

Does the Bible claim to be the word of God?

Before discussing whether there is evidence that the Bible is the word of God, it is important to establish that the Bible claims to be the word of God. If it does not claim to be divine there is no debate.

First of all, what is easy to establish is that the Bible claims to contain the word of God. One estimation says God speaks directly to people almost 480 times in the Old Testament.

The Bible begins with God speaking (Gen. 1:3), and throughout Genesis, God speaks to various people such as Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, and the Bible claims to record this. God continually speaks to Moses when calling him to go to Egypt, giving the law and judging the people, throughout the Pentateuch we have repeated references to the Lord speaking. Likewise, God speaks in Joshua (Josh. 1:1-9), Judges (Judges 6:8-10) and to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 and continued to do so in his ministry.

God speaks to Solomon in 1 Kings 3 and to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:9-18.

God speaks to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:12-22

Additionally, the narrative portions of these texts are attempting to describe acts of God and therefore implicitly claim to come from God.

- Judges 1:4
- Judges 6:1
- 2 Samuel 8:14
- 2 Kings 5:1
- 1 Chron. 18:6

The prophets are littered with phrases like “Thus says the Lord” or “the word of the Lord came to...”

Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai and Zechariah all begin with the phrase “the word of the Lord came”

The other prophetic books, with the exception of Daniel, begin with a reference to a vision the prophet saw. However, Daniel also claimed to be shown visions by God, with the meaning explained. Dan. 7:15-16

The reason the prophets wrote was to record what had been revealed, this is an implicit claim to be inspired.

The only books that don't have direct explicit speech from God are Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. However, in the final three, the reported author Solomon is said to be given wisdom from God (1 Kings 4:29-34)

The book of Ruth ultimately records where the line of David came from, in 2 Samuel 7:8-12 God says He was working in bring David to power.

Jer. 29:4-10 – The return of the exiles was part of God's purpose and its happening was not just an event of history but an act of God.

– The return is what is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah

Jer. 31:36 – God’s preservation of His people is a certainty. What Esther records is how His people were preserved at a specially dangerous time – It is viewed as a recording of an work of God.

In addition, those books were still considered part of Jewish scripture and viewed as divine. What the Jews thought of scripture

“We have but twenty-two [books] containing the history of all time, books that are justly believed in; and of these, five are the books of Moses, which comprise the law and earliest traditions from the creation of humanity down to his death. From the death of Moses to the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, the successor of Xerxes, the prophets who succeeded Moses wrote the history of the events that occurred in their own time, in thirteen books. The remaining four documents comprise hymns to God and practical precepts to men” (William Whiston, trans., Flavius Josephus against Apion, Vol. I, in Josephus, Complete Works, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960, p. 8).

And how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willing to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in numbers, and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws, and the records that contain them

Bart Erhman:

By the time of the destruction of the Temple “the final part canon of the Torah (Law), Nevi’im (prophets) and Kethuvim (writings)” was accepted by most Jews.

This is brought out more by what Jesus said about scripture.

- Mat. 23:35
 - The Lord takes an example from the beginning of the Jewish Bible and from the end and lumps them together as inspired history
- Mat. 19:4-5
 - The Lord quotes what was written by Moses and says it was God speaking
 - He views the written Old Testament as the Word of God
- Mat. 15:6
 - The Lord views the written word as the word of God and the Pharisees tradition as not scripture – What was written
- John 10:35
 - The Lord says the Jews are the ones to whom the word of God came – He asserts that their scriptures are the word of God

Paul believed the Old Testament was the word of God

Rom. 3:2

Peter believed the Old Testament was the word of God

2 Peter 1:20-21

Jesus

Jesus claimed His words are the word God

Luke 5:1

This is obvious and attested to in scripture as Jesus is presented as God and as the Word of God

The epistles

Jesus anticipated the apostolic writings and said they were scripture

- John 16:13
 - The word written by the apostles come via the Holy Spirit – just as Old Testament scriptures were claimed to be written – 2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter claimed to be an apostle and claimed to write with authority from God

- 1 Peter 1:1

John in his epistle claimed to be an apostle and that all false teaching should be compared to the word they received

- 1 John 1:1
- 1 John 4:6

Paul claimed his writings were scripture

- 1 Cor. 14:37
- 1 Thes. 2:13

Peter also claimed Paul's writings were scripture

- 2 Peter 3:16

James & Jude both begin with a reference to themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ – they are writing on the behalf of Christ, not as themselves

Hebrews claims to pass on a message given by apostles

- Heb. 2:3-4

What about the gospels?

Matthew is taken in by Jesus' anticipation of His disciples' writings; however, he also picks up from the last book in the canon, intentionally showing the Jews that this is meant to be a continuation of revelation

Mark calls his book the gospel of Jesus Christ – the whole of it was meant to be viewed as a message from God – Mark 1:1

Mark also picks up from the possibly the last book written chronologically and the last prophetic book, implicitly attempt to show this is revelation beginning again

Luke opens his gospel saying that what he is recording is the word of apostles and comes from those that had "the word" given to them.

Paul appears to believe Luke's gospel was scripture

- 1 Tim. 5:17-18 – (Luke 10:7)

John again is taking in under Jesus anticipation of the apostles writings which John himself records.

- John 21:24-25 – The writer claims to be an apostle

Paul appears to group all of the scriptural writings together in 2 Timothy as scripture

- 2 Tim. 3:14-16
 - 14: NT
 - 15: OT
 - 16: All scripture