

DOCTRINE UNPACKED: INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

As we embark on these nights together, we're taking time to lay out the core doctrines that have shaped us and carried our church to where we are today. And what better place to begin than with the foundation of it all — the infallibility of Scripture.

INFALLIBLE

The word “infallible” means “will not fail” or “trustworthy.” To say Scripture is infallible signifies its full trustworthiness, “as a guide that is not deceived and does not deceive.” Infallibility does not mean the Bible cannot contain errors—it means that it cannot fail in accomplishing God’s purpose. In *Christian Thought: Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Beth Felker Jones explains that the concept of infallibility means the Word of God “will do what God intends for it to do” for His expressed purpose. The Bible’s infallibility, or inability to fail, is one of three I’s that describe the nature of Scripture:

- **Inspired** – God-breathed; although authored by men, it is written under the inspiration of the Spirit.
- **Inerrant** – The Bible is without mistake; both in the original manuscripts and in faithful translations, it speaks truth that is without error.

We begin here because, as the foundation of Christian doctrine, we must be convinced that the source of our beliefs is beyond mere human reasoning.

THE HISTORY OF BIBLE

The Bible is a supernatural book and, by far, the most important literature in human history. It is God’s Word to humanity.

If the Bible is not accurate, our faith is in vain. Christianity without the Bible is stripped of much meaning, lacking clarity and direction. It is our strongest source for understanding Christ’s divinity, death, and resurrection.

Throughout history, people have been so committed to the belief that this is God’s Word that many were willing to die for it. Strangely, others were willing to kill them for that conviction. The bitterness and opposition to this book are difficult to explain. Cruel instruments—body racks, tongue pinchers, thumbscrews, iron boots, and whipping trees—have been used in attempts to suppress it. Supporters were hung, drawn, and quartered; burned, boiled, and beheaded. Even in the twentieth century, in some countries, men and women were imprisoned and tortured simply for reading this forbidden book (*The Indestructible Book*).

The Bible remains illegal in some countries today, and people who possess one may face imprisonment or torture.

COUNTRIES WITH BANNED OR SEVERELY RESTRICTED BIBLES

1. **North Korea:** Possession or distribution of a Bible is a serious crime.
2. **Saudi Arabia:** Importing and distributing Bibles is strictly prohibited, though private practice of non-Muslim religions is technically allowed.
3. **Afghanistan:** The Taliban’s return has intensified restrictions, and suspected Christians may have their phones searched for religious materials.
4. **Yemen:** Bible ownership is heavily restricted, and Christians cannot publicly read or distribute Bibles.
5. **Maldives:** Bibles and other Christian literature are forbidden for all citizens, who must be observant Muslims.
6. **Libya:** Possession of Bibles is prohibited or severely restricted for Muslims.
7. **Brunei:** Bibles cannot be imported, and Christians must exercise extreme caution with electronic versions.
8. **Sudan and Iran:** Churches have had Bibles and religious literature confiscated.

COUNTRIES WITH HEAVY RESTRICTIONS

Algeria, Bhutan, Brunei, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kuwait, Laos, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia

COUNTRIES WITH SOME RESTRICTIONS

Other countries with some restrictions include Bahrain, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines (Mindanao), Sri Lanka, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam.

This should challenge us—do we value our Bibles as we ought and take the time to read them regularly? Muslims place their Qurans on high shelves as a symbol of great respect. We should value our Bibles even more, yet too often they remain unopened and unstudied.

In recent history, the infallibility of the Bible has come under increasing attack and, in some circles, has been reduced to a book of “good ideas” or, worse, “myths.” Yet, under careful archaeological, historical, and scientific scrutiny, the Bible continues to prove itself inspired and supernatural, just as it claims to be.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ITS DIVINE AUTHORITY

- **2 Timothy 3:15-17 (ESV):**

“15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

- **2 Peter 1:20-21:**

“20 Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 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 Peter 3:16:**

Peter already recognized Paul’s letters as Scripture, affirming that even apostolic writings were regarded as divinely authoritative.

These passages affirm that Scripture is not merely human writing but is inspired by God, fully trustworthy, and authoritative for teaching, guiding, and equipping God’s people.

PLENARY - VERBAL INSPIRATION

We would describe the Bible as - ***Plenary- Verbal Inspiration***.

- Plenary – ‘full, complete in every part’
- Verbal – ‘by means of words’

Plenary-Verbal inspiration states that the Bible writers were fully inspired even as to their choice of words; that the Bible is completely the Word of God including each and every word. We do not attribute the authors writing to their own personal preference or desire, instead we consider it ‘God’s Words’.

One of the hallmarks of this claim is that the scriptures have ***Supernatural consistency...***

GOD WROTE THE BIBLE

Consider this: forty different men wrote sixty-six books in three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek—over a period of sixteen hundred years, yet the result is one harmonious, unified book. The remarkable consistency, progression of thought, and absence of contradiction point to a single ultimate author: God.

MEN WROTE THE BIBLE

While God is the author of Scripture, He chose to work through human writers. He channeled His Word through their unique perspectives, cultural backgrounds, historical contexts, personalities, emotions, and experiences. In doing so, God clothed His divine revelation in humanity, making it accessible and relatable to His people.

PROOF THAT THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED

1. Prophecy and Fulfillment

The Bible contains numerous prophecies that were fulfilled with remarkable accuracy:

- The prophecy of judgment on Egypt and its fulfillment (Gen 15; Exodus 4–12)
- The rise and fall of Assyria (Isaiah 10; Ezekiel 31–32)
- The reign of Cyrus before he was born (Isaiah 44–45)
- Daniel's prophecies regarding the rise and fall of Gentile kingdoms (Dan 2, 7, 8, 11)

For example, in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue destroyed by a rock:

- **Babylon** – head of gold, the first great Gentile empire over Israel
- **Medo-Persia** – arms and chest of silver, succeeding Babylon
- **Greece (Hellenistic Empire)** – belly and thighs of bronze, following Medo-Persia
- **Rome** – legs of iron and iron-clay mixture, the fourth empire dominating Israel

Most impressively, over 330 Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ:

- Born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2
- Came out of Egypt – Hosea 11:1
- Sold for 30 pieces of silver – Zech 11:13
- Cheek smitten, hair plucked – Isaiah 50:6; Micah 5:1
- No bone broken – Ex 12:46; Ps 34:20
- Cast lots for his clothes – Ps 22:18

2. Numerical Structure of the Bible

- **Mathematical Patterns:** Some researchers identify complex numerical patterns within Scripture, such as the first verse of Genesis containing 30 distinct patterns, including 7 Hebrew words and 28 letters.
- **Symbolic Significance:** Numbers like 3 (God's purpose) and 7 (completeness) appear throughout Scripture, highlighting divine intent.
- **Gematria and Numerical Values:** Hebrew and Greek letters also served as numbers. Scholars argue that the numerical values of words reveal an intelligent, deliberate design woven into the Bible.

3. Miracles Recorded in the Bible

Many of the Bible's miracles were confirmed by eyewitnesses and preserved through both oral and written traditions.

4. The Unity of the Bible

Despite being composed of sixty-six books written over 1,600 years by 40 authors from different cultures and countries—including kings, prophets, peasants, fishermen, herdsmen, priests, and tradesmen—the Bible maintains remarkable unity. Written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, across genres like history, law, poetry, prophecy, biography, songs, letters, parables, and proverbs, every book harmonizes with the whole, without contradiction. This unity demonstrates the Bible's divine inspiration.

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES ITSELF AS:

- Fire – Jer 23:29
- Hammer - Jer 23:29
- Lamp – Ps 119:105

- Mirror – Jam 1:23-25
- Milk – 1 Pet 2:2

And so much more...

CHURCH HISTORY. WHAT HAS THE CHURCH HISTORICALLY THOUGHT ABOUT THE BIBLE?

We tend to think that because our scientific, medical and technological knowledge as a society has increased our theological knowledge has as well. This can give us an arrogance towards the and wisdom of those who have gone before us.

The universal belief of the church until the last couple of centuries has always been that the Bible is authoritative, infallible and inerrant. Even though there has been disagreement on doctrines it was still agreed that there was only one place you could get your doctrine – the infallible Word of God.

QUOTES FROM EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON THE BIBLE

- **Clement of Rome (35–99 AD):**
“Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit.”
- **Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 AD):**
“The Scriptures are divinely inspired and breathe the Spirit of God.”
- **Origen (c. 185–254 AD):**
“The Holy Scriptures are perfect and divine, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.”
- **Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373 AD):**
“The Holy Scriptures are the writings which the Holy Spirit has guided, and which we receive as the true Word of God, without error.”
- **Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395 AD):**
“The Scriptures are full of divine wisdom, perfectly spoken by the Holy Spirit, and are the rule of our faith and life.”
- **Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD):**
“I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error.”

QUOTES FROM THE THEOLOGIANS IN THE MEDIEVAL AND REFORMATION PERIODS.

- **Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109):**
“The words of Holy Scripture are given by God Himself, and thus they contain nothing false.”
- **Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274):**
“For the things which Scripture teaches, God is the author; therefore, Scripture cannot deceive.”
- **Bonaventure (1221–1274):**
“Sacred Scripture is the light that illuminates the mind and guides all our knowledge toward God.”
- **Martin Luther (1483–1546):**
“I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the true and pure Word of God.”
“Scripture alone is the judge of doctrine, not the church or the pope.” (*This is where the term *Sola Scriptura* originates.*)
- **John Calvin (1509–1564):**
“The knowledge of God and of ourselves is the beginning of wisdom; this knowledge comes to us solely through the Word of God.”
“The Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

QUOTES FROM THEOLOGIANS AND CONFESSIONS POST-REFORMATION

- **Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571)** – Summary of the Articles’ View on Scripture:
 - Scripture is divinely inspired and contains all that is necessary for salvation.
 - The Bible is the supreme authority over the church and its teachings.
 - The Church and its councils must submit to Scripture’s authority.
 - Both the Old and New Testaments are equally authoritative and harmonious.
- **Lutheran Church Formula of Concord (1576):**
 - “No one should place the Word of God on a level with their own reason or with human traditions.”
 - “The Holy Scriptures are the only true and divine rule, since they alone are inspired by God and are sufficient to teach everything necessary for salvation.”
- **Belgic Confession (1561) – Article 5: The Authority of Holy Scripture:**

“We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them—not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.”
- **John Wesley (1703–1791):**

“After fifty years of preaching, I have found no method, no system, no church, no doctrine, no opinion, nothing but the Bible.”
- **Billy Graham (1918–2018):**

“The authoritative source for mankind is the Holy Bible. Its wisdom is both ancient and relevant; historic and prophetic. Above all, it is the Word of God.”

HOW WAS THE BIBLE FORMED? THE CANON AS WE HAVE TODAY..

In relation to the Bible, a *canon* is the authoritative collection of books recognized as sacred and divinely inspired by Jewish and Christian traditions. The term comes from the Greek word for “measuring rod” or “rule,” highlighting that these books serve as the standard for faith and practice. The Biblical canon represents the definitive list of writings that hold divine authority within a particular religious context.

Not all books claiming divine inspiration were included in this canon. Examples of writings excluded for not meeting the established criteria include:

- The Book of Mormon
- The Apocrypha (which is included in the Catholic Bible but not in most Protestant canons)

OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Jewish canon, limited to what we know as the Old Testament, was largely acknowledged well before the birth of Christ. The official closing of the canon, however, took place around AD 100 at a rabbinical assembly in Jamnia. Books written between the completion of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament—commonly referred to as the Apocrypha—were not considered inspired by Jewish tradition.

SEPTUAGINT AND APOCRYPHA

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, completed because Jews scattered during the intertestamental period often no longer knew Hebrew but widely understood Greek, the common language of the time. This translation provided them with access to the Tanakh, which the New Testament apostles refer to as the Word of God.

Around 285 BC, at the request of Demetrius, the custodian of the famed Library of Alexandria, 72 Jewish scholars translated the Torah into Greek. Remarkably, they completed the translation in just 72 days and were in full agreement despite working in separate rooms without communication.

After the Torah, they translated the rest of the Old Testament and also included the Apocrypha—books not part of the Tanakh. These Deuterocanonical books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Inclusion of the Deuterocanonical Books:

- **Catholic Church:** Includes these books in the Old Testament.
- **Eastern Orthodox Churches:** Also include them in their canon.
- **Oriental Orthodox Churches (e.g., Coptic, Ethiopian):** Accept these books.

Non-canonical in Other Traditions:

- **Protestant Denominations:** Following the Reformation in the 16th century, these books were generally rejected as divinely inspired, along with papal authority, as emphasized by Martin Luther.
- **Lutherans and Anglicans:** May include readings from the Apocrypha in their lectionaries but do not consider them canonical.

NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The New Testament canon developed gradually over the early centuries of Christianity rather than through a single formal decree. Key criteria for inclusion included apostolic origin—meaning the writings were attributed to the apostles or their close associates—widespread acceptance across Christian communities, and orthodoxy, ensuring the content aligned with established Christian teachings and did not contradict existing scripture.

Debates over authoritative texts were common, as seen with groups like the Marcionites and proto-orthodox Christians. By the 4th and 5th centuries, councils such as the Council of Carthage (397 AD) formalized the canon, recognizing the 27 books of the New Testament.

KEY CRITERIA FOR CANONICITY:

- **Apostolic Origin:** Written by, or closely connected to, the apostles—e.g., Mark with Peter, Luke with Paul.
- **Widespread Acceptance:** Books widely recognized and used in public worship by diverse Christian communities.
- **Orthodox Content:** Theologically consistent with core Christian doctrines and non-contradictory to accepted scripture.
- **Liturgical Use:** Read aloud in weekly gatherings, especially during the Lord's Supper, reinforcing their authority.

Through this careful process, the church recognized a trustworthy, inspired collection of 66 books that form the Bible as we know it today.

COPYING AND TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

The Jewish scribes had extremely strict rules for copying the Old Testament, which ensured its accuracy and preservation over centuries. Some of these meticulous practices included:

- Writing only on clean animal skins.
- Limiting each column to 48–60 lines.
- Using black ink made from a special formula.
- Speaking each word aloud as it was written.
- Wiping the pen and themselves before writing the name “Jehovah” each time.
- Reviewing the completed scroll within 30 days; if three or more pages required correction, the entire document had to be rewritten.
- Counting letters, words, and paragraphs to ensure accuracy, including matching the middle word and letter of each paragraph with the original.
- Burying old or worn copies, as documents containing God's Word could not be destroyed.

- Storing texts only in sacred places.

If any step was missed, the document was discarded, and the process started again.

While the New Testament did not have the same strict copying rules, the sheer number of manuscripts—over 24,000 in total—ensures a high level of reliability. For comparison, Homer’s *Iliad*, the next most-copied ancient text, has only about 1,757 manuscripts. This abundance allows scholars to identify errors and confirm the accuracy of the New Testament text with great confidence.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, beginning in 1947 and continuing with finds as recent as 2021, includes nearly complete manuscripts of books like Genesis and Isaiah. These ancient texts demonstrate the remarkable accuracy of the Masoretic Texts and provide strong evidence for the careful preservation of Scripture over millennia.

TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

The first English translation of the Bible was completed by John Wycliffe in 1382, making Scripture accessible to English speakers for the first time. However, Wycliffe’s translation was based on the Latin Vulgate rather than the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

William Tyndale later produced the first English translation directly from the Greek manuscripts, providing a far more accurate rendering of God’s Word. His commitment came at a great cost—he was martyred for his work.

Today, Bible translators have access to the earliest and most reliable manuscripts, allowing them to produce highly accurate translations into English and other languages.

The invention of the Gutenberg press in the mid-1400s further revolutionized access to Scripture. In 1455, the Gutenberg Bible became the first large book to be printed, with about 180 copies produced. This innovation made the Bible more widely available, paving the way for Christians today to own one—or even several—Bibles in their own language.

COMMON CRITIQUES OF THE BIBLE TODAY

1. “Science has proven the Bible to be untrue.”

This claim is based on a misunderstanding of both science and Scripture. Science explains the *how* of the natural world through observation and experimentation, while the Bible addresses the *who*, *why*, and *what* of our existence, revealing God, truth, and the purpose of life.

Far from being in conflict, science and Scripture are complementary. Scientific methods cannot prove or disprove spiritual truths such as the existence of God, the soul, or salvation—these lie outside the scope of scientific inquiry.

Many of history’s greatest scientists, including Newton, Kepler, and Pasteur, were devout believers who saw no contradiction between their faith and their work. Christianity even paved the way for modern science because it assumes a God of order whose creation can be studied and understood. While the Bible is not a science textbook, it contains remarkable insights for its time. For instance, Isaiah speaks of the world as round during an era when many assumed it was flat. Scripture communicates truth in language and imagery accessible to all people, across all ages.

Scientific theories often change, but the core truths of Scripture have remained consistent and continue to transform lives. When rightly understood, both science and the Bible point to a rational, intelligent Creator and a world filled with order, beauty, and meaning.

2. “The Bible is full of contradictions.”

To claim that the Bible is “full” of contradictions is a serious overstatement.

Many critics use the word “contradiction” loosely. Two accounts that appear to differ are not necessarily contradictory. A genuine contradiction occurs only when something is asserted to be both true and false *in the same respect at the same time*.

For example, the Bible commands, “Thou shalt not kill,” yet God instructs the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites and permits capital punishment. Is this a contradiction? No. The Fifth Commandment forbids murder, not sanctioned warfare or justice against a guilty criminal. The word “kill” is used in different contexts, so no real contradiction exists.

Some apparent contradictions arise from differing perspectives. For instance, one Gospel mentions a single angel at Jesus’s tomb, while another mentions two. There is no contradiction because neither account claims exclusivity.

Other supposed contradictions stem from copyist errors. Before the printing press, the Bible was copied by hand, so minor typographical mistakes were inevitable. Careful comparison of manuscripts allows scholars to identify and correct most of these errors.

As scholarship continues—through manuscript study and archaeological discoveries—many apparent discrepancies are resolved. Today, there is far less reason to believe the Bible contains genuine contradictions than at any time in church history.

3. “The manuscripts of the Bible have been corrupted and changed over the years, so we cannot be sure what was originally written.”

It is true that the Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, and that we do not possess the original manuscripts—only copies of copies. Some critics argue that this, combined with the passage of time, has introduced so many errors that the Bible is no longer reliable.

This, however, is mistaken. Scribes were highly trained in copying texts with extreme accuracy, and rigorous practices—especially for the Old Testament—ensured remarkable consistency across generations.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided concrete evidence of this precision. These ancient manuscripts, some nearly 2,000 years old, closely match the traditional Hebrew text used today, demonstrating that the Bible has been preserved faithfully and can be trusted as a reliable record of the original writings.

4. “The Bible is full of historical errors.”

There is strong reason to trust the Bible’s historical accuracy. Archaeological discoveries consistently support the events, locations, and cultures described in Scripture. Many details once thought to be errors have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. Far from undermining faith, careful study of history and archaeology affirms that the Bible is a reliable record of real events, and Christians can approach rigorous historical research with confidence.

HOW DOES HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND SCIENCE SUPPORTS THE BIBLE

1. Archaeology Supports the Bible

Archaeological discoveries continue to confirm people, places, events, and customs described in the Bible—many of which were once questioned or dismissed. Examples include:

- **The Hittites** – Once thought to be mythical, now recognized as a well-documented ancient civilization.
- **Jericho** – Excavations reveal collapsed city walls consistent with the biblical account in Joshua 6.
- **The Pool of Bethesda** – Described in John 5, it was once considered fictional but has been uncovered in Jerusalem with five porticoes.
- **Pontius Pilate Inscription** – Confirms the historical role of the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus to death.
- **House of David Inscription** – Found in northern Israel, validating King David as a historical figure.

These findings demonstrate that archaeology consistently affirms the Bible’s historical reliability.

2. Science Aligns with the Bible's Big Picture

While the Bible is not a scientific textbook, many of its statements align with modern scientific understanding:

- **The universe had a beginning** – Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning...”) aligns with the scientific view that the universe is not eternal but had a starting point.
- **The earth is round** – Isaiah 40:22 refers to the “circle of the earth,” anticipating the scientific understanding that the earth is spherical.
- **The water cycle** – Job 36:27–28 and Ecclesiastes 1:7 describe processes of evaporation and precipitation.
- **Life is in the blood** – Leviticus 17:11 recognizes the essential role of blood in sustaining life.

Furthermore, many early scientists were motivated by a biblical worldview, assuming an intelligent Creator behind an ordered and observable universe.

3. History Confirms the Bible's People and Events

Historical records outside the Bible support the reality of many biblical figures and events:

- **Josephus** – First-century Jewish historian who wrote about Jesus, James (Jesus' brother), and John the Baptist.
- **Tacitus** – Roman historian who mentions Jesus' execution under Pontius Pilate.
- **Assyrian Records** – Confirm the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC (2 Kings 18–19).
- **Babylonian Chronicles** – Record the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, consistent with Scripture.

While the Bible is primarily a book of spiritual truth, it is grounded in real history. Archaeology, science, and historical records consistently affirm its trustworthiness and reinforce its claim to be divinely inspired.

CONCLUSION

In recent times, the Bible has come under attack, often from those unwilling to acknowledge its authority due to personal biases or misunderstanding.

While we cannot change people's minds for them, Christians can be confident that the Bible is inspired, infallible, and supernatural. It has transformed lives, families, societies, governments, and civilizations for the better—and it continues to do so. The Bible is authoritative and true, has stood the test of time, accurately foretold the future, and continues to provide guidance today.

Historical, archaeological, and scientific discoveries only strengthen this confidence. As we see the supernatural nature of Scripture so clearly, we should prioritize it in our daily lives, submit to its authority, and live in a way that is pleasing to God.