

# What Does the Bible Say About...?

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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT...?

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rhodes, Ron

[The complete book of Bible answers]

What does the Bible say about—? / Ron Rhodes.

p. cm.

Originally published: The complete book of Bible answers. c1997.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-1903-6

ISBN-10: 0-7369-1903-6

1. Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Bible—Miscellanea. I. Title.

BS511.3.R48 2007

220—dc22

2007003235

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**Printed in the United States of America**

07 08 09 10 11 12 / VP / 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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# PART 1



## GOD'S BOOK—THE BIBLE

*The Inspiration of Scripture*

*The Reliability of Scripture*

*The Canon of Scripture*

*Interpreting Scripture*



## The Inspiration of Scripture

*What does it mean to say that the Bible is “inspired”?*

Inspiration doesn't mean the biblical writer just felt enthusiastic, like the composer of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Nor does it mean the writings are necessarily inspiring to read, like an uplifting poem. The biblical Greek word for *inspiration* literally means “God-breathed.” Because Scripture is breathed out by God—because it *originates* from Him—it is true and inerrant.

Biblical inspiration may be defined as God's superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities—and even their writing styles—they composed and recorded *without error* His revelation to humankind in the words of the original autographs. In other words, the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents, wrote under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the result being a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message God desired to give to man.

Hence, the writers of Scripture were not mere writing machines. God did not use them like keys on a typewriter to mechanically reproduce His message. Nor did He dictate the words, page by page. The biblical evidence makes it clear that each writer had a style of his own. (Isaiah had a powerful literary style; Jeremiah had a mournful tone;

Luke's style had medical overtones; and John was very simple in his approach.) The Holy Spirit infallibly worked through each of these writers, through their individual styles, to inerrantly communicate His message to human-kind.

*To what extent were the biblical writers controlled by the Holy Spirit as they wrote?*

In his second letter, Peter provides a key insight regarding the human-divine interchange in the process of inspiration. This verse informs us that "prophecy [or Scripture] never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The phrase *carried along* in this verse literally means "forcefully borne along."

Even though human beings were used in the process of writing down God's Word, they were all literally "borne along" by the Holy Spirit. The human wills of the authors were not the originators of God's message. God did not permit the will of sinful human beings to misdirect or erroneously record His message. Rather, "God *moved* and the prophet *mouthed* these truths; God *revealed* and man *recorded* His word."<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, the Greek word for "carried along" in 2 Peter 1:21 is the same as that found in Acts 27:15-17. In this passage the experienced sailors could not navigate the ship because the wind was so strong. The ship was being *driven*, *directed*, and *carried along* by the wind. This is similar to the Spirit's driving, directing, and carrying the human authors of the Bible as He wished. The word is a strong one, indicating the Spirit's complete superintendence of the human authors. Yet, just as the sailors were active on the ship (though the wind, not the sailors, ultimately controlled the ship's movement), so the human authors were active in writing as the Spirit directed.

*Were the New Testament writers aware that their writings were inspired by God and therefore authoritative?*

Yes, I believe so. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 the apostle Paul said he spoke “not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” In this passage Paul (who wrote over half the New Testament) affirmed that his words were authoritative because they were rooted not in fallible men but infallible God (the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *truth* who was promised to the apostles to teach and guide them into all the *truth* (see John 16:13).

Later, in 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul said, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul likewise said, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” Again, the reason Paul’s words were authoritative is because they were rooted in God, not in man. God used Paul as His instrument to communicate *His* word to man.

*What are some of the incorrect views of the inspiration of Scripture?*

There are at least seven incorrect views of inspiration that are circulating today. Briefly:

The “Dictation Theory” says that God raised up men, prepared the men *and* their vocabularies, and then dictated to them the very words which they would put down in the Scriptures.

The “Natural Inspiration Theory” says that the writers of Scripture were simply men of great genius. There was nothing supernatural involved. These were men with talent similar to that of Shakespeare.

The “Mystical Theory” says that the writers of Scripture were simply Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided believers, like any believer may be today.

The “Neoorthodox Theory” says that the Bible is a fallible and often unreliable “witness” to the Word of God. In a fallible way, it points to Christ.

The “Concept Inspiration Theory” holds that the concepts, but not the very words of Scripture, were inspired. So, for example, the concept of salvation in Christ may be inspired, but the words used to communicate this concept are not inspired and therefore may have mistakes.

The “Inspired Purpose Theory” says that although the Bible contains many factual errors and insoluble discrepancies, it still has “doctrinal integrity” and thus accomplishes God’s purpose for it. The Bible’s infallibility is carefully limited to the main purpose or principle emphasis of the Bible—that is, salvation.

The “Partial Inspiration Theory” says that certain parts of the Bible are inspired—that is, the portions that would otherwise have been unknowable (creation, prophecy, salvation by faith in Christ, and so forth).

The correct view of inspiration involves God’s superintendence of the human writers of Scripture so that, while allowing for their own personalities and writing styles, they recorded without error, in the words of the original manuscripts, God’s word to humankind.

## OBJECTIONS TO INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY

*Some critics question the Bible’s reliability by arguing that the gospel writers were biased. How can we respond to this?*

Some critics say the four gospel writers were biased in the sense that they had theological “motives.” Their intent was to convince readers of Jesus’ deity, we are told, and hence their historical testimony is untrustworthy.

The fallacy here is to imagine that to give an account of something one believes in passionately necessarily forces one to distort history. This is simply not true. In modern times some of the most reliable reports of the Nazi Holocaust were written by Jews who were passionately committed to seeing such genocide never repeated.<sup>2</sup>

The New Testament is not made up of fairy tales but rather is based on eyewitness testimony. In 2 Peter 1:16 we read, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” First John 1:1 affirms, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

### *Why did God allow four Gospels into the Bible that have apparent contradictions?*

First of all, while the Gospels may have some *apparent* contradictions, I do not believe they have *genuine* contradictions. There are differences, yes, but actual contradictions, no.

Second, foundationally, it is important to keep in mind that inspiration and inerrancy are, strictly speaking, ascribed only to the original autographs of Scripture. Certainly I believe that the copies we have of the original autographs are extremely accurate. But theologians have been very careful to say that the Scriptures, in their *original autographs* and *properly interpreted*, will be shown to be *wholly true* in everything they teach.

Third, if all four Gospels were the same, with no differences, critics would be screaming “collusion” all over the place. The fact that the Gospels have differences show there was no collusion but rather represent four different (but inspired) accounts of the same events.

One should not assume that a *partial* account in a gospel is a *faulty* account. In Matthew 27:5, for example, we are told that Judas died by hanging himself. In Acts 1:18 we are told that Judas burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. These are both partial accounts. Neither account gives us the full picture. But taken together we can easily reconstruct how Judas died. He hanged himself, and sometime later the rope loosened and Judas fell to the rocks below, thereby causing his intestines to gush out. As one probes into alleged contradictions, one consistently sees that they are all explainable in a reasonable way.

### *How can we respond to those who claim that science disproves the miracles of the Bible?*

Science depends upon observation and replication. Miracles, such as the Incarnation and the Resurrection, are by their very nature unprecedented events. No one can replicate these events in a laboratory. Hence, science simply cannot be the judge and jury as to whether or not these events occurred.

The scientific method is useful for studying nature but not *super-nature*. Just as football stars are speaking outside their field of expertise when they appear on television to tell you what razor you should buy, so scientists are speaking outside their field when they address theological issues like miracles or the Resurrection.

Actually, there is good reason to believe in the biblical miracles. One highly pertinent factor is the brief time that elapsed between Jesus' miraculous public ministry and the publication of the Gospels. It was insufficient for the devel-

opment of miracle legends. Many eyewitnesses to Jesus' miracles would have still been alive to refute any untrue miracle accounts (see 1 Corinthians 15:6).

One must also recognize the noble character of the men who witnessed these miracles (Peter, James, and John, for example). Such men were not prone to misrepresentation, and they were willing to give up their lives rather than deny their beliefs.

There were also hostile witnesses to the miracles of Christ. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, for example, none of the chief priests or Pharisees disputed the miracle (John 11:45-48). (If they could have disputed it, they would have.) Rather, their goal was simply to stop Jesus (verses 47,48). Because there were so many hostile witnesses who observed and scrutinized Christ, successful "fabrication" of miracle stories in His ministry would have been impossible.

I believe that nature and Scripture, properly interpreted, do not conflict. God has communicated to humankind both by *general* revelation (nature, or the observable universe) and *special* revelation (the Bible). Since both of these revelations come from God—and since God does not contradict Himself—we must conclude that these two revelations are in agreement with each other. While there may be conflicts between one's *interpretation* of the observable universe and one's *interpretation* of the Bible, there is no ultimate contradiction.

We might say that *science* is a fallible human interpretation of the observable universe while *theology* is a fallible human interpretation of the Scriptures. If the secularist challenges the idea that science can be fallible, remind him or her of what science historian Thomas Kuhn proved in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*—that is, science is in a constant state of change. New discoveries have consistently caused old scientific paradigms to be discarded in favor of newer paradigms.

Here is the point: it is not *nature* and *Scripture* that contradict; rather, it is *science* (man's fallible interpretation of nature) and *theology* (man's fallible interpretation of Scripture) that sometimes fall into conflict. Hence the secularist cannot simply dismiss certain parts of the Bible because "science and the Bible contradict."

*How can we respond to the claim that some language in the Bible is scientifically incorrect?*

Some critics allege that the Bible is not scientifically accurate in view of its frequent use of "phenomenological" language—that is, the language of appearances. Ecclesiastes 1:5, for example, refers to the sun "rising" and "setting." From a scientific perspective, the sun does not actually rise or set. But let's be fair. This is the same kind of language weather forecasters use today. "Rising" and "setting" are accepted ways of describing what the sun *appears* to be doing from an earthly perspective. So, the Bible's use of such language does not prove there are scientific errors in it.