GODBREATHED

What It Really Means for the Bible to Be Divinely Inspired

Study Guide

by ZACK HUNT



STOP WORSHIPING THIS BOOK!

- 1. Imagine yourself in that classroom in the opening scene of this chapter. How would you respond if you saw your professor slamming a Bible against the wall?
- 2. Zack talks about his beloved WOW 97 Bible, which he eventually covered in stickers and duct tape. Did you have a favorite Bible growing up? If so, what made it your favorite? Do you still have it?
- 3. This chapter talks a lot about idolatry and offers a definition for it—but how would you define it? Is there anything in your life that you devote the sort of time and attention to that would meet that definition?
- 4. This chapter chronicles a stark and almost sudden shift in Zack's relationship with the Bible. Have you ever considered it possible to hold the Bible in too high esteem? If not, why not?
- 5. You may not have done the same thing as the professor described at the beginning of this chapter, but have you ever come across something in the Bible that made you want to throw it against a wall? If so, what was it, and why did it provoke your anger?
- 6. The Bible is often described as a life-giving book, but that life comes from the breath of God, not the book itself. Without that breath, both we and the book are spiritually dead. What does spiritual death look like to you?
- 7. In this chapter the Bible is described as a living document. What does it mean for the Bible to be a living document?

8. Is the story of the people of God in the Bible one still worth telling? Why or why not?

RICHARD KILEY WROTE THE BIBLE

- 1. Did you have any biblical entertainment as a kid? If so, what impact, if any, did it have on you? How did it shape your faith? Does it still shape your faith in any way today?
- 2. Many of us who grew up in church assume we know the story of the Bible, how it was written and composed. Before reading this chapter, how did you assume the Bible came about? Did this chapter change any of those assumptions?
- 3. There is a lot of history in this chapter, much of which you may already be familiar with. What's the most surprising thing you learned about the history of the Bible?
- 4. In reading through the long and sometimes winding history of the Bible, does the story of how the Bible came together change your understanding of the Bible and its role in the life of the church?
- 5. The well-known Reformer Martin Luther famously wanted to drop James from the Bible because its emphasis on works as a critical part of salvation stood in contrast to his emphasis on faith alone. Is there any book or passage that you wish hadn't made the canonical cut? If so, why?
- 6. Given the Bible's long history of composition across many centuries and by many different authors, it's easy to come away with the sense of a disconnected Bible. Are there any common themes, ideas, or practices you see in the development of the Bible?
- 7. The Bible is an ancient collection of theological works written by people thousands of years ago in cultures and contexts very different from our own. What, if anything, can the story of the Bible's formation teach the church today?

8. The canon is closed, but if you could add a modern piece of literature to the Bible, what would it be

and why?	

BORN AGAIN ON THE BOARDWALK

- 1. Perhaps like Zack you grew up in or around fundamentalist Christianity, but no longer identify that way. If so, what was the hardest belief or most unexpected thing to give up when you no longer identified as a fundamentalist or attended a fundamentalist church?
- 2. The birth of evolutionary science is given a significant role in this chapter as a primary force in the birth of American fundamentalism in the late nineteenth century. Do you think Darwinism was the only thing that drove the early fervor of fundamentalists? If not, what else drove them?
- 3. The so-called Monkey Trials captivated the nation as two great lawyers fought over the teaching of evolution in public schools. Do you see any parallels between the Monkey Trials and the efforts to ban books and curriculum today?
- 4. Much of fundamentalist fervor is driven by fear of the other and fear of the impact that other beliefs might have on the world in general and the believer in particular. Why are we so afraid of people who believe differently than we do?
- 5. Try to put yourself in the shoes of fundamentalists. Why do you think they believe what they believe? Is there anything redeeming about fundamentalism? If so, what?
- 6. Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick famously asked his congregation, "Shall the fundamentalists win?" This chapter argues that they did. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 7. Fundamentalism has a strong hold on wide swaths of American Christianity in ways both seen and unseen. Do you see any hope of reversing the fundamentalist takeover of American Christianity? If so, how could we go about doing that?

8. The term fundamentalist is derived from a list of beliefs or doctrines that its adherents believe are

undamental or essential to the Christian faith. Why do you suppose love is never mentioned in this isting of the fundamentals of faith?			

ICARUS

- 1. This chapter opens with Zack's experience of hearing both planned and spontaneous testimonies during church on Sunday mornings. Did you grow up in a church with testimony time? How did it make you feel? Did you ever participate? What would you say if someone asked you to give your testimony today?
- 2. The story of Icarus is used in this chapter as an example of myths that are nonetheless true. Can you think of any other examples? What makes them true?
- 3. This chapter gives a definition of biblical truth as being understood more along the lines of wisdom than as a list of historical or scientific facts. How do you define truth in general? How would you define biblical truth in particular?
- 4. This chapter also offers a definition of being godbreathed, but notes that it's a word that the apostle Paul never defined, almost as if he assumed Timothy already knew what he meant. How would you define *godbreathed* in your own words?
- 5. Those of us who hold the Bible in any sort of reverence or as a source of authority in our lives do so because we believe its message to be true in some sense, or at least that it contains truth. If that describes you, what makes the Bible true to you?
- 6. From the outside looking in it may appear easy to debunk biblical inerrancy, yet many people vehemently affirm the idea. Why do you think those who believe in biblical inerrancy insist it is essential to faith?
- 7. In our growing-up years we may not be expressly forbidden from asking tough questions about the Bible, but many of us do grow up with at least an unspoken understanding that there is a limit to the things we can ask about the Bible. Why do you think so many in the church are so afraid of asking hard questions about the Bible or truly wrestling with Scripture?

8. This chapter considers the concept of orthodoxy to make the point that despite the word's frequent

use as a general term for Christian beliefs, it actually has a particular meaning specific to a certain context. If you had to create your own version of Christian orthodoxy from scratch, what would you include and why?			

CUSSIN' FOR JESUS

- 1. As they say in youth group, with all heads bowed and eyes closed and no one looking over your shoulder while you answer, this is a judgment-free zone. So, be honest. What's your favorite cuss word? (There's no secret spiritual meaning here other than the always important lesson that it's always important to never be too uptight.)
- 2. There aren't many preachers who use cuss words in their sermons, yet there are many other things that churches consider too profane to say or do. What was considered profane in your church growing up? What about today? What made those things (or people) profane?
- 3. Aside from cuss words, is there anything in the Bible that you consider profane? If so, what is it and why?
- 4. This chapter takes a long, hard look at the concept of biblical authority. If you believe that the Bible has authority in your life, what does that look like in practical terms?
- 5. Here's a deceptively simple question: Why does the Bible exist at all?
- 6. This chapter lists several questions asked by biblical authors and characters alike, such as "Am I my brother's keeper?" and "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Given the chance, what questions would you ask of God? Why those questions?
- 7. Many Christians like to talk about the plain meaning of Scripture or the clarity of a particular verse in the Bible without acknowledging their own role in interpreting the meaning of a text that has been translated from a completely different language written in a totally foreign culture. Why do you think we have such a hard time admitting our own role in biblical interpretation?

8. We don't often hear pastors, preachers, leaders, or even online influencers admit that they don't know

something. Why is it so hard to admit when we don't know something? Especially about faith? How could we shift the culture of the church to make it a more welcoming place for questions and doubt?				

WHAT IF THE BIBLE IS WRONG?

- 1. We all have our favorite Bible verses, stories, and songs or hymns, and some of us even have favorite or at least particularly-important-to-us theological ideas. Have you ever been so sure of something about your faith or the Bible only to find out you were wrong? What was it? How did you handle it?
- 2. Learning shouldn't end the moment we cross the stage at high school or college graduation. When was the last time someone said something to you or you learned something new that completely rocked your understanding of the world or your faith in particular? What was it? How did it change you?
- 3. The Bible is full of weird, wonderful, wacky, frightening, awe-inspiring, and sometimes just downright confusing passages. What passage or verse or story in the Bible do you find most challenging, and why? How do you make sense of it?
- 4. Have you ever thought the Bible could simply be wrong about something? What was it? How has that changed your relationship with the Bible?
- 5. This chapter lists a few examples of what Origen calls "stumbling blocks" in Scripture. What other examples come to mind?
- 6. Origen said there are two senses to Scripture: the literal and the spiritual. Can you think of examples where the spiritual sense is often neglected because so much focus is placed on the literal sense?
- 7. As a practical matter, in your own Bible-reading or devotional time, what would it look like for you to intentionally search for the spiritual meaning in biblical passages instead of just settling for the literal meaning?

8. Despite the emphasis this chapter places on analogy and metaphor in the Bible, some scripture pas-

sages are intended to be unde	erstood literally. What	literal passages do you stru	ggle with most? Why?

THE BULL STAMP

- 1. From childhood to old age, we all have embarrassing moments in life. What's the most embarrassing moment you've ever experienced? How did you handle it?
- 2. If your faith has changed or evolved from your youth or even more recent years, what is something you were once convinced of that now makes you embarrassed or regret believing? Who or what made you change your mind?
- 3. Jesus and Augustine both say that our most important calling is to love God and one another. But what does that look like in practical terms?
- 4. If you were to follow Augustine's rule of love for reading the Bible, how might that change your understanding of the passages in the Bible that you cherish the most? What about those that you loathe or avoid?
- 5. Passages that address slavery, women, and homosexuality are listed as examples of texts that seem clear but can't be taken literally if they don't lead to love. What are some other examples of such passages in the Bible?
- 6. We often talk about the Christian faith, and theological doctrines in particular, in abstract terms, as if faith were completely or at least mostly relegated to the spiritual realm, too often forgetting the practical effect it has not just on our own lives, but on the lives of those around us. What role, if any, should people or personal relationships play in shaping our theology?
- 7. The truth of the Bible is not found in facts. Nor is the truth of our lives found in basic facts about us. And yet the story of the Bible is one that is filled with truth. What is the truth of your story? Your life?

8. Many people are fleeing the church today, never to return. Others have left or are thinking of leaving

learnin	n't quite ready to give up on their faith, Jesus, or even the Bible. If someone is interest g more or rediscovering or recovering the Bible in a spiritually healthy and intellectual	
honest		

CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

- 1. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is one of the strangest scenes in the entire Bible, yet most of us don't have much trouble understanding its meaning. But understanding and application don't always go hand in hand. Are there any valleys of dry bones in your life that seem beyond resurrection?
- 2. It is no secret that American Christianity is in dire straits and has been for many years. If the church can be resurrected, why should it be? What would it take to accomplish that?
- 3. Like American Christianity in general, the Bible faces its own set of challenges. Long ago displaced as a leading source of authority in public life, in the private faith of many believers it is also neglected, tucked away on a shelf somewhere and rarely read, let alone seriously studied outside of seminaries and Sunday school. If the Bible can be resurrected, why should it be? What would it take to accomplish that?
- 4. Over a century ago, Henry Emerson Fosdick asked whether the fundamentalists were going to be allowed to win. Sadly, asserts Zack, they did. Is it too late to stem the tide of fundamentalism? Why or why not?
- 5. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind, to play an essential role not just in what God is doing but in how God should act in a time of need—an action not unlike prayer. If you had the chance, what would you tell God needs to be done in your life or community? And like Ezekiel, how would you go about making that happen?
- 6. Breathing new life into a dead and dying world isn't a task reserved for prophets. We have the same godbreathed spirit in our lungs that Ezekiel had in his. What are some creative ways you could go about breathing new life into your local church? Your local community? Your home?
- 7. In the United States we love to talk about freedom. We have an entire day dedicated to freedom in July. But the freedom to explore, wrestle with, and even challenge Scripture is not a freedom many of us grew up enjoying. Consider yourself set free. Free to ask, free to challenge, free to doubt, free to question, free to celebrate, free to go wherever the Spirit leads you. How can you share that freedom with others?

8. Let us end with another deceptively simple and straightforward question: Now that we've learned

the story of the Bible, how it came to be, what it is, what it is not, and what our role is in that story, what will your story be going forward? How will you be remembered? How do you want your story to be told after you are gone?