

THE BIG BOOK of BIBLE ANSWERS

RON RHODES



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To my beloved son, David

Acknowledgments

Through the years I've received countless letters and e-mails from people around the world asking a variety of interesting questions about the Bible. I'm happy to say that many of these questions have found their way into this book. A special thanks to each of you for taking the time to write. You have continued to challenge my thinking!

I also continue to be profoundly thankful to our gracious God for the wondrous gift of my family—Kerri, David, and Kylie. Without their endless love and support, my work of ministry would truly be an impossible task.

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My Interest in Strong Bible Answers

I remember it as if it were just yesterday. Back in 1990, when I worked at the Christian Research Institute, I was asked to become a “regular” on the *Bible Answer Man* call-in radio broadcast. I was initially very resistant. Who in his right mind wants to go on national radio, with millions of people listening, and get asked hard questions for an hour each day?

After a while, though, I became quite comfortable and even grew to enjoy the challenge of responding to these tough questions on live radio. A side benefit of doing that show was that it forced me to give thoughtful (and *biblical*) attention to issues I’d really not thought that much about. And the more I wrestled with these issues, digging through the Scriptures each day for answers, the more I came to see that the Bible really does provide wisdom and insight on a plethora of relevant issues.

Over the years that I was on the *Bible Answer Man*, I noticed that many questions seemed to come up quite regularly. In fact, over time, I developed a detailed listing of the most frequently asked questions. Since my days on the *Bible Answer Man*, I’ve continued doing countless other call-in radio shows where I’ve answered a plethora of challenging questions, and I’ve continued to supplement my list of frequently asked questions. The book you’re holding in your hands is largely the fruit of that list. I’ve also supplemented the list with the “best of the bunch” in terms of questions people have sent me via mail or e-mail.

I need to mention at the outset that this book does not attempt to provide an exhaustive treatment of every Christian doctrine. This is not a theology textbook. My goal in this book is simply to answer

common questions people are asking about some of these doctrines. If you want a fuller treatment of individual doctrines, you might be interested in reading some of my other books, such as *The Wonder of Heaven*, *Angels Among Us*, and *Christ Before the Manger*.

As you read this book, you'll notice that I answer some questions very briefly, while others are allocated more space. This is by design. The fact is, some questions are easily answered, while others require more detail.

My prayer as you read this book is that *you* will become truly comfortable in answering questions people ask you about the Bible. You will find that God will open many doors of opportunity for you to engage in dialogue with others *if you make yourself available to Him*.

Dig in! And by all means, as you go through this book, look up some of the Scripture references I cite. Like the ancient Bereans, we should make a regular habit of testing all things against Scripture (Acts 17:11; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:21). If you do this consistently, you'll soon become a formidable warrior of the Word, or, as I jokingly used to say among my apologetics colleagues, an Apolo-Jedi Master.

—Ron Rhodes, Frisco, Texas, 2012



Part 1

Questions About the Bible

Scripture: From God to Us

The Trustworthiness of the Bible

The Books That Belong in the Bible

All About Bible Translations

Interpretation of Scripture: Sense and Nonsense



1

Scripture: From God to Us

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

Inspiration does not 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 were permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents but wrote under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The result was a perfect and errorless record of the exact message God desired to give humankind.

In what way did the biblical authors use their own writing styles?

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. John was very simple in his approach.

The Holy Spirit infallibly worked through each of these writers, through their individual styles, to communicate His message to humankind without error.

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 “no prophecy [or Scripture] was ever produced by 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.”¹

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. But 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, no doubt about it. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 the apostle Paul said he spoke “in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit.” In this passage Paul (who wrote nearly half the books in the New Testament) affirmed that his words were authoritative because they were rooted not in fallible human beings 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 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.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul likewise said, “We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

Again, Paul’s words were authoritative because they were rooted in God, not in man. God used Paul and other biblical writers as His instruments to communicate *His* word to man.

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

At least seven incorrect views of inspiration are circulating today:

First, the Dictation Theory says that God raised men up, prepared the men *and* their vocabularies, and then dictated to them the very words which they would put down in the Scriptures. Second, the Natural Inspiration Theory says that the writers of Scripture were simply men of great genius. Nothing supernatural was involved. These were men with talent similar to that of Shakespeare. Third, the Mystical Theory says that the writers of Scripture were simply Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided believers, like any believer may be today.

Fourth, the Neo-orthodox 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. Fifth, 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.

Sixth, 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.

And seventh, 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).

This is the correct view of inspiration: God superintended the human authors so that they used their own personalities and styles to record without error (in 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 therefore 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.²

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 devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of

his majesty.” First John 1:1 affirms that the apostles proclaimed “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, 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, keep in mind that inspiration and inerrancy are, strictly speaking, ascribed only to the original autographs of Scripture—that is, the original documents penned by the actual biblical authors. 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 shows there was no collusion. They 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.

Is science the judge and jury of the miracles in the Bible?

No. Let’s keep in mind that 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. Science therefore cannot be the judge and jury as to whether or not these events occurred.

Besides, the scientific method is useful only for studying *nature*, 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.

Can we trust that the biblical miracles really occurred?

Yes. 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 development 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 what they knew to be true.

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 so many hostile witnesses observed and scrutinized Christ, a successful fabrication of miracle stories in His ministry would have been impossible.

Are science and the Bible irreconcilable?

Personally, 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*: 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: *Nature* and *Scripture* do not contradict. Rather, *science* (a fallible human interpretation of nature) and *theology* (a fallible human interpretation of Scripture) sometimes fall into conflict. So the secularist cannot simply dismiss certain parts of the Bible because certain interpretations of nature offered by some scientists may conflict with particular interpretations of Scripture.

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, says that the sun “rises” and “goes down.” From a scientific perspective, the sun does not actually rise or go down. But let's be fair. This is the same kind of language weather forecasters use today. “Rising” and “going down” 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 that it contains scientific errors.