
Chapter 8.10

The Incarnation of Scripture

The Human/Divine Mix in Creating Scripture

Table of Topics

A) The Divine/Human Mix in Scripture

- A.1) The divine & human elements of Scripture
- A.2) The popular exclusion of the human element in descriptions of the writing of Scripture

B) The Problems with a Mystical Understanding of How Scripture was Written

C) The Differing Levels of the Human Element in the Process of Communicating Scripture

D) What Can God Expect Humans to Do?

- D.1) To be human is not necessarily to err
- D.2) Humans are able to record divine revelation
- D.3) Humans are able to remember divine revelation
- D.4) Humans are able to record divine history
- D.5) Humans are able to translate & copy divine revelation
- D. 6) Humans are able to teach divine revelation

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The Bible is not shy about revealing its human element.
- The popular disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation has led to the unbiblical notion of some sort of *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* or mind control in the writing of Scripture.
- Paul could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of some secret "inspiration" and *divine/human mental telepathy*.
- If supernatural "inspiration" is so critical for humans to sufficiently *record* divine revelation, then why does God remove such influence in the subsequent *transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching* of the Scriptures, steps that are all just as vital to the accurate communication of divine revelation as its recording?
- The theological theory of "inspiration" is another example of invoking the need of the supernatural where it is not needed. God will not do for us, what He has already enabled us to do. God has already given, especially regenerated humans with *Spirit-liberated reason*, sufficient abilities for the recording, transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching Scripture to accurately communicate His divine revelation. These tasks are not miracles. For God to speak to man in any form or fashion requires a miracle, but not the accurate recording of that revelation.

A) The Divine/Human Mix in Scripture

A.1) The divine & human elements of Scripture

The central question on the issue of how divine messengers wrote the Bible concerns the relationship between its divine and human attributes. If the writing of Scripture were purely divine, then it would be a matter even beyond dictation, but one of *automatic writing* where a spirit controls the very arm and hand that is writing while the person is in somewhat of a trance.¹ However, there are certainly human elements in Scripture. Many of the Psalms, for example, do not appear to be divine dictation. In Psalm 6 we find a typical statement from David:

Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?" (Ps 6:2-3)

This is a prayer from a person to God, not a statement of God to a person. Yet, we believe there is a divine message in the example of this man of God praying to God. Accordingly, the Bible is not shy about revealing its human element, as demonstrated in the numerous references to Scripture as what "**Moses says**" (Rom 10:19; cf. Matt 22:24; Mark 7:10; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:5) or "**Isaiah cries out**" (Rom 9:27; cf. John 1:23).

Such a human element seems particularly evident in Paul's personal remarks in his letters such as telling Timothy:

Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.¹¹ **Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.**¹² **I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.**¹³ **When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.** (2 Tim 4:9-13)

This seems less a "revelation from God" and more of a man simply describing his circumstances and some personal desires. Again, however, there is a divine message here in even such "human" writing.

Nonetheless, this can be contrasted with the words of the Prophets. In very typical fashion, Isaiah wrote:

This is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a

siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city," declares the LORD.
(Isa 37:33-34)

That seems nothing less than a direct, exact quote from the Almighty, with no "human" element whatsoever, especially since the content would have been far beyond any capabilities Isaiah had in himself to be the source of such an unlikely prediction.

In regards to the previous chapter, we pointed out four general types of writing we see in Scripture, and each of them certainly emphasizes either the divine or human element. For example, the apostolic *deposited* and prophetic *dictated* types of Scripture clearly reflect more of the divine. However, the *researched* Scripture in OT history and Acts, and the *experienced* Scripture in the Psalms generally reflect more of the human element.

A.2) The popular exclusion of the human element in descriptions of the writing of Scripture

It is obvious, then, that both divine and human characteristics are found in Scripture. And this is why we refer to it as an incarnation. Could we not say of Christ that He at times displayed His divine attributes more, and at other times His human attributes? Would we not misunderstand and even malign who He was if we diminished either His divinity or humanity? And do we diminish His divinity in any way by recognizing and embracing His humanity? Of course not. And yet, Evangelical theologians are far too often guilty of diminishing the incarnation of Scripture in order to supposedly uphold its divinity. God effectively communicated His supernatural revelation through the human Jesus Christ. And He just as capable of communicating His word now through human Prophets and Apostles.

As we have noted repeatedly, the predominant approach to understanding the writing of Scripture is to insert the concept of "inspiration" into the mix in an effort to provide a "one-theory-fits-all" explanation that essentially eliminates the human elements, supposedly in order to preserve its divine authority. Accordingly, notice how the human element is excluded and disparaged in the following explanations of "inspiration" that we have already quoted. Carl F. H. Henry has written:

By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation.²

If the Holy Spirit is influencing the mind of the men to this degree than we are talking about robots, not humans. Likewise, we have quoted J. I. Packer who writes:

Inspiration is a work of God terminating, not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to themselves to find a way of saying it), but in the actual written product. . . .

Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author; the primary author is God the Holy Spirit, through whose initiative, prompting and enlightenment, and under whose superintendence [i.e. mind control] each human did his work.³

Notice the complete disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation. And this disbelief unavoidably leads to the unbiblical notion of some sort of *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* or mind control. Of this we wrote earlier:

Scriptures *never* describe Apostles or Prophets experiencing such a thing. For example, there are no instances in Scripture where God subjectively and mystically gives an author of Scripture a mere inward mental impression for the sake of guidance or revelation. In fact, we have demonstrated (in chapter 7.16) that the only clear examples of such secret *divine manipulation* through *divine/human mental telepathy* occurred in the lives of pagan unbelievers, never regenerated believers.⁴

In other words, Evangelical authors are simply inventing a theory of "inspiration" that has no biblical basis whatsoever, and may actually be unbiblical regarding how God works with His people.

B) The Problems with a Mystical Understanding of How Scripture was Written

We see several significant problems with the popular idea that the Scriptures were recorded through some sort of mystical, subjective, "divine influence" on the minds of the writers. First, read again David's emotional cry to God or Paul's personal notes to Timothy. Do we really believe that the writing of these required, as Dr. Packer claims, that "God [could not have] left them to themselves to find a way of saying it, that the wording of these emotional and personal expressions are "a work of God" rather than

the humans who are “only the secondary author”? Was the supernatural “superintendence,” (which means “control”) of God necessary for these men to express these things as examples of their relationship with God and men for our spiritual instruction and edification? We do not think so.

The second problem with the typical explanations of “inspiration” is that its proponents have a very difficult time explaining how these very human elements of Scripture got there. Typically, another theory is advanced, and a contradictory one that claims God simultaneously controlled the writers’ minds so that they chose the exact wording He wanted, and the human writers had the freedom to express things in their own wording. That is a formal contradiction no matter how such theorists want to put it, and as such, would not even be possible for God. Do we see the trouble that we get into when we try to claim that even the *recording* of divine revelation was controlled by God?

A third problem is one we have mentioned throughout *Knowing Our God*: How would the biblical writers know when this controlling “divine influence” for writing inerrant Scripture was active, and when it was not? ⁵ When Paul was writing to a church, how did he know the controlling “divine influence” was present and he was not just writing thoughts from his head? He could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of some secret “inspiration” and *divine/human mental telepathy*.

On the contrary, the Apostle knew he was writing divine revelation because he had previously received it in very miraculous and obvious ways through visions or actual appearances of Christ. And from that deposit of divine revelation that he had been given, he wrote as a rather normal human being to apply that divine knowledge and wisdom to the different circumstances he encountered in the churches. That’s how he knew when he was writing the Corinthians: “**What I am writing to you is the Lord's command**” (1 Cor 14:37).

Finally, let us suggest another problem with the common Evangelical view of “inspiration.” An important question is this? When does the *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* cease in the process of God communicating His message to His people? If the supernatural mental influence of “inspiration” is so critical for humans to sufficiently *record* divine revelation, then why does God remove such influence in the subsequent *transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting,* and *teaching* of the Scriptures, steps that are all just as vital to the accurate communication of divine revelation as its recording? If humans cannot accurately record God’s revelation

then we must claim that copyists, translators, and preachers are supernaturally “inspired” as well.

Yet, no Evangelical scholar we know of has ever claimed the divine influence of “inspiration” supposedly needed to *record* revelation, is also present in any of these subsequent steps necessary to ensure the accurate and effective communication of God’s word. Why do we think “inspiration” is so necessary for Jeremiah, Paul, or Peter to record divine revelation, when we do not think such a thing was operating in their scribes such as Baruch (cf. Jer 36:4), Tertius (Rom 16:22), and Silas (cf. 1 Pet 5:12) respectively? Do we think Baruch needed some sort of mystical divine influence and control on his mind when we read: “**Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll**” (Jer 36:4). And the product of Baruch’s writing was considered the word of God, as we read a few verses later, “**Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the Prophet told him to do; at the LORD’S temple he read the words of the LORD from the scroll**” (v. 8)

Do we invoke the need for “inspiration” because *recording* revelation that God has just spoken to you or given you is more difficult and prone to error than transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, or teaching it? We don’t think so.

In fact, while it is doubtful that God would personally appear to a copyist, translator, interpreter, or Teacher of His word to correct any of their errors, we can certainly imagine this as a likely occurrence if a Prophet or Apostle for some reason failed to accurately record God’s message in the original manuscripts. Goodness, He personally replaced a whole stone tablet of Scripture when it was broken (cf. Exod 34:1, 28; Deut 10:1-5). And because of the availability of such revelation to the writers of Scripture, this is one more reason they would not need “inspiration.”

Therefore:

- If we have no biblical evidence that God was in the habit of controlling the minds of Apostles and Prophets,
- If the only biblical evidence we have of such *divine manipulation* through *divine/human mental telepathy* is in the lives of pagan leaders,
- If it is obvious that “inspiration” has nothing to do with the transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching of God’s word,

Accordingly, we see no biblical evidence, or practical need for the whole theory of “inspiration.”

Why can't we simply say that God supernaturally revealed divine content to Prophets and Apostles through especially visions and even more physical means such as apparitions, and then they used the natural God-given abilities humans have to accurately record what they saw, heard, and experienced? We believe a committed and sane Evangelical can say such a thing and this is how we claim that Scripture is the word of God written by humans. And we are just as committed to its inerrancy as anyone else.

Others have said the same. Moises Silva, former NT Professor at Westminster and Gordon-Conwell quotes none other than A. A. Hodge (1823-1886) and B. B. Warfield as saying:

It is not merely in the matter of verbal expression or literary composition that the personal idiosyncrasies of each author are freely manifested . . . but the very substance of what they write is evidently for the most part the product of their own mental and spiritual activities. . . . [Each author of Scripture] gave evidence of his own special limitations of knowledge and mental power, and of his personal defects as well as of his powers. ⁶

Likewise, William Sanday (1843-1920), a Professor of Exegesis at Oxford and co-author of a very respected and influential commentary on Romans wrote in regard to discussing the topic of "inspiration":

To assume then this ungracious and unwelcome but I fear necessary task, I must first point out how it is probably true that the human element in the Scriptures is larger than many good people now, and nearly all good people not long ago, supposed it to be. ⁷

In our opinion, the theological theory of "inspiration" is another example of invoking the need of the supernatural where it is not needed. God will not do for us, what He has already enabled us to do. God has already given, especially regenerated humans with *Spirit-liberated reason*, sufficient abilities for the recording, transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching Scripture to accurately communicate His divine revelation. These tasks are not miracles. For God to speak to man in any form or fashion requires a miracle, but not the accurate recording of that revelation.

C) The Differing Levels of the Human Element in the Process of Communicating Scripture

It would seem the mixture between the human and divine vary in the process by which God's word comes to us. At the beginning of the process is the fact that divine revelation is especially supernatural such that it results in a communication of God's very thoughts that have the authority of God Himself. Accordingly, a Prophet like John describes himself as being **"in the Spirit"** (Rev 1:10; 4:2; as opposed to in the body), and being **"carried . . . away [by an Angel] in the Spirit into a desert"** (17:3) or **"to a mountain great and high"** where he is given revelations. Obviously, he is describing a rather supernatural event in the process of God getting His word to His people.

But how has John's revelations come to us? Through more natural means of copying, translating, and interpreting. And the humanness of these processes is reflected in the fact that there are significant variations in the copies, translations, and especially interpretations of the original supernatural revelation that John received. And which human copyist, translator, or interpreter of Scripture would want to claim some sort of unique supernatural assistance in order to defend why their work differs from another?

As we have already noted, there are even different variations of the human and divine mix reflected in the different genres of Scripture. It would seem, for example, that a Prophet like Jeremiah received his revelation in a much more supernatural way than the historian Luke. Luke personally observed much of what he wrote, and simply recorded it. There is no mention that he ever saw a vision or received direct divine revelation as the basis for his writing. In fact, he simply says, **"I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning [and] it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account"** (Luke 1:3).

D) What Can God Expect Humans to Do?

D.1) To be human is not necessarily to err

Of course humans are prone to error unlike God. But that does not mean they are completely incompetent. We have already noted that a perfectly written autograph of Scripture is useless, if not even dangerous, if it is copied, translated, interpreted, or applied incorrectly. And yet we are faced with this odd fact that God has

left all of these critical tasks up to the natural abilities of spiritually regenerated human beings. Evidently, He too thinks humans are capable of sufficiently fulfilling these vital tasks for the effective communication of His word.

Nonetheless, a skepticism regarding the ability of a Prophet or Apostle to accurately record their revelations has prompted the development of theories of "inspiration." Accordingly, William Abraham remarks regarding B. B. Warfield (1851-1921):

Despite the whole structure of his positive epistemology, Warfield was a skeptic about human cognitive capacities when it came to recording the content of divine revelation. Despite all his positive talk about the cruciality and reliability of objective evidence, there was a failure of nerve when it came to the justification of theological claims. The only adequate foundation, the only resting-place, for securing the certainty he required lay with an infallible, divine inspiration.⁸

Along the same lines, Karl Barth (1886-1968) concluded that the Bible has errors because humans are fallible and the Bible is a human document. He wrote:

The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word.⁹

In our opinion, the skepticism and subsequent quest for a theory of "inspiration" by both Drs. Warfield and Barth was unnecessary. Not because we don't believe in Scripture's inerrancy, but because we don't believe a theory of "inspiration" is necessary to accomplish it. Nor do we think regenerated, godly humans are as incompetent as so many assume.

Accordingly, William Dembski, Professor of Philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and well-known proponent of "intelligent design" writes:

Error is not a necessary feature of human language use. To err is certainly human but not an essential feature of our humanity. . . . We all are capable of making true assertions and of stringing true assertions together. A person can even write a computer program that will generate infinitely many true assertions, none of which will be in error (e.g., $0 < 1$, $0 < 2$, $0 < 3 \dots$).

The wide prevalence of error in human practice is an accidental, not an essential, feature of human practice. There is therefore nothing inherently absurd about an inerrant

Scripture.¹⁰

Even if the recording of its supernatural revelations were accomplished with the natural abilities of God-fearing, Spirit-filled, conscientious human beings.

Kevin Vanhoozer, Professor of Theology at Wheaton, writes:

Must humanity entail errancy? I do not see that it does. Fallibility need not entail actual fault. For example, it does not follow that just because a math textbook is written by a fallible human being, there must be mistakes in it!¹¹

This is precisely the point that R. C. Sproul is making when he writes:

If being human demands error, is a man not a man when he speaks the truth? The term "fallible" describes an ability, not an act. To say that men are fallible is to say they are capable of error, not that they must err or that they always err.¹²

Finally, Erwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Bible Church has written:

Although we are all fallible human beings, we all have written some infallible statements (for example, "Winston Churchill was at one time the Prime Minister of England"). In the case of the Scriptures, such accurate statements are not only made about history, but theology and even science. The point, of course, is that fallible human beings can write an infallible message.¹³

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that all of these respected scholars would link these admissions to the conclusion that we do not need a theory of "inspiration" that requires a supernatural explanation for how Prophets and Apostles recorded their revelations. We believe they should make that connection.

D.2) Humans are able to record divine revelation

The numerous times in Scripture that God tells a Prophet to write or record what He is saying, implies their ability to do so. Especially since there is never any promise or description of God helping them to record the revelation. We read of Moses:

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." ⁴ Moses then wrote down [while being inspired?] everything the LORD had said. (Exod 24:3)

There is no mention of “inspiration” or some other supernatural act of God between His revelation to Moses and Moses recording that revelation. Likewise we read:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” ²⁸ **Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.** (Exod 34:27-28)

Again, no hint of divine assistance for Moses’ task of recording “the Ten Commandments.” And when we read them in Exodus 20:1-17 we have no problem imagining that Moses was able to record them accurately without being “inspired.” We can also imagine that if Moses had made a mistake, that God would have reappeared to him and given him another *revelation* to correct it, not some mystical “inspiration.”

We have already noted the example of Isaiah of whom we read: **“The LORD said to me, ‘Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’”** (Isa 8:1). There is no hint of the need or occurrence of “inspiration” to do this.

Likewise, Isaiah describes: **“An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev”** (30:6-7). Then God tells him, **“Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.”** There is no hint here of divine assistance or influence on the mind of Isaiah as he recorded the oracle he had just received from God. Nonetheless, God later refers to what Isaiah wrote as, **“the scroll of the LORD”** (Isa 34:16).

We read of Daniel:

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. (Dan 7:1)

Something, it would seem he was quite capable of doing (cf. Dan 7:2-28).

We see the same with the NT Prophet John who writes:

On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ **which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches”** (Rev 1:10-11).

We believe John was able to do that with the revelation he had received without some sort of “inspiration.”

In all of these cases, we believe we have the occurrence of a supernatural revelation given by God and then the subsequent natural human recording of that supernatural revelation. These are not instances of “inspiration” which somehow mystically combines the two events (revelation and recording) and the two actors (God and Prophet) as occurring and working simultaneously such that God is supposedly directly influencing the writer’s mind in some sort of telepathic way.

D.3) Humans are able to remember divine revelation

We have written elsewhere regarding Christ’s promise to supernaturally enable the Eleven to remember His teachings (cf. John 14:25-26).¹⁴ However, this supernatural assistance was not intended to help them remember it minutes, hours, or even days after He had spoken. Remember that the Apostle John, for example, probably wrote his Gospel more than 60 years after Christ had spoken the long discourses John records. In such a case it is reasonable to understand why a supernatural reminder from the Holy Spirit would be needed, and why John recorded this very promise from Christ.

However, John did not need supernatural assistance to remember what he recorded in the Revelation. He was simply told, **“Write on a scroll what you see”** (Rev 1:11, 19; cf. Hab 2:2), and he did.

Likewise, we read in Jeremiah:

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD:² **“Take a scroll and write on it all the words [dabar] I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now [about 23 years]. . . .**

So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words [dabar] the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll.⁵ **Then Jeremiah told Baruch, “I am restricted; I cannot go to the LORD’S temple.**⁶ **So you go to the house of the LORD on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words [dabar] of the LORD that you wrote as I dictated. (Jer 36:1-2, 4-6)**

A few verses later we read:

After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸ "Take another scroll and write on it all the words [*dabar*] that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. . . .

So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words [*dabar*] of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words [*dabar*] were added to them. (Jer 36:27-28, 32)

Our question is whether or not Jeremiah needed some sort of "divine influence" or even supernatural remembering to dictate to Baruch the revelation he possessed. John Calvin (1509-1564) thought so and wrote:

Here the prophet declares that he dictated to Baruch, a servant of God, what he had previously taught. But there is no doubt that God [directly] suggested to the [mind of the] prophet what might have been effaced from his memory; for not all things which we have formerly said always occur to us: therefore the greater part of so many words must have escaped the prophet had not God dictated [*dictasset*] them again to him.

Jeremiah, then, stood between God and Baruch, for God, by his Spirit, presided over and guided the mind and tongue of the prophet. Now the prophet, the Spirit being his guide and teacher, recited what God had commanded. . . . Jeremiah repeats again that nothing came from himself. We see, hence, that he did not dictate according to his own will what came to his mind, but that God suggested whatever he wished to be written by Baruch. ¹⁵

Obviously Calvin assumed that the Prophet Jeremiah needed supernatural assistance to record the revelation God had given him. As noted above, God was asking Jeremiah to record the revelation he had received over a span of 23 years. Calvin described this supernatural assistance at one point as "God dictated" the revelation "again to him." If we understood this as the same kind of objective, physical, even visionary dictation that Prophets usually experienced, we would see no problem here. However, Calvin describes this act of dictation elsewhere as the "Spirit presided over and guided the mind and tongue of the prophet" and "God suggested whatever he wished to be written by Baruch." Such

descriptions imply some sort of possession and *automatic writing* or *divine/human mental telepathy*, neither of which are described in Scripture as occurring with God's people. In our opinion, Calvin's possibly erroneous assumption that Jeremiah needed supernatural assistance to record his revelation led him to assert an instance of mystical "inspiration."

On the contrary, it is not at all clear that Jeremiah needed such divine assistance. It is possible that God simply gave him another revelatory experience as a vision in order to record past revelations. But the text does not suggest this and God's simple command for Jeremiah to: **"Take a scroll and write on it all the words [dabar] I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now"** suggests Jeremiah was able to do so with his God-given human faculties.

This is supported by the fact that the Hebrew word *dabar* ["event"] is used to describe what Jeremiah was to write. As described elsewhere,¹⁶ *dabar* does not mean that God was expecting a word for word recording of the revelation, but something that simply and faithfully reflected the general content of those revelations. Accordingly, Keil and Delitzsch, who are no liberal scholars by any means, comment on Jeremiah's action:

It is not a copying, word for word, of every separate address that is meant, but merely a writing down of the essential contents of all his oral discourses. This is quite clear, not merely from what is stated in v. 3 as the object of this command [*dabar*], but also from the character of these collected addresses, as they are preserved to us.

That the expression "all the words" is not to be understood in the most rigid sense, follows from the very fact that, when Jeremiah anew wrote down his prophecies, v. 32, he further added "many similar words" [*dabar*] to what had been contained in the first book-roll, which was burned by Jehoiakim. But Jeremiah might perhaps be able to retain in his memory the substance of all the addresses he had delivered during the twenty-three years, since all of them treated of the same subjects—reproof of prevailing sins, threat of punishment, and promises.¹⁷

D.4) Humans are able to record divine history

Likewise, H. B. Swete (1835-1917), successor of the more famous B. F. Westcott as Professor of NT at Cambridge, wrote:

The historical books of the New Testament from the nature of their contents show fewer signs of spiritual influence exerted upon their writers. They deal not with revelations but with facts, which could be collected and verified by the ordinary processes of memory or research. ¹⁸

Dr. Swete's contemporary at Oxford, William Sanday (1843–1920), wrote in his book on "inspiration" after giving several examples:

Where the [biblical] history contains doctrine, there we have every reason to suppose that the doctrine rests upon the same supernatural basis, that it is as intimately connected with the great Messianic outpouring of the Spirit as it is elsewhere. But the history as history, as a narrative of events, appears to proceed upon ordinary methods. . . .

In other words, there are some books in which the Divine element is at the maximum and others in which it is at the minimum. . . .

It cannot be said that the writing of history as practiced by the Hebrews required, or that as a matter of fact it shows, signs of supernatural intervention. The Hebrew, like the Greek or Roman, made use of previously existing documents or of oral tradition. ¹⁹

And they were able to do so without some sort of divine manipulation or "inspiration."

Before Swete and Sanday, in America, James Strong (1822–1894) and John McClintock (1814–1870) had written in their highly respected *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*:

[I]t is not true that all the subject matter [of Scripture] is equally revealed; for some of the facts, doctrines, and views were known to the writers in their ordinary intelligence, while others were specially communicated by immediate divine afflatus. In other words, all is inspired [i.e. authoritative ²⁰], but not all revealed. ²¹

More recently, Dr. Lutzer has written:

We can identify at least three different kinds of inspiration. For example, some things the authors wrote they knew by ordinary means. Luke, for example, said that he did careful research before he wrote his account of the life of Christ, just as did others who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. ²²

Finally, the Reformed scholar Sinclair B. Ferguson has written of

Scripture: "While there are no degrees of inspiration [i.e. authority], there are degrees of revelation."²³

D.5) Humans are able to translate & copy divine revelation

The rightly respected NT scholar F. F. Bruce expressed a common perspective when it comes to the copying of Scripture over the millennia it has existed:

By the singular care and providence of God the Bible text has come down to us in such substantial purity that even the most uncritical edition of the Hebrew or Greek . . . cannot effectively obscure the real message of the Bible or neutralize its saving power.²⁴

Indeed, we do not believe *any* meaning has been lost from the autographs that Moses and Paul wrote to what we read in our Bibles today? But has that required "the singular care and providence of God"? This suggests that God has miraculously intervened in the minds of men as they copied manuscripts. Has such intervention been necessary? Perhaps. But we would remind us again that conscientious God-fearing humans are able to accurately copy Scripture. And we can prove this. Norman Geisler writes:

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have Hebrew manuscripts 1000 years earlier than the great Masoretic Text manuscripts, enabling them to check on the fidelity of the Hebrew text. There is a word-for-word identity in more than 95 percent of the cases, and the 5 percent variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling.

The Isaiah scroll from Qumran led the Revised Standard Version translators to make only thirteen changes from the Masoretic Text; eight of those were known from ancient versions, and few of them were significant. Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen Hebrew letters in the Isaiah B scroll differ from the Masoretic Text. Ten letters are a matter of spelling, four are stylistic changes, and the other three compose the word for "light," (added in verse 11), which does not affect the meaning greatly.²⁵

In addition, as we argue in the next chapter (8.11) regarding a critique on the theory of *verbal inspiration*, God intended to reveal *ideas* in Scripture, not just individual and specific or unique words and grammar that must be maintained with perfect precision or the meaning is lost. God's word is more flexible than that, because

there is normally more than one way to communicate the intended meaning of the ideas God desired to communicate.

This is certainly demonstrated in the translations of Scripture. We are not aware of anyone claiming any kind of “singular care and providence of God” over the translation committees who put the Bible in languages we can understand. We, and God, for that matter, rely on their expert knowledge of these languages and their God-fearing and loving concern to accurately translate the meaning of Scripture. And thank God that meaning is not dependent on individual, specific words themselves, but on ideas communicated with a cluster of words, and that even those words normally have a number of suitable synonyms.

What we are trying to say is that because the message of Scripture is bound up in *ideas* rather than *words*, it is even easier to preserve its meaning through copying and translation, because while a single word might be missed or mistaken, a whole idea likely would not. Because God knew Scripture would be handled by humans He did not create any of its message to depend on one little word, and even repeated the messages and ideas of Scripture several times in several places. Nonetheless, we would claim that accurately copying and translating Scripture is something God has made humans capable of doing with no need of miraculous intervention. This is why God did not drop the Bible from the sky in a multitude of copies in a multitude of translations. He trusted His people to do that.²⁶

D.6) Humans are able to teach divine revelation

God told the Prophet Jeremiah: “**Let the Prophet who . . . has My word speak it faithfully**” (Jer 23:28). It would seem God expected a Prophet to do so, because they were able to do. And if humans are not able to “**faithfully**” and accurately “**speak**” the word of God, then all of the care, work, and even divine providence invested in getting that word to the people is for nothing. When a correctly recorded, copied, and translated Scripture is wrongly interpreted and taught, it is no longer the Word of God anyway. And this, again, demonstrates the great responsibility (and ability!) that God has given humans in the delivery of His divine revelation.

In the end, then, if God deems humans capable of accurately copying, translating, and teaching His word, do we still doubt that He deems Prophets and Apostles *incapable* of recording His word?

Along these lines, David Jensen has written:

When we consider how the gospel was actually transmitted by Jesus and the apostles, we see that human effort, whether

physical, personal or intellectual, is not bypassed. On the contrary, in accordance with the incarnation itself, the human is regarded as fit to communicate the divine message. In the words of Paul, 'we have this treasure in jars of clay' (2 Cor. 4:7). . . . The biblical writers, then, are not in the slightest embarrassed by the human involvement in the transmission of revelation. For them, God uses human nature without abusing it to accomplish his ends.²⁷

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What evidence is there for the claim that the Bible is not shy about revealing its human element?
- 2) What do we believe the popular disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation has led to? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) Why do we claim that Paul could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of "inspiration"? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What aspects of the copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching of Scripture suggest to us that divine control over the recording of revelation is unnecessary? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

¹ Regarding the phenomenon of *automatic writing* see section 9.5.D.

² R. A. Finlayson in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed. (Baker, 1958), Henry, *Bible*, 222.

³ J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.

⁴ Regarding the biblical data concerning *divine/human mental telepathy* see especially chapter 14.1.

-
- ⁵ Regarding the necessary obvious attribute of divine revelation see section 7.1.B.5.f.
- ⁶ A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, quoted by Moises Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvey Conn (Baker, 1988), 68.
- ⁷ William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 18.
- ⁸ William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology : From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 318.
- ⁹ Quoted in Sproul, "Analysis", 256.
- ¹⁰ Dembski, "Problem," 92
- ¹¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, & Hermeneutics* (Intervarsity, 2002), 138.
- ¹² Sproul, "Analysis", 256.
- ¹³ Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 24
- ¹⁴ Regarding the nature of Christ's promise to His disciples to enable them to remember His teaching see section 8.3.C.3.
- ¹⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Jer 36; online at www.ccel.org.
- ¹⁶ Regarding the meaning of the Hebrew word *debar* see section ?
- ¹⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Jer 36:2, 32.
- ¹⁸ H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (MacMillan, 1909), 335.
- ¹⁹ Sanday, *Inspiration*, 72, 398, 401.
- ²⁰ Regarding the unbiblical and confusing nature of the term "inspiration" see chapter 8.9.
- ²¹ "Inspiration" McClintock, John, James Strong, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000).
- ²² Lutzer, 22-3.
- ²³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself? in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvey Conn (Baker, 1988), 56.
- ²⁴ J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1958), 90
- ²⁵ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 553
- ²⁶ Regarding the "thought-for-thought" ("dynamic) approach to Bible translation as opposed to the "word-for-word" approach, see chapter 15.2.
- ²⁷ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Intervarsity, 2002), 38-9.