

THE NEED FOR WRITTEN REVELATION

Not every word of divine revelation has been put into a written form, but much has been committed to writing. God himself set the pattern by writing ten commandments on stone tablets with his own “finger” (Exodus 31.18) after he audibly spoke these to Moses (see Deuteronomy 5.22). Afterward Moses wrote down the rest of the law at God’s command (Exodus 24.4; 24.27). And when God sent the Hebrew and Christian prophets, he sent them to preach and also to write (see Jeremiah 30.2; cf. 36.2; also Luke 1.3; Revelation 1.11, 19).

Why Written Revelation?

1. For a permanent record that would be available to the immediate recipients and to future generations. God’s redemptive acts in history are one-time events. These events have been recorded and explained for all times. Divine revelation has been given to specific persons in specific historical circumstances, and this has been put into written documents that have been preserved and made available permanently. See John 20.30, 31; Romans 4.22-25; and 1 Corinthians 10.11.
2. For an objective standard that is accessible to all. Written revelation invalidates appeals to subjective experiences as a standard or norm. See Matthew 4.10 and Romans 1.17.
3. For a testimony that has finality suitable to God’s character. When a law or a judgment or a prophecy is written, that makes it final, firm, and solid. It should be done; it shall be done; it must be done. Once written, God’s word cannot and must not be changed. See Exodus 17.14; Deuteronomy 27.2, 3; Joshua 8.32; Isaiah 30.8; and Revelation 22.18, 19.
4. For living proof of God’s acts in history that provoke faith and redemption. See John 5.39, 40; 20.31.

God Is the Author of Scripture

1. The source of error in divine matters is ignorance of the scriptures. Notice how Jesus answers his critics, “Have you not even read this scripture?” “Have you never read . . . ?” “You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.” [Mark 12.10; Matthew 21.16; 22.29; NKJV]. The one who rightly knows the written word does not err in matters that Jesus spoke of.
2. In Matthew 19.4, Jesus attributes to God a statement that was made by Adam in its Old Testament context (Genesis 2.24). This word of scripture is a declaration of God, since all scripture is a declaration of God (i.e., Word of God).

3. The writers of the New Testament could speak of God saying what the scriptures say (even though God might not have uttered it in its Old Testament setting). For example, Acts 4.24-25 from Psalm 2.1; Acts 13.34-35 from Isaiah 55.3; Hebrew 3.7 from Psalm 95.7; and several quotations from Hebrews, chapter 1.
4. The words of scripture are the words of God. Paul uses the expression “oracles of God” when speaking about scripture (Romans 3.2). The written scriptures contain and are the living voice of God that speaks to the depths of the human soul.
5. To the writers of the New Testament, the scriptures are God-breathed testimony that is trustworthy in its assertions, authoritative in its declarations, and the very word of God, his “oracles.”

The Human Aspect of Scripture

1. The scriptures came into being by human agency. It would be inexact to say, however, that there is a human element in scripture, as if there were parts of the Bible from man and parts from God. Rather in all parts, scripture comes from God, even though the whole of the Bible has been given by God through the instrumentality of humans.
2. The writers of scripture spoke *from God*. Scripture is, therefore, the production of humans who spoke from God and under such control of the Holy Spirit that they they were “carried along” by him.
3. David spoke “in the Spirit” and called his son “Lord” (see Matthew 22.42-43). Peter indicates that, in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas, “the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David” (Acts 1.16). When Peter and John and the other believers prayed for boldness to preach about Jesus, they appealed to “God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of your servant David have said . . .” (Acts 4.24-25). When Paul says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” he quotes, among others, the words of Moses and Isaiah (Romans 10.17ff.).
4. The writers of the New Testament have no difficulty in assigning scripture to its human authors or in discovering in scripture traits due to its production by humans. See Acts 17.28; Romans 9.1ff.; 1 Corinthians 1.16; 7.40; 15.33; Titus 1.12; 2 Peter 3.15-16; Jude 14.
5. To say that “Moses says” or “David says” is evidently the same as saying that “scripture says” or “God says.”

6. The gift of scripture through its human writers took place by a process more intimate than dictation, and it took place by a process in which the control of God's Holy Spirit was too complete and pervasive to permit the human qualities of the secondary authors to damage or distort the purity of the product. This process does not do violence to the nature of the writers as humans and, all the while, preserving their words as expressive of the mind of God. In this way, the scriptures are both human and divine.

Inspiration of Scripture—Important Passages

2 Timothy 3.16—The What of Inspiration

1. The word translated “inspired by God” (RSV) is the Greek *theopneustos* which literally means “God-breathed” (so NIV).
2. What is indicated is not that the scriptures were “breathed into by God” (i.e., the divine “inbreathing” of the human authors) but rather that the scriptures were “breathed out by God” or the product of the creative breath of God (i.e., the word of his breath).
3. The “breath of God” or “the breath of his mouth” (see Psalm 33.6) is in scripture the symbol of his almighty power, the source of his creative word.
4. 2 Timothy 3.16 simply states that the scriptures are a divine product. The passage says nothing about the process or the how of the operation of God in the production of the written word.

2 Peter 1.16-21—The How of Inspiration

1. Peter assures his readers that “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” did not rest on or come from “cunningly devised fables” (NASB) or “cleverly devised myths” (RSV).
2. For Peter, “every prophecy of scripture” (Greek *pasa propheteia graphes*; verse 20) is the exact equivalent of Paul’s “every scripture” (Greek *pasa graphe*; 2 Timothy 3.16) in the previous passage.
3. The source of scripture is God. True, it was spoken by men, but the men who spoke it “spoke from God” (RSV).
4. Those who spoke from God are said to have been borne along or carried along by the Holy Spirit. The things which they spoke under this influence or operation of the Holy Spirit were therefore God’s words and not their own. This is why “the prophetic word” can be considered true and sure (“certain,” NIV; “confirmed,” NKJV). See also John 14.26; 16.13.

5. The action of the Holy Spirit in “moving,” “reminding,” and “guiding” the human authors of scripture—the how of inspiration—does not deny certain human activities or traits of the writers (e.g., seeing, hearing, feeling, telling, thinking, learning). But it does mean that “every prophecy of scripture” comes as a result of the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit and not as a result of “one’s own interpretation” (RSV; “someone’s own interpretation,” ESV; “the prophet’s own interpretation,” NIV).

John 10.34-39—The Result of Inspiration

1. In his dispute with Jewish leaders, Jesus affirms that “the scripture cannot be broken.”
2. It is impossible for the scripture to be annulled. Its authority cannot be withstood or denied. People can bicker and argue about any religious matter, but the Bible always has the last or final word. Why is this? It is because the scriptures are the very word of God.
3. Jesus consistently appeals to scripture as the final authority against the temptations of Satan (see Matthew 4.4, 7, 10; Luke 4.4, 8; and note the emphatic “it is written”).
4. Those who do not believe all that the prophets have spoken concerning the Christ are foolish in their hearts (see Luke 24.25ff.).