

# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE BIBLE

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## STUDY ONE: HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

### INTRODUCTION

It is no longer popular to view the Bible as the inspired, authoritative, infallible, once-for-all Word of God. In some cultures, including our own, such a view is seen to be not only out of date, but also discriminatory and intolerant. The Bible, however, has a high view of itself and its teaching; this high view is directly linked to its claim that the God it presents is the only true God.

### A. IF THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE GOD THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE TRUTH

The Bible unquestionably teaches that there is only one true God, and that all other 'gods' are worthless shams fashioned by man. One of the dominant and recurring themes of the Bible is God's opposition to all other 'gods', and the persistent inclination of man to reject 'God' in favour of 'gods'.

**Task 1: Read the Scriptures below, and identify what they teach about 'God' and 'gods'.**

Exodus 20:3-5

Deuteronomy 4:23,39

Isaiah 41:5-7,21-24

Isaiah 44:6-20

Isaiah 45:18

Isaiah 46:1-10

Jeremiah 2:5-13

Jeremiah 10:1-16

These verses, and many others, teach that God alone is God, that the idols are created by men. The obvious and logical conclusion of this is: if there is only one true God, if all the 'gods' have no independent existence, but are fashioned by the minds and the hands of men, then it is the words of the one true God that are true, and the supposed teaching and expectations, rules and regulations of the 'gods' are as false as the 'gods' the supposedly represent.

Belief in the one, true God automatically commits us to belief in one true truth. If, as the Bible teaches, there is only one true God, then obviously it is *his word alone* that is the true truth, and that truth is both absolute and ultimate.

### B. THE BIBLE PRESENTS ITSELF AS THE WORD OF THE ONE TRUE GOD

#### B.1 'All Scripture is God-breathed' [2 Timothy 3:16]

What does this mean? Here are the comments of a number of Bible scholars:

'This reference to inspiration ... has no psychological overtones. It does not imply that the biblical authors all wrote in a state of ecstasy, or abnormally heightened consciousness, nor yet that they wrote as automata, in some trance-state in which the normal functioning of their kinds was suspended. ... 'Inspired by God' translates a single Greek word, *theopneustos*, meaning 'breathed out from God' – expired, in fact, rather than *inspired*. And it is not the writers, but their writings, of which the word is predicated. Thus, the statement means simply that all that comes in the category of Scripture came from God, and should therefore be received as instruction from God. Accordingly, inspiration, in its theological sense, is to be defined as the work of the Holy Spirit (God's 'breath': 'Spirit' means 'breath') ensuring that men wrote precisely what God wanted written for the communication of his mind to men'. ... Inspiration is the activity which ensures that what is written is in truth the Word of God. Thus, the inspired Scripture is written revelation.' [J.I.Packer: *God's Words*, IVP, p33,34]

'In *theopneustos*[Paul] is affirming the nature of the Bible: it is 'breathed out by God'. His meaning is not obscure. When people speak they breathe out words. ... Paul says that God breathed out or produced Scripture. Its origin is in Him. It is His product, through His breath, His spirit. God's revealing activity did not end when chosen individuals received His Word. It continued, to

ensure that His breathed-out word was written down and preserved.' [Robert M. Horn: *The Book that Speaks for Itself* IVP, p47]

'What it says of Scripture is, not that it is "breathed into by God" or is the product of the divine "inbreathing" into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, "God-breathed," the product of the creative breathe of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them. No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed. The "breath of God" is in Scripture just the symbol of His almighty power, the bearer of His creative word. "By the word of Jehovah," we read in the significant parallel of Psalm 36:6, "were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." And it is particularly where the operations of God are energetic that this term ... is employed to designate them – God's breath is the irresistible outflow of His power. When Paul declares, then, that "every scripture", or "all scripture" is the product of the Divine breath, "is God-breathed," he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation.' [BB Warfield: *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, p133].

**Task 2: Discuss the above quotes, and in your own words write the meaning of 'inspired by God' or 'God breathed' in 2 Timothy 3:16:**

## **B.2 Scripture is trustworthy because it originated with God and was produced by God [2 Peter 1:19-21]**

In 2 Peter 1:12-21 Peter is preparing his readers for the time when he would no longer be around to encourage and instruct them. He assures them of the trustworthiness of the message that he and the other apostles had proclaimed to them. He tells them:

- a. What the apostles told them was not 'cleverly invented stories' [verse 16]. In other words, it was not something they, or anyone else, had made up.
- b. What they told them was what they had personally witnessed: 'we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain' [verse 16-18]. This refers to the incident on the mount of transfiguration [see Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36].

**Task 3: Look up and write out these additional affirmations of the 'eye-witness' nature of the message:**

*1 John 1:1-3a:*

*John 1:14:*

See also: Luke 24:48; Acts 1:21-26; 2:32; 3:15; 10:39

- c. The 'word of prophecy' – the prophetic word: the Old Testament which in its entirety spoke of the coming of Christ – is confirmed – 'made more certain' [verse 19] now that its consummation is in place. We will be looking at the concept of fulfilment in a later study. Here Peter's point is that fulfilment has confirmed the trustworthiness of the prophetic word of the Old Testament. The fact that it has been fulfilled in Christ in both macro and micro detail makes it utterly reliable and valid.
- d. The Old Testament Scriptures are 'a light shining in a dark place' [verse 19]. This affirms both the integrity and revelation nature of the Scriptures: it is 'light', and the non-validity of all that is outside the Scriptures: it is darkness, 'a dark place'.
- e. The 'prophecy of Scripture' was never human interpretation of events or history [verse 20]. It was never human speculation, human ideas, human wisdom, human philosophy. In fact Peter tells his readers in 1 Peter 1:10-11 that the prophets themselves didn't understand what they wrote, even though they tried to. Similarly, Jesus said that the prophets desired earnestly to catch just a glimpse of the truths that he himself revealed to his disciples.
- f. Rather than coming from 'the will of man', the Old Testament prophetic word had its origin in God. It is *God's* will from which it came. Yes, men spoke, but they 'spoke from God' [verse 21]. Here Peter emphatically teaches the divine origin of the Scripture, and emphatically rules out the concept that these writings are a human book. They exist as a result of God's will, not man's. The men who wrote them did not speak their own ideas, or even as a result of their own idea: they spoke from God.

#### Task 4: Check out these examples of God at work in the Old Testament writers:

*Jeremiah 1:4-10:*

*Jeremiah 20:9:*

*Amos 7:14-15:*

g. The men who 'spoke from God' and thus produced the Old Testament scriptures, were '*carried* (= 'borne) *along by the Holy Spirit*' [verse 21]. BB Warfield comments:

'The term used here is a very specific one. It is not to be confounded with guiding, or directing, or controlling, or even leading in the full sense of that word. It goes beyond all such terms, in assigning the effect produced specifically to the active agent. What is "borne" is taken up by the "bearer," and conveyed by the "bearer's" power, not its own, to the "bearer's" goal, not its own. The men who spoke from God are here declared, therefore, to have been taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by His power to the goal of His choosing. The things which they spoke under this operation of the Spirit were therefore His things, not theirs.' [p137]

In this way Peter teaches the utter trustworthiness of the Scriptures based on their origin in God and their production by God.

### B.3 The Scripture presents itself as the word, or speech, of God

On a number of occasions the Scriptures are called '*the oracles of God*' [KJV]. The Greek word used is *logion*, rather than the usual *logos*.

- *Acts 7:38*: '(Moses) received *living words* to pass on to us.'
- *Romans 3:2*: '... they have been entrusted with the *very words of God*.'
- *Hebrews 5:12*: '... you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of *God's word* all over again.'

Warfield comments on *logion*:

'...It means, not "words" barely, simple 'utterances," but distinctively "oracular utterances," divinely authoritative communications, before which men stand in awe and to which they bow in humility: and this high meaning is not merely implicit, but is explicit in the term. ... it means ... high, authoritative, sacred utterances ... it characterizes the utterances ... as emanations from God.' [p403]

Dunn comments on *logion* in Romans 3:2:

'Paul means the utterances of God, given through Moses and the prophets ... and now constituting the holy scriptures.' [James D.G. Dunn: *Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 38a, Romans 1-8, p130]

'It would certainly be taken to refer to the words of God spoken and written in the Jewish scriptures. But for a Gentile readership the word "oracle" would evoke the thought of inspired utterances preserved from the past, often mysterious and puzzling in character, awaiting some key to unlock their meaning. Paul may well imply then that the Jews had been entrusted with the stewardship of safeguarding and preserving these oracles of God until the coming of the key, that is, the gospel of Christ Jesus, which unlocked the mystery of what had always been God's purpose but which had remained hidden hitherto until this time of the End. Alternatively, Paul could be taken to imply that the Jews should have understood what God was saying to them all the time ... and that their stewardship was a commissioning to make these revelations known to the wider world.' [p138-139].

[The same word is used in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 33:9; Isaiah 5:24; Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 107:11 and 119:11,25,38.]

In addition, we read a straightforward statement in Hebrews 1:1:

'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.'

This affirms the divine origin of the message of the Old Testament.

#### Task 5: Discuss and answer the following questions:

1. How would you respond to a person who believes that there is no such thing as absolute truth that is true for all people in all places at all times?
2. How would you support your confidence in the Bible as God's Word from statements contained in the Bible?
3. In what ways would lack of confidence that the Bible is God's Word affect (a) your assurance of salvation, and (b) your obedience to the Bible's instructions?
4. Why is it impossible for an unbeliever to share your confidence that what the Bible says God says?
5. How is it logically absurd to claim to be a Christian and at the same time believe the Bible is merely a human book?