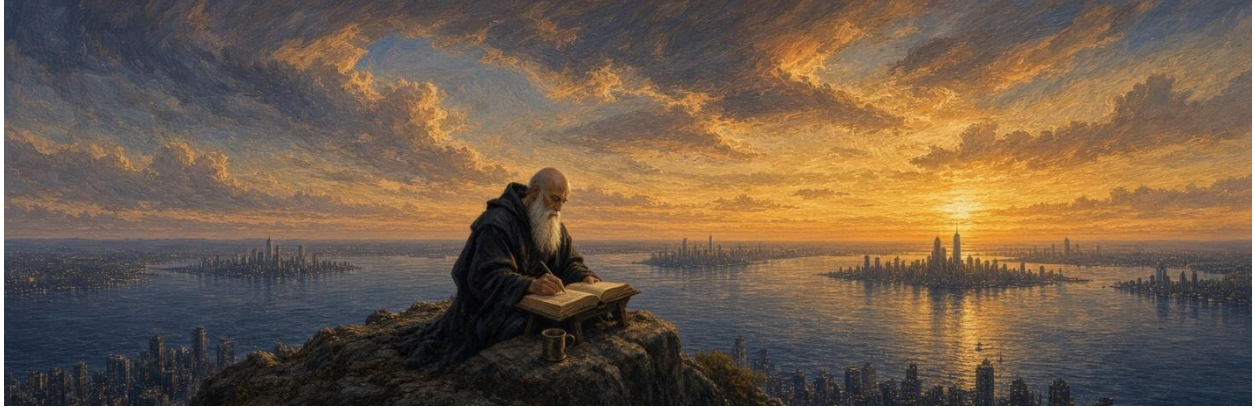


Is the Bible the Word of God?



Foreword

The question is not a literary-theory curiosity. **It is a question of authority.** If the Holy Bible **merely expresses** religious feeling, then it may inspire, but it cannot bind. If it **merely contains** the Word of God amid human opinion, then the reader becomes the judge of which parts still speak. **If it is the Word of God in written form**—God speaking through chosen witnesses—**then it stands over** culture, conscience, and appetite rather than under them.

This essay does not claim to end every later argument about which books belong, how a verse should be translated, or what a hard passage means. **It argues that the Bible's own claim, and Jesus's claim within it,** is stronger than “expression” and stronger than a loose “container.” The Scriptures present themselves as **God-breathed speech**, received, quoted, and submitted to by the very people who wrote them.

Context

“**Word of God**” is not a book title. It is God speaking. He speaks, and creation comes to be. He speaks to Abraham, to Moses, and to the prophets. Israel receives what Jesus later calls “the Law of Moses and the Prophets

and the Psalms.” In the New Testament, “the word of God” can mean the gospel as it is preached, the message about Christ, and also the written Scriptures. The pattern is the same throughout: God speaks, human beings write, and the writing is treated as God’s speech.

Three answers are commonly given.

First, the Bible **expresses** faith. It records what Israel and the church felt and believed. On that view, **it can inspire. It cannot require.**

Second, the Bible **contains** the Word of God. Divine truth is mixed with human error, and the reader must pick out what still “speaks.” On that view, **the book does not judge. The reader does.**

Third, the Bible **is the Word of God**. Not because paper is divine, but because God so governed the writing that what Scripture says, **God says.**

The third is the claim the biblical writers themselves make. They do not treat earlier Scripture as optional folklore. They quote it as decisive. Jesus does the same with the Torah.

Observations

Jesus Affirms the Torah

Jesus does not treat Moses as something He has outgrown. He treats Moses as pointing to Him, and He brings what Moses wrote to its completion.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He says, “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” (**Matthew 5:17–18**). “The Law and the Prophets” was Jewish shorthand for Israel’s Scriptures. Jesus binds His mission to those writings down to the smallest stroke.

After the resurrection, He does the same with the whole Hebrew Bible: “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then “he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (**Luke 24:44–45**). He treats Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings as a unified witness that must be believed.

He also treats Scripture as unbreakable. Confronting His opponents, He says, "Scripture cannot be broken" (**John 10:35**). He tells them the Scriptures "bear witness about me" (**John 5:39**). When Satan tempts Him, He answers not with private insight but with Deuteronomy: "It is written" (**Matthew 4:4, 7, 10**). That is Torah affirmed in the wilderness.

Jesus therefore does not stand outside the Torah as a later moralist. **He stands inside it as its Lord and fulfillment.** To discount the Torah while claiming Jesus is to claim a Jesus the Gospels do not give.

Jesus and Many Writers Quote the Old Testament

The New Testament is soaked in the Old. This is not decoration. Quotation is a claim of continuity and authority.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy against the tempter, Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth (**Luke 4:16–21**), Hosea—"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"—against hollow religion (**Matthew 9:13; 12:7**), and the Psalms from the cross (**Psalms 22; 31**). He argues from the tense of a verb in Exodus: God "**is**," not "**was**," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and therefore the dead are raised (**Matthew 22:31–32**). He treats the written text as precise enough to settle doctrine. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell Jesus' life as the completion of what Scripture had already said. Matthew repeats the line, "This took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" (**Matthew 1:22**, and often after that). Luke records the risen Christ opening the books of Moses and the Prophets and explaining them. John calls Jesus the Word made flesh, and still says that Moses wrote about Him (**John 5:46**).

Paul builds justification, Gentile inclusion, and the meaning of the cross on Habakkuk, Genesis, Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and Isaiah. "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction" (**Romans 15:4**). Peter applies Isaiah and the Psalms to Christ and to the church. James cites Leviticus, the Decalogue, Genesis, and Proverbs. Hebrews is a sustained reading of the Old Testament as the living voice of God: "He says," "**the Holy Spirit says**." Jude recalls Enoch and the Exodus generation as a moral warning. Revelation is a mosaic of Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, and the Psalms.

The writers do not quote the Old Testament as a museum. **They quote it as the prior Word that interprets God's present act in Christ.**

Biblical Writers Affirm Scripture

It is not possible, in a short essay, to invent a sentence from every unnamed copyist. It is possible to show that the Bible's authors, across both testaments, **treat Scripture as God's speech, not merely their own.**

Moses presents the Law as what the Lord commanded, to be read, taught, and not added to or taken from (**Deuteronomy 4:2; 6:4-9; 31:9-13**). Joshua is told not to let "this Book of the Law" depart from his mouth (**Joshua 1:8**). The historical books repeatedly measure kings by whether they kept "what was written." The psalmist calls the law of the Lord perfect, sure, right, and more desirable than gold (**Psalms 19; Psalm 119**). The prophets introduce their oracles with "**Thus says the Lord,**" and they call the people back to the written covenant.

In the New Testament, the same posture continues.

Paul writes that "**all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness**" (**2 Timothy 3:16**). He tells the Thessalonians they received the apostolic message "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (**1 Thessalonians 2:13**). He claims to speak "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (**1 Corinthians 2:13**). He places a saying of Jesus beside Deuteronomy and calls both "Scripture" (**1 Timothy 5:18**).

Peter says Scripture did not come from a prophet's private idea. "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (**2 Peter 1:20-21**). He then places Paul's letters with "the other Scriptures" (**2 Peter 3:15-16**). One biblical writer is calling another biblical writer's letters Scripture.

James calls hearers to receive "**the implanted word**" and to be doers of "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (**James 1:21-25**). The author of Hebrews describes **the word of God as living and active**, and treats Old Testament citations as God still speaking. John warns that anyone who adds to or takes from "the words of the prophecy of this book" stands under judgment (**Revelation 22:18-19**). The Gospel of John presents Jesus' words as words that will judge on the last day (**John 12:48**) and presents the written testimony as given "**that you may believe**" (**John 20:31**). Luke writes so that Theophilus may have certainty about the things fulfilled among

them, things already taught from the Scriptures (**Luke 1:1–4; 24:27**). Jude urges the church to contend for the faith once delivered and treats earlier revelation as given. **The pattern is consistent:** earlier Scripture is not raw material for later genius. It is the standard later writers use, and they present their own testimony as standing in that same line of divine speech, holy.

God Creates Culture and Does Not Live Under It

If Scripture is only an artifact of ancient culture, then culture is lord and the Bible is a costume. The Bible's own story runs the other way.

God is not a product of Israel's social world. He calls Abram out of Mesopotamia. He gives Torah at Sinai to a people who did not invent Him. He judges Israel by a word they did not vote into existence. The nations rage; He sits in heaven (**Psalms 2**). Customs change; His counsel stands.

Jesus lives in first-century Galilee, yet He does not treat Roman honor, Pharisaic hedge-laws, or family expectation as the highest court. He says, "Have you not read?" **He places the Word of God above** "the tradition of the elders" (**Mark 7:8–13**). Paul can become "all things to all people" in missionary flexibility, **but he will not let Corinthian custom redefine sexual holiness or the resurrection.**

Culture is real. Language is real. Historical setting is real. Inspiration does not erase those things. But Scripture claims that the God who made the nations also addresses them. He is not trapped inside one century's assumptions. To say "**that was only their culture**" as a way of silencing a text is often to make our culture the unexamined scripture.

Many Seek to Justify Actions by Discounting Scripture

This is not a modern invention. It is an old reflex.

Eden begins with a question about what God actually said. Later Israel keeps the form of religion while ignoring the word that forbids idols and injustice. Jesus accuses teachers of voiding God's commandment for the sake of tradition. Paul warns that people will accumulate teachers to suit their own passions and "turn away from listening to the truth" (**2 Timothy 4:3–4**). Peter says the ignorant and unstable twist the Scriptures to their own destruction.

Discounting Scripture rarely announces itself as rebellion. It announces itself as sophistication: the text is primitive, patriarchal, pre-scientific, unkind, or "not what Jesus would say now." Sometimes the motive is honest difficulty. Often the

motive is simpler: if the text can be lowered from “**God has said**” to “**an ancient writer felt**,” then the desired action no longer has to answer to it.

This essay’s question is therefore practical. A Bible that only **expresses** can be admired. A Bible that only **contains** can be edited. A Bible that *is* the Word of God **must be heard**.

Conclusion

Does the Holy Bible express God’s Word? **Yes**—human voices, genres, and histories are on every page. Does it contain the Word of God? **Yes**—in the sense that divine speech is given in written words. **But those two answers, if left there, are too small for the Bible’s own claim.**

Jesus treats the Torah and the Prophets as writings that cannot be broken, and that must be fulfilled. He quotes the Old Testament as the final word. The biblical writers do the same. They receive earlier Scripture as God’s speech. They write as men carried along by the Spirit. They place one another’s testimony with “the other Scriptures.”

God does not live under culture. He makes cultures, and He calls them to account. **The old temptation is to change the text until it approves what we already wanted to do.**

The Scriptures themselves press this answer: the Holy Bible does more than **express** faith, and it is more than a **container** of true sentences. **It is God’s written Word. God breathed it. Christ affirmed it. Prophets and apostles attested to it.** It remains the measure of the church, and of every age that would rather be **excused** than **addressed**.

Finally – To call the Holy Bible only an expression of faith, or only a container of some true sentences, is to set aside what Jesus Himself affirmed. He treated Scripture as the Word that cannot be broken. If that claim is refused, His other claims are refused with it, including His claim to be one with the Father. A Christ who may be edited is not the Christ who said, “**Scripture cannot be broken.**”

