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### **“Men Spoke from God”: Prophetic and Apostolic Awareness of Inspiration**

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In the wake of the historical-critical study of the Bible, the notion that the biblical authors were aware they were writing normative, canonical Scripture has seemed absurd.<sup>2</sup> For example, consider the words of James Barr who wrote the following:

The men of the Bible were, as we now see it, engaged in the process out of which our Bible in the end would emerge, but they themselves had no Bible: at that time, clearly, the Bible as we know it was not yet there. A scripture, in the sense of an already existing defined and delimited, written guide for the religion, did not yet exist. In the time of (say) the prophet Isaiah there was no such scripture, and he never speaks of there being one.<sup>3</sup>

While it is correct that a closed list of books did not exist at the times Barr references, Barr’s statements go beyond this minimal claim to argue that the authors of the biblical books did not view their writings as authoritative, inspired *Scripture*. Consider the words of Eugene Ulrich as well: “The books that came to be the Bible did not start off as books of the Bible. In many passages that now constitute those books, the authors did not think that they were writing scripture.” Ulrich goes on to say these now canonical books only gained “general acceptance as a book of scripture” much later than the time of their composition.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Mark Allan Powell writes the following in his *Introducing the New Testament*:

The authors of our New Testament books did not know that they were writing scripture—our current books of the Bible. They did not know that a New Testament

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<sup>2</sup> I use “canonical” here in the sense that the inspired text is intended to function as a normative, authoritative text for the covenant community—not that it was put on an official, closed list. For discussion of this “broad” notion of canon, otherwise called Canon 1, see Darian Lockett, “Canonical Interpretation” in *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G.K. Beale, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 80–2.

<sup>3</sup> James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Ulrich, “The Notion and Definition of Canon,” in *The Canon Debate*, eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 34–5.

would ever exist, much less that their writings would be a part of it. Nevertheless, these writings owe their prominence and influence to the fact that they came to be included in that corpus.<sup>5</sup>

For many, the answer to the question of whether the human authors of Scripture were always aware of God's inspiring activity would be an emphatic "No!" The assumption is that these books (if they are in any way inspired) were only seen to be authoritative Scripture once they were either recognized by others as such or endowed with that authority by the ecclesial community. Any claim otherwise is preposterous.

Even evangelicals with a higher view of Scripture may not know how to answer this question when it comes especially to books like Proverbs, Job, Philemon, or 2 John. We may believe every word of Scripture is inspired by God. We may even adhere to the concursive, compatibilistic relationship between divine and human activity in the production of these texts. But did the concursive activity of God and the human authors *always* entail that these authors knew that their texts were God's word? Were the human authors of Scripture always aware in some way of God's concursive activity in the production of holy writ? Asking this question may at first appear to be an exercise in speculation or a subtle form of the intentional fallacy. I believe, however, that an answer to this inquiry can be established by analyzing the internal evidence of the canonical writings themselves as well as by considering the relevant theological judgments derived from the unified testimony of Scripture. The resultant conclusions of this study will aid an increased understanding of several issues including how God has revealed his word to select human beings and how he inspired their writings for God's people across the ages.

In this paper, I will argue that the human authors of Scripture were aware that their writings were inspired of God, and thus, the written, authoritative words of God. To demonstrate this claim, I will first set the context for the discussion by noting the important relationship between inspiration and compatibilism. Next, I will present a series of interconnected biblical evidences that demonstrate that the human authors of Scripture were aware their words were indeed God's words. Lastly, I argue that relevant sections of 1 & 2 Maccabees and Josephus' *Against Apion* support my thesis derived from the biblical evidence.<sup>6</sup>

## Setting the Stage

Before we dive into the various evidences for the thesis above, it will be helpful to set forth some preliminary points that the following discussion will assume and build upon. In setting

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), chap.2, "The New Testament Writings," sec.2, "Development of the Canon," para. 1. Ebook. For a similar view, see Lee McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 250–1.

<sup>6</sup> Though others have argued this thesis elsewhere as my sources will show, this article provides a helpful, concise articulation of the biblical evidence for such authorial inspiration-awareness for both Old and New Testaments in the context of a concursive view of inspiration along with a discussion of the way certain texts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Period and of Josephus contrast with the biblical evidence. The view this article advances is an often-under-discussed element of the concursive nature of inspiration.

the stage this way, I will not offer extended proofs for these foundational points, since that has been done sufficiently elsewhere.

The first element that must be discussed by way of introduction is the nature of inspiration. Inspiration may be defined as follows: Inspiration is that mode of the Holy Spirit's supernatural, revelatory work in which he sovereignly and concursively bore along human authors so that what they wrote is the very word of God, breathed out by the Spirit and entirely truthful.<sup>7</sup> This supernatural work of God in bearing along these authors did not involve the suspension of their will, rationality, or personality, but it involved God sovereignly moving the writer so that his words simply were God's words.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, John Owen wrote, "Though their mind and understanding were used in the choice of words . . . yet they were so guided, that their words were not their own, but immediately supplied to them."<sup>9</sup> This principle extends across the various genres of literature contained in Scripture, and even to cases where source material may have been used by the human author. Further, in his providence, God set apart and preparatorily endowed the human authors with the backgrounds, lineages, educations, and experiences they needed to be the instruments of God's inspiring work.<sup>10</sup> But when the time of the textual composition came, God inspired these texts' very words, or more precisely, these words and the speech acts they form such that they are exactly God's words and speech acts.<sup>11</sup>

If it is true that "God was sovereignly at work, superintending the process of composing the Scriptures so that the end result manifests his divine intention without overriding the intentions of the human author,"<sup>12</sup> then we must conceive of Scriptural composition in compatibilist terms. God's absolute sovereignty and determination is compatible with the human authors' active and deliberate agency as they thought, studied previous revelation, chose words, and wrote their carefully formulated speech acts upon parchment and papyri. As Randall Johnson persuasively argues in his article "Compatibilism and the Inspiration of Scripture," any other formulation of human free will and God's sovereignty such as absolute determinism or any form of incompatibilism will inevitably devolve into either a mechanical dictation theory of inspiration or a dynamic inspiration theory – neither of which has been historically accepted by

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<sup>7</sup> This is my definition, though, like any theological definition, it is developed in conversation with other definitions, of which, in the case of inspiration, there are numerous. For a sampling of the best of these, see the following: "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition," *JETS* 21.4 (1978): 291 which states, "We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word." Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 1:329: "inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit to produce the Bible through human authors so that it is God's Word just as surely as the breath of our mouths produces our own words." My definition is my attempt to collate the best of what may be seen in the various definitions given. See also the lengthy but comprehensive summary of what verbal-plenary inspiration is in Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 228. See also his thorough discussions in pp.111–228.

<sup>8</sup> See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1874), 1:156–7.

<sup>9</sup> John Owen, *The Divine Original of the Scripture*, in vol. 16 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. by William H. Goold, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 305.

<sup>10</sup> See Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), 154–8.

<sup>11</sup> For the nexus of words and speech acts in God's act of inspiration, see Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 85–86.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024), 224.

evangelicals, and, more importantly, is contrary to the biblical evidence.<sup>13</sup> John Webster helpfully asserts, “To say that those moved by the Spirit spoke from God is to say that Scripture rises from no violation of the literary integrity of its writers, but the opposite: ἀπὸ θεοῦ indicates both the sovereign origin and moving power of their authorship, and its genuinely human phenomenality.”<sup>14</sup>

Taking as our starting points that all Scripture is “breathed out by God” and that God sovereignly carried along the human authors who wrote with full volitional and mental engagement (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pt 1:19–21), we are now able to ask whether these authors of Scripture were always aware that their written words were also and primarily God’s very own words.<sup>15</sup> Does this concursive activity entail that the human authors always were aware of the inspired nature of their textual compositions? Or were they sometimes unaware of this fact, and thus it was later readers who discovered the inspired nature of their writings? As we will see toward the end of this project, how we answer this question will have significance in other areas of our theology.

### **Evidence for Inspiration-Awareness: Of Covenants, Prophets, and Apostles**

God’s acts of inspiring sacred writings for his covenant people through human authors is directly related to his covenantal economy.<sup>16</sup> And key to answering whether the biblical authors possessed what may be called inspiration-awareness is the nature of their authoritative identity in their covenantal contexts and the nature of God’s initiation in giving his words through them. In this section, I will argue that the biblical presentation of God’s covenantal work of inspiring the texts of specially appointed prophetic and apostolic writers supports my thesis that biblical authors were aware of God’s inspiring activity. First, I will look at the Old Testament and then at the New.

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<sup>13</sup> See Randall K. Johnson, “Compatibilism and the Inspiration of Scripture,” *SBJT* 26.3 (2022): 72–93. The purpose and limited space of this paper will not allow me to marshal biblical evidence for a compatibilist plenary verbal model of inspiration. For such a defense, see Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 289–300. For definition’s sake, a mechanical dictation model entails God dictating all the words to the human authors, thereby diminishing their active agency in the process. A dynamic inspiration holds that God inspired only the authors directly, and thus, they “were given special insight into the things of God,” but the text is only inspired indirectly, (Johnson, “Compatibilism and the Inspiration of Scripture,” 74).

<sup>14</sup> John Webster, “On the Inspiration of Holy Scripture,” in *Conception, Reception, and the Spirit*, eds. J. Gordon McConville and Lloyd K. Pieteresen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 249.

<sup>15</sup> I am not discussing here the question of when these books were formally brought together into a recognized list by the believing community. While related, this is still a separate question. What I develop here is a theological assessment based on the biblical evidence of whether the authors of Scripture always knew in their writing activity guided by the Spirit that they were giving inspired Scripture, canonical writings from God. Given the circumstances and the particular book in question, the widespread recognition of a book as inspired Scripture amongst the broader believing community could have taken time.

<sup>16</sup> See Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 21–68. Although I would not necessarily agree with all Kline’s conclusions or methodology, his point is excellent that God’s covenant making activity from Moses onward is intrinsically bound up with written authoritative documentation.

## Old Testament

This authoritative identity for the OT authors was that of “prophet.” After the Exodus from Egypt, the office of prophet in Israel was uniquely tied to the Mosaic covenant.<sup>17</sup> The prophets not only called Israel to covenant faithfulness, but they foretold the coming seed of the woman, the Messiah, of whom Moses wrote. The concept of prophet in the OT can also be expansive beyond an official office as we will see below. However, both the official prophets of Israel and those in Israel endowed in a broader sense with the Spirit of prophecy all served in reference to the Mosaic covenant.<sup>18</sup> And it is this self-consciously prophetic activity in its covenantal context which produced the Scriptures of the OT.

In the NT, the whole OT is frequently described as the work of the prophets or is given titles related to the prophets. In Luke 24, Jesus rebukes the disciples on the road to Emmaus, because they were “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (v. 25). Lest one erroneously conclude that Jesus only meant books claiming to be written by those in the office of prophet, Luke explains by saying that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (v. 27). “The prophets” (v. 25) is Jesus’ way of referring to all the authors of Scripture. Titles or phrases like *Moses/the Law and the Prophets* for the whole OT feature extensively in the NT (e.g., Matt 5:17; Lk 16:16; 29, 31; Jn 1:45; Acts 24:14; 26:22; 28:23; Rom 3:21).<sup>19</sup> In Romans, Paul speaks of the gospel being promised “beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2), and he concludes the book by referring again to the whole OT as “the prophetic writings” (16:26). In a *locus classicus* of the doctrine of inspiration, 2 Peter 1:19, Peter refers to the OT as “the prophetic word.”

This denominating of all the OT as prophecy may be puzzling at first. David and Solomon did not hold the office of prophet, and we do not know who wrote some OT books (e.g., Job, Esther). It is important to recognize that it was not necessary to hold the office of prophet to be even occasionally a bearer of the prophetic word or the Spirit of prophecy (e.g., 1 Sam 10:5–13; 19:20–24; 23:1–12; Job 38:1; 40:6). The non-official prophetic authors of Scripture we know of

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<sup>17</sup> I say “after the Exodus” because before this time, God’s prophets included men such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Isaac (for more on this, see James M. Hamilton Jr. *Typology: Understanding the Bible’s Promise-Shaped Patterns* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022], 92–111). However, after the Exodus and the cutting of the Mosaic covenant, God’s prophetic gifts were uniquely tied to the Mosaic covenant, as God’s redemptive purposes would be fulfilled through the nation of Israel from whom, in accordance with the Abrahamic covenant, would come the Messiah, the true Prophet. It was by Moses and the prophets serving under the Mosaic covenant that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were given.

<sup>18</sup> Though this prophetic activity is tied to the Mosaic covenantal context, it was by the Spirit of Christ the prophets gave their oracles (1 Pt 1:11) — meaning that the Son is the only Mediator by which any of God’s people have ever been saved and received God’s saving word. Thus, the prophets gave their words from the true Prophet, the Son, who was established in eternity as such according to the Covenant of Redemption. On the basis of this Covenant of Redemption and upon the event of the fall and the giving of the first gospel promise (Gen 3:15), the Son of God has acted as Mediator and Prophet of his people, giving forth his word progressively until he came in the flesh. For more on this, see John Owen, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, in vol. 1 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. by William H. Goold, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 85–96.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, “the Law” is prophetic as well because Moses was the ultimate prophet before the coming of Christ.



“were rulers, courtiers, Temple-officials and wise men.”<sup>20</sup> They held or were related to positions of leadership in God’s covenant community. David, the king of Israel wrote, “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me. . .” (2 Sam 23:1-3). Solomon in Ecclesiastes writes that the words of his book “are given by one Shepherd” (Eccl. 12:11) – a title that hardly fits himself or any other leader in Israel.<sup>21</sup> These and other similar authors may not have been prophets like Jeremiah or Ezekiel, but when we speak of their inspired writings, we know “God superintended their authors just as he did the prophets and their scribes, so that the words they wrote counted as the words of God. And that is tantamount to affirming that all Scripture is prophetic, whatever else it may be.”<sup>22</sup>

The authors of the OT were not simply anyone who decided to write about the Israelite religion while being unwittingly guided providentially to do so. They were men who held the Spirit-anointed offices of prophet, king, and likely even priest (e.g., Ezra).<sup>23</sup> They were sages and divinely approved leaders amongst God’s covenant people. They wrote God’s word, and only God initiates the communication of his word. And as we will see through specific examples below, the pattern the OT itself presents to us starting with Moses is that these covenantally-situated prophetic authors self-consciously delivered God’s word to God’s people.

In Exodus 24, Moses told the people of Israel at Mount Sinai “all the words of the LORD and all the rules” that he had received on the mountain after the people fearfully begged Moses to act as covenant mediator for them (see 20:18-21). In 24:4-8, we read that “Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD” in what is called “the Book of the Covenant.” Moses confirmed the covenant with Israel by sprinkling this book, the altar he built, and the people with the blood of sacrificed oxen.

After this event, Yahweh called Moses up on the mountain saying, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction” (24:12). Later in 32:15-16, we read that God gave Moses two tablets of the testimony written on the front and back. “The tablets were the word of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets” (v. 16). After Moses broke the tablets upon seeing Israel’s idolatry (ch. 32), God called Moses back up to the mountain to give him the words again (34:1-2). In 34:27-28, we read, “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” This testimony, the tablets of the covenant, Moses later placed in the ark of

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<sup>20</sup> Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 67.

<sup>21</sup> For a thorough survey of the debate regarding authorship of Ecclesiastes and a defense of Solomonic authorship, see Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 254-267.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew G. Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire: The Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah*, NSBT 29, ed. D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 258.

<sup>23</sup> Some prophets came from priestly families, like Jeremiah (Jer 1:1) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3).

the covenant under the mercy seat according to Yahweh's previous commandment (Ex 40:20; 25:16, 21). The Lord gave this initial covenant document to Moses and his people, and from this document's home in the ark, God said he would continue to give covenant revelation to Moses for the people (40:21; cf. Num 7:89).

After the first generation of Israelites perished in the wilderness for their refusal to enter the land of promise, Yahweh renewed the covenant with this second generation. There, on the plains of Moab, Moses "wrote this law and gave it to the priests" to be read before all the people when they gathered every seven years at the place God will choose (Deut 31:9, 10–12). In 31:24–29, we read, "When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end," he commanded the Levites who carried the ark to put "this Book of the Law" by the ark as a "witness" against the rebellious people and the evil that will befall them "in the days to come." The "Book of the Law" here would have been at least the main content and structure of the Pentateuch as we have it now,<sup>24</sup> including the instructions regarding the coming of a future prophet like Moses who would act as a mediator and have God's word in his mouth, speaking with God face to face (18:15–19; cf. 34:10–12; Ex 33:11; Num 12:1–9).<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Moses must have written the prediction of the curses coming upon Israel along with a greater Exodus-like restoration of the people (30:1–10; cf. 31:24–29), thereby anticipating the new covenant.

Moses' divinely commanded, covenantal act of writing God's words sets the pattern for the future. God saved his people through the Exodus, gave them his covenant, and commanded that his word to them be written as a testimony for future generations as well as the one then present (Deut 31:9–13, 24–29; cf. 29:15–28). God did not give this written word to just anyone, but he gave it through Moses upon whom he conferred public prophetic authority by fulfillment of his prophecies and signs and wonders.<sup>26</sup> John Sailhamer notes that the written

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. John H. Sailhamer who writes, "This 'book' may have been all or part of the Mosaic Pentateuch" (*The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 272). I intend my statement to be a bit stronger than Sailhamer's here, since I believe that in order to preserve a meaningful notion of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (see Lk 24:44; Jn 5:45–47), we must affirm that the essential content, meaning, and message of the five books is Mosaic in origin, even if certain sections such as the death of Moses may have been added by Spirit-guided authors through inspiration. Of course, Sailhamer also wanted to affirm a meaningful notion of Mosaic authorship, but I believe my statement makes it more explicit and coherent.

<sup>25</sup> While I affirm that Moses does have in view the whole prophetic succession in Deut 18:15–22, I believe that the nexus of texts cited above indicate that Moses primarily speaks in vv.15–19 of a particular prophet who is not just given God's words but is given them as a covenant mediator who speaks with God face to face. This could be said of no prophet after him, except for the incarnate Word himself, Jesus Christ.

<sup>26</sup> Robert I. Vasholz, *The Old Testament Canon in the Old Testament Church: The Internal Rationale for Old Testament Canonicity* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 34–40. In this book, Vasholz makes the helpful point that "the rationale for canonicity pertains to the authors of scripture receiving an overt divine 'stamp-of-approval' witnessed by an audience of his contemporaries aside from the kind of literature he wrote or whether or not he gave an eyewitness account of his information" (29, emphasis original). He argues from Scriptural examples that this "stamp-of-approval" from God is the sign of fulfilled prediction (34–68). In order for a book to be received as authoritative Scripture, it had to have been written by one upon whom God publicly conferred authority and validated by the sign of fulfilled prediction. Though it is possible that fulfilled prediction was indeed the way God bore witness to the authority he conferred upon authors of canonical Scripture, I would like more evidence than Vasholz provides. However, I believe his point is valid that biblical authors were only those who bore God's public

book as “a medium of divine revelation . . . was the great legacy that Moses passed on to future generations, a written book whose words were the Words of God.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the succession of prophets Moses anticipated, whose “task was the elaboration and application of the ancient covenant sanctions,” picks up on Moses’ pattern when they wrote down God’s words which were essentially “extensions of the covenantal documents of Moses.”<sup>28</sup> Taking our starting place with what is now the Former Prophets, this succession began with Joshua who was a Moses-like figure appointed by God to lead his people into the promised land. He wrote covenant commandments for the people “in the Book of the Law of God” after they had experienced the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises of entrance into the land (Josh 24:25–28).<sup>29</sup> Frame writes, “As with the words of Moses, the words of Joshua are God’s words, put with the other words of God with the ark, in God’s sanctuary, with a stone as God’s witness against Israel. Thus, a pattern is established for additions to the canon.”<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, prophets self-consciously wrote authoritative records of the events of Israel’s history which we now possess in Samuel through Kings. Samuel wrote the rights and duties of kingship and stored up his writing before the Lord as Moses and Joshua had done (1 Sam 10:25). The “acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the Chronicles of Gad the seer . . .” (1 Chron 29:29). Solomon’s acts were written “in the history of Nathan the prophet and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam” (2 Chron 9:29). Jehu, the son of Hanani, who was a seer, wrote his chronicles, “which are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel” (2 Chron 20:34; cf. 19:2). That these “Chronicles” appear to be the basic source material for the final composition of Samuel–Kings does not injure the point that these books as we have them now are prophetic. If the source material was prophetic in origin, then the final composition of the material had to be done by one with some kind of prophetic authority, as attested by the NT’s including these books in the category of the “Prophets” (e.g., Luke 24:44).<sup>31</sup> Stephen Wellum correctly observes that the historical books “serve as commentaries on God’s covenant relationship with Israel while anticipating a greater, new covenant to come.”<sup>32</sup>

The prophets responsible for the Latter Prophets (Isaiah–Malachi) served as God’s messengers of the covenant and self-consciously wrote texts recording their ministry of calling the people

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stamp of approval via some sign that they bore the Spirit of prophecy. Further, these human authors were those in official roles of leadership in Israel, such as prophets, priests, or kings/rulers.

<sup>27</sup> Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 58–9. Of course, not all the prophets in the OT wrote down their words from God. But those who did were following in the pattern set by Moses, God’s mouthpiece.

<sup>29</sup> See Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 275.

<sup>30</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 110.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 1:393.

<sup>32</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 276. While the term “historical books” is common, it is not the best descriptor for these books, which, while indeed recounting history, do not present bare history but rather are true histories inspired by the Spirit and bursting with prophetic patterns and theological significance.



back to the obligations of the Mosaic covenant and pointing them to faith in the coming salvation and revelation of God in his Messiah.<sup>33</sup> The evidence of their self-conscious bearing of God's words includes but goes beyond the frequency of the phrase "Thus says the LORD" in their writings. The prophetic origin and God-initiated composition of these books is often asserted in other ways as well. For instance, in Isaiah 30:8–9a, Yahweh commands Isaiah to "go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. For they are a rebellious people . . ." <sup>34</sup> This idea of writing God's word as a witness for future generations connects back to Deuteronomy 31:9, 26: "Then Moses wrote this law. . . When Moses had finished writing the words of this law to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites . . . 'Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark . . . that it may be there for a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are . . .'" <sup>35</sup> Thus, we see within Isaiah a growing textual work the author of which views as God's word, just as the Law is God's word. Similarly, God also commands Habakkuk to "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets . . ." (Hab 2:2).

The divine initiative of the prophetic activity of inscripturation is particularly evident in Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 30:2, we read "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, when I will restore the fortunes of my people . . ." Again, in Jeremiah 36:2, Yahweh commands Jeremiah, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today." After Jeremiah wrote all the words of the Lord to him through Baruch, his secretary/scribe, the scroll was read to King Jehoiakim who burned it entirely (36:4–31). But "Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them" (36:32).<sup>36</sup> Regarding this re-written scroll, Duane Garrett writes, "The scroll was not simply a miscellaneous collection of prophetic oracles, however important that would be in its own right; it was the first edition of a canonical book of Scripture."<sup>37</sup> These examples set the pattern that the prophets and their scribes self-consciously wrote their texts knowing that these words were God's words. Importantly, as we will see below, in the writings of these prophets we see an expectation for new revelation from Yahweh to come when he

<sup>33</sup> See Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 58–9.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah also seems to allude to the developing text of his own prophecies in 29:11, 18: "And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. . . In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see." See also Isa 8:16: "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples." Though the immediate referent of what is to be written seems to be the particular prophecies in the specific contexts, the broader reasons God gives for his commands to write in addition to the unity of the message of these particular prophecies to the whole of Isaiah's book all point toward God's initiation in every step of the composition process. This becomes even clearer in the example of Jeremiah below.

<sup>35</sup> Moses clearly intends the "you" to include future generations as seen in his subsequent comment that "after my death . . . in the days to come evil will befall you" (Deut 31:29).

<sup>36</sup> This account of the written words of the Lord is an excellent example of the development of a prophetic canonical book with implications for canonical books outside the genre of prophecy. See Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, 233–263, who provides a very helpful discussion, though I would disagree with some details of his work.

<sup>37</sup> Duane Garrett and Calvin F. Pearson, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2022), 335.

accomplishes his “last days” salvation through the Messiah and establishes the new covenant (Is 2:1–5; 6:1–3; 9:1–7; 11:1–12:6; 42:1–9; 52:13–55:13; Jer 30:1–33:26; 30:24, cf. 23:20; cf. Ezek 20:33–44; 34:25–37:28).

The covenantally-situated authors of the books of the Writings also leave behind evidence of self-conscious communication of God’s words, even though the mode of God’s revelatory activity to certain authors sometimes differed from the official prophets. King David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel,” claimed, “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue” (2 Sam 23:1, 2). The sons of Asaph and other official musical families appointed by David are said to have regularly prophesied in their role as musicians (1 Chron.25:1–8). In the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes his work by writing, “. . . the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. . . and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd” (Eccl 12:9, 10–11). Eaton comments here saying, “Although his words are the result of his own reflections, at the same time they come from God. . . The Preacher (or his editor) is conscious of his own activity (v. 10) with regard to both the form (v. 9) and content (v. 10) of his work; yet he contends that the finished product is the word of God as well as the word of man.”<sup>38</sup> Prophetic oracle or history is not the only form of inspired literature in which the authors knew that their written words were given by one Shepherd, God himself. This reality is stamped upon royal and sagely poetry as well.

A closer look at 2 Peter 1:19–21 will prove helpful. In vv. 20–21, Peter writes, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Peter speaks of the entire OT by referring to “prophecy of Scripture.”

Although, debate surrounds how to translate and interpret the phrase *ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως* [ESV: “someone’s own interpretation”], it likely refers to the prophets’ own interpretation or imagination, as evidenced in part by the content of the grounding statement of v. 21.<sup>39</sup> In v. 21, we see that the prophetic writers of Scripture did not move themselves or originate by their own volition the communication of God’s word. Webster notes about the biblical authors that “there is a Spirit-given impulse to write.”<sup>40</sup> The prophetic human authors were “carried along [*φερόμενοι*] by the Holy Spirit,” which “implies an *effectual* work, much stronger than mere guidance. . . [and] involves a sovereign, ‘constraining’ influence of the Spirit” without negating in any way the authors compatible active agency.<sup>41</sup> They actively wrote in step with this divine impetus but not by their own independent decision. In fact, when a prophet spoke from himself

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<sup>38</sup> Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 175. Cf. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 372.

<sup>39</sup> Space does not allow for an engagement with the debate here. See Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 210–213. NIV: “. . . no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.” Cf. NET: “No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination . . .”

<sup>40</sup> Webster, “On the Inspiration of Holy Scripture,” 245.

<sup>41</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 292.

without being sent by the Lord, he was condemned as a false prophet (e.g., Deut 18:20–22; Ezek 13:1–7).<sup>42</sup> Regarding the prophetic awareness of divine revelation, Bavinck writes the following:

Finally, the prophets are conscious, when speaking or writing, of proclaiming not their own word but the word of the Lord. Indeed, the word was not revealed to them for themselves but for others. They were not at liberty to hide it. They had to speak (Jer. 20:7, 9; Exod. 3, 4; Ezek. 3; Amos 3:8; Jonah 1:2) and therefore do not speak to win human favor or out of calculation (Isa. 56:10; Mic. 3:5, 11). Precisely for that reason they are prophets, speakers in YHWH's name and of his word. . . The writing of the prophets may and must be derived from a similar impulse.<sup>43</sup>

This divine impulse to write certainly must have manifested itself in various ways, and we should avoid seeking descriptions of what this experience would have looked like in every case. However, we should observe that it was a reality of which the prophetic authors were conscious though they wrote with their own volition and creative activity – all the while being sovereignly carried along by the Spirit so that they communicated God's covenant words exactly. This reality transcended whether the author was an official, life-long prophet like Isaiah or whether he was another God-appointed official leader in Israel who was endowed with the Spirit of prophecy for a particular task. It also transcended the genre of the inspired writings – whether law, history, poetry, prophetic oracle, or apocalyptic literature. The pattern that emerges from the OT's internal evidence strongly indicates that the authors were official covenant-leaders endowed with the Spirit of prophecy like Moses, the first and archetypal OT author, and that they knew their words were God's words.

## The New Testament

In the New Testament, we see the arrival of the expectation of Moses and the Prophets for a future work of God to bring about a new and greater exodus and covenant for God's people through the promised Deliverer. In Luke 4:16–30, Jesus proclaims in the synagogue from Isaiah 61:1–2 that the eschatological “good news” coming with God's great end times salvation has finally arrived – in himself. After his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus reminds his disciples that all that happened to him was in fulfillment of everything written about him in the Law, Prophets, and Writings. “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Lk 24:46). C.E. Hill convincingly argues that the notion here and in Acts 1:8 of the proclamation of the name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem is drawing from Isaiah 2:1–4.<sup>44</sup> Regarding this going forth of God's end-times word

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<sup>42</sup> See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:390.

<sup>43</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:390–391. Bavinck goes on to discuss on p. 393 the “strictly poetic books” like Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Psalms. While he does not directly refer to them as prophecy as above, he does write, “Both lyrical and didactic poetry in Israel are deployed in service of divine revelation. David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, spoke by the Spirit of the Lord, whose word was on his tongue (2 Sam. 23:1–3).”

<sup>44</sup> C.E. Hill, “God's Speech in These Last Days: The New Testament Canon as an Eschatological Phenomenon,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in the Service of the Church*, eds. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 207–12.

from Jerusalem seen in Acts, he writes, “The eschatological setting for the going forth of the new ‘law,’ the ‘word of the LORD from Jerusalem’ is announced at the beginning of Isaiah’s prophecy, ‘It shall come to pass in the latter days’ (Isa. 2:2).”<sup>45</sup>

This arrival of the good news of God’s new covenant work is the setting from which the new written revelation of the Triune God springs.<sup>46</sup> Given the pattern of covenant-revelation we saw in the OT, when we read the OT’s prophecy of a new covenant it becomes evident that “there would have been clear expectations that this new covenant, like the old covenant, would be accompanied by the appropriate *written texts* to testify to the terms of the new arrangement that God was establishing with his people.”<sup>47</sup> This reality adds significant color to our reading of Jesus’ promise to the apostles to send the Holy Spirit, the gift of the new covenant. Christ said “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth, because he will not speak from himself but whatever he hears he will speak and he will tell you the things to come” (Jn 16:13; cf. 14:26, 15:26–27).<sup>48</sup> Jesus promises the Spirit to equip the Apostles with God’s word and truth, a significant element of which will be the written texts accompanying the new covenant. Wellum writes, “As God spoke in the past and gave covenant writings, so in Christ, and through the apostles, we have NT covenant writings for the church that completes God’s unfolding word-act revelation until Christ returns.”<sup>49</sup> The formation of the NT was not an accidental phenomenon. Like the Old Testament before it, it is from its inception the word of God given by God to his covenant people via authoritative agents.

Thus, the NT authors possessed an awareness that their written words were indeed God’s authoritative words. They saw their writing activity as fulfilling and building upon the prophetic Scriptures of the OT, even if in their lifetimes they never came to know all the books that would be in this new covenant textual revelation. Wellum insightfully articulates the following:

Previously, the prophets spoke and wrote God’s word, but our Lord is the *Word* of God (John 1:1–4), which the NT directly bears witness to (Eph 3:2–6). The era that our Lord has inaugurated is the “last days” and the dawning of the new creation. Due to Christ’s coming and the fullness of revelation in him, the prophetic word is now confirmed to be completely truthful (2 Pet 1:19; cf. Heb 1:3). In this sense, then, the apostles know that their writings, which are the new covenant documents that expound the full revelation in Christ for the church, are fully authoritative, true, and “greater” than the Old Testament revelation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, “God’s Speech in These Last Days,” 210.

<sup>46</sup> Hill, “God’s Speech in These Last Days” does a magisterial job of demonstrating this point throughout the article in addition to answering challenges to this notion.

<sup>47</sup> Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 166.

<sup>48</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>49</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 383.

<sup>50</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 280–1, emphasis original. When Wellum says “greater” he means “not in an inspiration sense, but due to the coming of the Word made flesh” (280).

Although God had spoken “in many times and in many ways” through the prophets, the apostles and their associates were self-consciously the bearers of the last-days written word of God concerning his Son (Heb 1:1).

The NT authors’ writings evidence their self-conscious communication of God’s word. The Gospel writers intentionally locate their message of the gospel of Jesus Christ in connection with the authority of the OT, presenting their works as equally authoritative and even “greater” given the Christ at the center of the gospel. The allusions and quotations to the OT abounding on every page of the four Gospels form an intentional link between these works and the OT. The Gospel writers possessed a canon-consciousness – an awareness of an authoritative body of Scripture and an intentional association of their work “with that broader (authoritative) literary context.”<sup>51</sup>

This association with the OT achieved by the Gospel writers was meant not merely to give a generic context in which to understand the story of Jesus. It serves to identify their Gospels as God’s new covenant written word proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 1:1; Mk 1:1). Matthew’s words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” along with the following genealogy intentionally link his work back to Genesis 5:1 and to Chronicles, the last book of the TaNaK and the only other biblical book that begins with a prominent genealogy. Thus, Matthew indicates that his Gospel picks up where the Old Testament left off.<sup>52</sup> Also, John combines his frequent use of the OT citation formula “it is written” (6:31; 6:45; 8:17; 12:14; etc.) with his statement about his own Gospel: “these are written” (20:31).<sup>53</sup> He is the one who bore witness [ὁ μαρτυρῶν] and wrote (Jn 21:20), even as Christ said his disciples would bear witness [μαρτυρέω] since the Spirit will bear witness (Jn 15:26–27).

Other indications of the NT authors’ conscious delivery of God’s written word may be briefly surveyed. Paul quoted Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 in 1 Timothy 5:18, referring to both as “Scripture,” indicating that both Paul and his associate Luke were aware that this Gospel was inspired.<sup>54</sup> In 1 Corinthians 14:38, Paul writes, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” As the OT was read in Israel’s synagogues, so Paul commands his letters to be read publicly in the gathered church, indicating his conviction that his written words were God’s words (Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Cor. 10:9; 1 Tim 4:13).<sup>55</sup> Peter refers to Paul’s “letters” being

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<sup>51</sup> Ched Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020), 61. See the rest of the excellent work by Spellman, who was among those from whom I first learned of an intentional association of the biblical books together by the biblical authors.

<sup>52</sup> See Jeremy M. Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 186–8.

<sup>53</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutics: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> By implication, Acts must be included within this category of Scripture as well given the literary unity of Luke–Acts. Additionally, this gives evidence that apostolic authority was given to those in the apostolic circle, such that they could write Scripture as well.

<sup>55</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 286.



twisted by some people who do the same to the “other Scriptures” (2 Pt 3:15–16) thereby acknowledging the canonical status of a collection of Paul’s letters.<sup>56</sup> Lastly, in his Apocalypse, John receives the command to write what he sees directly from Christ (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; cf. 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). Additionally, “John alludes extensively to the Old Testament prophetic books, signaling his conscious dependence on and a place within this tradition.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, we can appreciate Wellum’s assertion: “Although the apostles were human, by the Spirit’s work in them, they were conscious that they were writing God’s word.”<sup>58</sup>

## Answering Some Objections

One may object that the notion of a biblical author being self-conscious of giving God’s authoritative written word strips the biblical books of their frequent occasional and natural character since at least some of these books were written with a unique situation in view (e.g., Philemon; 2, 3 John, etc.). Francis Turretin argued that writing in light of a specific occasion and writing by the command of God are not mutually exclusive. “They could write both on the presentation of an opportunity and yet by a divine command and by divine inspiration.”<sup>59</sup> After all, it is not as if the occasions to write occurred apart from God’s sovereign design nor were they “employed of [the authors’] own accord.” He goes on to assert that God’s command to write could take an explicit form similar to what we see in Jeremiah 36:2, Revelation 1:11, and elsewhere, or it could be more “implicit and general.” Citing 1 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21, Turretin says that “immediate inspiration and the internal impulse of the Holy Spirit by which the writers were influenced was in the place of a command.” Nevertheless, this “inspiration of the things to be written” is essentially God’s command.<sup>60</sup> “The command of Christ was the principle impelling cause and the occasion offered the secondary impelling cause (as it were less principle) which they knew how to use for the glory of God and the edification of men, just as the apostles preached both by command and by occasion.”<sup>61</sup> The biblical authors’ inscripturating activity entailed normal human agency and the compatible and variously manifesting impulse of the Spirit under which they operated.

One may also ask about the nature of the two letters Paul sent to Corinth which are now lost to us.<sup>62</sup> Were they inspired Scripture? Were they just as inspired as the canonical 1 and 2 Corinthians which we possess, but somehow they became lost because the Spirit did not want us to have them? I would argue that they were not inspired *Scripture*, though they were authoritative for the church at Corinth. Hill puts it this way:

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<sup>56</sup> See Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible*, 79–83.

<sup>57</sup> Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48, ed. D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 211.

<sup>58</sup> Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 383.

<sup>59</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave, (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1994), 1:60.

<sup>60</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:60.

<sup>61</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:61.

<sup>62</sup> See 1 Cor 5:9–13; 2 Cor 1:23; 2:3–4; 7:8, 12. For discussion of these letters and their relationship to 1 and 2 Corinthians, see David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, CSC (Nashville: TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 9–14.

Paul's 'lost' letter(s) to the Corinthians and possibly his letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16, if it is not essentially identical to Ephesians) are not a problem for the concept of canon, any more than the 'loss' of many of the prophets' words or of Jesus' own words (cf. John 21:25). These letters may be affirmed to have been authoritative, but not canonical and never intended to be included (by decision of Paul or of his successors) in the authoritative edition for the churches.<sup>63</sup>

I would argue that while they were authoritative for the Corinthians because Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, these 'lost' epistles were not *Scripture* breathed out by the Spirit and thus authoritative for *all* the covenant community. Paul gave inerrant teaching and commands bearing God's authority in these lost letters, but they were not God-breathed Scripture, and Paul, I argue, was aware of this. As I have contended throughout, the Spirit's special work of breathing out the Scripture while bearing along human authors was a special work of which the human authors were cognizant as it was occurring. This would not have pertained to these lost letters. Thus, while the apostles were not alive when all their inspired writings were compiled together and recognized by the church catholic, the principle of canonization began with the Spirit's work in and through the apostles who knowingly wrote as they were borne along.

Another possible objection might be that not every biblical book can be said to have such identifiable prophetic or apostolic origin or attestation. However, it is one thing to say that not every biblical book was written by an official prophet or an apostle. That is true. But it is incorrect to say that there is any biblical book which is not prophetic or apostolic. As we noted above, the Spirit of prophecy extended beyond those in an official line of prophets to those who nevertheless still sometimes received words and visions from the Lord, like David (2 Sam 23:1–2), Solomon (1 Kgs 9:2; Eccl. 12:9–11), and Daniel (Dan 7:1).<sup>64</sup> As Geisler and Nix write, "It was necessary to have prophetic gifts in order to write canonical Scripture, because all inspired writing is 'prophetic.'"

Further, every NT book was written either by an apostle or an apostolic associate. Mark was a close associate of Peter as well as being within the broader apostolic circle (1 Pt 5:13; Acts 12:12–17, 25; Col 4:10–11).<sup>65</sup> Luke's close relationship with Paul is evident in Acts and several of Paul's epistles, and Paul bears witness to the Scriptural status of Luke's Gospel (1 Tim 5:18; Acts 20–28; Col 4:14; Phlm 24). And while it is difficult to say with certainty who wrote Hebrews, all the viably proposed non-Pauline answers have been apostolic co-workers. Additionally, the author's reference to traveling with Timothy in 13:23 along with his apparent identity as one who heard directly from the apostles (2:3) points toward his qualification to write such an epistle.<sup>66</sup> Jude was most likely the brother of James of Jerusalem, and therefore had obvious ties

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<sup>63</sup> Hill, "God's Speech in These Last Days," 240–241.

<sup>64</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, revised and expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 212.

<sup>65</sup> See the discussion on Mark and his authorship of the Gospel which bears his name in Benjamin L. Glad, *Handbook on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 105–106.

<sup>66</sup> For a helpful survey of the discussion on Hebrews' authorship and date, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, BTCF, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, et. al. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2015), 2–6.

with apostolic authority and mission (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19).<sup>67</sup> These co-workers could share by divine appointment in the special apostolic task of writing new covenant Scripture.

Lastly, one may object to this paper's thesis based on Caiaphas' unwitting prophecy in John 11:50–51. Speaking to the plotting chief priests and Pharisees, Caiaphas stated that it was better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to perish (11:50). John comments that "He did not say this of his own accord, but being the high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only . . ." (11:51–52a). Some may take this instance to demonstrate that the prophets and apostles need not always know their words were God's words, since Caiaphas prophesied unwittingly. This objection has some weight at first glance. But only at first glance.

John includes this account because it ironically shows the abject spiritual poverty of the Jewish leaders represented by the high priest who should have understood Christ to be the fulfillment of God's prophetic word. The high priest was the spiritual leader of the Jews. Further, in Israel's history, God gave the Urim and Thummim to the high priest which were used in the determination of divine guidance and will (Ex 28:30; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65). If anyone should have responded to the words of Christ who was the fulfillment of the prophets and the Levitical system, it should have been the high priest.<sup>68</sup> God's act of giving this profound prophetic word to an unwitting high priest powerfully illustrated the defunct and spiritually useless state of an office that was supposed to faithfully keep *Torah* and lead the people. Caiaphas asserts that the council knew nothing at all nor did they understand (11:49, 50), yet it was he who ironically did not understand (cf. 3:10). The inadequate type of the high priest now gives way to the true Lamb who will die for the people (11:51–52) and to the true anointed Priest (12:1–8).<sup>69</sup> This unique prophetic word is a sign of judgment which holds Caiaphas and the council accountable.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, clarity is gained on the unique phenomenon of this instance of prophecy by comparing it to John's presentation of the faithful biblical authors. In 12:41, John writes, "Isaiah

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<sup>67</sup> See the discussion on Jude as the brother of James of Jerusalem and thus the half-brother of Jesus in Edwin A. Blum, *Jude*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.12, *Hebrews-Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 381–2.

<sup>68</sup> The high priesthood remained through the Second Temple period while the Davidic throne and the office of the prophet ceased. When prophecy came again at the arrival of the true Davidic King, Jesus Christ, the high priesthood embodied the uncircumcised heart that resists God's word.

<sup>69</sup> I suggest that the anointing of Jesus by Mary in 12:1–8 should be read in context with the priestly imagery and language started in 11:45 with the chief priests and the high priests, continued in the reference to Jesus dying for the people (11:51–52; cf. 1:29), sustained in the repeated mention of Passover drawing near (11:55–12:1), and landing in the anointing of Jesus for his death (12:2–8) – a death which would take away the sins of the world (1:29). This priestly imagery being invoked need not be to the exclusion of the kingly imagery invoked by anointing since the very point is that these offices come together in Jesus.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Henri A.G. Blocher, "God and the Scripture Writers: The Question of Double Authorship," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 510: "God, in judgment, mockingly plays on the words Caiaphas utters. . ."; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, transl. by John Pringle (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 1:453. Cf. his whole discussion of the passage on pp. 452–4.

said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.” Although not a biblical author but still a prophet (Gen 20:7), Abraham rejoiced that he would see Christ’s day. “He saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). Significantly, in John 5, Jesus rebukes the Jewish leaders saying, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me . . . For if you believed Moses you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (Jn 5:39, 40, 46). Just as with Caiaphas in John 11:50–51, the Jewish religious leaders had the words of God and missed the very substance of them, as is common theme throughout the Gospel (1:11, 19–28; 3:1–14; 5:9–46; 7:40–52; 9:28–29; 12:37–43; 19:7).<sup>71</sup> Thus, John’s presentation of Caiaphas does not indicate an absence of prophetic awareness among faithful prophets, priests, and kings in the OT or apostles and apostolic associates in the NT. In fact, Caiaphas’ ironic case is the exception that proves the rule that they did understand their words were from God.

Thus, what we see is a clear biblical pattern that God gave his covenant words to divinely appointed human authors who were self-conscious of the Spirit’s inspiring work as they wrote Scripture. This pattern is further evidenced when one compares Scripture’s testimony with the way early non-biblical sources speak of and relate to Scripture.

### **Evidence for Inspiration-Awareness: The Uniqueness of the Biblical Self-Attestation**

The biblical evidence for the biblical authors’ awareness of divine inspiration set forth above can be confirmed in a secondary way by contrasting it with what we see in 1 & 2 Maccabees and Josephus. In 1 & 2 Maccabees, the author distances his work from the kind of self-conscious authority evident in the biblical books. He repeatedly states in various ways that prophecy had ceased in Israel, and thus, an authoritative word from God could not be found. After Judas initiates the cleansing of the temple after its defilement, the priests decided to pull down the altar and to store it away, “until there should come a prophet to give an answer concerning them” (1 Macc 4:46). In 1 Maccabees 9:27, the author speaks of the great tribulation in Israel, “such as was not since the time that no prophet appeared unto them.” Later in the book, the Jews appoint Simon the high priest as their leader “until there should arise a faithful prophet.” The author’s repetition of the absence of a prophet to give an authoritative word from the Lord on these decisions clearly disqualifies his own book from having the kind of self-consciously prophetic authority we see in the books of Scripture. This reality is further evident at the end of 2 Maccabees 15, where the author writes, “And if I have written well and to the point of my story, this is what I myself desired; but if meanly and indifferently, this is all I could attain unto” (15:38). The author clearly does not view his work as bearing divine authority nor as contributing to the body of canonical books given from God.<sup>72</sup> He was not a prophet nor did he

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. also John 6:30–59; 7:19.

<sup>72</sup> Additionally, in the prologue to Ecclesiasticus, the grandson of Ben Sira distances his grandfather’s writing from the canonical books of the “law,” “the prophecies,” and “the rest of the books” by presenting Ecclesiasticus as instruction based upon and relating to these authoritative books. For this and the relevant discussion concerning other non-canonical books of early Judaism, see Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 338–381.

bear the Spirit of prophecy, and so his writing does not present itself as an authoritative word of the Lord on Israel's history.

The writing of Josephus is particularly insightful here. In *Against Apion*, he argues for the legitimacy and supremacy of Jewish historical records. Switching from speaking about the accuracy of all the Jews' priestly genealogies to the accuracy and authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, Josephus writes the following, which is well-worth quoting at length:

Naturally, then or rather necessarily – seeing that *it is not open to anyone to write of their own accord*, not is there any disagreement present in what is written, but *the prophets alone* learned, by inspiration from God, what had happened in the distant and most ancient past and recorded plainly events in their own time just as they occurred – among us there are not thousands of books in disagreement and conflict with each other, but only twenty-two books, containing the record of all time, which are rightly trusted. Five of these are the books of Moses . . . the prophets after Moses wrote the history of what took place in their own times in thirteen books; the remaining four books contain hymns to God and instructions for people on life. From Artaxerxes up to our own time every event has been recorded, *but this is not judged worthy of the same trust, since the exact line of succession of prophets did not continue*. It is clear in practice how we approach our own writings. Although such a long time has now passed, *no-one has dared to add, to take away, or to alter anything*. .

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Several points stand out from Josephus' comments. First, he denies that the task of writing the authoritative books he delineates in 1.38–40 was open to all indiscriminately. This privilege lay with "the prophets alone" who learned "by inspiration of God."<sup>74</sup> Second, when the "exact line of succession of prophets" ceased, then the writing of the supremely authoritative books ceased as well. In fact, "no-one has dared to add, to take away, or to alter anything." While the polemical context of Josephus' writing should be taken into account, his writings still reflect a common early Jewish understanding that prophetic qualification was necessary to write holy Scripture.<sup>75</sup> As we have seen in the previous section of this paper, no prophet speaks from his own initiative. This same principle also flows into the NT era, when, as we also saw in the last section, Christ entrusted his apostles with the Spirit-guided task of giving God's authoritative word in both oral and written form. Therefore, these non-canonical sources from the Second

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<sup>73</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, translation and commentary by John M.G. Barclay (Boston: Brill, 2013), 1.37–40, 42. On the likely content of the book categories Josephus mentions (which reflect a tri-partite division with the same books of current Hebrew Bible/Protestant OT), see Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 78–80, 119.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. his inclusion of the chief-priests along with the prophets in 1.29. Clearly, for Josephus, the *sine qua non* for writing authoritative Scripture is the presence and activity of prophets, regardless of whether another authoritative office may have been included.

<sup>75</sup> See Stephen G. Dempster, "The Old Testament Canon, Josephus, and Cognitive Environment," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 321–361, for an excellent treatment of these issues and many other related helpful points as well as a survey of the debate on Josephus and his statements here.



Temple period and Josephus confirm in a secondary way that the biblical authors were aware that they communicated the written words of God to his people.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the concursive activity of inspiration entailed that the human authors knew that their written words were indeed God's covenantal words to his people. In defending this statement, I set the stage by defining inspiration and laying out the compatibilist framework undergirding the concept of verbal plenary inspiration. Then I argued that the biblical evidence in both the OT and NT indicates that God gave his covenantal words to his people via authoritative prophets and apostles who necessarily were cognizant of the inspiration of their writing. Lastly, I contrasted the biblical evidence with ancient Jewish writings which demonstrate the prophetic activity and authority necessarily bound up with writing Scripture.

This evidence clarifies in important ways our notion of the relationship between divine and human activity in writing Scripture. The human element of Scripture has always presented occasions for distortions of an orthodox understanding of inspiration. In some cases, the human element of Scripture was seen to require that these writings be merely human reflection on a history of God's revelation to his people. Human words and communication can never be properly said to be God's words. For others, since Scripture is God's words and not man's ultimately, then the human authors could not have used their volition and literary creativity, but God always dictated to them the words to write. These views are insufficient and harmful, and a concursive model of inspiration best fits the biblical evidence.<sup>76</sup> But within this concursive model, the argument of this paper seeks to bring further clarity to the relationship between divine and human activity in inspiration. I believe the view defended here bolsters our account of inspiration while providing a solid groundwork for other discussions such as the self-attestation of Scripture, a canonical reading of Scripture, and the relationship between divine and human authorial intent.

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<sup>76</sup> For a survey of the insufficient views of inspiration and a presentation of the proper view, see Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 219–253, 289–309; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:428–448.