

## Tests of Inspiration

God has revealed His word to men by inspiring certain individuals to record the exact words He chose to convey His will (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, how would early Christians know which epistles and books were inspired and which were not? They were taught to, “Test all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21) and they were commanded to, “Test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). Consider four of the questions that early Christians would have asked concerning any text that someone claimed was the inspired word of God:

***Who wrote this book?*** – The question of authorship is of utmost importance, for God’s written word only came through recognized apostles and prophets (men who received revelation from God). The early church, “Continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42), and Peter (an apostle) wrote that Paul’s (another apostle) words were equal with other Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul quoted the Gospel of Luke as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18). John (an apostle) said, “He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 5:6). Plainly put, if first century Christians did not recognize the author of a book, or if they knew that author to be an unbeliever or heretic, they rejected the book as uninspired (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-2).

***When was this book written?*** – The entire New Testament was written within a very narrow window of time (c. A.D. 50 to A.D. 96). During this time God temporarily aided the revelation of His message with miraculous signs and wonders (Mark 16:15-20). However, Paul wrote of a time when both the progressive revelation of God’s written word AND miraculous signs and wonders would cease (1 Cor. 13:8-13). Any book claiming to be inspired yet authored after the death of the last apostle would be rejected as fraudulent. “That which is perfect” (the completion of God’s inspired revelation) had come by the end of the first century (1 Cor. 13:10).

***What does this book teach about Jesus Christ?*** – One notable mark of the so-called “Lost Gospels” being rediscovered today such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Judas* is that they present false and heretical ideas about Jesus Christ. Any book that denies that Jesus is sinless (1 Pet. 2:22), that He came in the flesh (John 1:14-18), that He is Divine (Col. 2:9-10), and that He is eternal in nature (John 1:1-3) is contrary to the teaching of the apostles, and is therefore not inspired by God. John wrote, “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3).

***Does this book harmonize with the Gospel plan preached by the apostles?*** – Any book that alters or amends God’s plan of salvation is to be spurned as uninspired. By the time Paul wrote the inspired letter to the Galatian churches, he and others had already orally communicated the entirety of the Gospel plan of salvation to those congregations (Gal. 1:6ff). In fact, Paul wrote to rebuke these churches for being so

quickly removed from what they had learned and for their embracing of a different plan for salvation (Gal. 1:6-8). Any book that teaches a different plan for salvation than the plan the apostles taught is uninspired.

May God help His people to test all things and hold fast only that which is good. **--JB**