

THE BIBLE AND REVELATION

(The following is cited from the *ESV Study Bible*)

Knowing God is the most important thing in life. God created people fundamentally for relationship with himself. This relationship depends on knowing who he is as he has revealed himself. God is personal, which means he has a mind, will, emotions, relational ability, and self-consciousness. **Because he is personal, and not merely an impersonal object, God must personally reveal himself to us.** He has done this in general revelation (the world) and special revelation (the Word of God).

General Revelation

General revelation is revelation of God given to all people at all times. This revelation is found both in the external creation (Ps. 19:1, “the heavens declare the glory of God”) and in internal human experience (Rom. 1:19–20, “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For 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”). General revelation shows attributes of God—such as his existence, power, creativity, and wisdom; in addition, the testimony of human conscience also provides some evidence of God’s moral standards to all human beings (Rom. 2:14–15). **This means that from general revelation all people have some knowledge that God exists, some knowledge of his character, and some knowledge of his moral standards. This results in an awareness of guilt before God as people instinctively know that they have not lived up to his moral requirements. Thus in the many false religions that have been invented people attempt to assuage their sense of guilt.**

But general revelation does not provide knowledge of the only true solution to man’s guilt before God: the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus Christ. This means that general revelation does not provide personal knowledge of God as a loving Father who redeems his people and establishes covenants with them. For this, one needs *special revelation*, which God has provided in his historical supernatural activities, in the Bible, and definitively in Jesus Christ.

Special Revelation

The Bible is God’s written revelation of who he is and what he has done in redemptive history. Humans need this divine, transcendent perspective in order to break out of their subjective, culturally bound, fallen limitations. Through God’s written Word, his people may overcome error, grow in sanctification, minister effectively to others, and live abundant lives as God intends.

The Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible is “God-breathed” (cf. [2 Tim. 3:16](#)) and gets its true, authoritative, powerful, holy character from God himself, who inspired human authors to write exactly what he wanted them to write. Instead of merely dictating words to them, God worked through their unique personalities and circumstances. Scripture is therefore both fully human and fully divine. It is both the testimony of men to God’s revelation, and divine revelation itself. “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” ([2 Pet. 1:20–21](#)). **Because the Bible is God’s Word in human words, it can be trusted as the definitive revelation from the mouth of God himself.**

The Inerrancy of Scripture

The doctrine of inerrancy means that the Bible is entirely truthful and reliable in all that it affirms in its original manuscripts. Another way of saying this is that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and because God is always perfectly truthful, it follows that his Word is completely truthful as well: He is the “God who never lies” ([Titus 1:2](#)). It would be contrary to his character to affirm anything false. God is all-knowing, always truthful and good, and all-powerful, so he always knows and tells the truth and is able to communicate and preserve his Word. “O Lord GOD, you are God, and *your words are true*, and you have promised this good thing to your servant” ([2 Sam. 7:28](#)). “Every word of God proves true” ([Prov. 30:5](#); cf. [Ps. 12:6](#); [119:42](#); [John 17:17](#)).

Inerrancy does not require twenty-first-century precision or scientifically technical language. The following quotation from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy summarizes what inerrancy does *not* mean:

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations (*Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Art. XIII).

The inerrancy of Scripture gives the believer great confidence in the Bible as his sure foundation for understanding all God wants him to know and all that he needs for godliness and eternal life.

The Clarity of Scripture

The Bible itself acknowledges that some passages of Scripture are “hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16, referring to some aspects of Paul’s letters). In general, however, with the illumination of the Spirit (2 Tim. 2:7), the teaching of the Bible is clear to all who seek understanding with the goal of knowing and obeying God. OT believers were instructed to teach God’s commands continually to their children with the expectation that they would understand it: “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut. 6:6–7). God’s Word is said to “make wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7; 119:30). Jesus based his teaching squarely on the OT Scriptures: he assumed its teaching was clear and would often ask, “Have you not read ... ?” (cf. Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:14; 21:42; 22:31).

Because of the basic clarity of the Bible, when Christians disagree over the meaning of a passage they can assume that the problem is not with the Bible but rather with themselves as interpreters. Misunderstandings may be due to various factors such as human sin, ignorance of enough of the relevant data, faulty assumptions, or perhaps trying to reach a definite conclusion about a topic where the Bible has not given enough information to decide the question. Yet the emphasis of the Bible is not on difficulties in understanding but on the fact that ordinary believers are capable of comprehending Scripture for themselves. In addition, God provides teachers of his Word to further help his people’s understanding (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Believers have the responsibility to read, interpret, and understand the Bible because it is basically clear. This was an assumption of the Protestant Reformers who sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. They believed that all true Christians are priests who are able to know God for themselves through his Word and to help others do the same.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Scripture provides all the words from God that we need in order to know God truly and personally, and everything we need him to tell us in order for us to live an abundant, godly life (Ps. 19:7–9; 2 Tim. 3:15). God has given his people a sufficient revelation of himself so that they are able to know, trust, and obey him. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). God commands that nothing be added or taken away from the Bible, which indicates that it has always been exactly what he has wanted at each stage in its development throughout the history of salvation. “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you” (Deut. 4:2; cf. Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:5–6). The powerful admonition against tampering that stands at the conclusion of the entire Bible (Rev.

[22:18–19](#)) applies primarily, of course, to the book of Revelation, but in a secondary sense what it says may be applied to the Bible as a whole: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” ([Rev. 22:18–19](#)).

Believers should find freedom and encouragement in the knowledge that God has provided all of the absolutely authoritative instruction that they need in order to know him and live as he intends. God’s people should never fear that he has withheld something they might need him to say in order for them to know how to please him, or that he will have to somehow supplement his Word with new instructions for some new situation that arises in the modern age. (The NT allows for the activity of the Holy Spirit in leading and guiding individuals, as in [Rom. 8:14](#); [Gal. 5:16, 18, 25](#); but this guidance is always in line with Scripture, never in opposition to scriptural commands.) Therefore believers should be satisfied with what Scripture teaches and what it leaves unsaid. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” ([Deut. 29:29](#)).

Jesus’ View of Scripture

The most convincing reason to believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, clear, and sufficient is because this is what Jesus believed. His teaching assumed that the OT was the authoritative Word of his Father: “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. For 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” ([Matt. 5:17–18](#)). Jesus referred to dozens of OT persons and events and always treated OT history as historically accurate. He quoted from Genesis as his Father’s Word when he said, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” ([Matt. 19:4–6](#)). Jesus not only assumed that the creation story was true, he also freely quoted words from the OT narrator as words that God himself “said.” It is not uncommon for Jesus’ theological arguments to depend on the truthfulness of the OT account ([Matt. 5:12](#); [11:23–24](#); [12:41–42](#); [24:37–39](#); [Luke 4:25–27](#); [11:50–51](#); [John 8:56–58](#)). Jesus’ view of the OT as the Word of God aligns with the way the OT regularly speaks of itself.

Jesus saw his entire life as a fulfillment of Scripture ([Matt. 26:54](#); [Mark 8:31](#)). Throughout his life, Jesus used Scripture to resist temptation ([Matt. 4:1–11](#)) and to settle disputes ([Matt. 19:1–12](#); [22:39](#); [27:46](#); [Mark 7:1–13](#); [Luke 10:25–26](#)). At the end of his life, Jesus died quoting

Scripture (cf. [Matt. 27:46](#) with [Ps. 22:1](#)). On his resurrection day he explained Scripture at length on the Emmaus road and to his disciples in Jerusalem ([Luke 24:13–17, 44–47](#)).

Conscious of his identity as God the Son, Jesus saw his teaching as no less divinely inspired than the OT. Jesus taught with an authority that distinguished him from other teachers of the law. He interpreted the law on his own authority rather than depending on rabbinic sources ([Matt. 5:21–48](#)). He described his teaching and the law as sharing the same permanence: “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” ([Matt. 24:35](#), cf. [Matt. 5:17–18](#); [John 14:10, 24](#)). Jesus viewed both the OT and his own teaching as the Word of God. The NT apostolic witness was a result of Jesus giving his disciples authority and power through the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual truths in writing no less than by word of mouth ([Mark 3:13–19](#); [John 16:12–14](#); [Acts 26:16–18](#); [1 Cor. 2:12–13](#)).

Jesus took Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God upon which he based his entire life. Those who follow Christ are called to treat Scripture (OT and NT together) in the same way. For Christians, the Bible is a source of great delight and joy. God is to be diligently sought in his Word ([1 Pet. 2:2](#)). The Word of God is a precious treasure that deserves to be studied, meditated upon, and obeyed:

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God ([Prov. 2:1–5](#)).

This article is an excerpt from: <http://www.esvbible.org/resources/esvsb/article-doctrine/>