Establish Institute
Theme: Christian Story

Topic: Biblical Interpretation, Part 1

Fall 2023

#### Theme Introduction

The Establish Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His world for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The Institute is a two-year discipleship program that emphasizes four major themes: Christian Story, Christian Belief, Christian Formation, and Christian Witness. This fall, we will focus on the theme of Christian Story.

#### **Topic Introduction**

This week begins a three-week study of basic biblical interpretation. In this lesson, we will discuss an introduction to biblical interpretation and the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

### Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

Hermeneutics is the interpretation of language in both its oral and written forms. It is from the Greek word hermeneuo, which means to translate or interpret. When Christians talk about hermeneutics, they are referring to the interpretation of the Bible.

It is important to note up front that Christians do not believe that all interpretations of the Scriptures are equally valid. The Bible is not an infinite "babel" of differing interpretations that are at times incompatible with each other. While some biblical texts lend themselves to multiple layers of meaning, the Bible's meaning is determined by the original human authors and the Lord who inspired them to write those words.

Our goal as interpreters is not to invent the meaning of the biblical text. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

# The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is inspired: it is literally God's words in written form. We also acknowledge that the Bible was written by dozens of different authors over a period of about a thousand years. Unlike every other book that has ever been written, the Bible is both a divine book and a human book. We also believe that the Bible is *authoritative*: when the Scripture speaks, God speaks, and thus those written words carry His divine authority.

## What the Scriptures Teach

The Bible attests to its own inspiration and authority. Sometimes God's spoken words were written down and recorded by men. There are many examples of this phenomenon in Scripture, so we will only look at one example.



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Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 24:3-4). See also Exod 17:14; 34:27; Deut 29:1; 31:24-26; Isa 30:8; Jer 36:2-4 In at least one case, God himself wrote down His words: the Ten Commandments that the Lord spoke to Moses on the mountain. And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the Lord had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly (Deut. 9:10). See also Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1. Sometimes the words and writings of men are called God's words. This is true of both Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel (Hos 1:1). And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 Thess 2:13). See also 1 Kings 12:22-23; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1, Acts 4:31. The New Testament identifies the words of Old Testament prophets with God's words. It also argues that the entire Old Testament is God's words that He has breathed out into written form. The Old Testament is alive with God's power and changes people's lives. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (Matt 1:22-23; citing Isa 7:14).

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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:15–16).

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12).

The New Testament also identifies itself with God's words, implying that the New Testament is inspired in the same way as the Old Testament. Both the Old and New Testaments are considered the words of God. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea (Col 4:16; cf. 1 Thess 5:27; Luke 4:16). For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages" (1 Tim 5:18; citing both Deut 25:4 and Luke 10:7). And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures (2 Pet 3:15-16). The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his 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). Jesus himself argues that every word of the Old Testament is inspired, that He came to fulfill the Old Testament, that God's words will not pass away without accomplishing their purposes, and that God's words should be obeyed. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:17-19). God's words are of everlasting authority and always perfectly accomplishes God's intentions. A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Isa 40:6-8). "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to

the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isa 55:10–11).

God's words were to be recorded, continually meditated upon, and passed down from generation to generation.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut 6:6–9).

Believers are to know God's words, obey God's words, and allow God's words to change their hearts and shape their actions.

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word (Psa 119:1-16).

Believers are to trust the Bible because, though it is the words of men, it is most importantly the written words of God who inspired those men to write it.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:14–17).

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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 Pet 1:19–21).


Theological Summary	
The whole Bible, both Old and New Testament, is inspired by God and is God's written revelation of Himself and His will to humanity. The Bible is a thoroughly human book, written by real people, and as such bears the marks of any other piece of literature. As such, each book has its own style, ts own grammar, its own emphases, and its own vocabulary.	
The Bible is also a thoroughly divine book, written by the Holy Spirit, revealing God's words just as much as the human author's words. Every book of the Bible shares common themes and contribute elements to a common grand narrative.	
Because the Bible is inspired by God it is also His authoritative, written words for humanity in general and believers in particular. We are thus obligated to submit to God's words as our supreme authority for life, doctrine, and practice. Christian faithfulness in any matter is contingent upon the degree to which we place ourselves under the Bible's authority.	
Our church's confessional statement, The Baptist Faith and Message (2000), nas an excellent article on Scripture that addresses biblical inspiration and authority.	
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.	
Recommended Resources	
The ESV Study Bible	
Kevin DeYoung, Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me (Crossway, 2016).	
Matt Rogers and Donny Mathis, Seven Arrows: Aiming Bible Readers in the Right Direction (Rainer Publishing, 2017).	
J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, <i>Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On</i> Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible, 4 <sup>th</sup> ed. (Zondervan, 2020).	
Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.	

(Kregel Academic, 2021).