

DISCOVERY

BIBLE STUDY COURSE

Lesson Two: The Bible Is Inspired By God

Is the Bible really a book from God? Is the Bible believable? Are the teachings of the Bible reliable? Does the Bible apply to us today? We seek to answer these questions in this study.

If the answer to these questions is “no,” then nothing matters in religion, and we are wasting our time in pursuing a better understanding of the Bible. On the other hand, if the answer to these questions is “yes,” then we ought to consider carefully what the Bible teaches.

There was once a time when the vast majority of people in our nation believed the Bible to be God’s true and accurate revelation to humanity. While there was disagreement over the interpretation of Scripture, there was little question regarding its divine inspiration.

The world has since changed and so has our nation. The “intelligent” people of today believe the Bible is a great myth and that those who believe the Bible to be God’s Word are intellectually weak. They explain that our ancestors who did not understand the world around them created the concept of “God” as the answer to their questions and began to write

LOOKING BACK...

The Bible contains sixty-six books organized according to their content...

The Old Testament contains thirty-nine books, the New Testament contains twenty-seven books...

The Bible tells the story of God’s love for us and His desire to save us from our sin...



about Him. Others, though they do not disdain the Bible, look at it as a purely human work, much like the writings of Aristotle or Shakespeare. They claim it is a book to be admired and studied—a book of great value to society in molding character and shaping lives. But they, too, deny that it is a book from heaven.

Are such theories correct? How can we know if the Bible's message is God's message? Despite the views of some in our society, we maintain that the Bible is God's Word. We maintain that the men who wrote the Bible wrote exactly what God wanted them to write, without error or contradiction, each retaining

his own character and writing style. These are not wild assertions based on blind faith—there is ample objective evidence to support the divine inspiration of the Bible.

If the Bible is not God's Word, then its writers were liars and hypocrites. But if this were so, would they have written a book that condemned liars to a devil's hell (Revelation 21:7)? Or would they have condemned hypocrisy and all forms of deceit? Would such arrogant men write a book that praised humility and self-sacrifice? If it is not inspired, then the Bible's authors condemned themselves by what they wrote. This would go against human nature.

➤ **The Bible Claims Divine Authorship**

The word "inspiration" is from the Greek word, **theopneustos**. **Theos** means "God" and **pneustos** means "breathed into." Therefore, "inspiration" means "God-breathed." Paul affirms that the Bible's teachings are inspired, coming from the very mouth of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

In this passage, Paul makes three important claims about the Bible: (1) its teachings are inspired—they come from God; (2) its teachings are authoritative—they are useful

When we consider the issue of inspiration, questions arise such as, “Which books are inspired? How can we know that other existing books are not inspired and that the ones found in our Bibles are?” These are good questions. While issues such as these can be complex and have yielded many articles, we will give a cursory summation of the process by which books have been regarded as inspired.

Old Testament. The Israelites meticulously guarded and copied those writings they accepted as having come from God. The Massorettes, who shouldered much of this responsibility, developed a quite sophisticated system of checking the accuracy of the work done by scribes in copying the inspired manuscripts.

In addition to the testimony offered by Israelite tradition, the New Testament writers lend credence to the books of the New Testament. The New Testament writers quote from nearly every book in the Old Testament, thus lending credence to their validity. Jesus refers to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:44)—the same organizational sections the Israelites recognized in their Scriptures—and identified Moses as the author of the first five books (John 7:19).

In 1546, the Roman Catholic Church, amidst much controversy, added fifteen books to the Old Testament. These books, commonly referred to as the Old Testament Apocrypha, while generally respected by the Israelite nation as accurate and useful, were never accepted as inspired. Further, none are quoted by New Testament writers and therefore are widely rejected as inspired.

New Testament. The main criterion used by early Christians in determining the inspiration of a book was whether or not it was written by an apostle. Jesus promised that these chosen men would receive special guidance from the Holy Spirit in the area of teaching (John 14:26; 16:12–13). Twenty-three of the books in our New Testament were written by apostles. The other five books (Mark, Luke, Acts, James, and Jude) were written by inspired teachers who wrote while in the company of the apostles.

for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness; and (3) it is complete, giving us all we need for acceptable service. In other words, the Bible contains all we need to know in order to serve God properly. A proper relationship with God depends on a proper understanding of these truths. Peter said:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy 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 1:20–21, NIV).

Thus, according to the Bible, when we read from its pages, we are not reading the words and thoughts of some frail mortal such as you or I. The Bible maintains that it contains the mind of the eternal God, the all-powerful Creator. Is the Bible what it claims to be? Is it really the Word of God?

Fortunately, this subject does not come down to mere subjective speculation, or "our word against their word." There is ample evidence, from within the Bible and from archaeology, verifying the inspiration of the Bible. In this limited format, we will focus on four evidences that point to the Bible's divine inspiration.

➤ **Fulfilled Prophecies**

An important proof of the Bible's inspiration is the fulfilled prophecies within its pages. Bible prophecies are quite different in nature from so-called prophecies of today. True prophecy must have two characteristics: (1) it must predict something far enough in the future and far enough removed from the norm that it cannot be passed off as an educated guess, and (2) it must be specific enough that one may be reasonably certain of its fulfillment. For example, one may predict that a Super Bowl will be played next year, or even that a certain football team will win the Super Bowl. But even the latter would be an educated guess based on how that team did last year and the quality of the players and coaches. In contrast, to predict accurately that the New Hampshire Grizzlies (a nonexistent football team) will win the Super Bowl in the year 2074 would

require true prophetic insight. Horoscopes are not true prophecy, for they speak in such vague generalities that their “prophecies” apply to half the population.

No other book has dared to reach out and predict the future as the Bible does, and yet it does not fail in any point. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Scriptures, but we will limit our consideration to a few of the more prominent ones.

Prophecies concerning Jesus. There are over three hundred prophecies concerning the Messiah found in the Old Testament, and each was fulfilled by Jesus. Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14, fulfilled Matthew 1:22-25). Micah prophesied the Messiah would be born in the small, insignificant village of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, fulfilled Luke 2:1-7). David prophesied the Messiah would be killed and yet would rise from the grave on the third day (Psalm 16:8-10; 30:3, fulfilled Matthew 28:1-7). Isaiah portrayed the character, life, and death of Jesus centuries before He was born (Isaiah 53). Zechariah prophesied the Messiah would be betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12, fulfilled Matthew 26:14-15). All of these prophecies were made more than four hundred years before Jesus was born. Such prophecies cannot be dismissed as educated or lucky guesses. For more prophecies concerning Jesus, see the chart following this section.

Prophecies concerning nations. Micah prophesied the Kingdom of Judah would be taken captive by Babylon 150 years before the event, even though Babylon was

HERE'S A THOUGHT...

If the Bible is not God's Word, then surely its message would have been quite different. Suppose you were making up a story of a god who saved the human race—what kind of story would it be? Most of us would produce a fantastic, heroic story very different from the Bible. Would your god become human? Would your savior be born in a barn? grow up in Nazareth (instead of Jerusalem or Rome)? be crucified on a Roman cross? Probably not. Not only did the New Testament writers portray the Savior in this way, but they often depicted themselves as lacking faith and being prone to sin. If the Bible authors were not guided by God, they would have written a much different story.

HERE'S A THOUGHT...

hundreds of miles away and was not a world power at the time of the prophecy (Micah 4:10, fulfilled 2 Chronicles 36:15–20). Jeremiah further prophesied that this captivity would last for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11–12, fulfilled 2 Chronicles 36:21–23). Both prophecies were accurate. Isaiah prophesied that during the captivity, when Babylon was at its strongest, the Medes would conquer Babylon and leave the city desolate (Isaiah 13:17–22). Daniel briefly records the Median invasion of Babylon (Daniel 5:31–32), and in keeping with Isaiah's prophecy, the site of ancient Babylon lies in ruins to this day. Daniel prophesied there would be four universal kingdoms beginning with the Babylonians, and that during the fourth kingdom (the Romans), God would establish His own kingdom (the church) on the earth (Daniel 2). Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would establish His house (the church) in the city of Jerusalem, when all nations were present, during the last days (Isaiah 2:1–4, fulfilled Acts 2:1–5).

Many other prophecies could be cited concerning the Messiah, the church, historic events, the rise and fall of nations, and the end of time. Most of these have been fulfilled and testify to the Bible's divine inspiration; others will be fulfilled between now and the end of time. These prophecies are real, meeting the two criteria laid out at the beginning of this section. Bible prophecies generally are unpredictable and often even impossible to be fulfilled without the intervention of a Higher Power (e.g.,

If the men who wrote the Bible were making up their story, what motive did they have? What did they have to gain? They did not gain wealth, comfort, prestige, or honor. If they were living a lie, they did not gain emotional happiness, nor did they gain the home in heaven about which they wrote (for heaven would have been "made up"). On the contrary, because of their faith, these men were considered the scum of the earth in the eyes of many. They sacrificed jobs, comfort, earthly happiness, and more. People do not go to such lengths without a motive. So, what was their motive? If the testimony concerning Jesus and His mission was a hoax, the disciples had nothing to gain and everything to lose.

the prophecy that Jesus would be born of a virgin or resurrected on the third day). Could these prophets see into the future? Did all of these prophecies come true as a matter of happenstance? Did the Old and New Testament writers make up the prophecies and then somehow make them come true? No. Many of the Bible prophecies are found in the Old Testament and were fulfilled in the New Testament hundreds of years later. The Bible must truly be the Word of God in light of its fulfilled prophecy.

OT SCRIPTURE	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Genesis 3:15	Messiah would be born to a woman	Galatians 4:4
Isaiah 7:14	Messiah would be born of a virgin	Matthew 1:22-25
Micah 5:2	Messiah would be born in Bethlehem	Matthew 2:1-8
Isaiah 9:1-2	Messiah would live in Galilee	Matthew 4:14
Genesis 49:10; Micah 5:2	Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah	Matthew 2:5-6 Hebrews 7:14
Isaiah 9:7; 11:1	Messiah would be from the lineage of David	Matthew 1:6; 22:42
Zechariah 9:9	Messiah would enter Jerusalem on a donkey	Matthew 21:4-5
Isaiah 53	Character and death of the Messiah portrayed	various
Zechariah 11:12-13	Messiah would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Matthew 26:14-15
Psalms 22:16	Messiah's hands and feet to be pierced	John 20:24-31
Psalms 24:20	Messiah's bones were not to be broken	John 20:32-33
Isaiah 53:7	Messiah was to suffer without putting up any resistance	Matthew 26-27
Psalms 16:8-10; 30:3	Messiah would be killed, yet would rise after three days	Matthew 28:1-7
Isaiah 53:9	Messiah was to die among the wicked	Matthew 27:38
Isaiah 53:9	Messiah was to be buried among the rich	Matthew 27:57-59
Isaiah 2:1-3	Messiah's kingdom to be established in Jerusalem	Acts 1-2

➤ **Unity of the Scriptures**

One of the best ways to learn about something is simply to look at it, to examine it. When we look at the Bible, we cannot help but be impressed with the unity we find within its pages. This unity testifies to its divine inspiration.

An Illustration. Suppose someone in England wrote two lines of music; someone in Greece wrote three lines of music; someone in Germany wrote five lines of music; you and I wrote a few lines of music; and so on. Also, like myself, most of the other writers were generally unskilled musicians and each writer lived in different time eras ranging from the tenth to the twentieth centuries. Yet, though writing independently, suppose we all wrote the same melody, in the same key, with the same timing and rhythm, so that when the music was brought together, it made a beautiful, complete symphony. What would you think? You would probably say, "Impossible!" You would be right, unless somehow each musician was being guided by the same master musician.

Consider the Bible. The Bible contains sixty-six books that were written by at least forty different men, spanning sixteen hundred years (the first five were written by Moses around 1500 B.C. and the last was written by John around A.D. 95). These different authors wrote from many different countries: some wrote in Palestine, some in Egypt, others in Asia, Italy, Babylon, and Persia. They wrote from prisons, palaces, fields, and islands. Some were well-educated, some were not; some were kings, some were farmers, shepherds, and fishermen. Because they were separated by time, distance, and circumstance, many of the Bible authors never saw, spoke to, or even heard of the other men who helped pen the pages of Scripture. Yet, when all of these books were brought together, they harmonized perfectly with one another, without contradiction or discrepancy. Each wrote of the same God, the same Savior, the same fears, and the same hopes.

Impossible? Sure it is, unless these men were somehow guided by a single "Master-Mind." This "Mind" can be none other than the Eternal God. If the Bible were not inspired by God, we would expect to find all sorts of differing opinions, concepts, and values. The fact that the Bible is a unified whole, despite the fact that forty men of different backgrounds and periods penned its pages, testifies to its divine authenticity.

➤ Scientific Foreknowledge

We know the Bible is inspired by God because of the scientific foreknowledge displayed within its pages. In a book written when the Bible was written (1500 B.C. to A.D. 95), one would expect to find many superstitions and inaccuracies, especially regarding any scientific statements made. However, just the opposite is true. Even though the Bible is not a science book, we find that all scientific facts presented to the reader are accurate. Further, the scientific facts that are presented contradict the superstitions and scientific fallacies that ruled the understanding of ancient times.

Job wrote of God, “He stretches out the north over empty space, and hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7). At the time Job wrote this there was little accurate knowledge of the universe. The thinking of the day was that the earth had to sit on something—the law of gravity proved it. Some thought it rested upon the back of a great turtle, while others held equally ridiculous theories. How was Job able to know that the earth was suspended in space, hanging “on nothing,” thousands of years before telescopes or space travel? He must have had help from someone greater than himself.

Centuries before human exploration confirmed the fact, this verse also revealed that the northern polar region of the earth is an “empty space”—a barren, frozen wasteland, a permanent ice cap with no land underneath. Submarines are able to navigate under the ice cap because there is nothing underneath it to prevent them. This fact was unknowable to man until recent times, but was revealed in the book of Job centuries before the time of Christ.

Isaiah wrote, “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22). People believed the earth was flat for more than twenty centuries after Isaiah wrote

If the men who wrote the Bible knew it was a book of lies, why would these same men be willing to suffer persecution and even die because of their faith? All of the men who wrote the New Testament suffered terribly, and most were killed because of their faith in Jesus. If the story they penned were fiction, would they not, in the face of pain and death, recant their faith and admit their fraud? People do not choose to suffer for a lie.

this statement. When Columbus made his famous voyage at the close of the fifteenth century, there were still some who held to this erroneous belief. Yet, Isaiah confidently declared that the earth was round. How could he acquire such information on his own?

Jeremiah affirmed that the stars of the heavens could not be numbered (Jeremiah 33:22). This statement is in contrast to ancient astronomers who attempted to determine the exact number of the stars. For example, Hippocrates, the famed Greek astronomer, said, "There are 1056 stars in the heavens; I have counted them." In the second century, Ptolemy claimed that the number was closer to three thousand. Scientists held this figure to be generally true until the seventeenth century when Galileo peered through a telescope and discovered that Hippocrates and Ptolemy had barely scratched the surface. Astronomers today claim there are about 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone!

There are numerous other passages that could be noted. For example, the Bible declares there are channels or rivers that flow through the seas (2 Samuel 22:16), a fact later understood by sailors who use these channels for navigation. The Bible proclaimed the existence of springs within the sea (Job 38:16; Jeremiah 51:36). These vast springs have yielded a number of life forms that were unknown in times past. The Bible gives accurate teaching concerning the control and prevention of disease long before microbes had been discovered or their spread understood (Leviticus 13:45; 14:1-47). And the Bible consistently gives accurate geographical information without the available use of air photography or modern technology.

HERE'S A THOUGHT...

The Bible was written by many different men, most of whom were of ordinary background. Many were shepherds, farmers, tax collectors, and fishermen—uneducated in comparison to the scholars of their day. Yet, these same men wrote with exaltation and confidently claimed their writings were from God. They gave God credit for everything they did. These same men produced a book that has lasted for centuries and is still the best-selling book in the world. Is this not incredible? It is, unless the Bible is not merely a work of man, but of God.

One cannot help but be impressed by the scientific statements made in the Bible, and equally impressed by what the Bible does not say. The Bible was written from 1500 B.C. to A.D. 95, and yet over this sixteen-hundred-year period the Bible does not record any scientific inaccuracies. Since human understanding of the universe is constantly changing, we would expect just the opposite. The Bible writers, though not scientists, were centuries ahead of their time in astronomy, geography, biology, and oceanography. Therefore, they must have been guided by a Higher Power.

➤ **The Bible Has Endured the Test of Time**

Finally, the fact that the Bible has endured the test of time is evidence of its inspiration. This great book has survived three great threats, any one of which would destroy a normal book: hate, misrepresentation, and neglect.

Hate. First, the Bible has survived the threats and warfare of those who have hated it. Through the ages, people have tried to destroy and discredit the Bible. Roman emperors of the first three centuries tried to destroy it. They were unsuccessful. In the centuries to follow, the Roman Catholic Church tried to keep the Bible out of the hands of the people. They made it a crime to translate the Bible into a language other than Latin. Later, in A.D. 1229, they made it a crime to own a Bible without authorization and forbade the public from reading or studying the Bible. Despite these aggressive attempts to keep the Bible away from the people, it is now printed in nearly every known language and is available throughout the world.

Robert Ingersoll, the famous infidel of the nineteenth century, once raised a copy of the Bible and boasted, "In fifteen years, I'll have this book in the morgue." In less time than this, Ingersoll was in the morgue and the Bible was still very much alive.

Voltaire, the French philosopher, boasted that within one hundred years the Bible would be found only in museums. Nearly two hundred years have passed and the Bible is more widely available than ever. Ironically, after Voltaire's death, his house was purchased by the Geneva Bible Society. From the same presses that once printed Voltaire's propaganda, thousands of Bibles were printed.

Misrepresentation. Second, the Bible has survived the misrepresentation of its teachings. Through the centuries, people with varying motivations and aspirations have misrepresented the Bible's message—some for ill-gotten gain, some to gain a following and foster new denominations, some to justify their own ideas. No book has been used, abused, and misquoted like the Bible. Just look at our nation. There are more than three hundred denominations, all claiming to believe and practice the message of the Bible, and yet believing and practicing different things! Even so, despite the religious confusion brought on by human misrepresentation and exploitation, the Bible lives on.

Neglect. Third, the Bible has survived the neglect and hypocrisy of those who claim to love and practice it. Though there are millions in our nation alone who claim to be Christians, a relatively small percentage of these have read more than a few verses from the Bible. Though it is the bestselling book in the world, it may be one of the least read. Of those who have taken the time to read the Bible thoroughly, not all are committed to its teachings. We occasionally read even of church leaders and preachers engaged in illicit sexual practices, fraud, deceit, and tax evasion—and there are many others who never get caught! Sadly, neglect and hypocrisy have done tremendous damage to the cause of Christ. These are the greatest threats to Christianity today. Yet, despite the neglect and hypocrisy throughout the ages, the Bible survives and its message still finds its way into good and honest hearts.

Years have come and gone, and the Word of God continues to be published and read by people everywhere. Indeed, it continues to be the bestselling book in the world. The fact that the Bible has survived the test of time suggests there is something special about it—it is inspired by God. The Bible is truly an anvil that has worn out many a hammer. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Peter wrote, "For all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever" (1 Peter 1:24–25).

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he; then said with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."
And so, I thought, the anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptic's blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone!
—John Clifford

➤ Conclusion

When we open the Bible, we have before us a special book—a book that claims to contain God's message for His creation. The evidence confirms this claim to be true. Some have called it the Good Book. That it is. But more than that, it is the God Book—it is God's written communication to the world. The Bible contains everything God wants us to know about Himself, His creation, and our destiny. It is the only book containing the divine message of how we can escape sin and corruption to find a home with Him. In this sense, it is not just any book—it is "the book."

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are Holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are unchangeable. Read it to be wise; believe it to be saved; practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the travelers' map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilots' compass, the soldiers' sword, and the Christians' character. Here, paradise is restored,

heaven is opened, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you in life; it will be opened in judgment; and it will be remembered forever.

Question and Answers

1. What does the word “inspiration” mean? _____

2. What three claims does Paul make about the Scriptures in 1 Timothy 3:16-17?

3. Peter wrote that “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but _____.”
4. What four areas of objective evidence proving the Bible’s inspiration are presented in this lesson? _____

5. True prophecy must have two characteristics. What are they? _____

6. Name three fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah. _____

7. Job accurately stated that the earth hangs on _____.
8. Isaiah accurately stated that the earth was _____.
9. Jeremiah accurately stated that the stars _____.
10. In the course of time, with what three enemies has the Bible contended?

Thought Questions

1. Can you think of other arguments for the Bible's inspiration?
2. Briefly explain why the Bible's unity of thought testifies to its divine origin.
3. Do you believe the Bible to be God's message for mankind? Why or Why not?
4. What do you consider the most convincing evidence for the Bible's inspiration? Why?

Additional Study Goals

1. Read Isaiah 53 and Matthew 27, remembering that Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' suffering death was written more than seven hundred years before Jesus' death.
2. Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 1 Peter 1:20–21.

Your Questions

In the space below, write down any personal notes or questions that you had while reading through this lesson.

CHARTING THE COURSE

Have you ever felt confused by the vast number of churches and preachers all claiming to be "right?" How can we know right and wrong in matters of religion today?

These important questions deserve the attention of every Bible student. In our next lesson, we will consider the question of religious authority.