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## CORE BELIEFS SERIES

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# DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE

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USEFUL AND AUTHORITATIVE

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### QUOTES

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*The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.*

Baptist Faith & Message<sup>1</sup>

***The Bible is God's Word*** – *The Bible is God's written revelation to people, divinely given through human authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is entirely true. The Bible is totally sufficient and completely authoritative for matters of life and faith. The goal of God's Word is the restoration of humanity into His image.*

Student Life Bible Study<sup>2</sup>

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### SCRIPTURE (MAIN PASSAGES)

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**2 Tim.** 3:14-17; **Josh.** 1:8; **Ps.** 19:7-12; 119; **Heb.** 12:4; **1 Pet.** 1:20-21

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### KEY TRUTHS

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- The source of the Bible
  - The Bible was written by man
  - The Bible is inspired by God
- The Bible is useful and authoritative
- God aids in understanding the Bible

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## 1. THE SOURCE OF THE BIBLE

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The Word of God was both written by man and inspired by God. 1 Pet. 1:20-21 declares that prophecies came through men speaking from God “as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” How does an author’s specific words and style integrate with the divine authority of God’s words? We do not have the full answer to that question, but we can understand that, like the full humanity and deity of Christ, it is possible for the two ideas to work in tandem.

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### THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN BY MAN

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In much the same way that God uses us now to carry out His will, He used human authors to reveal His Word. God certainly could have dramatically given His commands straight from heaven (He did inscribe the tablets of the Ten Commandments), but He chose people to do this. Here are some results of God’s choice that we get to appreciate from Scripture<sup>3</sup>:

- Various writing styles – The different authors wrote with their own style. The prose that Paul writes has an elegant (and sometimes complicated flow). Contrast that with Peter, who had a much less elegant style! The words of the former Pharisee and the words of the former fisherman both carry the full weight of God’s authority, but we get to see their different styles. Authors also wrote from first, second, and third person perspectives.
- Various literary forms – The pages of Scripture contain historical narrative, divine command, poetry, personal and group letters, apocalyptic literature, along with other genres. We see a full range of God’s creativity expressed through human authors.
- Writings tied to historical figures – Most books in the Bible are attributed to a specific author. When we read them, these biblical figures become more alive to us. We are able to learn more about them. There would be a certain richness lost if God did not use human authors to write.

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### THE BIBLE WAS INSPIRED BY GOD

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Though His Holy Spirit, God influenced the writers of Scripture to pen exactly what God wanted to reveal. This means that all of Scripture contains the words of God.<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16 says that all Scripture is “breathed out” by God. Though men wrote it, the Bible is not of human origin. We can extrapolate this truth to two other related issues:

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### HARMONY IN SCRIPTURE

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God’s Word, though made up of sixty-six books, is one unit. The collection is not disjointed but rather a cohesive whole. Consider the following:

*Here is a book, written over a 1,500 year span; written over 40 generations; written by more than 40 authors, from every walk of life – including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc...written in different places [wilderness, dungeon, hillside, palace, prison walls, while traveling, etc.]; written at different times [both during peace and war]; written during different moods: some writing from the heights of joy and others from the depths of sorrow and despair; written on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe; written in three languages: [Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek].<sup>5</sup>*

This quote by Josh McDowell goes on to point out the various subjects discussed within the pages of Scripture. But in the entire Bible, there are no contradictions!<sup>6</sup> This is the **internal evidence** of the Bible's reliability: The Word itself claims its divine origin and authority, plus it is without error or contradiction throughout the text. As we examine internal reliability, we must also consider external reliability, for there is overwhelming evidence outside of Scripture that elicits its trust.

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### PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

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We believe that the words of Scripture have been preserved so that what we have today remains the authoritative word of God. The original manuscripts of the Bible have not withstood the test of time. We have none of the actual books of the Bible. So how can we be confident in the reliability of our Bibles? The answer lies in manuscript evidence. The details vary a bit with the Old and New Testaments, but each book has been carefully copied down by scribes. The result is that we have tremendously more biblical manuscript evidence than for any other ancient document.

Josh McDowell notes that over 24,000 manuscripts exist for the New Testament. The next highest work is Homer's *Iliad* with 643 surviving manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> The amazing thing about these manuscripts of Scripture is their level of agreement. While there are some small discrepancies (amounting to one half of one per cent of the New Testament<sup>8</sup>), they do not affect any doctrine but are smaller, less significant phrases.

The Old Testament was considered much less reliable for years, since the earliest copies were dated A.D. 900. That left a huge time gap of material to be questioned. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Within them were several Hebrew manuscripts, some dating as far back as 125 B.C. The manuscripts of the Old Testament discovered there revealed that our copies of Scripture had been very faithfully preserved. This **external evidence** shows that God did indeed use people to faithfully preserve His Word for us.

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## 2: THE BIBLE IS USEFUL & AUTHORITATIVE

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Even if the Bible has been preserved accurately as God's divinely inspired Word, we need to make the argument as to why that matters. We believe that the Bible is both useful to us and authoritative as God's Word.

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### THE BIBLE IS USEFUL

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2 Tim. 3:16-17 demonstrates clearly the usefulness of Scripture. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for...

- "...teaching" – The Bible teaches us about who God is, about our condition and need for redemption, and about several other important truths. It is our Source of God's revelation.
- "...rebuking" – Scripture is divinely able to point out our sin. It holds God's standard before our eyes as a mirror to reveal our sin.
- "...correcting" – God's Word not only shows our sin but also informs how to correct our course. It shows how to get right with God.
- "...training in righteousness" – After getting right we learn how to stay right with God. It runs the gamut of human behavior and teaches us to "take every thought captive to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” When we apply God’s Word to our lives, it is useful to make us more like Christ and able to be used for His purposes. See also Ps. 19:7-11; Josh. 1:8; Heb. 4:12.

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### THE BIBLE IS AUTHORITATIVE

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Ps. 119:4 says, “You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.” God’s Word is authoritative in our lives, according to this verse. As a matter of fact, all of Psalm 119 – the longest chapter in the whole Bible – deals with loving God’s Word and obeying it. It seems fitting that the Bible’s longest chapter is about the need to love and obey the Bible itself.

Wayne Grudem notes that “all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”<sup>9</sup> As was previously mentioned, all (not some) of Scripture contains the words of God; this makes the Bible completely authoritative.

Another passage, Ps. 19:7-11, does a great job mentioning both the authority and usefulness of Scripture, as this chart illustrates below:

<b>Authority</b>	<b>(“is/are ___”) Description</b>	<b>Usefulness</b>
Law of the LORD	Perfect	Reviving the soul
Statutes of the LORD	Trustworthy	Making wise the simple
Precepts of the LORD	Right	Giving joy to the heart
Commands of the Lord	Radiant	Giving light to the eyes
Fear of the LORD	Pure	Enduring forever
Ordinances of the LORD	Sure and altogether righteous	--

What we see from this passage is that God does not separate the authority of His Word from its usefulness to us. “Authority” words in the chart are poetic ways of describing Scripture, and each is incredibly beneficial. So there is an inextricable link between the Bible’s authority and usefulness.

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### 3: GOD AIDS IN UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

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If the Bible is authoritative, that makes it important for people to know it. Parts of the Bible are certainly difficult to understand. On the whole, however, an understanding of Scripture and its truth is accessible to virtually everyone.<sup>10</sup> Ps. 119:130 declares, “The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” The simple are able to gain understanding from the Bible. They do not have to work their way up to the ability to understand it. So the words of Scripture are able to be understood, though some sections may require more effort than others.<sup>11</sup>

There is another part of understanding, however, that requires God’s help. Full appreciation and understanding of the spiritual truths of Scripture requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 2:14 says that “the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The preceding verses in the passage (vv. 8-13) teach that those with the Holy Spirit in them have His aid in understanding “what God has freely given us” (v. 12). See also 1 Jn. 2:27.

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## IMPLICATIONS

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Understanding this Core Belief fundamentally affects our views in the following areas:

- We can trust the Bible – The copy of the Scriptures that we have is trustworthy. It comes from God, who has ensured that it accurately reflects His revelation to us.
- We should appreciate and revere God’s Word – The Bible is completely unique, unlike any other book. It is a marvel at God’s creativity and ability to use people – even us – to do His will. In the same vein, we should respect the Bible and treat it differently than any other book.
- We need to read and obey the Bible – Getting into the Bible on a regular basis helps us to know it better and see its usefulness for our lives. As we understand Scripture, it becomes like a mirror to us, revealing our sin; at the same time, it is like a portrait of Christ, the One like whom we should strive to be. Jam. 1:22-25 shows the importance of not just learning the Bible but obeying it, applying it to our lives.
- With the Spirit’s help, we can understand the Bible – For Christians, the Holy Spirit aids in understanding the truths of God’s Word. When we do not understand, we can ask Him for guidance and trust that He will give understanding (though it is not always on our timetable!).

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## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

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In the course of your lesson, there may be certain questions that come up. Listed below are some possible questions, along with a biblically appropriate response.

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### HOW DID A BOOK GET TO BE PART OF THE BIBLE?

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For a book to be in the Bible, it had to meet some requirements. First, it needed to be written or recommended by an apostle. Second, the early church would have needed to consider it to be Scripture. Third, it must point to Christ. Fourth, it needed to match the teaching of other Scripture. Fifth, it had to give some evidence of its inspiration or authority. There was a lot of agreement on the books of the Bible in the early church, so much agreement that they did not feel the need to make an official list until AD 325 at the Council of Nicea!

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### COULD A BOOK BE ADDED TO THE BIBLE IF IT WERE SUDDENLY DISCOVERED?

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Our understanding of Heb. 1:1-2 and Rev. 22:18 tells us that even if a book were discovered tomorrow that seemed to be worthy of being included in the Bible, it would not get added. That is not to say that the book would not be useful, just not Scriptural. Plus, we would have to answer one key question: If God had a book that He intended to be included in the Bible because it was useful to us and authoritative for us, why would He keep it hidden for over 2,000 years?

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## WHY DO PEOPLE DISAGREE ON SOME BIBLE PASSAGES?

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There can be a few reasons for this. Sometimes people think something is true and try to force their view on a passage that does not necessarily teach what they say it does. Other times, Scripture is silent in an area, but we try to pull out an answer that is not really there.<sup>12</sup> Other times it is due to faulty interpretation methods (see question below, “How come I find the Bible difficult to understand?” for more on that).

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## HOW COME I FIND THE BIBLE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND?

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There are certain rules for interpreting the Bible (and any other writings). When those rules are properly followed, then we are much more likely to understand a given passage. The first step in interpretation is to make observations about what the text says to the original audience (the people the book was first written to). The next step is to take those observations and understand what it means – what point was the author making? The third step is to take that meaning and determine how it should be applied personally. The mistake that most people often make is to do this third step without ever doing the first two steps. When we do this, we pull unintended meaning from the Bible.

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## WHY DOESN'T THE BIBLE TELL US CERTAIN THINGS WE WANT TO KNOW?

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The Bible should be looked at as God's revelation of Himself to us. Everything that He deemed important for us to know is recorded in the pages of Scripture. While it is certainly okay to want to know more (God gave us curiosity, after all!), we should understand that the Bible completely fulfills the purpose God set for it. For some things God has given us the ability to reason and learn the answer (part of His call to have dominion over the earth); for other things we won't know the answer this side of heaven. It is worth adding that if the Bible included some extra truths we wanted to know, we would most likely come up with other things we wished were in the Bible!

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## MORE QUESTIONS

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As you teach and get questions, please pass them on. Our goal is to make these notes helpful for teachers by including several questions that arise in the teaching time. Thanks!

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<sup>1</sup> (Southern Baptist Convention 1999-2011)

<sup>2</sup> (Student Life, Inc. 2011)

<sup>3</sup> Specific authorship of each book of the Bible is not mentioned in this study. Some books of the Bible specifically name an author (Nehemiah, Paul's letters); in those cases we trust what Scripture says. Other books are more vague, some giving strong indication of the author (Such as Moses for the Pentateuch or John for his Gospel), and others less so (Some think Samuel wrote Ruth and Paul wrote Hebrews, but we do not know that for sure). In academia, the authorship of biblical works is subject to constant debate. This debate is important, but for our purposes here we remain confident in the explicitly named and logically inferred authors of Scripture.

<sup>4</sup> Some argue that only certain parts of Scripture are inspired, such as matters of faith or specific citations from God. A proper view of Scripture negates this possibility, however, for all Scripture comes from God. Nowhere in the Bible do we see a distinction between inspired and non-inspired sections. Quite the opposite, Matt. 19:4-5 cites Gen. 2:24 as a direct quote from God, even though the text in Genesis does not record God speaking. The implication is that since it is Scripture, even though God is not speaking, it is still counted as God's words. This same mindset is found throughout the Old Testament, as prophets spoke the words of God; disobeying them was the same as disobeying God, for they spoke His words.

<sup>5</sup> (McDowell 1993, 27-28)

<sup>6</sup> That is not to say there are no difficulties or supposed contradictions. Paul Feinberg notes that "when all facts are known, the Scriptures...will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach..." (source unknown). Evangelist and theologian R.A. Torrey noted that in the beginning of his ministry, he could find about a hundred difficulties in the Bible, but decades later, there were only a few. As he matured and understood Scripture more, those difficulties melted away. The same can be said of any student of God's Word.

<sup>7</sup> (McDowell 1993, 43)

<sup>8</sup> (McDowell 1993, 46)

<sup>9</sup> (Grudem 1994, 73)

<sup>10</sup> Obvious exceptions include those who are too young to understand, or those with severely diminished mental faculties.

<sup>11</sup> It is also worth noting that while the Bible is elegantly simple, it is also simultaneously rich and deep in its truths. Any time God's Word is probed, no matter the intelligence and expertise of the individual, a wealth of life-changing truth awaits. So unlike a children's book, which is just plain simple, and unlike a heavily intellectual book, which is highly complex, the Bible is uniquely simple and complex at the same time.

<sup>12</sup> (Grudem 1994, 107-110)