

## The Doctrine of Scripture

1. The Bible is the Word of God, a unique and special means of God revealing himself to humanity in a written form. The Bible tells God's true story and invites all humanity to participate in it. This is sometimes called the metanarrative, or the overarching story of God and his working in and through all creation and all human history.<sup>1</sup>
2. The Bible is inspired by God. God the Holy Spirit moved in and through human authors to select the very words and produce the entire text of Scripture, while utilizing the unique personality, style, and vocabulary of each human author<sup>2</sup> (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16).
3. The canon of Scripture is the list of books that are recognized as being inspired by God. The word *canon* comes from the Greek word *kanon* and refers to a measuring instrument. There are 66 books comprising the Old and New Testaments that have been measured and recognized as canonical. The canon is closed, which means that no additional books can be added to the canon, nor can any books be taken away from the canon<sup>3</sup> (Deut 4:2; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-2; Rev 22:18-19).
4. The Bible is inerrant, meaning that it is free from error in the original documents and does not affirm anything that is false. Our understanding of inerrancy takes into account ordinary language of everyday speech, approximations in numbers, variations in the spelling of names, and edited versions of what was passed down through oral tradition<sup>4</sup> (Prov 30:5-6; Heb 6:18).
5. The Bible is altogether accurate and trustworthy. It alone teaches a complete Christian worldview and is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks. The Bible is written in such a way that all things necessary for salvation and spiritual life are clearly set forth. However, we acknowledge that there are difficult passages in Scripture that are not easily understood. In such cases, clearer passages should guide us in our interpretation of passages that are less clear (Ps 19:7; 119:130; Luke 16:29-31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:3; 3:15-16).

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<sup>1</sup> For further study, see Bartholomew & Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*.

<sup>2</sup> This is often known as verbal, plenary inspiration: *Verbal*, meaning that the very words of Scripture (not just the general idea of the words) are inspired by God. *Plenary*, as in "whole" or "complete," meaning that every word of Scripture (not just certain words, like the words of Jesus) is inspired by God.

<sup>3</sup> We acknowledge that the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches include in their canons a collection of Jewish writings from the intertestamental period, known as the *Apocrypha*. These writings, while valuable as historical documents, were never widely recognized as canonical by the Jewish community that produced them, nor has there been widespread consensus in Church history for including them in the canon. The Roman Catholic Church did not officially declare the *Apocrypha* to be canonical until the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and this decision was in direct response to challenges raised by the Protestant Reformation regarding catholic teachings and practices that were based solely on apocryphal texts. Therefore, we stand in the tradition of the Reformation and the majority of the Church throughout history in recognizing the 66 books of the Old and New Testament—and no others—as inspired, authoritative, and therefore canonical. For more, see Geisler & Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1978), ch's 6-10.

<sup>4</sup> This definition of inerrancy is based on Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 42. See also Appendix C: *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.

6. An accurate understanding of the Bible is reached through a literal, historical, grammatical, cultural, and contextual interpretive process, using accepted rules of interpretation.<sup>5</sup> A literal understanding of scripture takes into account figures of speech and different literary genres.<sup>6</sup> In addition to inspiring the human authors of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is also the supernatural Teacher of Scripture, guiding us to understanding as we diligently read and study (John 16:12-15; 2 Tim 2:15).
7. While there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is only one true interpretation. In stating this, we do not assume that we alone have that one true interpretation, but we are continually striving to understand it by God's grace, through rigorous study, and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:19-21).

## Resources for Further Study

### Beginner

Bartholomew and Goheen, *The True Story of the Whole World*, 2009.

DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, 2016.

Duvall and Hays, *Journey into God's Word*, 2008.

Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2014.

Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 2002.

The Bible Project video series: "How to Read the Bible" <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/how-to-read-the-bible/>

### Intermediate

Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2014.

Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 1988.

Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2012.

Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 2012.

Grudem, *Making Sense of the Bible*, 2011.

Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1970.

### Advanced

Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis*, 2017.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* and Duvall & Hays, *Grasping God's Word*.

<sup>6</sup>Biblical literary genres include narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, epistle, etc. Each genre has unique characteristics that must be understood for accurate interpretation. See Duvall & Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, ch. 14-22 and The Bible Project video series "How to Read the Bible": <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/how-to-read-the-bible/>