Does the Bible Contain Errors?
Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16
Code: BQ073112

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (3:16–17)

Before we examine the sanctifying power of Scripture, this crucial statement by Paul must be considered. Some scholars suggest that **All Scripture is inspired** should be translated, "All Scripture inspired by God is . . ," which would leave open the possibility that *some* **Scripture** is *not* inspired by Him. But that rendering would make the Bible worthless as a reliable guide to divine truth, because we would then have no way to determine which part of it is inspired by God and which is not. Men would be left to their own finite and sinful devices and understanding to discover what part of the Bible may be true and which may not, what part is God's Word and what part is human conjecture. Paul's thought is that the Scripture that gives salvation must therefore be inspired by God. The words of men could never transform the inner person (Ps. 19:7).

In addition to the many other specific biblical references to the inspiration and authority of **Scripture**—some of which are mentioned below—it is important to note that similar Greek constructions in other parts of the New Testament (See, e.g., Rom. 7:12; 2 Cor. 10:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:3; 4:4; Heb. 4:17) argue strongly from a grammatical perspective that **all Scripture is inspired** is the proper translation. Scripture is the revelation conveyed, inspiration is the means of that conveyance. In the words originally revealed and recorded, **all Scripture** is God's inerrant Word.

The first predicate adjective that describes **Scripture,** namely, its being **inspired by God,** focuses on the authority of His written Word. *Theopneustos* (**inspired by God**) literally means, "breathed out by God," or simply, "God-breathed." God sometimes breathed His words into the human writers to be recorded much as dictation. He said to Jeremiah: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9). But, as clearly seen in Scripture itself, God's divine truth more often flowed through the minds, souls, hearts, and emotions of His chosen human instruments. Yet, by whatever means, God divinely superintended the accurate recording of His divinely breathed truth by His divinely chosen men. In a supernatural way, He has provided His divine Word in human words that any person, even a child, can be led by His Holy Spirit to understand sufficiently to be saved.

It is of utmost importance to understand that it is **Scripture** that is **inspired by God,** not the men divinely chosen to record it. When speaking or writing apart from God's revelation, their thoughts,

wisdom, and understanding were human and fallible. They were not inspired in the sense that we commonly use that term of people with extraordinary artistic, literary, or musical genius. Nor were they inspired in the sense of being personal repositories of divine truth which they could dispense at will. Many human authors of Scripture penned other documents, but none of those writings exist today, and, even if discovered, they would not carry the weight of Scripture. We know, for instance, that Paul wrote at least two other letters to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 2:4), but no copies of those letters have ever been found. The letters doubtless were godly, spiritually insightful, and blessed of the Lord, but they were not Scripture.

Many men who wrote **Scripture,** such as Moses and Paul, were highly trained in human knowledge and wisdom, but that learning was not the source of the divine truth they recorded. David was a highly gifted poet, and that gift doubtless is reflected in the beauty of his psalms, but it was not the source of the divine truths revealed in those psalms.

Scripture first of all and above all is from God and about God, His self-revelation to fallen mankind. From Genesis through Revelation, God reveals His truth, His character, His attributes, and His divine plan for the redemption of man, whom He made in His own image. He even foretells the eventual redemption of the rest of His creation, which “also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” and which “groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Rom. 8:21–22).

The Bible is not a collection of the wisdom and insights of men, even of godly men. It is God’s truth, His own Word in His own words. The psalmist declared, “Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). God’s Word is divinely revealed to men on earth and divinely authenticated in heaven. Peter declares unequivocally, “Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20–21).Those God-given, humanly recorded words became God’s written Word, inerrant and authoritative as originally given. *Propheteia* (“prophecy”) is not used here in the sense of prediction but in its basic and broader meaning of speaking forth, of proclaiming a message. It carries the same inclusive idea as “the oracles of God,” with which ancient Israel had the marvelous privilege of being entrusted (Rom. 3:2). “Interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20b) translates *epilusis,* which refers to something that is released, sent out, or sent forth. In this verse the Greek noun is a genitive of source, indicating origin. In other words, no message of Scripture was originated and sent forth by men’s own wisdom and will. Rather, the godly men through whom Scripture was revealed and recorded were divinely instructed and carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Within the Bible itself, “God” and “Scripture” are sometimes used almost interchangeably. Referring to words spoken directly by God to Abraham (Gen. 12:3), Paul wrote that “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you’ ” (Gal. 3:8). Later in that same chapter the apostle again personifies

Scripture as God, declaring that “Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (v. 22). In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul wrote, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth’ ” (Rom. 9:17).

When he first preached in Galatia, many years before he wrote his epistle to the churches there, the apostle had declared,

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, “Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.” And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.” Therefore He also says in another Psalm, “Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.” (Acts 13:32–35)

The Inspired and Inerrant Scripture

Scripture *is inspired and inerrant in both testaments.* **All Scripture** refers to the New as well as to the Old Testament. As noted above, the *hieros grammata* (“sacred writings”) were the Hebrew Scriptures (The Old Testament), which Timothy had been taught from childhood (v. 15). *Graphe* (Scripture), on the other hand, was commonly used in the early church not only of the Old Testament but also of God’s newly revealed Word, in what came to be called the New Testament.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus gave powerful and unambiguous testimony to the divine authority of both testaments. The four gospels contain the first divine revelation after that of the Old Testament prophets, which had ceased some four hundred years earlier. Jesus’ declaration that “Scripture [*graphe*] cannot be broken” (John 10:35) applied specifically to the Hebrew Scriptures but also, as will be seen, to the totality of Scripture, that is, to both testaments, which together compose God’s written Word.

Early in His ministry, Jesus said of the Old Testament, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17–18). Later He said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

Jesus repeatedly used divinely revealed truths from the Old Testament to affirm His messiahship. He declared, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’ ” (John 7:38), and, “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” (John 7:42). As Jesus walked with the two

disciples on the Emmaus road after His resurrection, “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27).

In addition to His teaching that “Scripture [*graphe*] cannot be broken” (John 10:35), Jesus said that “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me” (John 12:48–50). The words of the incarnate Christ are the words of God the Father; therefore, to reject Jesus’ words is to reject God’s Word.

The men whom God assigned to write the gospels would not have been able in their mere humanness to remember accurately everything Jesus said or did. For that reason Jesus promised that “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26; cf. 15:26–27).

The Lord would reveal additional truth after He returned to heaven. “I have many more things to say to you,” He said, “but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you” (John 16:12–14).

In 1 Timothy, Paul wrote, “The Scripture [*graphe*] says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages’ ” (1 Tim. 5:18). It is important to note that the first quotation is from the Old Testament (Deut. 25:4) and that the second is from Jesus’ own lips (Luke 10:7), that is, from the New Testament.

The Pentateuch (The first five books of the Old Testament) contains at least 680 claims to divine inspiration. Such claims are found 418 times in the historical books, 195 times in the poetic books, and 1,307 times in the prophetic books. The New Testament contains more than 300 direct quotations and at least 1,000 indirect references from the Old Testament, almost all of them declaring or implying that they were God’s own Word. The book of Hebrews opens with the declaration “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). The writer was speaking of both testaments, God’s speaking through “the prophets” representing the Old and His speaking through “His Son” representing the New.

Many New Testament writers directly testified that they knew they were writing God’s Word. Paul reminded believers in Corinth of a truth he doubtless had taught them many times in person when he ministered there: “[These] things we also speak,” he said, “not in words taught by human wisdom, but

in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13; cf. 16). In his next letter to them he defended his earnestness as well as his authority, saying, "We are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 2:17).

Paul assured the churches in Galatia: "I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.… He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb,… called me through His grace, [and] was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:11–12, 15–16). He told the church in Colossae, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25–27). And to the church at Thessalonica he wrote, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Peter recognized that Paul, a fellow apostle, had been used by the Lord to write His Word. Referring to Paul's letters, Peter wrote of "some things [in them that were] hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also *the rest of the Scriptures,* to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16, emphasis added). Jude attests that "the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" carried the weight of Scripture, divinely warning that "in the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 17–18).

No New Testament writer had a greater awareness that he was recording God's own Word than did the apostle John. That awareness is affirmed with particular certainty in the book of Revelation, which begins, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw" (Rev. 1:1–2). A few verses later the apostle says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches' " (vv. 10–11). At or near the end of each message to those churches is the admonition "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The apostle also makes clear in many other parts of that book that he is writing God's explicitly revealed truth (See, e.g., 19:9; 21:5; 22:6).

It is both remarkable and significant that, although most, if not all, of the human writers were aware they were recording **Scripture** and sometimes were overwhelmed by the truths God revealed to

them, they exhibit a total lack of self-consciousness or apology, in the common sense of that word. Together, the biblical writers make some 4,000 claims to be writing God's Word, yet they offer no defense for being employed by God in such an elevated function. Despite their realization of their own sinfulness and fallibility, they wrote with the utter confidence that they spoke infallibly for God and that His revelation itself is its own best and irrefutable defense. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven," Isaiah proclaimed for God, "and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without ac-complishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10–11).

Scripture *is inspired and inerrant in its words.* To deny that all of the Bible is **inspired** obviously is to deny that all of the *words* of **Scripture** are **inspired.** Just as obviously, such denial places man as judge over God's Word, acknowledging as authentic and binding only those portions which correspond to one's personal predispositions. Whether the human judgment about inspiration is made by a church council, church tradition, or individual preference, it is based on subjective, sin-tainted, and imperfect knowledge and understanding. When men decide for themselves what to recognize as true and worthwhile, as meaningful and relevant, they vitiate all authority of Scripture. Even when they concur with **Scripture,** the agreement is based on their own human wisdom.

Unless the very *words* of **Scripture** are **inspired** and authoritative, man is left to his own resources to ferret out what *seem to be* underlying divine concepts and principles. But instead of discovering what has been called "the Word behind the words"—that is, the divine truth behind the human words—that approach leads to the very opposite. It presumptuously and self-deceptively "discovers" man's *word,* as it were, behind God's words, judging God's divine truth by the standards of man's sinful inclinations and distorted perceptions. As Paul said to Titus, the commandments of men turn people away from God's truth (Titus 1:14).

Even from a purely logical perspective, to discount the *words* of **Scripture** is to discount all meaning of Scripture. Not only is it impossible to write without using words but also is impossible, except in the most nebulous way, even to think without words. It is as meaningless to speak of thoughts and ideas without words as to speak of music without notes or mathematics without numbers. To repudiate the *words* of **Scripture** is to repudiate the *truths* of **Scripture.**

It is true, of course, that both testaments contain revelations whose bare words God intentionally made cryptic. In some cases, as with Jesus' parables, the purpose was to hide the meaning from willful unbelievers. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the multitudes in parables, "He answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted' " (Matt. 13:10–11). In other cases, as with predictive prophecies, even the most godly believers, including the men to whom God revealed the prophecies, could not discern the full meaning. Peter explains, for example, that, "as to this salvation [through

Jesus Christ], the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look" (1 Peter 1:10–12).

In other words, although **Scripture** never reveals truths apart from words, in some places it reveals words apart from their full truth. The point is this: The *words* of **Scripture** are always inerrant, whether or not they convey their full meaning to those who read them or can be fully understood by our limited comprehension.

When Moses protested to God that he was not qualified to lead Israel because he had "never been eloquent" and was "slow of speech and slow of tongue,… the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say' " (Ex. 4:10–12). When Moses continued to object, "the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, 'Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently… And you are to speak to him and put the *words* in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him' " (Ex. 4:14–16, emphasis added).

In Psalm 147, the inseparable relationship between God's Word and His words is clear. The Lord "sends forth His command to the earth; His *word* runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His *word* and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow. He declares His *words* to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel" (Ps. 147:15–19, emphasis added). It is only through words that God has revealed His Word.

Jeremiah testified: "The Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put My *words* in your mouth.' … Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, 'Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them.' … Thy *words* were found and I ate them," the prophet responded,"and Thy *words* became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 1:9; 15:14, 16, emphasis added). Ezekiel made a similar affirmation, saying, "Then [the Lord] said to me, 'Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me.… But you shall speak My *words* to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.'… Moreover, He said to me, 'Son of man, take into your heart allMy *words* which I shall speak to you, and listen closely' " (Ezek. 2:3, 7; 3:10, emphasis added).

In reply to Satan's temptation to make bread from stones in order to satisfy His physical hunger, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on *every word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God' " (Matt. 4:4, emphasis added). Man is fed spiritually by God's "every word," and every revealed word of God is found in His written Word, the Bible. In His last major public discourse, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My *words* shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35, emphasis added).

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus proclaimed the essence of the gospel: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My *word,* and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24, emphasis added). "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing," He said on another occasion. "The *words* that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63, emphasis added). "For I did not speak on My own initiative," our Lord again makes clear, "but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me" (12:49–50; cf. 14:24). Believing in the Father is believing in the Son, and the Son's words are the Father's words.

Scripture *is inspired and inerrant in everything it teaches and reports.* Some scholars maintain that, because the Bible is not a textbook on such subjects as history, geography, and science, it is inerrant only when it speaks on spiritual and moral matters. But like those who claim to accept the underlying divine concepts and principles of Scripture but not its words, these interpreters also determine by their own resources what is divine and infallible and what is human and fallible. Again, man becomes the judge of Scripture.

Through the centuries, some scholars have pointed to "mistakes" in the Bible, statements about people, places, and things that did not jibe with the accepted "facts" of history, archaeology, or modern science.

Until Copernicus's discovery in the sixteenth century, men assumed that the sun rotated around the earth, because that is how it appears from our earthly perspective. Because we now know that the earth rotates around the sun, many scholars charge the Bible with factual error in reporting that Joshua successfully commanded the sun to stand still and the moon to be stopped (Josh. 10:12–13), whereas it must have been the earth that stood still. But highly trained meteorologists still speak of sunrise and sunset, especially when communicating with the general public. Those phrases are firmly established figures of speech throughout the world, and no sensible person accuses someone of being inaccurate or unscientific for using them. Not only that, but if God created the universe, stopping the rotation of the earth, the sun, or the moon—or of all three—would have been equally simple. It is significant that most people who question the reality of such miraculous events also question many of the clear theological and moral teachings of Scripture as well.

For many years some scholars charged the book of 2 Kings with error for reporting that “the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold” (2 Kings 18:14). They based that judgment on an ancient Assyrian record of the transaction that gives the amount of silver as being 800 talents. But later archaeological findings have revealed that, although the Assyrian standard for a talent of gold was the same as that used by Judah and Syria, the standard for silver was considerably different. When adjusted for that difference, the biblical figure was found to be accurate.

Not only is the Bible’s *reporting* of history unerring but so is its *prediction* of history. Ezekiel foretold in amazing detail the destruction of Tyre, first by Nebuchadnezzar, later by Alexander the Great (Ezek. 26:1–21; 29:18), and then by Egypt (30:10–26). In similar detail, Nahum predicted the devastation of Nineveh (Nahum 1:15–3:19; cf. Zeph. 2:13, 15), which was conquered and destroyed in 612 b.c. by the Medes and Chaldeans. Both Isaiah (Isa. 13–14; 21:1–10) and Jeremiah (Jer. 50–51) accurately predicted the ultimate destruction of Babylon, which would “never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation” (Isa. 13:20). That great city was conquered first by Cyrus, founder of the Persian empire and the man whom God prophesied would free His people Israel from Babylonian captivity (Isa. 44:28; 45:1–14). That noble king not only allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but, with an amazing awareness of his divine mission under the true God, charged them to rebuild the temple there and returned to them all the sacred and valuable temple objects pilfered by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1). Other Assyrian and Persian kings successively conquered and plundered Babylon. Its final conquest was by Alexander the Great, who intended to rebuild the city but was prevented by his untimely death at the age of thirty-two. When the capital of the Syrian empire was moved from Babylon to Seleucia by Seleucus Nicator in 312 b.c., Babylon gradually died. By the time of Christ, the city was inhabited primarily by a small group of scholars, and bricks from its rubble were carried away to build houses and walls in surrounding towns. Today the almost barren site of ancient Babylon, located in the southern part of modern Iraq, is valued only for its archaeological significance.

As noted in the first point, God’s divine Word, revealed through His divine words, is not itself the means or the power of salvation, but is the agency of it. Near the end of his gospel account, John explained that “these [things] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

As Peter declared to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem soon after Pentecost, “Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified,… He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10–12).

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul echoes the words of Jesus: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation…. So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the *word of Christ*” (Rom. 10:9–10, 17, emphasis added; cf. James 1:18).

Christ also uses His Word to sanctify and cleanse His church from sin. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul said: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water *with the word*” (Eph. 5:25–26, emphasis added). In his first letter to believers at Thessalonica he said, “And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the *word of God’s message,* you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, *the word of God,* which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13, emphasis added; cf. Phil. 2:16).

The second predicate adjective Paul uses to describe Scripture is **profitable,** which focuses on the sufficiency of God’s written Word. **Profitable** translates *ophelimos,* which includes the ideas of beneficial, productive, and sufficient.

Scripture is sufficient in being comprehensive. Paralleled in the Old Testament only by Psalm 119 and confirmed by Joshua 1:8, these verses supremely affirm the absolute sufficiency of Scripture to meet all the spiritual needs of God’s people.

David understood the sufficiency of God’s Word, and in one of his most uplifting psalms he exulted:

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression. (Ps. 19:7–13)

In verses 7–9 David refers to God’s Word by six different titles: God’s law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear (Referring to worship), and judgments. In those same verses, he mentions six characteristics of that divine Word: It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true. Also included are six blessings that the Word brings in the believer’s life: It restores the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures forever, and produces complete righteousness. The remaining verses (10–13) extol the benefits of the work of the Word: It makes rich, delights, rewards, convicts, and protects. It is a marvelous mark of God’s loving grace that He has given us every truth,

every principle, every standard, and every warning that we will ever need for living out our salvation according to His will.

Scripture also is complete. Jude admonished his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). John closes the book of Revelation, as well as the entire Old and New Testaments, with this sobering warning from the Lord: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18–19).

False religious systems that claim to be Christian invariably expose their falsehood by their view of Scripture. Mormonism considers *The Book of Mormon* to be as divinely inspired and authoritative as the Bible, in fact more so, because they view that book as being a latter-day, updated revelation from God. Christian Science views *Science and Health, With a Key to the Scriptures* in the same way. Some charismatics claim to have received special revelations from God, which, if genuine, would carry the same divine authority as the Bible. For most of the twentieth century, a large percentage of members and a higher percentage of clergymen in most major Protestant denominations have not recognized the Bible as being wholly revealed by God and inerrant. Those views and many others like them share the common heresy of considering Scripture to be incomplete or inadequate.

It is because of such distorted and destructive views of Scripture within professing Christendom that biblical believers must, more than ever before, “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). As in the early church, the greatest danger to the church has always been from within. Paul warned the godly, mature church at Ephesus, pastored first by the apostle and then by Timothy, and led by godly elders, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in *among you,* not sparing the flock; and from *among your own selves men will arise,* speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30, emphasis added).

In the remainder of verse 16, Paul declares that Scripture is **profitable** for believers in four important ways: **for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.**

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