ⁷And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house. ⁸But you, son of man, hear what I say to you.'

Zechariah 7:7 Were not these *the words that the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets*, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?"

Zechariah 7:12 They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and *the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets*. Therefore great anger came from the LORD ...

- False prophets are condemned because the LORD had not spoken through them

Jeremiah 14:14 And the LORD said to me: 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. *I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them*. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

Jeremiah 23:16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, *not from the mouth of the LORD.*'

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 ²¹And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?' – ²²when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, *if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken*; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

- To disobey a prophet is to disobey the LORD

1 Samuel 13:13-14 ¹³And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept *the command of the LORD your God*, with which *he commanded you*. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what *the LORD commanded you.*'

1 Samuel 15:19 Why then did you not obey *the voice of the LORD*? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because *you have rejected the word of the LORD*, he has also rejected you from being king.'

1 Kings 20:35-36 ³⁵And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the LORD, 'Strike me, please.' But the man refused to strike him. ³⁶Then he said to him, 'Because you have not obeyed *the voice of the LORD*, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down.' And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and struck him down.

Step 2: Jesus taught that the OT is God's word

Roger Beckwith:

'Christ passed on to his followers, as Holy Scripture, the Bible which he had received, containing the same books as the Heb. Bible today' (*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 169).

- Jesus describes parts of the OT as God's word

Matthew 19:4-5 ⁴[Jesus] answered, 'Have you not read that *he who created them* from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"?'

Matthew 4:4 But [Jesus] answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"'

In **Mark 7:9-13**, Jesus describes Ex 20:12; 21:17; Lev 20:9; Deut 5:16; 27:16 as 'the commandment of God,' what 'Moses said,' and 'the word of God' interchangeably.

- Jesus ascribes divine authority to the OT in general

Matthew 5:17-18 ¹⁷‘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. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.’

Matthew 26:53-54 ⁵³‘Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But *how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?*’

Mark 14:48-49 ⁴⁸And Jesus said to them, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But *let the Scriptures be fulfilled.*’

Luke 22:37 For I tell you that *this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’* For *what is written about me has its fulfillment.*

Luke 24:44 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.*’

John 13:18 I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But *the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’*

John 15:25 But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

John 17:12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Step 3: The apostles and NT writers describe the OT as the word of God

- Specific parts of the OT are described as the word of God

Matthew 1:22-23 ²²All this took place to fulfil what *the Lord had spoken* by the prophet: ²³‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).

Acts 1:16 Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which *the Holy Spirit spoke* beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Acts 2:16-17 ¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷‘And in the last days it shall be, *God declares*, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...’

Luke 1:68-70 ⁶⁸Blessed be *the Lord God of Israel*, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as *he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets* from of old...

Acts 4:24-25 ²⁴And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘*Sovereign Lord*, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵who *through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit*, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?”’

Acts 13:47-48 ⁴⁷For so *the Lord has commanded us*, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’

Acts 28:25 ²⁵And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: ‘*The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet...*’

Romans 3:2 First of all, they have been entrusted with *the very words of God*. [NIV]

Hebrews 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, *God spoke to our fathers by the prophets*.

Hebrews 1:5-8, 13 ⁵For to which of the angels did *God* ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’ Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?’ ⁶And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, *he says*, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’ ⁷Of the angels *he says*, ‘He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.’ ⁸But of the Son *he says*, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and

ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom ... ¹³ And to which of the angels has *he ever said*, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?

- The OT in general is described as the word of God

Acts 3:18-21 ¹⁸But what *God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets*, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which *God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets* long ago.

Romans 1:1-2 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of *God*, ²which *he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures* ...

Step 4: The NT writings claim to be inspired by God

- Jesus prepared his disciples to write what the Holy Spirit would teach them

John 14:26 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 have said to you.*

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, *he will guide you into all the truth*, for 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.

- The NT writings claim to be divinely inspired

1 Corinthians 2:13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

1 Corinthians 14:37 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 Thessalonians 4:15 For this we declare to you by *a word from the Lord*, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brothers, *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with *the tradition that you received from us.*

2 Peter 3:1-2 ¹This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ²that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and *the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles...*

Step 5: The NT writings fall into the same category of 'Scripture' as the OT

- 'The Scriptures' [*graphē*] are described as 'God-breathed'

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture [*graphē*] is breathed out by God [*theopneustos*] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...

- The NT writings are included in the category of 'Scripture' [*graphē*]

1 Timothy 5:18 For the Scripture [*graphē*] says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The labourer deserves his wages.'

2 Peter 3:15-16 ¹⁵And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother *Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him*, ¹⁶as 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* [*graphē*].

Summary

Step 1: The Old Testament contains prophetic teaching identified as ‘the word of the LORD’

Step 2: Jesus taught that the OT is God’s word

Step 3: The apostles and NT writers describe the OT as the word of God

Step 4: The NT writings claim to be inspired by God

Step 5: The NT writings fall into the same category of ‘Scripture’ as the OT

NB: the NT writings direct the early church to the apostolic tradition, never to ‘fresh revelations’

1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6, 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 3:14

Possible objections

- Objection 1: ‘It’s a circular argument.’

Response:

1. Self-referential, not circular
2. Every system is ultimately self-referential
3. The argument is self-referential in exactly the way it ought to be

Francis Turretin (18th century):

‘Since the Bible is the first principle and the primary and infallible truth, is it strange to say that it can be proved by itself?’²

4. The importance of self-consistency

Counter-question: ‘On what authority do you reject the Bible’s claim to be the word of God?’

- Objection 2: ‘1 Corinthians 7:10, 12 reveals that Paul is conscious of lacking divine authority.’

Response:

1. 7:12 concerns lack of explicit words from Jesus’ lips, not lack of divine authority. Compare 1 Corinthians 7:10 with Matthew 5:32.
2. See also 1 Corinthians 7:25; subsequent (authoritative) instructions; etc.

God is personally present in his word

- Words accomplish things
- God’s words accomplish God’s works

Psalm 29:5, 8 ⁵The *voice of the LORD* breaks the cedars; the *LORD* breaks the cedars of Lebanon. ... ⁸The *voice of the LORD* shakes the wilderness; the *LORD* shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

Isaiah 55:10-11 ¹⁰For 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, ¹¹so 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.*

Creation, covenant, regeneration, etc.

Timothy Ward:

‘To trust God’s covenant promise is not to enter into an agreement with an absentee God; it is to trust the God who has come to you ... It seems that *God’s actions, including his verbal actions, are a kind of extension of him.*’³

² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.vi.18 (1:91).

³ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God*, p. 33.

- Consequently, Scripture bears other marks of its speaker

Inerrancy
 Authority
 Sufficiency
 Clarity
 Necessity

The inerrancy of Scripture

Everything that the Bible teaches is true

Hilary of Poitiers (4th century)

‘Since then we are to discourse of the things of God, let us assume that God has full knowledge of Himself, and bow with humble reverence to His words. For He Whom we can only know through His own utterances is the fitting witness concerning Himself.’⁴

William Whitaker (16th century):

‘No one is so fit a witness of God and his word, as God himself in his word’.⁵

- God never lies, so the Bible never lies

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?

Titus 1:2 ... God, who never lies ...

Hebrews 6:18 ... it is impossible for God to lie ...

- The Bible *rightly interpreted* is inerrant
- Inerrancy doesn’t rule out ordinary speech

‘I waved goodbye to my kids when I set off as the sun rose at 6:30 this morning.’

The divine authority of Scripture

We must do what the Bible says

William Whitaker:

‘Scripture hath for its author God himself; from whom it first proceeded and came forth. Therefore, *the authority of Scripture may be proved from the author himself*, since the authority of God himself shines forth in it.’⁶

The sufficiency of Scripture

The Bible tells us everything we need to know about everything that matters

- Exhaustive ethical sufficiency

⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, i.18 (NPNF2, 9:45).

⁵ William Whitaker, *Disputation*, iii.3 (p. 292).

⁶ William Whitaker, *Disputation*, iii.3 (p. 289).

The clarity ('perspicuity') of Scripture

The Bible is clear enough for the church to understand it adequately

Clarifications

- 'The church,' not every individual Christian
- The importance of teachers
- 'Adequately,' not exhaustively

The necessity of Scripture

We need the Bible in order to know God

- Sin corrupts our 'natural' knowledge of God

Romans 1:18-23 ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but *they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²²Claiming to be wise, *they became fools,* ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

- Scripture opens our eyes so that we may know God

John Calvin:

'Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, clearly shows us the true God.'⁷

Scripture and tradition

- The church *authenticates* Scripture as divine in origin, it doesn't *confer* divine origin

Scripture and the Spirit

- The Spirit opens our eyes to enable us to see that Scripture is God's word

Illustration: seeing the sun

Illustration: single malt whisky

Further resources

Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009)

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: IVP / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), chs 2-8

Garry Williams, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Scripture* (The John Owen Centre, London Theological Seminary; <http://www.ltslondon.org/joc/index.php>)

J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1958)

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.vi.1.