

# Can I Trust the Bible?

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**R. C. SPROUL**



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R. C. SPROUL

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## Chapter One

# Special Revelation

In the 1970s, Harold Lindsell published a book titled *The Battle for the Bible*. In that book, Lindsell addressed what had become a huge matter of controversy—the truthfulness and reliability of the Scriptures. In the face of myriad arguments against the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Bible, Lindsell took a stand and declared that the Bible remains trustworthy.

It was this same desire to stand against the persistent

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questioning of the Bible's integrity that brought together more than 250 evangelical leaders in Chicago in October 1978. That summit meeting, convened by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, sought to draw a line in the sand, affirming the historic Protestant position on the Scriptures. The result was the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

The issue of the Bible's reliability is crucial. It is via the Scriptures that the church historically has claimed to understand matters of faith and life, from God's creation of all things out of nothing to the significance of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ to the ultimate consummation of all things toward which history is moving. If the Bible is unreliable in what it teaches about these things, the church is left to speculate and has nothing of value to speak to the world.

In the years since the summit meeting, the battle for the Bible has not abated. It is more crucial than ever that believers understand what the Bible is and why they can trust it wholeheartedly. Christians still need to be equipped with the understanding of why they can and should trust the Bible.

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God's plan of redemption. It tells us of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection—things that cannot be learned through a study of the natural realm. It is found primarily (though not exclusively) in sacred Scripture. The Bible bears witness to how God has revealed Himself in a special way:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1–3)

We receive distinct information from God Himself, and that astonishing fact lies at the root of a Christian understanding of knowledge. Epistemology (a subdivision of philosophy) is the science of knowing. It analyzes the ways in which human beings acquire knowledge. Great debates rage over whether humans learn primarily through the

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### The Nature of Revelation

Christianity at its heart is a revealed religion, and there is a content to that revelation. The issue of the nature of divine revelation focuses on a question that's been disputed for ages, not least in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Theologians have offered other explanations for what revelation is, how we have received it, and how it can be understood and interpreted. This is the disagreement that is at the heart of the battle for the Bible: whether God can and does reveal Himself in a way that people can understand. Historically, the church has affirmed that God reveals Himself, and that He does so in two distinct ways: through general revelation and special revelation.

General revelation is just that: general. It is available to people everywhere. The Bible speaks of God as revealing Himself through nature and conscience (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 2:15). This is general revelation. It tells everyone in the world some of who God is: that He exists, that He is good, that He is powerful (Rom. 1:19–20).

Special revelation, on the other hand, is not available to everyone. In that sense, it is not general information, but its content is more specific. Special revelation discloses

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mind—the rational approach to knowledge—or through the five senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell—the empirical approach. Even within Christian circles, the debate goes on as to whether reason or the senses are primary.

As Christians, however, we should all agree that Christianity is based ultimately on knowledge that comes to us from God Himself. Holding to that conviction is vitally important for our determination of truth, because knowledge that comes from God is far superior to anything we can deduce from an analysis of our situation, from introspection, or from observation of the world around us.

## God Speaks

A crucial concept in understanding the revelation we have from God is that it is *received*. The word *received* has historical significance. Church councils used the Latin word *recipimus* (we receive) in reference to the canon; they were saying “we receive” various books to be included in Scripture. By using the word *receive*, the church made clear that it was not declaring certain books to be authoritative by its own authority; rather, they recognized the voice of God

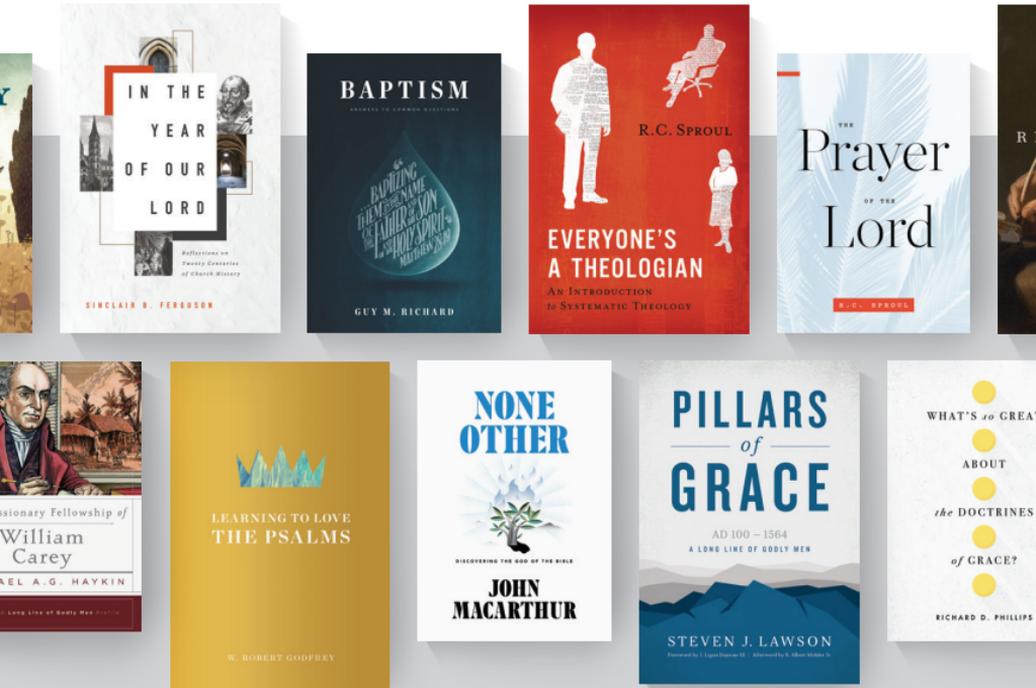
in Scripture and displayed their willingness to submit to His Word. Ultimately, they—and we—believe the Bible because it comes from God Himself.

Since the close of the canon in the first century, the Word of God alone is the means by which God speaks to the church. But previously, He spoke to His people in various ways. In Old Testament times, He spoke to people directly on occasion. There were also occasions when He revealed Himself through dreams or particular signs, as He did for Gideon. There were times when God revealed Himself through the casting of lots, through the use of the Urim and Thummim by the priests, and through theophanies. The word *theophany* comes from the Greek words *theos*, which means “God,” and *phaneros*, which means “manifestation,” so a theophany was simply a visible manifestation of the invisible God.

Perhaps the best-known Old Testament theophany is the burning bush that Moses encountered in the Midianite wilderness. When Moses saw a bush on fire but not consumed by the flames, he approached the bush, and God spoke audibly to Moses from the bush, saying, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). The bush was a visible manifestation of the invisible God. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that

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# Did God really say?

What is the Bible? Can we really trust it? Many people today assume that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions. At best, it is a mildly interesting look at the lives and beliefs of people who lived centuries ago.

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul shows that these common assumptions are wrong. The Bible is the Word of God, and therefore it is trustworthy, authoritative, and without error. What it says is of life-changing importance and should not be neglected by anyone. We can always trust what God reveals about Himself in His Word.

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

**Dr. R.C. Sproul** was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



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