



Regarding Scripture

Christianity is *different* from every other religion on the earth. Every other religion tells you how to *earn* your way to a better afterlife. Christianity makes it clear that you *cannot earn* your way to a better afterlife. If you want a better afterlife you must trust wholly in Jesus for your salvation, justification, sanctification, and entrance into the presence of the Lord. It is his completed work on the Cross that grants you these things. As Christians, we know this through the Scripture, which we believe is the inerrant and infallible word of the living God.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 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 complete, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:12-17

What do we mean by the word *Scripture*? Most, if not all, religions have documents that they refer to as their holy scripture. The *sacred writings* may not be called scripture in all of the manifold religions of the world, but the writings themselves exist, even for religions that many people don't think of as *religions*. However, I am pretty sure that Paul wasn't referring to the sacred writings of *other* religions when he spoke or wrote of Scripture.

Jesus and the Apostles frequently quoted from what Christians today refer to as the *Old Testament*. These were the writings of Moses and the prophets, what the Jewish people would call Holy Scripture. This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote to Timothy. So what of the *New Testament*? Well, the Apostle Peter made it clear that Paul's writings at least were also Scripture.

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. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

—2 Peter 3:15-17

So, according to Peter, Paul was writing Scripture when he wrote his many letters to the churches. But, *not all* of Paul's writings are regarded as Scripture by the church. Indeed, we know that some of the letters Paul wrote weren't preserved by the early church like Scripture was. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 he refers to an earlier letter to the Corinthian church, yet we don't have that letter today. If the Lord had inspired that letter the way he did Holy Scripture, you can bet it wouldn't be lost.

"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.

—Isaiah 55:10-12

"And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the Lord, "from this time forth and forevermore."

—Isaiah 59:21

Today, Protestants recognize 66 books as Scripture. This is called the *Canon* of Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church includes several additional books in their Canon, adopted in 1546 at the [Council of Trent](#). The Eastern Orthodox Church includes different books as well. The 1535 edition of the Coverdale Bible has this to say...

"APOCRYPHA: The books and treatises which among the Fathers of old are not reckoned to be of like authority with the other books of the Bible, neither are they found in the Canon of Hebrew."

—[Bible Research](#)

The important point here is that what we have received as Canon today was *recognized* as Scripture by the church. Protestants today don't recognize any books as canonical before the New Testament that are not also recognized by the Jews as canonical, even if those books were included in the Septuagint or the Latin Vulgate. There are also several books associated with the New Testament that are expressly rejected as non-canonical.

As a Protestant, I recognize the 66 books of the Protestant Canon as Scripture, not because

some man says they are Scripture, but because the church *recognizes* them as Scripture. They were Scripture before the church recognized them. The church had universally recognized them as Scripture for some time before Athanasius listed them in 367 AD. According to the International Bible Society...

He distinguished those from other books that were widely circulated and he noted that those 66 books were the ones, and the only ones, universally accepted.

—[Biblica](#)

Later listings of the Canon, such as those at the Council of Trent, added additional books, but those books were not recognized as Scripture by the early church.

In any case having recognized the Canon of Scripture we return to the words of Paul, “All Scripture is breathed out by God”. What this tells us is that Scripture is the very word of God. Knowing that God does not lie, nor make mistakes we can assert that Scripture is the infallible and inerrant word of God, at least in the original manuscripts.. This is true even though God used fallible men to record his word and to preserve it throughout the ages.

[I’ve written before](#) about the marvelous preservation of God’s word throughout the ages, and I’m not going to rehash that here. As [David noted](#) there, God is able “to make His Word *infallible* that is, un failing in its effective transmission of His message, regardless of any errors of transmission from one hand to another.” Read his whole comment please. God is able to ensure that his message is effectively transmitted *despite* the witting or unwitting errors of those who pass it on.

So even where deliberate error has been introduced in the transmission of God’s word, his word is *still infallible*. Which brings me to my point. Though God’s word is infallible, the translations of it that we rely upon are *not inerrant*.

During our Bible Study this morning, we were discussing Psalm 84. We had covered the context of the Psalm, and were starting to discuss the text itself. Since the members of the class use many different translations, a question immediately arose about what the correct translation was for verse 1. The text we were reading in our study guide was from the Christian Standard Bible. The woman who raised the question was reading from the New International Version. I typically use the English Standard Version here. Here is how the text is translated in each of these versions.

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD of Armies.

—*Christian Standard Bible*

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!

—*New International Version*

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

—English Standard Version

I could provide several more variants from several more translations, but I think you see the general point. It's just one verse, but the three different translations all use a different title for the Lord. So which translation is correct? I believe they all are, but you can see where the confusion might have arisen. LORD Almighty certainly sounds a lot different than LORD of Armies.

I don't have access to the original text of this Psalm in Hebrew, and even if I did, I don't speak or read Hebrew. I *do* have access to Strong's Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible and an ESV Bible with Strong's Numbers on my tablet, through Olive Tree's Bible+ software, so I looked up the word "hosts" and found this definition of the Hebrew word צָבָא (tsaba): army, war, warfare. The short definition was "hosts". Reading this, I recalled often seeing some translations render the title LORD of Sabaoth, which Easton's Bible Dictionary says is a transliteration of tsebha'oth, meaning "hosts," "armies". Easton's also notes that the LXX (Septuagint) renders this word as Almighty.

It's helpful to have access to more than one translation of the Bible when you're doing a Bible study. It's also helpful to have access to other tools, like Strong's Lexicon, a Bible Dictionary, or Bible commentaries. None of these are "inspired" the way that the original autographs of Scripture were inspired, and none of them are inerrant, but they are part of the means that the Lord uses to ensure that his message will be delivered effectively.

Sadly, our Bible study went off track about that point, with one of the class members asserting that his *translation* was inerrant, and that if it wasn't, what was the point of studying it. It took a while to get back on track and back to our study, but we did get back to it and still managed to work our way through the rest of the Psalm. But to the point that a Bible Translation is not inerrant, here's an example where two translations translate the same text in contradictory ways...

Consider Psalm 19:3, which is part of a passage that poetically describes the heavens declaring God's glory. The 1984 NIV renders this as "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." This wording implies that the "voice" of the heavens is always heard. But when we compare with another translation we see an inconsistency. The NLT renders Psalm 19:3 as "They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard." So which is it? Is the "voice" of the heavens always heard as the NIV suggests, or never heard as the NLT suggests? They cannot both be true. This is one of those very few places in Scripture where one of the translations is simply wrong.

The KJV and NKJV translate Psalm 19:3 as "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." This seems to confirm the NIV translation of the passage: that the

voice of the heavens is always heard. Notice that the word “where” is in italics, meaning that it is not in the original Hebrew text but was added for clarity. But the addition of this word changes the apparent meaning. Reading it again without that word we find, “There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard.” This confirms the NLT translation of the passage. The NASB also confirms this: “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.” Psalm 19:3 indeed teaches that the message of the heavens is a silent message. It is never heard. We can look up the verse in the original text and confirm that the word “where” is not present in the Hebrew text. Once that word is dropped, the synonymous parallelism in the passage becomes clear: no speech, no words, not heard. The message of the heavens is not an audible message. It does not use words or human speech, and for that reason the “voice” of the heavens cannot be heard. We can understand the true meaning of the passage even before going to a Hebrew lexicon just by comparing several translations, and recognizing that words in italics have been added.

*—Lisle, Jason. *Understanding Genesis: How to Analyze, Interpret, and Defend Scripture* (pp. 135-136). Master Books. Kindle Edition.*

Jason Lisle isn't the only person to come out and say that a translation isn't necessarily inerrant. In 1978 an international summit of evangelical leaders came up with the [Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#). Article X of the Articles of Affirmation and Denial says...

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

WE DENY that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

The accompanying exposition included this section on Transmission and Translation:

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step

away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

This is, indeed, my point. While we don't necessarily have any English translations that are *inerrant* as translations go, we still have access to the word of God, and the Lord has preserved its meaning for us so that we can trust in it and be saved through faith in Jesus. By taking advantage of the host of English translations of the Bible that are available to us *we most definitely can* be sure that we can depend upon the Bible. We have no excuse.

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