



Doctrine of REVELATION

V. INSPIRATION

1. DEFINITION & EXTENT

The word "inspiration" is the Greek word **θόρυος** (*theopneustos*) [the-o'-pnyü-stos] which combines the word **GOD** (**θός**) with *breathe* (**ύω**).¹ In short, inspiration means the words of the Bible are "God breathed" – the words are the very words of God Himself.

The word "God-breathed" is a descriptive way of saying that God is the source of the Bible. Even though God Himself did not do the actual writing, the words, sentences, and thoughts of the Bible are those which God wanted written.²

Although this scripture gives us an understanding of what is meant by the Bible being "inspired" it still does not tell us exactly how the inspiration occurred. Let us thus look at another important passage from 2 Peter.

2. BIBLICAL DATA ON INSPIRATION

Beginning to reflect upon the topic of inspiration leads us to what the Bible says about itself. Some may say this is circular reasoning. "The Bible is just like a lot of other religious books claiming to be the Word of God! You're just using circular reasoning. Saying it doesn't make it so!" someone may exclaim. True enough. Affirming "The Bible is the Word of God because it says it is the Word of God" is indeed circular however I want to clarify that at this time we are not trying to make an apologetic argument about the authenticity of the claims made within the Bible about its nature. Rather we are simply trying to understand the claims in themselves theologically. We are doing systematic theology not apologetics, but we will briefly address such concerns later on. However, for now, I think a quote for consideration at least is in order from the theologian Millard Erickson who has addressed the argument of circularity:

"One may consult [the Bible] merely as a historical document which informs us that its authors considered it the inspired Word of God. In this case one is not viewing the Bible as its own starting point. This is circularity only if one begins with the assumption of the inspiration of the Bible, and then uses that assumption as a guarantee of the truth of the Bible's claim to be inspired. As person who does not present the Scripture writer's claim as final proof on this matter is not guilty of circularity. It is permissible to use the Bible as a historical document and to allow it to plead its own case."³

The point is we are looking at the claims of the writers of the biblical text on their own terms. We want to see what THEY THOUGHT and how they UNDERSTOOD the concept of inspiration.

That said, the biblical authors in multiple places assumed that what they wrote, and what was handed down to them, was more than human writings. To them the "sacred writings" or "sacred scriptures" were God's Word. Consider:

¹ Tabb, Mark. Pg. 39

² Anderson, Brad and Scott Estell. *Biblical Foundations for Living, Teen Edition*. MS Word Document Lessons

³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., pg. 227

A. The Old Testament prophets would affirm that God was speaking through them to the people of Israel:

- In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted
MICAH 4:6 (ESV)
- The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you.
JEREMIAH 30:1 (ESV)
- Then the Lord said to me, "Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.' And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me."
ISAIAH 8:1-2 (ESV)
- The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said: "The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers." Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.
AMOS 1:1-3 (ESV)

B. The New Testament writers affirmed that what was written before and during their times was not merely the words of men but the words of God:

- ¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." . . . ²⁰"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and "'Let another take his office.'
ACTS 1:15-20 (ESV)
- ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)
- ²⁰knowing this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
Peter 1:20-21 (ESV)
- In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.
HEBREWS 1:1-2 (ESV)

- C. YET the Bible has portions of text that seem to be very human in nature. That is to say, there are portions of the Bible that bleed through with direct human psychological, emotional, linguistic, & cultural elements. Consider just a small sampling of such scriptural data:
- Consider the Imprecatory Psalms (Chapters 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, and 140 in the Book of Psalms)⁴ are a good example of human elements in the Old Testament. The verb “imprecate” means “to pray evil against” or “to invoke curse upon” another, hence the name for these prayers. Here is an example:
 - **Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.**
PSALM 5:10 (ESV)
 - **Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him! Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword**
PSALM 17:13 (ESV)
 - **6 Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name! 7 For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.**
PSALM 79:6–7 (ESV)
 - Consider the lamenting’s that occur throughout the Bible. Lamenting is the grieving or deep regret or sorrow or calling out to God that takes place through out the Bible. Consider just a few examples:
 - **After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 And Job said: 3 “Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived.’ 4 Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. 5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.**
JOB 3:1-5 (ESV)
 - **LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived, you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.**
JEREMIAH 20:7 (ESV) **whole chapter is good**
 - **I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; 2 he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; 3 surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. . . .¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! ²⁰ My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. ²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;**
LAMENTATIONS 3:1-3 & 19-22 (ESV) **whole chapter is good**
 - Consider the quoting of extra-biblical sources that occurs through the Bible. Just a sample:
 - Paul quoted various pagan philosophers (Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12)⁵
 - i. **ACTS 17:28**, “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’” This comes from Greek philosopher-poet Epimenides’ (c. 500s B.C.) work Cretica (Κρητικά) directed towards Zeus but Paul makes the quote apply to the biblical God revealed through Christ.
 - ii. **1 CORINTHIANS 15:33**, “Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Is quoted from the Greek comedic dramatist Menander (342-290 B.C.) who more than likely took it from the Greek tragedian dramatist Euripides (480-406 B.C.)

⁴ Good article on the Imprecatory Psalms: <https://www.gotquestions.org/imprecatory-psalms.html> and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/should-we-pray-the-imprecatory-psalms/>

⁵ <https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers>

iii. **TITUS 1:12**, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This is a quote from Epimenides (c. 500s B.C.), again the Greek philosopher-poet.

- Consider the compilation of sources to construct an historical-biographical narrative, such as:
- Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

- Consider the seemingly trivial, background, elements of scripture. Examples are:
- ⁹ Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!... ¹⁹ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. ²¹ Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
- 2 Timothy 4:9-16, 19-21 (ESV)**

3. INITIAL REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL DATA

- The prophet passages have a direct semi-dictation understanding of inspiration. That is that God directly spoke to the people through the prophet as a mouth-piece.
- The **Amos 1** passage however is interesting to consider. Notice a few things about this text:
 - Notice it says, "The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa... And he said: "The LORD roars from Zion" but then it says, "Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment."
 - Notice that the text says, "Amos" said something and "the LORD" said something. Human & divine.
 - "Thus" means "therefore" or "in this manner" or "to this degree." You use "thus" to show that what you are about to mention is the result of something else that you have just mentioned.
- The **2 Timothy 3:16-17** passage is one of the most classic texts in reflecting upon the concept of inspiration. Notice a few things about this text:
 - Notice that inspiration is a property of the TEXT not the author. The scripture says "ALL SCRIPTURE is God breathed" not "ALL AUTHORS OF SCRIPTURE are God breathed." The point is inspiration is a product of the TEXT not the authors.
 - CONSIDER: Scripture is profitable because it is God-inspired; not God-inspired, because profitable!
- The **2 Peter 1:20-21** is another classic text on inspiration. Notice a few generalized points for reflection:
 - The phrase "carried along" which is the Greek word *pherō* (*fe'-rō*) means to "be moved" or "borne along." In short, this passage states that the Holy Spirit "carried" the writers of the Bible along to write the Words of God. He moved upon them to write what He intended of them.
 - The lamenting's, quotations, and compilations of sources all point heavily in the direction that human psychology, social systems, and culture are involved in the process of inspiration.

- Now, although we have a general understanding of what inspiration involves, and we have seen what the biblical authors say upon this point, we still need to address the question:
- TO WHAT EXTENT did this inspiration take place and HOW exactly did it take place?

4. THEORIES OF INSPIRATION

In the long history of theology there have been dozens of theories put forward about the nature of inspiration. Each one tries to address the issues of the HUMAN and DIVINE elements present within holy writ. Below you will see a few of the major theories⁶ proposed throughout the history of theological thought on HOW inspiration works. As you consider them, reflect upon what we know & what we don't know, & what is more biblically accurate & less so:

- DICTION VIEW:** God simply said everything word for word and the writers of the Bible, like type-writers, wrote out every single word God said. This is essentially an Islamic view of inspiration. This is what Muslims believe about the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not written by Muhammad. The Qur'an is dictated by Allah to Muhammad, and Muhammad is simply a recorder – a stenographer – who writes down the dictation that God has given him in the Qur'an. So the question is: is this sort of theory of inspiration one that is also applicable to the books of the Bible in the same way that the Muslim thinks, at least, that it is applicable to the Qur'an. This is difficult to square with some of the data of Scripture. For example, the so-called lexicons of Scripture.
- INTUITION VIEW:** This is the view that the Bible is really just deep and rich religious insights of highly gifted religious people. They had great wisdom that the rest of the world can benefit from.
- ILLUMINATION VIEW:** Idea God worked within human limitations. Humans are not perfect, they error, thus God just accommodated Himself, degraded Himself, to their level to write the Bible. In other words this view says that the Holy Spirit kind of inspired the writers of Scripture to write eloquently and powerfully, much like a painting or a song could inspire or illuminate an author to act to produce a beautiful piece of poetry or story. In this view the Holy Spirit is present but only there to increase the sensitivities of the authors toward the spiritual. *Stain Glass Window Analogy*— light through a stain glass is turned a stained color. God shining through human authors. This idea asserts there are errors in the Bible because humans error.
- ENCOUNTER VIEW:** Inspiration is an ongoing process in which the Bible becomes revelation when what is heard and read meets with the Spirit. In other words when one encounters the spiritual truth of the word and is changed existentially then it is truly "The Word of God." This view believes in the idea of the Bible being "living" and "active" in the present and it is in the present that it is really divine revelation.
- DYNAMIC VIEW:** In this view God directed the writers of Scripture to the overarching concepts or big ideas and then allowed the authors to fill in the details with their specific styles and idiosyncrasies. Inspiration, on this view, is really confined to the first initiating impulse of God to give the concept or idea to the author, and thus inspiration falls not upon the product but upon the process and overarching purposes.
- APPROPRIATED DISCOURSE VIEW:** This is the idea that God speaks as others speak. In other words God's has deputized or affirmed certain people to speak for Him so when they speak He speaks. An analogy to this is when a secretary goes to a meeting on behalf of a CEO. When the secretary speaks the CEO speaks. Or an ambassador speaking on behalf of a nation. When the ambassador speaks, the nation speaks. God appropriates the words and speeches and styles of the authors and the discourse of the authors.

The Bible IS the Word of God: Dictation and inspired concepts view

The Bible CONTAINS the Word of God: Illumination view (religious illuminating literature) and intuition view (Jewish scrapbook of texts).

⁶ For more specific detail on these views consider: Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd Ed., pg. 231-233 and David Dockery's chapter in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel Akin, pg. 128-132

The Bible BECOMES the Word of God: Demythologized view of the Bible and the personal encounter view of the Bible

5. UNDERSTANDING THE CENTRAL IDEAS OF INSPIRATION

We have looked at a tremendous amount of biblical data about the concept of inspiration. We then looked at various theories about inspiration and have discussed their strengths and limitations. Now we want to try and give some form of a synthesis of the data and theories that is biblically consistent, rational, and applicable.

To begin I believe we need to affirm the following understandings about Inspiration: INSPIRATION is plenary, verbal, and confluent. Breaking these three words down we affirm the following that any biblical theory of inspiration must encapsulate:

- A. **PLENARY – Inspiration extends to the whole Bible!** Theologians use the word "plenary," which is an old word meaning "full in all respects" or "complete entirely," to indicate that the Bible as a whole is the Word of God. In other words the Bible is completely God's Word from beginning to end; it is the summation and completeness of God's revelation to mankind.

Plenary gets across the understanding that a person cannot pick and choose what sections of the Bible are divinely inspired and which sections are not. All sections, however difficult or trivial or odd are God's revelation.

Jesus even affirms the whole breadth of Scripture's inspiration when He said:

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.
Matthew 5:18 (NIV)

The smallest Hebrew letter is *yod* which looked like an apostrophe. The "least stroke of a pen" refers to the small marks that differentiate one letter from another – such as *dalet* from *resh*.⁷ The point is that God was extremely precise in the words and tenses that He wanted to use. The Bible writers took great care to get it right. Likewise, Bible translators and manuscript writers took extreme care in correctly translating the Bible from its original wording into other languages.

THINK OF THIS: A PORTRAIT ANALOGY – the small tree in the background is not as central or important as the central figure of the painting. However, the little tree in the background is nonetheless part of the whole portrait!

- B. **VERBAL— not just ideas or the concepts but the very words of the Bible are God's words!** In other words God decided to use those exact words in the Hebrew and Greek to get across exactly what He wanted to get across to people. This means that it is the original Hebrew and Greek writings that are fundamentally and technically THE WORDS OF GOD.

To get this across I want to show you how the authors of Scripture will sometimes stipulate that a singular word is essential in the process of getting a correct interpretation or to make a particular theological point. Consider John 10 where Jesus disputes with the religious leaders about His claim to being the Son of God:

³³The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"
JOHN 10:33-36 (ESV)

⁷ Tabb, Mark. *Theology*. Pg 40

Here Jesus quotes from PSALM 82:6 and makes His entire argument based off of the singular word “gods.” Also notice that Jesus affirms “Scripture cannot be broken” and then makes a precise argument using a precise word from a precise scripture.

Another example would be Galatians 3:16. Here the Apostle Paul builds a theological argument about the promises made by God to Abraham and his offspring. Notice again Paul basis his argument off of a singular word “offspring” based from the book of Genesis:

¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

GALATIANS 3:16-17 (ESV)

The point of all this is the fact that the arguments made hinge upon a singular word as being authentic or not. This difference is so minute that it hinges upon whether a word is translated in the plural or the singular. Also consider 1 Corinthians,

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 (ESV)

This therefore goes to weaken and undermine the idea that inspiration is simply God inspiring the general ideas or concepts of Scripture. Rather the WORDS are the exact words God intended to use even though they were the words the human author chose.

- C. **CONFLUENT**— The Bible is both the product of man and God. Confluent means “to flow or merge together.” This means to say that inspiration is a beautiful complex coactive process of human and divine authorship. It was written by men but guided and superintended by God Himself. God’s direct will worked with the free wills of the human authors by the Holy Spirit.

God “exercised control over” the process of revelation. “In the process of inspiration God sovereignly supervised and ordered the background, heredity and circumstances of individual writers; as a result, when they recorded events, meditations or sermons in writing, the words used were consciously the free composition of the authors and at the same time the very Word of God.”⁸

The great nineteenth-century Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) has given, to date, the best overall description of the confluent idea of inspiration:

The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defects they may manifest, but as working confluently in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach His aim. The product, therefore, which is attained by their means is His product through them. It is this fact which gives to the process the right to be called actively, and to the product the right to be called passively, a revelation.⁹

⁸ Information in this paragraph comes from: Milne, Bruce. Pg. 45

⁹ B.B. Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, from online book at http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/The_Inspiration_and_Authority_o_-_B_B_Warfield.pdf

6. A PROPOSED THEORY OF INSPIRATION: THE SUPERVISORY VIEW OF INSPIRATION

THE QUESTION IS HOW DOES PLENARY VERBAL CONFLUENCY WORK? How could something like this happen? I cannot do justice to answering this question without extensively quoting B.B. Warfield once again on this point. His breakdown of the nature or process of how inspiration could work in such a way is one of the best ever given. Consider:

For, of course, these books were not produced suddenly, by some miraculous act - handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods. There is to be considered, for instance, the preparation of the material. . . . And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and, indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them. . . . If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.

...

As light that passes through the colored glass of a cathedral window, we are told, is light from heaven, but is stained by the tints of the glass through which it passes; so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God. But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to His people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men formed by Him for the purpose, through which it is given? When we think of God the Lord giving by His Spirit a body of authoritative Scriptures to His people, we must remember that He is the God of providence and of grace as well as of revelation and inspiration, and that He holds all the lines of preparation as fully under His direction as He does the specific operation which we call technically, in the narrow sense, by the name of "inspiration." The production of the Scriptures is, in point of fact, a long process, in the course of which numerous and very varied Divine activities are involved, providential, gracious, miraculous, all of which must be taken into account in any attempt to explain the relation of God to the production of Scripture.¹⁰

This view would affirm that *God superintended* the writing of Scripture by sovereignly guiding the authors to write what God wanted. It would thus be a human writing but it would be what God wanted to have written.

In short, God knew Jeremiah would be depressed and lament, God knew Luke would gather resources to write His gospel, God knew Paul would write 2 Timothy and that he would put in greetings and closings to his letters. God knew all this and was ok with it because he was orchestrating the broader picture of all of these men's lives so they would do, by their own free will, what He intended them to do.

In this view, God allowed the unique personalities, perspectives, and writing styles of the Bible authors to shine through their writings.

This view is not wooden like the DICTATION views of inspiration and it is not unfaithful to the biblical text of other ILLUMINATION views which affirm just the ideas of scripture are God's Word. What this view implies is through the providential foreknowledge of God He had just those people He wanted in the right places, at the right times, doing naturally what they would do, if in those particular circumstances.

¹⁰ B.B. Warfield, from online book *ibid*

7. HOW DO WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED?¹¹

If the Bible is a supernatural book, then it follows that it should have some supernatural marks to distinguish it from other writings. In other words, the Bible should in some way possess the “fingerprints of the divine.” John Calvin had this to say about the authentication of the divine within the Bible,

“[It is a] fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably. Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, and others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.”¹²

“The Sacred Scriptures...breathe something divine.” I love that. It is true. The Bible is utterly unique comparable to other religious writings and in fact all other literary works in general. But we want to dig a little deeper. We want to really wrestle with the fundamental question of, “What makes the Scriptures ‘breathe something divine?’” In other words, what makes the Bible unique? What makes it ‘God’s Word’ in comparison to other books? To answer these questions let us consider some of the unique features of the Bible. Individually these are not all unique to scripture but taken collectively, holistically, they build a strong apologetical argument for affirming the divine authorship of the Bible. Consider the following:

- **Historical Reliability:** The Bible points to history for verification. This is such an amazingly unique aspect to Judeo-Christian scriptures. Especially the Christian New Testament. The Bible hangs the wholeness of its theological and epistemological claims upon the veracity of historical claims. In **1 Corinthians 15** the Apostle Paul said one of the most unique and utterly thought-provoking arguments of any religious literary on the planet,

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hopeⁱⁿ in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (ESV)

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.” Wow. You may say, “Why the ‘wow’?” Why to the “Wow” because the Apostle Paul affirms that if the historical tangible visible objective reality of the Resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then stop believing Christianity because it’s an illusion or pitiful ploy. Paul calls skeptics to disprove the historicity of the resurrection and if that can happen then Christianity crumbles. Without getting into the details of this however (look at the Doctrine of Christ materials) I will say that after 2,000 years of intense scrutiny, hatred, persecution, historical investigation, textual criticism, and skepticism the historical claims of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ still stand. There is without question NO OTHER RELIGION more historically analyzed or textually criticized than Christianity. And yet it still stands in the face of it all.

Over hundreds of years of archeology has confirmed over 25,000 historical people and places from the biblical text (hardly some mythical writing like other ancient texts). Likewise among the 5,000+ Bible manuscripts (the copies of the original writings) we possess it has been found that the scriptures have been consistently copied down at 99.5% accuracy (the remaining .5% is simply

¹¹ Also consider this wonderful article by Greg Koukl who wrote on this topic very nicely https://bible.org/assets/pdf/STR_Sept11.pdf

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.8.1

punctuation and spelling differences) – hardly a margin for error and corruption to take place within our Bibles. My point is the historicity and theology and spiritual reality of Christianity coming together and stand or fall together. And they still stand.

- **Internal Coherency:** The Bible has internal consistency among its immense diversity. Think of it: The Bible is not a single book even though we have the luxury today to have it all bound together into a singular volume. No, rather it is a collection of 66 individual books written over a span of 1,500 years by roughly 40 different authors coming from three different continents (Europe, Asia, Africa), inhabiting dozens of cities, encompassing a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (kings, peasants, poets, herdsmen, fishermen, scientists, farmers, priests, pastors, tentmakers and governors), who wrote in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic). YET in the midst of immense diversity there is a common theme, message and story told: Paradise Lost to Paradise Gained; OT is anticipation of Christ, NT is fulfillment of Christ; Humankind's continual problem with sin and the solution being salvation through Christ.

"If anyone ponders over the prophetic sayings...it is certain that in the very act of reading and diligently studying them his mind and feelings will be touched by a divine breath and he will recognize the words he is reading are not utterances of man but the language of God."

Origen of Alexandria (184-253 A.D.)

Quote in Michael Kruger,
Canon Revisited, pg. 126



- **Prophetic Fulfillment:** The Bible has consistently shown prophetic fulfillment. The Bible is the only book that confirms events will happen and actually seen those events take place. Of the roughly 2,500 prophecies declared in scripture, over 2,000 have been fulfilled (the remaining are futuristic).
- **Miraculous Confirmation:** The Bible is not just written by men who *claimed* to speak from God. It is written by men who showed they spoke from God. God worked through the lives of the authors of the scriptures in miraculous ways. He showed Himself through the authors as a king shows His authority with a signet ring. Through prophetic fulfillments, through divine decrees, through grand demonstrations of power, through mass healings, through great spiritual outpourings, God showed Himself as being the orchestrator of the scriptures and confirmed the authority of the authors who wrote for Him.
- **Unifying Answers:** The Bible presents true, unifying answers to life's essential concerns. When we read the Bible, we get clear holistic answers to the deep questions permeating Humanity for thousands of years: Does God exist (theology)? Where did we come from (origin)? What is the nature of reality (metaphysics)? What is knowledge (epistemology)? Who are we (anthropology)? Why are we here (purpose)? How should we live (morality/ethics)? Where are we going (destiny)?

It is true that other religions do give answers to the "Big Questions of Life" but not all of them cohere and not all of them are livable. Christianity has a **correlation** to reality, a **coherency** in which it stays true to the fundamentals of logic, a **consistency** within its fundamental ideas in relation to a worldview, and its **compatible** with living life to the fullest way.

But there is more. It is not just that the questions of life are answered and are unifying but the answers go against the fundamental grain of our humanity which gives testament to their veracity. Consider:

- What human makes up a religion that affirms the fundamental problem with the world are humans who are fundamentally sinners without the ability to do anything to save themselves?
- What human makes up a religion in which the human authors of the sacred religious texts themselves are shown to be sinful, foolish, unwise, reckless, self-centered, and they themselves are condemned? (i.e. Moses. David. Peter. Paul.)
- What human makes up a religion in which the only way back to God is through heart-faith rather than doing a set of human related religious ceremonies and sacrifices?

- What human makes up a religion and affirms that the religion can be affirmed or disaffirmed based from historical investigation into the facts available?
- What human makes up a religion with Hell? Not talking about a pagan version of Hades or the Underworld – which is shadowy, ethereal, not-eternal – but an internal state of damnation? Not just for enemies but themselves?

I cannot but be reminded to quote the words of John Calvin who wrote on this point saying,

“As far as Sacred Scripture is concerned...it clearly is crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived. Let each of the prophets be looked into: none will be found who does not far exceed human measure. Consequently, those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds.”¹³

- **Universal Nature:** The Bible is universally accessible and applicable. The Bible is not contained to one area of the globe, to one culture, one language, or one people group. The Bible has been translated into over 1,300 languages, is the number one best seller in the world to this day, and can be understood by the simplest mind to the greatest intellects. It has depth, breadth, and width to it, making it appealing to people from every tribe, tongue, intellect, and nation.

It is simply foolish to keep touting that Christianity is a “Western Concept” – that it is somehow a religion for White, Anglo-Saxon, Nationalists. That understanding of Christianity is shallow to the facts of History and modern times. Christianity CAME FROM THE EAST and within its very fiber retains that heritage! The first Christians were Jews. Jesus Himself was a 1st Century Jew who spoke Aramaic (possible Koine Greek) and taught in the rich beautiful tones of Middle Eastern parables. For crying out loud even consider the Pauline Epistles! Several of them are directed to people who were living in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey: Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians! And what of the Apostle John’s Revelations? It was directed to churches in the same place: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, etc. (Chp. 2-3). In fact, Christianity for 600 years Christianity was a Middle Eastern, African, European phenomenon. The major churches of early Christianity spanned from Jerusalem, Israel; Antioch and Constantinople, Turkey; Damascus, Syria; Alexandria, Egypt; Thrace, Bulgaria; Athens, Greece; Carthage, Tunisia; Rome, Italy; and even included more remote places such as Ethiopia, Armenia, Georgia, Parthia, Persia, Arabia, and Nubia. There is even ample evidence of early 1st and 2nd Century Christian communities in India and as far as China.¹⁴ In ALL these areas Christianity flourished. Thus this idea that Christianity is a “white western man’s religion” is simple poppycock.

You want to know why Christianity became a more “western” or “Euro-centered” religion? Why no high concentration of Christianity in Africa or the Middle East? One answer: ISLAM. Read it for yourself.¹⁵ Islam was birthed and developed in the Arabian Peninsula in the 600s A.D. and from there expanded outward in various military ventures that within the course of 200 years had expanded from Spain to India.

What is even more amazing is the explosion of Christianity in non-Western countries today!¹⁶ Things are changing. In 1900, roughly 90-80% of the worlds Christians lived in North America and Europe. Today only about 40% do and 60% live in the non-Western world. In Latin America and Africa alone, there are today 1 billion people claiming to be Christians. More specifically in 100 years Africa has gone from only 10% of its population being Christian to by 2030 exceeding 40%. It has already been projected that by the 2030s there will be more Christian’s in China than in most Western countries combined.¹⁷

¹³ Calvin’s, *ibid.*, 1.8.2

¹⁴ For evidence of early Indian and Chinese Christianity take a look at these cool articles: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/how-christianity-came-to-india-kerala-180958117/>; <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/india-did-you-know>; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomas-Christians/Later-developments>; https://religion.wikia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_India;

¹⁵ <https://www.politicalislam.com/impact-islam-christianity/> and Rodney Stark’s *God’s Battalions: The Case of the Crusades* (HarperCollins Publishers, NY: 2009)

¹⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/20/think-christianity-is-dying-no-christianity-is-shifting-dramatically/>

¹⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/a6d2a690-6545-11e4-91b1-00144feabd0>; <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/China-officially-atheist-could-have-more-12633079.php>; https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=gplus

The point of all this is to show that Christianity is NOT a “Western Religion.” It is a global one. A cross cultural one. It has the power, substance, and spiritual reality to integrate itself into the hearts and minds and lives of all people despite mass cultural, political, philosophical, and linguistic barriers.

- **Life Altering:** The Bible and its teachings have been central in shaping the conceptual, intellectual, cultural, and religious worldviews and cherished values and traditions of our civilization.¹⁸

Consider that biblical Christianity led to the elevating of dignity for women and children, it spurned intellectual debate and artistic expression. It helped spark literacy movements, the spread of universities and public education. Hospitals as well as prison and labor reforms can trace their conceptual roots to the biblical Christian understandings in ethics and sociology. It also laid the intellectual framework for scientific method and exploration as well as for the thoughts of liberty, inalienable rights, capitalism, abolitionism, and suffrage. For crying out loud the vast quantity of literature, art, and music trace their roots to the exultation of Jesus in particular and expression of the Christian mind and heart.

On a more personal note consider the Bible’s life altering power. How many countless personal testimonies attest to the life changing power within the words of Scripture? It can led drunks to become sober, murderers to become broken, heathens to become holy, marriages to be mended, rebels to be humbled, and the insecure to become confident.

This book is not merely a book about God, it is God revealing Himself to us. We gain a depth of who He is, what He wants of us, and how we can align our lives in a way that brings holistic positive change to our personal lives and relational lives.

Its words are not stale but filled with the power to bring change. This is so not because they are mere words but because their words correspond to a living God who is there wanting relationship and transformation to occur within and among us.

Paul Helm, a British philosopher and theologian, has affirmed,

“It is not simply that the Scriptures say that they are the revelation of God that is the evidence for their being so, but also that they function as the Word of God.... One element [of Scripture functioning as the word of God] is the idea that the Bible purports to give an analysis or diagnosis of the reader.... Connected with this is the power of the Scriptures to raise and satisfy certain distinctive needs in the reader.... Connected with this is the displaying in Scripture of excellent moral standards.... And connected with this is the provision of new motivations to read out for the newly set standards.”¹⁹

- **Christ’s Witness:** The Bible is the acceptable proven Word of God because Jesus Christ affirmed it as such. I will be bringing this point up in more detail at the end of our study on the Doctrine of Revelation. But suffice to say, Jesus affirmed that both Old Testament ([Matthew 5:17](#); [Matthew 23:35](#); [Luke 24:27](#)) and New Testament ([John 14:26](#); [John 16:13](#)) scriptures were divinely inspired and thus objectively authoritative. That says a lot for us who accept His person and work.

The point is that if Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and He is, then when He speaks God speaks. Therefore Christ, who is the God-Man, has the credentials to affirm that the scriptures are divinely inspired and authoritative.

What other book can claim to have such a resume? There is none! There is no other book, either secular or sacred, that can compare.

¹⁸ There is so much to read on this subject. Consider some of these books and articles: Rodney Stark’s, *The Victory of Reason How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (2006); Rodney Stark’s, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion*; Vishal Mangalwadi’s, *The Book that Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (2011); Vishal Mangalwadi’s, *This Book Changed Everything: The Bible’s Amazing Impact on Our World* (2019)

¹⁹ Paul Helm as quoted in Michael Kruger’s work *Canon Revisited*, pg. 130-131

8. WHY WOULD GOD USE HUMAN AGENCY & MATERIALS TO REVEAL HIMSELF?

Have you ever thought of the way God chose to reveal Himself to us? There may be questions that begin to surface in your mind on this point. For example: Why would God need to have humans write a book to tell us about His nature and character? Why wouldn't or couldn't God simply inscribe "God exists" into the heavens for all to see or initial every atom of the Universe or give every person a visionary experience or come in the personalized form of a theophany? Or why would He choose a fallible method of transmission and translation of ancient Middle Eastern texts to bring forth His infallible revelation? Even more, if God wants everyone to be saved, then why won't He just show Himself to everyone so there are no doubts and people would know the truth!?

What these questions wrestle with are interconnected thoughts about God's methods and God's seeming hiddenness. These are very good questions that need to be addressed.

Let's try and break this down into three sections: (A) let's address the assumptions within these questions, (B) let's address why God would choose human agents as the METHOD to reveal Himself, and then (C) let's address why God would choose a human book as the MEDIUM of His self-disclosure.

A. WHY ASSUME GOD WOULD REVEAL THE WAY YOU DESCRIBE?

The famed 20th Century atheist philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell once jested that if he were faced with God when he died, he would simply demand an explanation from the Almighty for why He made the evidence of His existence so insufficient. Perhaps we have thought the same way at times. Why does God seem so hidden? Or why would God reveal Himself through the seemingly complicated messiness of the transmission and translation of archaic writings?

I believe to begin addressing these types of questions we need to consider the assumptions within them. **The fact is that the way we think God should reveal Himself is directly related to who we think God is and what we think His purposes are.**

To answer this more fully I want to lay out several points of reflection about the nature of how God reveals Himself to us and the purposes behind why He reveals the way He does:

- **First, God HAS revealed Himself in more than written text:** Don't forget that God has revealed Himself through Cosmos and Conscience. The Heavens and the Moral Law reveal the Creator of the Universe. In fact, Romans even affirms the fact that such evidence of God's nature and purposes are enough that we are without excuse in denying His existence as Creator or His Moral Law (**Romans 1:19-23**).
- **Second, God DOES reveal Himself in more intimate supernatural ways:** God still shows Himself through dreams and visions as He did in the biblical times and there is good evidence that He may even still reveal Himself through theophanies. Consider, by way of example, the tremendous conversions of Muslims to Christianity happening in the Middle East today. Statistical data reveals that substantial numbers of them are converting to Christianity due to visions and dreams they have of Jesus revealing Himself as the Messiah BEFORE any missionaries could share the Gospel.²⁰
- **Third, God revealing Himself by inscribing His initials into reality doesn't ensure belief or commitment:** If God were to write into the heavens or upon every atom, "God was here," there is no indication that people would turn in faith to Him. Yes, it may let everyone know, "God exists," but it wouldn't lead people to believe or trust in the God that exists. God isn't interested in you merely *knowing about* His existence – even Satan and the demons believe and tremble (**James**

²⁰ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/muslims-dream-jesus/> and <https://www.christianpost.com/news/persecuted-christian-most-muslims-come-to-faith-visions-dreams-not-evangelists-197339/> and <https://www.christianity.com/theology/other-religions-beliefs/why-are-thousands-of-muslims-converting-to-christ.html> and https://world.wng.org/2014/07/the_rising_tide_of_muslim_converters_to_christianity

2:19). He want's your heart. Salvation isn't about knowing a bunch of content about God, it's about *knowing* Him and *trusting* in Him.

I mean have you even considered the children of Israel or the people in Jesus' day?! How many miraculous signs and wonders did they see? And yet they still didn't trust in God or have faith? What makes you think you would by any stretch of the imagination be different? One way to push it even more is considering how many times God has already moved in your life and mine! How many times has He guided you, healed you, protected you, preserved you, and you know that you know "It had to be God!" and yet three weeks later you yawn your way through worship and faith? This is because you and I, like the people in Jesus' day and in the days of Moses, suffer from what theologians call the "noetic effects of sin." What is that? We have sin on the mind, we struggle with it, we like it many times, and we are constantly being pulled towards it (Romans 3:10-18). Therefore, we must constantly allow the Spirit of God to work in and through us to draw us deeper into relationship with God and His truth. The Bible itself says that without the Spirit we cannot even interpret much less accept the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

- **Fourth, God revealing Himself is an invitation not an infomercial:** An invitation only has power when the giver and the receiver do their part. An infomercial is a one-way street of someone trying to sell you something or themselves. Revelation isn't God "selling Himself" to us, He is calling us to come and know Him. As I have already said *knowing about* God is a far cry from *knowing Him or being known* by Him. To know someone requires taking initiative, thought, care, effort, time, energy, and sacrifice. Through the process itself of knowing someone you are tamed, and you are transformed. To know and be known is a total giving of yourself to the other.

Now here is a question: How would that "knowing" be accomplished just by God plopping His existence into our minds with no effort on our part? The answer is it wouldn't change us. In fact, it may annoy us or we may grow to resent Him. God revealing Himself is a call for us to "pull back the curtain and see Him." Through seeking Him, through making the effort to read about Him, studying about Him, pray to Him, fasting for Him, meditate upon Him and the like we are, as the Apostle Paul said to the young Timothy, "disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul in his second epistle to the young minister went on to say,

¹⁵ from [your] childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (ESV)

Consider what Paul said. The Scriptures are not there to be a theological information dump, rather they have a promise, a process, and a purpose. The Scriptures (1) **PROMISE** to make you wise for salvation, but only by the means of the, (2) **PROCESS** of a heart of faith that studies and accepts reproof, correction, and training for good works, that is ultimately directed towards the (3) **PURPOSE** which is Christ Jesus. This idea of God having a purpose behind His revelation can be seen even in the Book of Acts where Paul gives a sermon in Athens. There he says,

²⁶ And God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)

It seems Paul is getting at something very interesting here. I don't have time to exegete it all but just consider these words, "God made from one man every nation of mankind... THAT they should seek Him." God made us to "seek" Him. That denotes present active continuity in our behavior. It means WE DO SOMETHING! We "grope after Him" through our lives, desiring to catch Him and to be caught by Him.

B. WHY DID GOD CHOOSE HUMAN AGENCY?²¹

Why would God want to use messed up people to bring forth His ordered vision? Why would God want to use imperfect people to do a perfect work? Such questions do not just apply to the theological but to the personal. Why does the perfectly capable self-sufficient all-powerful all-pervading God want to use anyone? Before giving a list of answers to these questions let us begin by considering a Biblical example: Moses.

Moses was a hot-headed insecure stutterer if you remember. When he came before the Almighty demonstrated in a burning bush he felt insignificant (**Exodus 3**). There he is before Yahweh, the God of gods, the LORD of Lords, the Holy One of all Creation, and God speaks to Him. God says many great things,

"I am the God of your fathers..."

"I have seen the misery of my people..."

"I have heard them crying out..."

"I am concerned about their suffering..."

"I have come down to rescue them..."

Everything seems to be going fine for Moses. And then the curve ball,

"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Wait what?! I thought Yahweh was the self-sufficient I AM? I thought He heard omnipotently His peoples cries? I thought He was the morally Holy One concerned with His peoples suffering? Then WHY MOSES? Moses' first response to all of this is a question:

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

God responds,

"But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

In short God told Moses what He was planning to do, then invited Moses to "jump into the story." What does this reveal to us about why God chooses people? He chooses them because of His good pleasure. Ephesians 1 reinforces this very thing,

"God chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will"
Ephesians 1:4-5 (ESV)

²¹ Also consider these articles to answering this question: <http://www.evidenceunseen.com/articles/the-goodness-of-god/what-about-those-who-have-never-heard/objection-3-why-did-god-choose-to-use-human-agency-in-delivering-his-message-to-others/>

He chooses to use people not out of need but desire. He desires us to be partakers in the work that He is doing through His Spirit so that we ourselves are transformed into His likeness as we reach others to become the same. The Apostle Paul says it this way:

**“We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”
2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)**

God loves to rescue people through people. God loves to use imperfection for His perfect ends. Why? Because He does. It’s His prerogative. It’s His character. It shows just how awesomely loving and sovereign He is. In the Gospel of John Jesus said,

**14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.
John 15:14-17 (ESV)**

“I chose you . . . that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.” I love that. God’s “way of doing what He does best” is by changing people as they help bring change in others. Through this God’s glory is displayed and is holiness is captured within the lives of the seemingly ordinary and ill-suited.

So, with all that said, consider these points on why God uses imperfect people to bring forth a perfect Word,

- **First, God receives greater glory in using broken people to reveal His beauty to the world.** Consider what I have said above already. This truth is shown through countless biblical examples (i.e. God using stutterers, prostitutes, murderers, shepherds, fishermen, and skeptics) as well as historical examples throughout the Church’s history (i.e. Augustine a former pagan and sexually promiscuous gent, or Luther, the hot-headed boisterous sin obsessed German monk, or Whitefield the flamboyant dramatist turned eloquent evangelist).
- **Second, it could be that God may have chosen to work within the parameters of certain rules or laws, which arise from His own nature and plan.** In other words, it could be God has decided the means through which He will reveal Himself will be in such a way as to preserve the free-will choices of human persons by having human persons desire to take part in revealing Him in a deeper way through prophecy and written words. That is a mouth full. Read it again and process what was said. To put it another way, in a far more captivating way, consider the words of C.S. Lewis in his *Screwtape Letters* on God and human will,

Merely to override a human will . . . would be for Him (God) useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. For His ignoble idea is to eat the cake and have it; the creatures are to be one with Him, but yet themselves; merely to cancel them, or assimilate them, will not serve . . . He cannot “tempt” to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles.²²

While there is much here to discuss simply consider it in light of God “obeying the rules.” What do I mean? God isn’t going to force anyone to obey Him and likewise we shouldn’t think He would force Himself on the biblical writers. Instead God worked within the parameters of the authors free wills because that is who He is. He is a perfect gentleman. “He

²² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 39-40.

cannot ravish. He can only woo.” He isn’t going to force you or me or the biblical writers even to believe in Him by imprinting it upon our minds or inscribing every atom with His name. If that is the case then it seems reasonable to conclude that for God to “get through” His special revelation to Mankind would require Him working within the confines of the natural and moral and intellectual laws that He put in place at the beginning of Creation.

- **Third, God working within a “limited frame of reference” is simply another element of His condescension for us.** What I mean is God is beyond FULL comprehension. An infinite, eternal, spaceless, incorporeal Being is never going to be known in “fullness” because to be able to be known fully would mean we would have to have infinite, eternal minds – which would entail us becoming God to know God. Doesn’t work. Thus, God has to “condescend” to our creaturely level, He has to make it possible for us to understand His immensity to the highest degree we can. The mere existence of “revelation” as a category epistemologically entrails God’s condescension (lowering of Himself). God’s acting in the world (miracles) is another level of condescension.

Speaking and writing – using human language and human thought with speech and pen – is condescension yet again. A person speaking and writing God’s words therefore is not really a far stretch in the long list of Gods’ already condescending mode of character. I love what John Calvin had to say on this point,

God’s immensity surely ought to deter us from measuring him by our sense, while his spiritual nature forbids us to indulge in carnal or earthly speculation concerning him.... Knowing that our minds are heavy and grovel on the earth, he [God] raises us above the worlds that he may shake off our sluggishness and inactivity.... For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In doing so, he must, of course, stoop far below his proper height.²³

In short, God uses “baby talk” for us to understand Him. Revelation just IS God revealing His incomprehensibility in a somewhat finite comprehensible manner. Him using humans via writing scriptures is no different.

C. WHY DID GOD CHOOSE A BOOK?²⁴

What is it about written text that would make it in any way better than say a spiritual experience or atomistic initials? I think there are several points to be made:

1. **Written text has a greater objectivity** – A written text is far superior to the subjectivity of personal preferences or feelings or visions. A written text is accessible beyond people’s minds. One may object based on everyone’s interpretive lenses. Yes, people have biases, but the fact that we can identify biases, can point out errors, can reveal smudges or “things that don’t add up” implies we can “see beyond” our biases to more fundamental objective levels. Otherwise why do we debate, call out “fake news,” or speak of historical “white-washing”? Written text therefore allows for a greater sense of objectivity and investigation into “the facts” than merely the subjective experiences.
2. **Written text has a stronger durability** – A written text can last for a longer period than people’s mere memories or spoken words. Words spoken are a moment, but words written can transcend space and time. This is the beauty

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1.13.1)

²⁴ Most of these points are adapted from Bruce Milne’s *Know the Truth* quoting Abraham Kuyper, pg. 35 as well as https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/bible-special/question15-why-do-we-need-a-written-revelation-from-god.cfm.

and the power of written languages and the invention of writing specifically! Ancient and even modern oral traditions do have significant levels of durability and richness but not as durable or rich in relation to written text.

3. **Written text has a broader universality** – A written text is far easier to translate across cultural, philosophical, linguistic, and temporal barriers than merely verbal debate or oral tradition. A written word, although able to be debated over meaning, is able to be debated for its meaning BECAUSE it is available within the cultural-context of diverse ideas interacting with the objective texts and languages behind it.
4. **Written text has a fixed finality** – A written text can preserve and conserve ideas across time and space and give a sense of limitation to what is within and without a frame-of-reference for any given set of ideas. In short written text gives a permanence to ideas, a weightiness, a restriction. The MEANING is there rather than within the mind. As one author has put it in relation to the Bible,

“The Bible publishes in objective form the criteria by which God judges individuals and nations, and the means of moral recovery and restoration to personal fellowship with him.”²⁵

5. **Written text has a richer relationality** – A written text involves human thoughts, emotions, personalities, struggles, and languages. Thus, a written text has the capacity to log and therefore inspire and remind us of who we are and what our relationships and obligations are. Consider how marriage certificates, birth certificates, insurance papers, adoption papers, court cases, and tax papers all LOG OUR RELATIONS to remind us and make us accountable.

Think of a collection of love letters for a specific example. While saying “I love you” to your beloved has a deep emotional weight sometimes it can be swayed by the fickleness of emotional currents. We can ride on emotion without reflecting objectively on our covenantal obligations with our beloved. But think of love letters. Love letters, although written at a time with particular emotion and captivation, can be a tangible sustained reminder of “I love you.” Love letters display the emotional currents of lovers across time and thus can have the profound power to attest and remind them of the sustained drama of their relationship.

The Bible is like this. The Bible is a beautiful drama. It is a myth made reality (C.S. Lewis and Tolkien). It is The Story of God creating, interacting with, covenanting with, saving, and empowering human beings to love and know and serve Him. I love the words of Michael Kruger, Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC, has said on this point,

“The [biblical] writings are God’s documentation, as it were, of his covenantal relationship with his people, laying out the nature of their relationship, the terms and conditions, and the blessings and curses. . . . [B]iblical covenants. . . [are a] written witness to the relationship between God and his people.”²⁶

²⁵ Carl F.H. Henry, “The Authority of the Bible,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip Wesley Comfort, pg. 16

²⁶ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 165-166