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Paper: “The Authority of Scripture” [Part 2]
“WORD MADE FLESH”
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Accepting the full authority of Scripture has long been a teaching of Christianity. The ancient rabbis argued that a mountain of matter hangs on every word. Back in the 5th century Augustine observed, “Scripture is like a river in which elephants can swim and little children can wade. We can only stand in awe before the mystery of divine speech.” The inspired status of both the Old and New Testaments has been acknowledged for centuries.

However, in the modern era, some biblical scholars began to skeptically analyze the Bible’s factual claims, complaining about the ancient writers and also who they called the “final redactors” or editors—relegating biblical teaching as outdated. Today theological study is often reduced to describing human experience and spirituality. For these and other reasons it becomes timely to restudy the critical issue of biblical authority.

That the God of heaven speaks through human language becomes obvious from the opening words of Genesis. After that all subsequent biblical writers claim to give true information about various public historical events. And the biblical record in which these events are recorded they believed to be inspired by God Himself.

Moreover, the HS who inspired the prophetic and apostolic testimony in its written form promises to still teach through the text—as He has done in every age.

Careful listening to the Bible will involve ever learning from the HS how to unlock the power of the text—ever remembering that what God reveals there our sin-clouded intellects only faintly comprehend, as Ellen White instructs:

“It is impossible for finite minds fully to comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. To the keenest intellect, the most highly educated mind, that holy Being must ever remain clothed in mystery.... The Word of God, like the character of its divine Author, presents mysteries that can never be fully comprehended by finite beings. The entrance of sin into the world, the incarnation of Christ, regeneration, the resurrection, and many other subjects presented in the Bible, are mysteries too deep for the human mind to explain, or even fully to comprehend. But we have no reason to doubt God’s Word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. In the natural world we are constantly surrounded with mysteries that we cannot fathom. The very humblest forms of life present a problem that the wisest of philosophers is powerless to explain. Everywhere are wonders beyond our ken. Should we then be surprised to find that in the spiritual world also there are mysteries that we cannot fathom? . . .”¹

Biblical writers all testify that God addresses us in the Bible. He is the original Speaker. When we open Scripture we hear His voice: sometimes in terrific thunder, other times in musical strains, always in sublime majesty in both mercy and judgment. And when we open Scripture, it should be with the profound and solemn conviction that

¹EGW: *A Call to Stand Apart*, 46.

we are about to listen to the voice of God. I appreciate Ellen White's instruction that the more we search the Bible, the deeper will be our conviction that it is the Word of the living God—and our human reason will bow before the majesty of divine revelation:

“The Bible unfolds truth with a simplicity and a perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart, that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while it enables the humblest and uncultured to discern the way of salvation. And yet these simply stated truths lay hold upon subjects so elevated, so far-reaching, so infinitely beyond the power of human comprehension, that we can accept them only because God has declared them.... A sense of the power and wisdom of God, and of our inability to comprehend His greatness, should inspire us with humility, and we should open His Word, as we would enter His presence, with holy awe. . . .”²

Recall some of the extensive biblical testimony regarding the divine authorship of Scripture:

- In the **Pentateuch**, dozens of times we read “the LORD said to Moses”,³
- **Abraham** had several conversations with God; one including a prophecy (Gen 15);
- Moses was told by God several times to write.
- **Joshua** was directed by God to the written word: “This Book of the Law shall not

²Ibid., 47.

³Ex 17:14 “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.’” Ex 34:27 “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.’”

depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Josh. 1:8.

- Job declared: “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food (Jb 23:12; oldest book in the Bible)
- **Psalm 119**, the longest chapter in the Bible, is an exquisite, detailed meditation on the Word of God. We are told to:
 - seek it (119:45) and choose it (119:30, 173);
 - to long for it, love it, and delight in it (119:40, 97, 113, 143);
 - to hide it in our hearts and remember it (119:11, 52)—for His “testimonies are wonderful!” (Ps 119:129);
- **Jeremiah** describes his experience: “His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.” (Jer 20:9)
- **Isaiah** quotes God’s promise: “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And does not return there, But waters the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Is 55:10-11)
- the wisest man, **Solomon**, declares: “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.” (Prv 30:5-6)

- 1600 times, four similar Hebrew expressions are explicit that God has spoken!
 - a statement is given as an “Utterance of Yahweh” (361x)
 - a prophet assures: “thus says the Lord” (423x)
 - “God spoke” (422x)
 - “**word** of the LORD” (394x)“... came to ...” This was also the electrifying call of an OT prophet: “the **word** of the LORD came to” (see Jer 1:4; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1, etc.). Prophets claimed to have real revelation from God—a knowledge God disclosed, not what they devised. They were convinced God was speaking when they thundered “thus says the Lord!” Notice **Ezekiel’s** testimony:

“And He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.”

Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.... You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.” Ezi 2:1-2,7.⁴

God’s climactic revelation came with Jesus who is called the “**WORD** of God” (Rev 19:11, 13), and “faithful and true.” Jesus entered time and space as the living incarnation of divine communication (Hb 1:1-3), and He Himself:

- knew the Word and trusted it;
- He quoted it often. “That it might be fulfilled” was one of the ways He insisted that Scripture was true.
- “Scripture cannot be broken” was how He addressed an argument that hinged on

⁴J.A. Motyer asks, “How did the prophet receive the message which he was commissioned to convey to his fellows? The answer in the vast majority of the cases is perfectly clear and yet tantalizingly vague: ‘The word of the Lord came ...’” “The word of the LORD came to me, saying” is also a common expression in the prophets....” The prophet speaks God’s words whether anyone listens or not.

one word of Scripture (Jn 10:35).

- the first **recorded** words of Jesus in the Gospels are found during His temptations by Satan in the wilderness where He quoted Scripture saying: “It is written” (Mt 4:4, 7, 10; Lk 4:4, 8).
- He also expressed wonder that Scripture had not be studied earnestly with robust trust. “Have you not read this Scripture?” He asks, as He quotes evidence from Psalm 118 to show that the rejection of the Messiah was already foretold in the OT (Mk 12:10; Mt 21:42).⁵
- Jesus also forcefully insists that the source of all error in divine things is ignorance of the Scriptures, stating: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Mt 22:29).

Throughout His public ministry Jesus would speak about the fulfilment of what was written in the OT, explaining events in His life as fulfilling it (Mk 14:49; Jn 13:18; 17:12; 12:14; Mk 9:12-13)—even anticipating the events because of the OT:

- At the Last Supper with His disciples, He declared: ““All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written ...” (Mt 26:31; also Mk 14:27; Lk 20:17);
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, although first demonstrating that He had at His command ample means of escape, He submits to His murderous persecutors with the words, how otherwise “shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must

⁵Sometimes He used similar expressions: “Did you never read in the Scriptures?” Another time when indignant religious leaders came to Him complaining of the loud “Hosannas” the children were singing in the temple, He responded, “have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings You have perfected praise?’” (Mt 21:16).

be?” (Mt 26:54).

- Luke records Jesus, on Resurrection Sunday instructing His disciples: “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.** (Lk 24:44);
- Earlier in the day he had expressed the same sentiment on the road to Emmaus, arguing that the “foolish and slow of heart” do not “believe all that the prophets have spoken” and beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He **expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.** (Lk 24:27).

The Apostles did the same. **Paul** did not invent new truth. But he carried it to a wider audience—instructing Gentiles regarding the teachings of the OT and Jesus which he viewed as the binding norm for his own mission and preaching.

- To the **Corinthians** he insists: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you” ... [and] For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen” by all the apostles. “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor 11:23;15:3-9)
- Paul told the Jewish leaders of **Rome** that “the Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet” that they were prone to be

“ever hearing but never understanding” (Acts 28:25-26; Isa 6:9-10)

- Biographical information about Jesus that can be gathered from Paul’s epistles includes:

- Jesus’ ancestry from Abraham and David (Gal 3:16; Rm

- 1:3)—confirming OT history;

- His gathering disciples—including Peter and John, and John having a brother named James (Gal 1:19; 2:9),

- Jesus’ impeccable character and exemplary life (for example, Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9; Rm 15:⁶),

- His Last Supper with His disciples and

- various details surrounding his crucifixion and resurrection.⁷

And the same Paul who urges that the Church should seek to work together peaceably, uses strong language to defend what he taught:

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal 1:8-9)

- **Luke** commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures as the norm for determining the truth that Paul had taught.

⁶“For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” Rm 15:3

⁷Also: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”

What is New Testament theology we must let the apostles teach us. If the the record of their testimony is somehow defective, there is no way that we can begin to know the truth. I can't imagine that "the Spirit would not leave such an important matter up to the jaded imagination of modern form-critics."⁸

For Jesus and His disciples alike, an appeal to Scripture was an appeal to its absolute authority. And they refer to every part of the Old Testament—to incidental clauses as well as to its history, poetry, laws, and prophecy. Their confidence is also suggested by their customary designation of the OT as *Scripture*, and the *Scriptures*, often stated the formula, "It is written." In their minds what was written in *Scripture* needed no defense. They took it for granted.

We are instructed in the NT that "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the HS" (2 Pt 1:21). There are various translations of the word "**moved**":

- some say it should be translated "carried along";
- others say that the word means "borne along";
- some say "driven along."

The word in the original language can carry these various meanings. What is significant, however, is that all of them agree that what is being conveyed is that when the biblical materials were written, it was never a person thinking things out with his natural powers and abilities and then writing as authoritatively as possible. Not at all! The impulse came from the Holy Spirit. The whole time the person was impelled by the Spirit of God. And as a result of that divine initiative Scripture came into being.

⁸Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method*, Wink, BHT.[133?]

In the Old Testament, **true prophets** were distinguished from impostors because they “stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear His word” (Jr 23:18). In the **NT, the apostles** claimed eyewitness status and to have been given a divine commission.⁹ They never suggest that they are merely describing their own inner experience—or taking divine dictation. Nor were they neutral observers or dispassionate historians (as if there is such).

At the same time, as **WITNESSES** they dare not create facts but only testify to actual events that they did not fabricate. In fact, they sometimes expressed surprise, confusion, and even fear in the face of what was happening.

They also faithfully acknowledge Jesus’ teaching:

- in **Romans** we hear clear echoes of Jesus’ words of blessing on those:
 - who were being persecuted (Rm 12:14; cf. Lk 6:27-28),
 - repaying no one evil for evil (Rm 12:14; cf. Mt 5:39),
 - paying appropriate taxes (Rm 13:7; cf. Mk 12:17),
 - loving one’s neighbor as summarizing the whole Law (Rm 13:8-9; cf. Gal 5:14; Mk 12:31).

⁹**Paul:** Gal 1:1-10-11—“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

John: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.” 1Jn 1:1-2.

Peter: “ For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.... And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pt 1:16-21).

- Three times in **1 Corinthians** Paul explicitly quotes the words of Jesus on divorce and remarriage (1 Cor 7:10; cf. Mk 10:10-12)—words that Jesus had quoted from the Old Testament thereby affirming the opening chapters of Genesis!
- Paul also describes the Last Supper of Jesus with His disciples (1 Cor 11:23-25; cf. Lk 22:19-20)
- In **1 Thessalonians** he references the return of Christ which Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24.¹⁰
- **The epistle of James** has allusions to the Synoptic gospels in almost every paragraph, especially from the Sermon on the Mount—including the quotation of the saying “letting your yes be yes and your no, [be] no” (in James 5:12; cf. Mt 5:37).
- The **Book of Revelation** reflects the teachings of Jesus, including the “Son of man” title Jesus often used. The twenty-two chapters of Revelation are called “the book of this prophecy” (Rv 22:19)—John thus implying that what he wrote was inspired by the same spirit of prophecy that spoke through the Old Testament prophets and standing in succession to them (Rv 19:10; 22:9).¹¹
- Moreover, several times the readers of the Apocalypse are told to hear what the “Spirit says to the churches” (Rv 2-3).

¹⁰Michael B. Thompson, CLOTHED WITH CHRIST: THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS IN ROMANS 12:1-15:13 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), builds on these data to argue for allusions and echoes of the Jesus tradition throughout virtually Paul’s exhortation.

¹¹Likewise, he claims “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”

New Testament writers earnestly authenticated their testimony, as the Gospel of John states: “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.” (Jn 19:35).

Paul, along with the other NT writers, believed they wrote by the Holy Spirit: “God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.... Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Cor 2:11b-13).

This is clear indication that at the beginning of the Christian era in the first century, the inspiration of the prophetic oracles of the Old Testament was believed to be continuing in New Testament as well.

It is clear from extensive testimony in the biblical record that revelation does not well up voluntarily within a pious individual, nor is it merely a type of heightened intuition. The prophets and apostles are not simply spiritual geniuses who operate on a higher wavelength. Rather, they are people who are called by God from their vocations as His spokespersons and penmen. In fact, a person commissioned by God typically expresses a sense of unworthiness, distress, and hesitancy rather than serenity and pious delight. Ellen White’s own testimony of her experience reflects the same.

Biblical materials didn’t result from a human hunch, feeling, intuition, or mystical experience. Bible writers give evidence of being “fully conscious of what was happening. Rather than seizing the moment, or mastering the situation, they were

summoned and commissioned by God. And then they don't speak for God—God speaks for Himself through them.

“God’s dwelling is on high” (Isa 33:5). He inhabits eternity—the realm to which humans cannot penetrate on their own (Isa 57:15; cf. Ecc 5:2). It is this divine transcendence that renders our unaided search for God impossible—and makes His self-disclosure absolutely necessary.¹² And because the Bible ultimately **IS** *God’s* revelation it is worthy of our complete confidence.

With Scripture’s impressive collection of prophetic and apostolic teaching, God encounters us with actual information! However, the biblical canon is not a collection of cold facts whose significance and meaning is left to fallible human interpretation. God also revealed His character, purposes, and accomplishments through His own interpretation of His mighty acts. And when doing so, He personally summons us to acknowledge His claim on us.

Christianity is not merely a code for living or a philosophy of religion. It is a divine record rooted and revealed in real people and real historical events. “The uniqueness ... of the Christian religion,” writes George Ladd, “rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events”—including divine interpretation of those historical events. These details would never be otherwise found in merely human analysis. This divine record confronts us with a record framed within a set of assumptions which can radically challenge our thinking, ideas, and experience.

Scripture confronts—maybe even accosts—the reader. The church that ignores

¹²Ibid.

the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic interpretation of it cannot be the true church—and fails to display a distinctive mark of the first-century church. If we are biblical Christians, our theology must correspond with the testimony of the Word—our working assumption being that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed a defective testimony to be written and transmitted. John Calvin cogently comments:

“The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded ... the beginning of true doctrine [is] a prompt eagerness to hearken to God’s voice.”¹³

It is helpful to review what happened in the first century: during the reign of Tiberius Caesar a certain number of persons preached the Old Testament to Jews **and** Gentiles, voluntarily submitted to great dangers, sufferings, and death, all for the truth which they proclaimed from the Old Testament wherever they went. The apostles could not be deceivers: pretending to have seen something that didn’t happen, asserting facts and claiming to teach truth through lies, believing Christ to be an impostor and His death by crucifixion a hoax—while bringing on themselves hatred, danger, and death? That such interpretation of the New Testament records is absurd. The apostles were devoted to Jesus, not ingeniousness deceivers.

Moreover, the church is described by Paul as the pillar and ground of **TRUTH** (1 Tm 3:15)—God’s own appointed means of upholding its veracity in the world. In fact, Bible writers place a good deal of emphasis of TRUTH—just refer to a Concordance to

¹³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” John T. McNeill, ed., trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:79 (1.7.4), 1:18 (1.8.5).

note the impressive biblical concentration on truth:

- God never lies (Tit. 1:2); lying lips are an abomination to Him (Prv. 6:6);
- over and over God is said to be true (Jn 3:33; 7:28; 8:26; 1 Ths 1:9; 1 Jn 5:20; Rev. 3:7; 6:10); He is true though every man prove false (Rom 3:4)
- He is the "God of truth" (Is 65:16; Ps 31:5);
- His judgments are true (Rom 2:2; Rev. 16:7);
- **CHRIST** is the Truth (Jn 14:6) and is full of truth (Jn 1:4) and is true (Rev 19:11); truth is in him (Eph 4:21)
- He is the true light (Jn 1:9), the true bread (Jn 6:32) and the true vine (Jn 15:1);
- He bears true witness (Jn 8:14) and is the true witness (Rev 3:14);
- He speaks the truth from God (Jn 8:40);
- The **HOLY SPIRIT** is the "Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn 5:7
- He guides people into truth (Jn 16:13¹⁴);
- **GOD'S WORD** is truth (Jn 17:17);
- **THE GOSPEL** is true (Gal 2:5, 14¹⁵; Col 1:5¹⁶);

¹⁴“when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” (John 16:13)

¹⁵“And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.... I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ...” (Gal 2:4-5, 14).

¹⁶“ ... we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.” (Col 1:4-5).

- **TRUTH** can be known (1 Tm 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tm 3:7;¹⁷ 1 Jn 2:21¹⁸), believed (2 Ths 2:11-14¹⁹), obeyed (Gal 5:7; 1 Pt 1:22²⁰), and loved (2 Ths 2:10²¹);
- Christians are "of the truth" (1 Jn 3:19²²) and (as already noted above) the church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tm 3:15²³).

The prophets and apostles all testify that the revelation they received from God is divine **truth** and can be trusted. That is why, for example, SDAs take the Creation narratives seriously for this is what God first describes as He introduces Himself when the Bible opens.

The center of Scripture is the incarnate **WORD** Jesus—who is also the Creator (Col 1). He regarded the words of Scripture as authoritative, as we noted earlier (Mt 4:4, 7, 10; 5:17-20; 19:4-6; 26:31, 52-54; Lk 4:16-21; 16:17; 18:31-33; 22:37; 24:25-27,

¹⁷“God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tm 2:3-4): “ ... those who believe and know the truth.” (1 Tm 4:3). But there are some “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tm 3:7).

¹⁸“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.” (1 Jn 2:21).

¹⁹“And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Ths 2:11-14)

²⁰“Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal 5:7); “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,” (1 Pt 1:22).

²¹“they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 Ths 2:10).

²²“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” (1 Jn 3:19).

²³“but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tm 3:15)

45-47; Jn 10:35-38).

Paul calls Scripture “the sacred writing, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” In the book of Hebrews we are reminded that “many times” and “many ways” God spoke in the past (Hb 1:1), through diverse literary styles over many centuries to a wide variety of audiences.

Scripture also testifies to its perspicuity and clearness:

- called a lamp and a light (Ps 119:105);
- the very entrance of it, it is said, gives light and understanding to the simple (Ps 119:130); “For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light” (Prv 6:23);
- in the NT, the Holy Scriptures again are called a light, particularly the prophetic word, referring to it as a shining light in a dark place dispelling darkness (“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pt 1:19);

It is always assumed that Scripture can be understood!

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.... But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” (Dt 30:11-14); “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tm 3:16-17).

Some moderns try to argue that human language is a barrier hampering divine communication. However, as the Bible opens we are instructed that humans were

created in God’s image—which implies some kind of correspondence between us. To deny that God can speak to us in human language inflicts an entirely unbiblical constraint on God and Scripture and our ability to understand. Certainly God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts but God has made it clear that He wants to communicate with us—and His transcendence is not denied by this. Nor is He “anthropomorphized” by speaking in human language. He freely expresses Himself in human language which He created. God, in tandem with human wills and intellects, moved in and through biblical writers to express precisely what He intended—and the Almighty God of the whole universe condescends to communicate with sinful humans made of clay.

That God speaks through a prophet and/or apostle with the words and language of a particular writer does not diminish the force of the Holy Spirit’s enabling. Canonical materials remain as truly God’s own address as if spoken audibly from Sinai’s burning mountain. Ellen White is helpful here:

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 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.

God is not silent—He is acoustical. And He speaks Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek—and all other human languages for that matter! Ellen White is instructive, stating that God’s speech and rhetoric is not on trial, nor does Scripture contain exhaustive truth. But Scripture says what God wants it to say “diffused” through human language:

The Lord gave His word in just the way He wanted it to come. He gave it through

different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history. Their testimonies are brought together in one Book, and are like testimonies in a social meeting. They do not represent things in just the same style. Each has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds. The thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mold, making the very hearing monotonous. In such uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty. (*Selected Message*, vol 1, 22-23)

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly being may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory." 1 SM 22

Nor is the Creator limited to human language. He uses various supernatural means:

- the Urim and Thummin (Ex 28:30; Nm 27:21; 1 Sm 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Ne 7:65);
- angels/Daniel;
- theophanies [direct manifestations of God]/Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, John;
- dreams/Abraham, Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar;
- supernatural writing (Ten Commandments in stone; on a wall/Daniel 5:5);
- His voice heard from Mt. Sinai and from heaven (Exodus 19-20; Mt 3:17; 2 Peter 1:17);

We must remember that we are never above divine revelation. The inspiration of Scripture is the genuine work of the sovereign divine Spirit, whose operation cannot be subjected to human analysis—or control. God remains the Master of that which He Himself has given, guaranteeing its authenticity. The text of Scripture also significantly contains its own interpretative [hermeneutical] principles. To be fair to Scripture, we must find and work within these.²⁴ For example, studying how later biblical writers refer to and understand the earlier writers (such as referring back to creation, the flood and the Exodus).

We are not lords over the texts even though modern critics suggest that they can be better judges as trained ‘authorities, with the attitude: “If I disagree with something in Scripture, Scripture must be wrong.”²⁵ This is just the opposite of what an honest biblical student will admit: “If I disagree with something in Scripture I must be wrong.”

All the great Reformers, coming out of the “Dark Ages,” recognized the absolute

²⁴“There are those who profess to believe and to teach the truths of the Old Testament, while they reject the New. But in refusing to receive the teachings of Christ, they show that they do not believe that which patriarchs and prophets have spoken. “Had ye believed Moses,” Christ said, “ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me.” John 5:46. Hence there is no real power in their teaching of even the Old Testament.

Many who claim to believe and to teach the gospel are in a similar error. They set aside the Old Testament Scriptures, of which Christ declared, “They are they which testify of Me.” John 5:39. In rejecting the Old, they virtually reject the New; for both are parts of an inseparable whole. No man can rightly present the law of God without the gospel, or the gospel without the law. The law is the gospel embodied, and the gospel is the law unfolded. The law is the root, the gospel is the fragrant blossom and fruit which it bears.

The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Both present truths that will continually reveal new depths of meaning to the earnest seeker.

Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. *Christ's Object Lessons* 128

²⁵Many modern critics refer to the prophetic and apostolic testimony as if implying, “You can't possibly understand prophets and apostles if we don't explain the problems to you.”

nature of the Bible:

- Luther declared himself “captive to the Word,” and who, like Calvin and Zwingli, called the people of God back to the centrality and sufficiency of Scripture. Ellen White describes Martin Luther’s influence this way: “The voice of Luther, that echoed in mountains and valleys, that shook Europe as with an earthquake.”²⁶
- In a time when infant baptism was thought necessary to guarantee salvation, the Anabaptists urged “believer baptism” because they knew that was what Scripture taught.

The Reformers believed:

- that Bible writers presented truth to be believed and commands to be obeyed.
- that the variety and richness of God’s manner of speaking led to the writing of narratives and praise, poetry and prose, wisdom and apocalyptic, prophecy and parable, law, letters, and doctrine—which the Spirit brought about.

God Word promises, threatens, creates, destroys, judges, liberates, confronts, confuses, and much more. It addresses not only the intellect, but also the heart—indeed the whole person.

Scripture did not come about by downloading eternal information onto a computer. Nor is it a record of an inner mystical experience—or, a new awareness of a religious feeling that certain spiritual geniuses described. Scripture cannot be reduced to

²⁶ST 2/19/1894. After Luther returned from Wartburg Castle, both he and Melancthon spent hours studying Greek when preparing the final draft of Luther’s German New Testament. Luther’s first draft produced at Wartburg only took him eleven weeks to complete! In 1522 the New Testament was published and because of its readability and affordability thousands of copies were sold.

John Knox, in Edinburgh, moved the pulpit from the side to the center, symbolizing the Reformation conviction of the importance of God’s Word

that. For God's living and active speech does more than reveal; it creates the reality of which it speaks:

"The process of revelation is not only concomitant with history, but it becomes incarnate in history. The facts of history themselves have a revealing significance for God's historical acts "are never entirely left to speak for themselves; they are preceded and followed by word-revelation."²⁷

And this Great God who inhabits eternity is our Creator who also made Himself the servant of our redemption. The One who is high and exalted abases Himself and becomes the greatest sufferer of human injustice and hatred who ever lived to redeem His fallen children. And wonder of all wonders, He inspires a written Word accommodated to our finite minds. The Reformer, John Calvin compares the words of Scripture to "baby talk," whereby God "must descend far beneath His loftiness."²⁸ Not even in revelation, according to Calvin, does the believer "attain to [God's] exalted state," but one **does** receive truth "accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it."²⁹ Better to limp along this path," Calvin cautioned, "than to dash with all speed outside it."³⁰

God is able to reveal Himself, His will, and His works through creaturely mediation. The Bible writers were not worthy, but God enabled them for His loving and

²⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 6-7.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.20; cf. 1.13.1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.17.13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.6.3.

sovereign purposes. Far from being a dead letter, the Word of God not only declares—it *brings* forth. It not only asserts truth—it creates and destroys, plants and uproots, judges and justifies, kills and makes alive. The transcendent triune God creates reality by speaking. The Word not only explains, describes, asserts, and proposes, but **CONFRONTS**. This reminds us that our attitude toward Scripture is critical. Ellen White carefully instructs us:

Never attempt to search the Scriptures unless you are ready to listen, unless you are ready to be a learner, unless you are ready to listen to the Word of God as though His voice were speaking directly to you from the **living oracles**. 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. (Mss 13, 1888)

It takes all of eternity to unfold the glories and bring out the precious treasures of the Word of God. Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. Tell all such they simply do not know. They simply are not able to comprehend the things of the mystery of God. What we want is to inspire faith. We want no one to say, "This I will reject, and this will I receive," but we want to have implicit faith in the Bible as a whole and as it is. 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 the Word. Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark. Do not lay your hand upon it, but let God move.... We do not want man's ideas to bind Him about." (7SDABC 919-920.)

Conclusions

The Bible is a remarkable record of the history of the ancients and their relationships with God. It is a trustworthy, authoritative depository of Jewish and Christian history along with divinely inspired commentary and theology—all expressed and framed within masterpieces of religious literature. Ellen White calls it is “a great system of truth.”³¹

- each Gospel is a supplement to the others,
- every prophecy an explanation of another,
- every truth a development of some other truth: the types of the Jewish economy are made plain by the gospel.

³¹“The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be fitted either for this life or for the life to come. And these principles may be understood by all. No one with a spirit to appreciate its teaching can read a single passage from the Bible without gaining from it some helpful thought. But the most valuable teaching of the Bible is not to be gained by occasional or disconnected study. **Its great system of truth** is not so presented as to be discerned by the hasty or careless reader. Many of its treasures lie far beneath the surface, and can be obtained only by diligent research and continuous effort. The truths that go to make up the great whole must be searched out and gathered up, “here a little, and there a little.” Isaiah 28:10.

When thus searched out and brought together, they will be found to be perfectly fitted to one another. Each Gospel is a supplement to the others, every prophecy an explanation of another, every truth a development of some other truth. The types of the Jewish economy are made plain by the gospel. Every principle in the word of God has its place, every fact its bearing. And the complete structure, in design and execution, bears testimony to its Author. Such a structure no mind but that of the Infinite could conceive or fashion.

In searching out the various parts and studying their relationship, the highest faculties of the human mind are called into intense activity. No one can engage in such study without developing mental power.

And not alone in searching out truth and bringing it together does the mental value of Bible study consist. It consists also in the effort required to grasp the themes presented. The mind occupied with commonplace matters only, becomes dwarfed and enfeebled. If never tasked to comprehend grand and far-reaching truths, it after a time loses the power of growth. As a safeguard against this degeneracy, and a stimulus to development, nothing else can equal the study of God's word. As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can. No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind thus brought in contact with the thoughts of the Infinite cannot but expand and strengthen.

And even greater is the power of the Bible in the development of the spiritual nature. Man, created for fellowship with God, can only in such fellowship find his real life and development. Created to find in God his highest joy, he can find in nothing else that which can quiet the cravings of the heart, can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul. He who with sincere and teachable spirit studies God's word, seeking to comprehend its truths, will be brought in touch with its Author; and, except by his own choice, there is no limit to the possibilities of his development. *Education* 123-125.

Every principle in the word of God has its place, every fact its bearing. And the complete structure, in design and execution, bears testimony to its Author. Such a structure no mind but that of the Infinite could conceive or fashion. (*Education* 123)

There is a theological unity of Scripture amid all of its diversity which enables readers of all sixty-six books to discern deep wisdom within a metanarrative explaining human nature and history from its origins to its final destiny. No other ancient literature even attempts to undertake all these tasks simultaneously.

It shouldn't surprise us that an astonishing amount of archaeological and scientific corroboration of details in the Bible that can be tested grows steadily with each generation. And the record of the lives transformed by the Bible continues to accumulate through the centuries. Listen to how the 19th-century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, a contemporary of Ellen White, expresses this:

“with the candle of the Spirit, we must deliberately seek out the hidden meaning of the Word. Holy Scripture requires searching—much of it can only be learned by careful study. This is milk for babes, but also meat for strong men. The rabbis wisely say that a mountain of matter hangs upon every word ... The Word of God will repay searching. God does not bid us sift a mountain of chaff with here and there a grain of wheat in it, but the Bible is winnowed corn—we have but to open the granary door and find it...

I wonder that God spoke by the prophets; but I admire still more that He should have written down His word in black and white, in unmistakable language, which can be translated into all tongues, so that we may all see and read for ourselves what God the Lord has spoken to us, and what, indeed, He continues to speak. For what He has spoken, He still speaks to us as freshly as if He spake it for the first time.”

“The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.” There is an urgent, pressing ring to that insight. God doesn’t break not the silence to say that which might as well have remained unsaid. His voice indicates great urgency. God does not speak without abundant reasons. Without reserve answer His call and say “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”³²

In spite of all the skeptics and scoffers, there is something about the Word of God that eludes them all. There is life in the Scriptures that renews God’s people generation after generation. Because God is real and He speaks the Word of life, and His Spirit cannot be quenched. If Scripture has one controlling presupposition from beginning to end, it is the power of God’s Word. “God *said*, ‘Let there be light,’ *and there was light*.” A Bible denied this power is not the Bible at all. Listen to just one among a thousand passages about this: The Lord utters His voice before His army.... He that executes His word *is*

³²From a sermon delivered March 11, 1888, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington. Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was an influential English Baptist preacher.

powerful.” (Joel 2:11). And Ellen White warns:

“Never let moral 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.” (Mss 13, 1888)

The writers of Scripture did not concoct a story of human search for God. What they emphatically wrote about was **God’s search for us**. God is overwhelmingly the subject of the verbs throughout the Bible—not the imagined object of human religious longing.

In the book *The Great Controversy*, we are told that

“God will have a people upon the 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 nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith.”³³

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

³³GC 595.

people?