

**The Foundation for Adventist Education
Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department – General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

**THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE:
WORD MADE FLESH**

Jo Ann Davidson, Ph.D.
Andrews University

**3rd Symposium on the Bible and Adventist Scholarship
Akumal, Riviera Maya, Estado Quintana Roo, Mexico
March 19-25, 2006**

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE: WORD MADE FLESH

Jo Ann Davidson
Andrews University

The primary “textbook” of the Christian faith is the Bible. Of course, the Bible isn’t a “textbook” in the modern definition of the word. But it is a book, nevertheless. And its materials need to be studied fairly and attentively, making sure one is heedful of the wide variety of ways in which different parts of Scripture are written, and also how these relate and interact with each other.

When doing this, the Bible’s sweeping claims of divine inspiration will be detected. These claims cannot be easily dismissed. They are too extensive. One must honestly deal with the fundamental assumptions and parameters within which the many Bible writers consistently work. Thankfully, these are fairly obvious.

For example, none of the Bible writers ever attempts to prove the existence of God. Without exception, they all assume He exists. This commences with the dramatic introduction of Genesis 1:1 where God is announced. He is given no verification, because no Bible writer thinks this is needed. All biblical writers claim to have real knowledge of an infinite God. This was not a “spiritual” insight they devised. It was a knowledge God disclosed. They were absolutely certain God was speaking through them when they thundered "thus says the Lord!" Fleming Rutledge is correct:

The witness of the Bible is that every other god under the sun is a product of human consciousness except only the God of the Old and New Testaments. Whether we believe this or not, we must admit that it is an awesome claim. I am more convinced than ever that the Scriptures set before us something, or rather some One, who is far beyond anything the unassisted human imagination could dream up.¹

¹Fleming Rutledge, *Help My Unbelief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 25.

Bible writers also assume God can foretell the future. For example, God through Isaiah claims that this is the paramount mark of His divinity:

‘Present your case,’ says the LORD. ‘Bring forth your strong reasons,’ says the King of Jacob. ‘Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know you are gods... I am the LORD, that is My name.... Behold the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.... Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it? (Isa 41:21-23; 42:8-9; 43:12b-13)

At various times in the ancient past God announced prophecies concerning the history and even rulers of nations by name, and likewise the coming of the Messiah. Some modern minds presume God could not be so precise, and thus predetermine that the prophecies were written as after-the-fact “predictions.” However, this contemporary attitude of denying God’s ability to know and predict the future is never found in Scripture.

Furthermore, consistently we find in Scripture that biblical writers assume that, though infinite, God can and does communicate with human beings. They never concede that human language is any kind of a barrier to direct communication from God. They would denounce modernist contentions denying correlation between language and reality. In fact Bible writers record numerous incidents of God speaking directly to human beings in the Old Testament. These include conversations with Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen 1:28-30; 3:9-19), and with Job (Job 38-41). There is the divine call of Abram (Gen 12:1-3), which was the first of several conversations with him (including the lengthy dialogue in Gen 18:1-23). The burning bush conversation between God and Moses is followed by other direct exchanges between them. The civil code in the Pentateuch is described as words spoken directly by God to Moses (“The LORD said to Moses” often punctuating the material; for example, Exod 33:1; 34:1, etc.). God’s

interchange with Elijah at Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:9-18) is another of many direct divine dialogues with the prophets.

New Testament writers also concur that it is possible for God to speak directly to people in human language: at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22); the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; 2 Pet 1:17-18); the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4); instructions to Ananias including street address (Acts 9:11-16); Peter's vision (Acts 10:13); Paul on his missionary journeys (Acts 18:9-10; 23:11); and the New Testament apocalypse (Rev 1:11-3:22) are a few examples.

Jesus insists numerous times that He speaks the words of God. For example: "the Father who sent Me has Himself given Me commandment what to say and what to speak." (John 14:10) Paul claims to have received revelation from God: "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37-38).

With great frequency God also is referred to as speaking through the prophets. For example, Elijah's words in 1 Kgs 21:19 are referred to in 2 Kgs 9:25-26 as the oracle that "the LORD uttered ... against him," and Elijah is not even mentioned. The message of a prophet was always considered equivalent to direct speech from God. This identification of a prophet's words with God's words is so pronounced in the Old Testament that to disobey a prophet's words was to disobey God. In Deut 18:19, the LORD speaks of the coming prophet, through Moses, and says: "Whoever will not give heed to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him." And when Saul disobeyed Samuel's command at Gilgal, Samuel rebuked him: "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your

God, which He commanded you ... now your kingdom shall not continue ... because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Sam 13:13-14).

We are not taught in Scripture that a prophet speaks for God. Rather, God speaks for Himself through His prophets. And human language is assumed to be capable of conveying divine communication. In the Old Testament, the spine-tingling formula “Thus says the Lord” or its equivalent is used thousands of times. It underscores the source and authority of the prophetic messages. With it, the Bible writers insist that what they said was to be received not as their pious pronouncements but as the very words of God.

The New Testament apostles claim the same absolute authority as the Old Testament prophets, insisting that they speak by the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:10-12), to whom they credit the content of their teaching (1 Cor 2:12-13). Notably, the same Paul who urges that believers seek to work together peacefully, often employs harsh language to defend the absolute truths he has preached:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed [anathema]! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary [other than, more than] to what you have received, he is to be accursed [anathema]! (Gal 1:6-9)

Apostolic teaching is very “directive,” issuing commands with the strongest authority (1 Thess 4:1-2; 2 Thess 3:6, 12---"we command you"). The writer to the Hebrews expressed his sense of the absolute authority of the words of Ps 95:7-11 and Jer 31:33f by using the present tense when speaking of their divine origin, writing: “The Holy Ghost says” (not “said,” in the past tense), and again, “the Holy Ghost bears (not “bore,” in the past tense) witness to us.” Hebrews 12:25 also insists, “See you refuse not Him that speaks.”

Biblical writers are invariably seen as messengers sent by God to speak His words. The extravagantly repeated formula “thus says the LORD”—or its equivalent, clenches the full authority of the prophetic words. In fact, a distinguishing characteristic of true prophets is that they do not speak their own words. Throughout the Old Testament, the point is repeatedly underscored that prophetic speech comes from God. God said to Moses: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” (Exod 4:12; cf. 24:3); to Jeremiah and Ezekiel--“I have put My words in your mouth” (Jer 1:9); “You shall speak My words to them” (Ezek 2:7; cf. 3:27). And people who refused to listen to a prophet were held accountable for refusing to listen to “the words of the LORD which He spoke through Jeremiah the prophet” (Jer 37:2).

Beginning in the opening chapters of the Bible and continuing throughout the entire canon, one is confronted with a God who communicates to human beings. Scripture never permits the impression that divine inspiration is a residue of what spiritual people have reasoned out themselves. Bible writers insist that God acts and speaks in human history and also directly reveals Himself through human messengers.

Extensive scriptural evidence strongly suggests that biblical prophets experienced something far more than a contentless “divine encounter” which merely implanted mystical conviction for God in their hearts. For example, consider how Jeremiah was instructed by God to buy Hanamel’s field. He had been prophesying that the Babylonians would be attacking Jerusalem. When this prophecy was fulfilled, any Israelite rights to the land would naturally be void. Owning property back in Judea would be of no value to a person in exile in Babylon. But the command to buy the field had come from God (Jer 32:6-8). So, Jeremiah bought the field, though it made no sense to him. The text states that he paid the full price and had the deed

properly signed, sealed, witnessed and deposited, complying with all the legal requirements as God had directed him.

Jeremiah wasn't acting under some personal inner obsession which he described as a command of God. He admits to being perplexed. In his prayer he acknowledges not understanding what God is telling him to do:

... they did not obey Your voice or walk in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore You have made all this calamity come upon them. Behold, the siege ramps have reached the city to take it; and the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, famine, and pestilence; and what You spoke has come to pass; and behold, You see it. You have said to me, O Lord God, 'Buy for yourself the field with money and call in witnesses'—although the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans (Jer 32:23-25, NASB).

Clearly this “word of the Lord” was not something that Jeremiah himself had calculated on his own. He obeyed, but he did not pretend to understand God's reasoning. After God had told Jeremiah that the people would be given into the hands of the Babylonians it made no sense to him to buy land. It was not as though the Babylonian threat was still remote and might possibly be averted. Hostile armies were at that very time attacking the city. “You can see it yourself, God,” Jeremiah poignantly prays.

Jeremiah does not describe how he recognized the “word of God” when it came to him, but clearly it was something plainly obvious and unequivocal to him. He was certain that God had spoken. He doesn't decide that he has a right to ignore God's instructions even though he objects to them.

Another instructive incident in the life of this same prophet is the occasion when Johanan, with the army leaders, asked Jeremiah to intercede with the Lord. They felt the need of divine guidance and came to Jeremiah. The prophet listened, agreed to intercede with God on their behalf and then promised, “I will tell you the whole message which the LORD will answer

you. I will not keep back a word from you.” (Jer 42:4, NASB). Jeremiah waited for ten days. He was not able to command a reply from God. Nor did he devise a response through spiritual meditation. The text is clear—“Now at the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.” (Jer 42:7).

These are but two instructive examples within the extensive canonical records that God does not just encounter human beings with glorious feelings, but with actual information (Deut 29:29).

Closely connected with God’s direct speech, are numerous accounts of a prophet writing down the words of God which are then taken as fully authoritative. A few examples can sensitize us to this crucial point: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book.’” Subsequently the text records---“And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.” (Exod 17:14; 24:4); and also, “When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book, to the very end ...” (Deut 31:24); “Joshua wrote these words [statues, ordinances, and the words of the covenant renewal, v. 25] in the book of the law of God.” (Josh 24:26; on Joshua as a prophet, cf. 1 Kgs 16:34; Josh 1:5; 16-18); “Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord.” (1 Sam 10:25)

Even the recording process is divinely controlled with the penman being “moved” or “impelled” by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). The writer is not merely creating a literary masterpiece or mystical treatise, but is writing under God’s directive. The written communication thereby has divine authority, as Moses testified: “You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you” (Deut 4:2, NRSV).

The final chapter of the New Testament speaks similarly—

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Rev 22:18-19, NRSV).

Divine inspiration is never controlled by human beings. It is not a human achievement, but paramountly a divine activity. Scripture claims that God testifies through His prophets (2 Kgs 17:13, 14). God also insists that He revealed Himself and made His acts known (Ps 103:7). And that He has also spoken through Jesus (Matt 11:27; 16:17; Heb 1:1-2). Moreover, God commands that His words be recorded and heeded. The biblical canon is not merely a collection of penetrating human intuitions of divinity. Both Testaments consistently bear witness that the truth of God is not the end-product of diligent human searching for the divine nor somebody's best thoughts about lofty matters. It comes exclusively through God's initiative in disclosing Himself to humanity.

It bears repeating that the prophets and apostles do not describe how they recognized the "word of God" when it came, but when they received "the word of the Lord" it is clear they were certain that God had spoken. Sometimes He spoke in ways that they not did not understand and on occasion even objected to as we saw with Jeremiah, yet they never questioned the divine origin of the words. However, the Bible was not verbally dictated by God. As Ellen White helpfully instructs, when human messengers were instructed to record the words of God, they were divinely guided in the selection of apt words to express the revelation and thus the writings are called the Word of God. The individuality of each writer is evident, yet the human and divine elements are virtually inseparable.² She then makes a striking comparison:

²"It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ John 1:14.³

God declares that He has manifested Himself through human language and ultimately in the incarnation of Jesus Christ Himself. Indeed, it is striking that one Person of the triune God is known as the WORD. The inspiration of Scripture is the genuine work of the sovereign God, whose operation cannot be subjected to human control or repudiation. Even the canonical writers’ presuppositions had to be molded by God. How each one thought, experienced and interpreted reality had to be carefully crafted. This is apparently a matter of the Holy Spirit superintending the canonical writers in expressing what God intends. “Prompting—urging, assisting, recalling to mind, supplying the right words—is the operative notion, the very thing Jesus assures the disciples the Spirit will do (John 14:26).”⁴

A close reading of the biblical texts also reveals a basic continuity and unity of both Testaments, as might be expected. The extensive citations of the Old Testament in the New Testament indicate that the Old Testament writings were considered divinely inspired. A few of the many hundreds of examples include: Isaiah’s words in Isa 7:14 are cited as “what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” by Matthew (Matt 1:22). Peter, in preaching Christ, produced his evidence from the Old Testament scriptures, beginning with Moses and the prophets. Stephen pursued the same course (Acts 7). The deacon Philip, with the Ethiopian on the Gaza road, uses Old Testament scripture to explain Jesus (Acts 8). Paul followed this same method, giving Old

diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of man are the word of God.... The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction....” 1SM 21-22.

³*Great Controversy* 88.

⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*

Testament proof for the mission, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. He sought to prove the identity of the Messiah, through the testimony of Moses and the prophets, and showed that it was the voice of Christ which spoke through the prophets and patriarchs from the days of Adam to that time.⁵ Acts 17:11 also instructs us that the Bereans did not search the Scriptures (the Old Testament materials at that time) in order to argue with Paul or to accuse him of heresy. They turned to the Word as the means of determining the truth.

Words of Scripture are said to be spoken by the Holy Spirit: in quoting “what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Joel 2:28-32), Peter inserts “says God,” attributing to God the words of Joel (Acts 2:16-17). Isaiah 49:6 is quoted by Paul and Barnabas as something that “the Lord commanded us,” claiming that an Old Testament prophecy placed obligation on them also, insisting that the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophet Isaiah (Acts 28:25). Paul also quotes God’s speech in Exo 9:16 as what “Scripture says to Pharaoh,” indicating an equivalence between what Old Testament Scripture says and what God says.

The minds of the New Testament writers are saturated with the Old Testament. They refer to it regularly, and quote it extensively to undergird their teaching.⁶ Furthermore, the four

(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 227-228.

⁵Ben Witherington is insightful: “It is important to recall *how* Paul reads the Hebrew scriptures in general. He reads them from first to last as a prophetic book all of which has relevance in various ways for the followers of Christ. In a revealing remark, he cites the story of Israel as an example for his converts. He says, ‘These things occurred as examples *for us*, so that we might not desire evil as they did’ (1 Cor 10:6), and even more tellingly in 10:11: ‘These things happened to them to serve as an example, *and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.*’ ... The scriptures themselves, and not just God’s salvation plan, are seen as teleological in character and thus are written especially for that last and eschatological community of God’s people.” Ben Witherington, III, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 38 (emphasis Witherinton’s).

⁶For example, in Romans 9-11, about one third of these three chapters is devoted to scripture citation, and about 40 percent of that one third comes from the book of Isaiah. R. B. Hays notes: [Romans 9-11] is most fruitfully understood when it is read as an intertextual conversation between Paul and the voice of Scripture.... Scripture broods over this letter, calls Paul to account, speaks through him; Paul, groping to give voice to his gospel, finds in Scripture the language to say what must be said ...” R. B. Hays, *Echoes*

Gospels make it strikingly obvious that Jesus accepted the full authority of the Old Testament. Old Testament prophecy was the pattern for His life, as He declared often: "it must be fulfilled"/"as it is written." Jesus quotes Gen 2:24 as words that God said. (Matt 19:5). He also speaks of "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4) and then quotes the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

Jesus ever carried the minds of his hearers back to the truth found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The esteem in which He held those sacred records is often expressed. For example, He declares, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." On another occasion Jesus said "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." At that time there was no other scripture in existence save that of the Old Testament; thus this injunction of the Saviour is plain.

On Resurrection Sunday Christ again opened the minds of his disciples to the Old Testament scriptures: "beginning with Moses and the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27) He could have made a miraculous appearance to provide evidence that he was the risen Redeemer. Instead He went back to the Old Testament, and gave a full and clear explanation of them to settle the question of His identity, and to underscore the fact that all which had occurred to him had been foretold by the inspired writers. When He rebuked the Jewish theologians of His time it was not for studying the Old Testament, but rather for devising incorrect interpretations that clouded and even falsified God's written word (Mark 7:1-13). Ellen White draws a cogent contemporary analogy:

In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God's word are set aside for human theories and speculations. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the Word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. Thus the seeds of

infidelity are sown broadcast.... Christ rebuked these practices in His day.... He pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.⁷

The four Gospels record evidence that Jesus Christ claimed divine authority for all He did and taught. “These things I have spoken to you,” repeated numerous times by Christ, was His emphatic way of drawing attention to the actual words He used in teaching. And He urges, regarding the Old Testament, “whosoever reads, let him understand.” (Matt 24:15). The fact cannot be evaded that Christ confirmed the absolute authority of the Old Testament. If one accepts the New Testament portrayal of Jesus, one cannot cavalierly dismiss His high view of Scripture.

And He expected others to have the same. Often He would inquire: “Have you not read what David did ... Or have you not read in the law...” (Matt 12:3-5). When questioned on the issue of divorce, He answered “Have you not read...” (Matt 19:4). His response to those upset by children praising loudly in the temple was “have you never read...” (Matt 21:16). Once when He told a parable, He concluded with these words: “And have you not read this scripture...” (Mark 12:10). In response to a lawyer’s question about salvation, Jesus asked: “What is written in the law? What is your reading?” (Luke 10:26). The lawyer answered with a direct quote from the Ten Commandments, and Jesus declared: “You have answered right...” Responding to the Sadducees’ inquiry about marriage in heaven, He said: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures ... have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying ...” (Matt 22:29-31). The prominent Pharisee Nicodemus sought Jesus one night. After discussing His mission, Jesus questioned Nicodemus, “are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?”

⁷*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 39, 40.

(John 3:10) When asked about last-day events on the Mount of Olives Jesus urged His questioners to read Daniel in order to understand (Matt 24:15). Jesus expected that all the Old Testament prophecies of Scripture would be fulfilled. He declared that Elijah had come, pointing to John the Baptist, and that he had been treated “just as it has been written of him” (Mark 9:13). When captured in Gethsemane, Jesus didn’t flee capture, but said, “I was daily with you in the Temple teaching, and you did not take Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mark 14:49).

After His resurrection, Jesus gave what is now called the “Great Commission”:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matt 28:18-20).

This divine imperative requires the proclamation of all that Jesus had taught to the whole world, specifically implying a cross-cultural communication of the words of God. His commission does not suggest a mere nominal adherence to some community. Baptism was not the final goal. The new disciple is also to be taught all things Christ commanded.

The apostle Paul’s ministry exhibits just such a cross-cultural preaching of the words of God. He also continues with the consistent biblical procedure of later biblical writers referring to earlier materials in the Old Testament, again underscoring its authority. In his letters to various Christian congregations filled with new converts, he constructs powerful arguments of the gospel built upon the Old Testament, and in the process again demonstrates the fundamental principle of listening to what Scripture says about itself. Paul, the great Old Testament scholar, took the prophecies in the Old Testament relating to the Messiah, linked these prophecies with the life and teachings of Christ, clearly proving the identity of the Messiah through the testimony of Moses and the prophets. He showed how impossible it was to explain the Passover without

Christ, as revealed in the Old Testament; and that the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness symbolized Jesus Christ, who was lifted up upon the cross. He maintained that all Old Testament religious services and ceremonies would be valueless if Jesus was rejected as the Saviour—the One who was represented in those ceremonies. He insisted that Christ was the key which unlocked the Old Testament, and gave access to its rich treasures. And strikingly described how the “veil” over his eyes was removed when he finally understood this Christology.

While it is sometimes argued today that the truthfulness of the Bible does not necessarily include the historical details, we find Jesus along with all the New Testament writers accepting the historicity of the Old Testament. In fact, without exception, all biblical writers rely on the very certainty of Old Testament historical events (such as Creation, Noah’s Flood and Exodus—three events regularly referred to and always presented as actual history) to validate the certainty of future actions of God. For example, in 2 Peter, the Creation and Flood along with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah certify the certainty of Christ’s Second Coming. It can be emphatically stated that no biblical writer ever displays any tendency to distrust any other biblical record.

Just as Old Testament writers did, New Testament writers often attach their materials to known historical facts. For example: historian Colin J. Hemer, with painstaking detail, chronicles Luke’s accuracy in the book of Acts verse by verse. He identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research.⁸ These details include: correctly named sea ports, proper maneuvers of ships, the correct language spoken in Lystra—Lycanian; names of pagan deities, superstitions held, names of landmarks,

⁸Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

the proper designation of Philippi as a Roman colony; names of rivers near cities, correct distances between certain cities, associating Thyatira as a center of dyeing, names of islands, proper names of magistrates and rulers in different areas, the presence of synagogues in different cities, the correct seasons for sailing, the proper reaction of Greek philosophers who denied bodily resurrection, use of contemporary slang and ethnic designations, right of appeal for Roman citizens. Roman historian A.N. Sherwin-White also states, “For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming.... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”⁹

The aesthetic quality inherent in the inspiration of Scripture is also significant. The exquisite nature of the ancient Hebrew poetry has long been extolled. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Roman Catholic scholar, has written of this striking, evocative speech: “God needs prophets in order to make Himself known, and all the prophets are necessarily artistic. What a prophet has to say can never be said in prose.”¹⁰

Indeed, the prophetic messages are regularly couched in poetry. Up to 40% of the Old Testament materials are poetically expressed. Even the prophetic messages are couched in poetic language, now formatted appropriately for visual recognition. Since poetry is known to intensify language, this should not be surprising considering God’s intense desire to bring salvation to His human family.

In the last quarter-century, the literary quality of the biblical narratives has finally been acknowledged. It is now recognized that these stories were not written primarily for children,

⁹A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 189.

¹⁰Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Glory of the Lord,” *A Theological Aesthetics I* (NY: Crossroad, 1982), p. 43.

but are sophisticated theological writing voiced within distinctive literary expression. God utilizes aesthetic values to intensify His revelation. Under inspiration, Bible writers masterfully record God's orderly action in human history.¹¹ Canonical writers consistently prove false the modern false dichotomy which argues that literary expression precludes historical accuracy.

It is significant that the exquisitely crafted biblical narratives often include specific external referents which could be checked. It is as if the writers were urging the reader to verify the facts for themselves. For example, Luke couches Christ's birth narrative in public historical details:

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zecharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron... now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division ... (Luke 1:5, 8).

Luke had already argued for the veracity of his historical narratives—

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-3)

It bears repeating that literary expression in Scripture does not preclude historical accuracy, nor disallow facts of content. Rather, aesthetic values are employed to intensify communication. Even today, Christians sing Fanny Crosby's hymn "Tell Me the Story of Jesus" with its five poetic verses reviewing the life of Christ from birth to death without losing faith in the historical life of Christ. As George Ladd cogently notes, "The uniqueness and the scandal of

¹¹Ellen White comments: "The lives recorded in the Bible are authentic histories of actual individuals. From Adam down through successive generations to the times of the apostles we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually occurred and the genuine experience of real characters." *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 9.

the Christian religion rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events.”¹² There is no bifurcation of history and theology. The Word has become flesh. The Scripture record is rooted in genuine events of human history.

It is striking to note how persons such as Julius Wellhausen, Herman Gunkel, and James Barr acknowledge the historical content of the Old Testament narratives. This should remind us that what one’s interpreting of the text should not override what the original authors had in mind. Wellhausen, foremost champion of the “documentary hypothesis,” when speaking of the author of Genesis, states:

He undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denies that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author.¹³

Herman Gunkel, father of Old Testament form criticism, concurs: “People should never have denied that *Genesis* 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened.”¹⁴

Premier British philologist of the Old Testament James Barr asserts:

Most conservative evangelical opinion today does not pursue a literal interpretation of the creation story in *Genesis*. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these days being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights.

¹²Cited by William Lane Craig in *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), p. 157.

¹³Cited on Evolution, Neutrality and Antecedent Probability, p. 216. There is an abundant literature on this topic. See, for example, Robert Clifford S.J., “Creation in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Physics, Philosophy, And Theology: A Common Quest For Understanding*, ed. R. J. Russell, W. R. Stoeger and G. V. Coyne S.J., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 151-170; Dianne Bergant CSA and Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP, “Creation according to the OT,” in *Evolution And Creation*, ed. E. McMullin, Notre Dame: U. Of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 153-175; Bernhard W. Anderson, “The Earth is the Lord’s” An Essay on the Biblical Doctrine of Creation,” in *Is God A Creationist?* Ed. R. M. Frye, NY: Scribner, 1983, 176-196.

¹⁴Ibid.

After underscoring this claim that most evangelicals (which he also calls “fundamentalists”) indeed do not pursue a literal interpretation, he continues: “In fact the only natural exegesis is a literal one, in the sense that this is what the author meant.”

Elsewhere he goes even further:

So far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament in any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of *Genesis* 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the *genesis* genealogies provide by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to the later stages of the Biblical story, and c) Noah’s flood was understood to be worldwide, and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark.¹⁵

But no one speaks to this issue stronger than Ellen White:

The assumption that the events of the first week required thousands upon thousands of years, strikes directly at the foundation of the fourth commandment. It represents the Creator as commanding men to observe the week of literal days in commemoration of vast, indefinite periods. This is unlike His method of dealing with His creatures. It makes indefinite and obscure that which He has made very plain. It is infidelity in its most insidious and hence more dangerous form; its real character is so disguised that it is held and taught by many who profess to believe the Bible ... There is a constant effort made to explain the work of creation as the result of natural causes; and human reasoning is accepted even by professed Christian, in opposition to plain Scripture facts.¹⁶

The “textbook” Christians hold with the highest authority is self-authenticated in an impressively extensive manner. The Christian canon testifies that God does not exist in unbroken silence. He has communicated. He has expressed Himself. As the many biblical writers, along with Martin Luther and the various reformers insist, the Christian experience of

¹⁵Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁶*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 111, 113. Also: “I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which GOD performed the work of creation is six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week. The great GOD in His days of creation and day of rest, measured off the first cycle as a sample for successive weeks till the close of time.... The weekly cycle of seven literal days, six for labor, and the seventh for rest, which has been preserved and brought down through Bible history, originated in the great facts of the first seven days.” *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90.

God is acoustical. God has spoken. Indeed, in all the Bible there is not a single example of God appearing without saying something. If there is a vision without spoken words, it is not from God. Moreover, God orders the written transcript of His words. As the prophet Habakkuk recounts, “Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it” (Hab 2:2).

And yet, to some readers, the Bible appears as an enigmatic collection of seemingly unrelated materials: narratives, poetry, legal codes, sermons, letters, prophecies, parables, royal annals and genealogies. Truly, the nature of God’s revelation is diverse. God did not use one single pattern to reveal Himself in Scripture. Thus, a simple explanation of the origin of Scripture is impossible. Yet, however complex God’s ways of revealing Himself are, we must try to understand the Bible if we are to come anywhere near to understanding God. A fundamental premise for understanding its contents would be to believe the whole Bible is revealed. This involves a sensitive reading of all its diverse materials, acknowledging that all of these are necessary.

A canonical practice is not a purely textual entity but a phenomenon of discourse: a matter of someone saying something in some way about something to someone. Readers who would understand must discover “the way the words go,” that is, the particular form of rule-governedness that regulates the communicative action.... The text directs the reader, so to speak, rather than the reader the text. The canon is the focal means whereby life-indicating word and life-giving Spirit are brought to bear in and on the church. To be sure, it is God’s use of the canon that counts, but we can participate in it, just as we participate in the covenant that is similarly the result of a prior divine initiative. The church learns to speak of God through its apprenticeship to the diverse canonical practices.... The canon is the norm of Christian language, thought, and action.¹⁷

¹⁷ Vanhoozer, p. 217. He writes eloquently on this issue: “it is important not to neglect the properly communicative dimension of the triune economy. The divine deeds require divine words if they are to be adequately understood; redemption entails revelation. *Just as the covenant norms the relationship between God and humanity, so the canon norms the meaning of the covenant.* The canon is a rule and criterion, then, not apart from but precisely because of its place in the divine economy of redemption. Scripture is more than the textualization of revelation; it is an instance of God’s own covenantally oriented communicative action...” p. 147, (emphasis Vanhoozer’s).

In addition to speaking directly with human beings and commanding those words to be recorded, God employed other supernatural methods of communication: such as with angels (Daniel); theophanies (Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Moses, Paul, John); dreams (Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar); supernatural writing (of the Decalogue on stone two times, Exod 31:18; and at a feast in Babylon (Dan 5:5); a voice from heaven (Exod 19:9; Matt 3:17; 2 Pet 1:17).

All these divine manifestations were then recorded and brought together under one cover. How does one make sense of it all? The issue of interpretation (hermeneutics) is a continuing topic in theological studies. Canonic writers also assist us in this regard. First of all, they regularly warn that it is possible to misread and misinterpret Scripture. Even Christ Himself, warns against false teachers and false teaching. Bible writers also helpfully exegete earlier biblical materials, as we have seen. The use of earlier Old Testament materials by later Old Testament writers and then subsequently by the New Testament penmen presents a working hermeneutic, undergirded with the presupposition of the complete veracity of the words of God. Moreover, the Holy Spirit has been promised to “guide us into all truth” (John 14:26; 16:13). Vanhoozer addresses this issue:

The biblical texts have been commissioned, authorized, and appropriated for divine use. What sets off *just these communicative practices* as authority for the church, therefore, is that these forms and patterns of communication are ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit: *Spirited* practices. A canonical practice is a practice of the Holy Spirit in which both past human authors and present human readers participate, though in distinctly different ways. The Scriptures are the Spirit’s work from first to last. The Spirit is involved in Scripture in the very messy historical process of producing Scripture—prompting, appropriating, and coordinating human discourse to present God’s Word—as well as in the process of bringing about understanding of Scripture among present-day readers.¹⁸

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, p. 226 (emphasis Vanhoozer’s).

Today some modern scholars suggest that certain portions of Scripture are of less value.

No one addresses this issue more forth-rightly than Ellen White. She states emphatically:

...what man is there that dares to take that Bible and say this part is inspired and that part is not inspired? I would have both my arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired.... Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do.... We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, "That is not inspired," simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark.... when men begin to meddle with God's Word, I want to tell them to take their hands off, for they do not know what they are doing.¹⁹

God Himself expresses the same sentiment:

Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who *trembles at My word*. (Isa 66:1-2)

The God of Heaven has ordained that His Word be contained in a Book. But truly, it is more than a Book. Through its many writers we are confronted with an omnipotent God who is in earnest to communicate His will and His ways in human history, and who loves human beings more than He loved His own life. The Christian canon is not some arbitrary collection of miscellaneous documents. We must allow Scripture to make sense on its own terms. Fleming Rutledge expresses my sentiments:

Every time I think I am losing my faith, the Biblical story seizes me yet again with a life all its own. No other religious document has this power. I remain convinced in spite of all the arguments that God really does inhabit this text. With Job, I say yet again, "I had heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise my words, I melt away in dust and ashes" (42:5-6).²⁰

¹⁹7BC 920 (Ms 13, 1888).

²⁰ Rutledge, *Ibid*.

The assumptions of the biblical writers about God and the historical grounding of divine revelation are clear. Only in the modern era has liberal theology moved from this stance.

Seventh-day Adventists correctly acknowledge canonical teaching by affirming two critical acts of God in human history—one past and one future—in our very name SEVENTH-DAY/ADVENTISTS. And Ellen White urges us—

God will have a people upon earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority, not one or nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith.²¹

Yes, God will have such a people ... will Seventh-day Adventists be among that people?

²¹*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.