

Chapter Seventeen

Is the Bible the Word of God?

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Most of the articles in this volume have addressed various questions related to the Bible's accuracy and truthfulness. This is all well and good. But one question remains. Christians throughout the centuries have claimed much more for Scripture than that it is historically reliable, consistent, and truthful. We have claimed that the Bible is *the Word of God*. That is, we believe that God is the (ultimate) author of the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. Despite the real authorial input of the human writers, the very words (*graphē*) of the biblical autographs find their origin in the mind of God (2 Tim 3:16). As Peter put it, "[M]oved by the Holy Spirit, . . . [they] spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:21 NLT). In ways that may be difficult or impossible to explain (and we will not attempt to explain it here), God worked providentially in the lives of the human authors, and sometimes spoke directly to them, so that the words they wrote were *his* words. This is what Christians mean when they say that the Bible is divinely inspired.

How can this faith in the divine inspiration of Scripture be justified? That is the question we seek to answer in this article. After discussing briefly various approaches to answering this question, I will present and defend what I take to be the strongest argument for the Bible's divine inspiration, an argument based on the authoritative testimony of Jesus, the Son of God.

Before beginning this discussion, however, I want to point out three assumptions that my argument will make. First, *I will assume that God exists*. This assumption entails that the universe and all that is in it are the creation *ex nihilo* of a transcendent, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent Person. Though I will not defend this assumption here, it should be known that it is not an arbitrary or unreasonable one. There is ample evidence for the

existence of God.¹ It is not a matter of blind faith but is eminently rational. For what it's worth, the Bible presents God's existence as a matter of knowledge (cf. Rom 1:18–20; Ps 19:1–6), and the vast majority of people in the history of the world (including today) find belief in a transcendent, personal God unproblematic.

Second, *I will assume that God can intervene in the course of history to perform miracles which can be identified as such by human beings.* A miracle may be simply defined as an event that is so unusual and contrary to the ordinary course of nature that the causal activity of God is the best explanation for the event. Modern skepticism toward the miraculous is rooted in metaphysical and/or methodological naturalism. The former is a philosophy that denies the reality of anything beyond the realm of nature and what can be studied by the scientific method. Accordingly, miracles, understood as acts of God, are rejected as impossible. But if God exists, metaphysical naturalism is false and miracles cannot be said to be strictly impossible. Methodological naturalism is the view that science and history may only appeal to natural causes in scientific and historical explanations. If a scholar invokes a supernatural cause to explain some natural phenomenon, then according to methodological naturalism he is no longer doing science or history but theology. Methodological naturalism, like atheism/agnosticism, is unjustified. If God causes a miraculous event to occur in space and time, and that event leaves empirical and historical traces (e.g., eyewitness testimony or physical changes in the world), there is no good reason why that event cannot be the subject of scientific and historical study; no reason why the scientist or historian, *qua* scientist and *qua* historian, cannot investigate that event and seek to discern its cause. And no reason, in principle, why a scientist or historian cannot conclude that the event has a *supernatural* cause. The view to the contrary assumes that God is not capable of leaving sufficient evidence—his “footprints” if you will—of his intervention in history.²

¹ For detailed evidence for God's existence, see Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, eds., *The Rationality of Theism* (New York: Routledge, 2003); James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 93–204; J. P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008); R. Scott Smith, *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-Claims* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012); Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

² For thorough responses to methodological naturalism in both science and history, as well as responses to objections to miracles, the following sources may be consulted: Steven B. Cowan, “But Is It Science?” *Areopagus Journal* 5, no. 1 (2005): 22–26; Alvin Plantinga, “Should

My third and final assumption is that *God is able to communicate verbally with human beings*. That is, God has the ability to reveal propositional truths to us about himself, about us, and about the world. We reject the notion that God is so totally other as to be ineffable and any “revelation” of himself so vague as to be unintelligible. As Doug Geivett has defended this assumption elsewhere in this volume,³ I will not belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that this assumption implies that there is no obstacle to God inspiring a written revelation as the Bible purports and as Christians claim it to be. All that remains is to explain how we would recognize such a revelation should it occur.

The Question of Method

How can we tell if the Bible is divinely inspired—as opposed to some other putatively revealed book such as the Qur’an? Let’s divide the answers that Christians have given into two broad families of views.⁴

Methodological Naturalism Constrain Science?” in *Science: Christian Perspectives for the New Millennium*, ed. Scott B. Luley, Paul Copan, and Stan W. Wallace (Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2003), 107–34; idem, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); J. P. Moreland, “Theistic Science and Methodological Naturalism,” in *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 41–66; idem, *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), esp. 213–46; William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 49–69, 252–60; idem, “Does the Bible Conflict with Science?” in this book (p. 349); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 104–51; Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 133–98; Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 75–82; C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 137–202; Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); idem, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17–26; Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1–42; R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Francis J. Beckwith, “Theism, Miracles, and the Modern Mind,” in *The Rationality of Theism*, 221–36; Winfried Corduan, “Miracles,” in *To Everyone an Answer*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 160–79; Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: The Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 39–90; *The New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), s.v. “Miracles in Scripture” by P. G. Bolt; *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, ed. George T. Kurian (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), s.v. “miracles” by Steven B. Cowan.

³ R. Douglas Geivett, “Can and Would God Speak to Us?” (p. 13).

⁴ Much of the remainder of this paper appeared in an abbreviated form in Steven B. Cowan, “How to Make a Case for the Inspiration of Scripture in the Current Milieu,” *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 2, no. 1 (2009): 65–85.

Non-Evidentialism

First, there is the *non-evidentialist family*. Those in this family eschew or minimize objective arguments and evidences for the divine inspiration of the Bible. The most popular non-evidentialist view among evangelicals is *presuppositionalism*, defended by Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, and others.⁵ According to the the presuppositionalist, the truth and authority of Scripture must be presupposed. To argue rationally *for* the authority of Scripture is to appeal to an authority (i.e., human reason) that is inferior to that of Scripture which, for the Christian, is the highest authority. Rather than let human reason judge the authority of Scripture, the presuppositionalist insists that Scripture should judge human reason.⁶

While no Christian wants to diminish the authority of Scripture or elevate finite, fallen human reason over the Bible, I do believe that presuppositionalism is guilty of confusing ontology and epistemology (i.e., the order of being versus the order of knowing). Of course, on the Christian worldview, the Bible *is* (order of being) the highest authority—because it is authored by *he* who has the highest authority, namely, God. But this does not tell us how we finite human beings are to *recognize* (order of knowing) the Bible as God’s Word and distinguish it from other claimants to that title. What if a genuine seeker after God (call him Sam) wants to know if God has revealed himself in writing. But he is confronted by two different persons, a Christian and a Muslim, who claim that the Bible and the Qur’an are, respectively, the true Word of God. How is Sam to decide which claim is correct? It won’t help for the Christian to say that Sam must simply presuppose the authority of the Bible or else subject the Bible to the judgment of a lesser authority. This problem is especially acute given the fact that the Muslim can tell Sam the very same thing!

Consider the following analogy. Jack Bauer is a government agent who gets his orders directly from the president of the United

⁵ See Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1955); idem, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1976); Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996); John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994); “Presuppositional Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 208–31, 350–63; K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord: The Power of Scripture for Defending our Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003); and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 77–80.

⁶ There are other reasons that presuppositionalists give for their view, but this one has always seemed to me to be the most cogent and persuasive. Therefore, I will limit myself to discussing this one argument.

States. One day he gets a letter purporting to come from the president that orders him to assassinate enemy agent X. A few minutes later he gets another letter, allegedly from the president, telling him that under no circumstances is he to harm enemy agent X. Now it is an ontological fact that the president has authority over Jack. And it follows from this that the letter that actually came from the president has authority over Jack. But which one? How is Jack to tell? The ontological facts don't solve Jack's epistemological problem. It seems that the only solution to this problem is for the president to provide some kind of objective indices by which Jack can discern the genuine article from the counterfeit. Likewise, for Sam to know that the Bible (and not the Qur'an) is from God, it would seem that God must provide him with some objective indices by which he can recognize the Bible for what it is.

The second non-evidentialist view makes some progress in meeting this requirement. *Reformed epistemology* suggests that God offers compelling indication of the divine inspiration of the Bible by means of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.⁷ The idea here is that a human may have the Holy Spirit impress upon him as he reads the Bible that what he reads is God's Word. God "speaks to the person's heart" as it were, giving him first-person assurance of the Bible's divine authority (or perhaps more precisely, that a portion of Scripture that he's reading is divine speech directed toward him). We might imagine that receiving the internal testimony of the Spirit would be analogous to Jack Bauer getting a phone call after he received the two letters, and recognizing the voice on the other end as that of the president who says, "Jack, the first letter you received is the one I sent. Follow its instructions."

Now it would seem that the Bible itself teaches that there is something like the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 2:10–16; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 John 4:6; 5:10–11). And several Protestant confessions of faith describe the internal testimony of the Spirit as the primary means by which Christians can know that the Bible is God's Word.⁸ So we want to acknowledge the legitimacy of

⁷ See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 241–89, 374–80; Kelly James Clark, "Reformed Epistemology Apologetics," in Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 266–84; and Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, 259–82.

⁸ For example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* asserts in chap. I, sec. V, "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable

this approach. However, the internal testimony works only for the person who has it. Because of its subjective nature, it has little or no apologetic value for non-recipients. Back to our analogy. Suppose Jack Bauer needs to enlist the aid of another person, Chloe, to carry out his assignment. But Chloe, who was not privy to the president's phone call, would very much like to have some kind of confirmation that the letter that Jack is certifying really is from the president. Barring a direct phone call of her own, she would need some kind of publicly accessible evidence of the president's authorship. Likewise, we might wonder whether or not God has provided some further, public indications of the divine origin of the Bible which would be beneficial to both Christian and non-Christian.

Evidentialism

Those who believe that God has in fact provided us with objective, public evidence of the divine inspiration of the Bible belong to the second family of approaches to our question. Call this the *evidentialist family*.⁹ Among its proponents, appeal is made to a wide variety of types of evidences, but speaking generally there are two broad approaches within this family. The first of these I will call the *inherent character approach*. According to this approach, the Bible has within itself certain properties that imply its divine inspiration.¹⁰ Chief among the properties cited by those who take this approach are (1) the unity of the Bible's teaching given that it was written by more than forty individuals over the span of almost two thousand years, (2) the spiritually and morally transforming affect that the Bible has

excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: *yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts*" (emphasis added).

⁹ The term "evidentialism" is used in three distinct ways in apologetic and philosophical circles. First, it may refer to a family of apologetic methods that share a similar approach to the relationship between faith and reason, namely, that they are compatible and that reason may provide rational support for the truth of the Christian religion in the form of reasons that appeal to "common ground" between believers and unbelievers. Secondly, "evidentialism" refers to one particular school of apologetics in the family of methods mentioned under the first sense—the school that stresses the offering primarily of historical evidences for the deity and resurrection of Jesus without a prior philosophical argument for God's existence. Thirdly, "evidentialism" can refer to the arch-enemy of Reformed epistemology, namely, the view that it is wrong to accept any belief without sufficient evidence. In this paper, I am using "evidentialism" in the first sense only.

¹⁰ For those who take this approach, see Chad Meister, *Building Belief: Constructing Faith from the Ground Up* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); A. W. Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Authors for Christ, 2007); and James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 57–66.

on those who read and study it, and (3) the Bible's amazing ability to survive attempts in history to eradicate it. Whether these or other factors, the idea is to draw attention to certain characteristics that the Bible has that would seem best explained by appeal to divine inspiration.

This approach certainly has merit. We might very well expect a divinely inspired book to have such properties. We might expect, for example, that its message be unified and that it have a life-altering affect on readers. We might also expect that God would insure the preservation of his Word despite attacks against it. However, this approach also has significant weaknesses if it is used as the primary way of arguing for divine inspiration. For one thing, the unity of the Bible's content,¹¹ as remarkable as it is, does not prove that it is divinely inspired. A book, even a large book written by multiple authors over a long period of time, can have a unified, consistent message and not be divinely inspired. I surmise that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy also has thematic unity, but we do not believe that Tolkien was divinely inspired. Likewise, the fact that the message of the Bible has a life-transforming effect does not establish the inspiration of the Bible unless we are willing to concede that the Qur'an, *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Book of Mormon*, and Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* are all inspired as well. People who read these books report life-changing experiences just as dramatic and positive as those who read the Bible. Again, we would expect that a book inspired by God would have transforming effects on people, but having such effects is not a sufficient condition for divine inspiration. So, though the inherent character approach is helpful in supporting the Christian belief in the authority and inspiration of the Bible, it would be worthwhile to consider other, perhaps stronger, alternatives.

The second, and I think better, evidentialist approach is called the *Christological approach*. It is better because it provides a strong argument that establishes a sufficient condition for inspiration. Essentially, the argument is that we should accept the divine inspiration of the Bible on the authoritative testimony of Jesus. To put it somewhat simply, we should believe the Bible is inspired *because Jesus said so*.

This argument is not new. One of the earliest defenders of this approach was B. B. Warfield. He wrote, "We believe this doctrine

¹¹ See the article in this volume by Craig Blaising, "Are There Conflicting Theologies in the Bible?" (p. 375), for a defense of the unity of the Bible.

of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures primarily because it is the doctrine of which Christ and his apostles believed, and which they have taught us.”¹² More contemporary proponents of the Christological approach are Norman Geisler and R. C. Sproul. As Geisler presents it, the argument has this structure:¹³

- (1) The New Testament documents are historically reliable.
- (2) These documents accurately present Christ as claiming to be God incarnate and proving it by fulfilled messianic prophecy, by a sinless and miraculous life, and by predicting and accomplishing his resurrection from the dead.
- (3) Whatever Christ (who is God) teaches is true.
- (4) Christ taught that the Old Testament is the written Word of God and promised that his disciples would write the New Testament.
- (5) Therefore, the Bible is the written Word of God.

As this argument shows, the Christological approach has two essential features. First, it seeks to establish the deity (and thus the infallible authority) of Jesus. Various evidences may be cited in support of this claim, but central to it are Jesus’ own teaching concerning his divine nature and the authenticating role of his resurrection. Second, this approach presents evidence that Jesus believed and/or taught that the Bible is divinely inspired. From these two crucial facts we may deduce that the Bible is divinely inspired.

We need to distinguish two versions of the Christological approach, however. Norman Geisler’s argument above exemplifies the version adopted by most who have written on the topic. I will call it the *historical reliability version* (HRV). I call it that because the first premise in the argument is the claim that the New Testament

¹² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1967), esp. 114–18. Another early voice for the Christological approach was Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Scriptures* (New York: Francis E. Fitch, n.d.), though he combines it with the inherent character approach.

¹³ See Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 353. R. C. Sproul’s argument is worded somewhat differently, but it is essentially the same (see his “The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John W. Montgomery [Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974], 242–61). Others who explicitly defend this approach include Gary Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); idem, “Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture,” *Areopagus Journal* 2, no. 1 (2002): 11–16; James Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 277–78; Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 503–6; and Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity* (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 233–39.

is a historically reliable document. That is, the premise asserts that the New Testament is a generally reliable source for historical information about Jesus. This version, then, depends for its success upon establishing that the New Testament is historically reliable. Only on that condition can the argument proceed to appeal to statements in the New Testament concerning Jesus' words and deeds—statements crucial to establishing the truth of premises (2) and (4) that assert Jesus' resurrection and deity and his teaching concerning the Bible.

Put another way, the HRV requires that one provide strong reasons to believe that the New Testament is historically reliable and then, on that premise, requires that one assume that whatever the New Testament says about the words and deeds of Jesus is true. As Craig Blomberg explains, once one has established that a particular work is historically reliable,

one must immediately recognize an important presupposition that guides most historians in their work. Unless there is good reason for believing otherwise, one will assume that a given detail in the work of a particular historian is factual. This method places the burden of proof squarely on the person who would doubt the reliability of a given portion of the text.¹⁴

It is important to not misunderstand what the HRV requires here. It might be thought that what the HRV actually requires after premise (1) is that one assume that the New Testament is inerrant. But that would not be quite right. As Blomberg states here, all it requires is that the New Testament accounts of Jesus are innocent until proven guilty; that the critic of the authenticity of any account bears the burden of proof. So, the HRV does not strictly require an assumption of inerrancy. Yet, it does require something close to that, namely, the working hypothesis that any assertions in the New Testament are to be taken as true *unless and until* they are shown to be false. We might say that the HRV requires a kind of provisional, practical inerrancy. Of course, establishing the plausibility of this working hypothesis requires that one do the hard work of showing that the New Testament is historically reliable. Followers of HRV will accomplish this task typically by subjecting the New Testament documents to standard tests for historical reliability.¹⁵

¹⁴ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 304.

¹⁵ For discussions and applications of these tests, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, rev. ed. (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979), 39–78; Meister,

I am sympathetic to such arguments for historical reliability. I believe that there is ample evidence to support the conviction that the New Testament Gospels are indeed reliable sources for the historical Jesus. Furthermore, I believe that the HRV provides the apologist with a plausible and potentially persuasive argument for the inspiration of the Bible.¹⁶ Certainly, if the apologist is engaging someone who is willing to grant the historical reliability of the New Testament and assume that the text is true unless *proven* false, then the apologist may have a relatively easy time in arguing for the other premises in the argument. Nevertheless, I do not believe that it gives the apologist the best and strongest case for the Bible's inspiration—at least not in the current academic climate.

Despite the arguments for reliability put forth by evangelical apologists, it is still the case that many, if not most, biblical scholars believe that the New Testament Gospels are largely fictitious fabrications of the early church. Now if this opinion was simply that of a few ivory-tower academics, it would not be that significant to the apologist's task. But the fact is that this attitude toward the New Testament books has widely infected the popular culture in part because the mainstream media have given a platform to scholars like those in the Jesus Seminar, Bart Ehrman, and others. And it does not help matters when novels like Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* concoct conspiracy theories about the origins of the Gospels and pass them off as historical facts. So, good arguments or not, the idea that the New Testament is historically reliable is in serious disfavor culturally.

Of course, one possible response to this cultural trend is to fight the uphill battle and continue defending the historical reliability of the New Testament as the first step in an argument for the Bible's inspiration. The advocate of HRV certainly has that option. However, would it not be an advantage to the Christological approach if it could provide an argument for inspiration that does not require the

Building Belief, 129–47; Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 305–27; Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, 185–203; Craig Blomberg, “Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?” in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17–50; Douglas Groothuis, “Jesus of Nazareth: How Historians Can Know Him and Why It Matters,” in *Christian Apologetics*, 438–74; and J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 133–57.

¹⁶ In addition to the sources in the previous note, see the articles in this volume by Walter Kaiser (“Is the Old Testament Historically Reliable?” p. 201) and Paul Barnett (“Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?” p. 223) for more evidence of the historical reliability of both Old and New Testaments.

premise of historical reliability—one that even seeks to give positive evidence for the New Testament's more spectacular claims?

This is the promise of the second version of the Christological approach, which I will call the *critical version* (CV). As indicated above, most contemporary NT scholars approach the Gospels, fairly or unfairly, with a skeptical eye, treating the portrait of Jesus contained in them as largely legendary, the fabrication of the post-Easter consciousness of the early church. Yet most contemporary NT scholars, to varying degrees, believe that it is possible to peer through the legendary accretions and recover accurate information about the sayings and deeds of the historical Jesus. They accomplish this feat through the use of what are called the *criteria of authenticity*. These are principles that may be employed to study works that may not be considered generally reliable historically in order to identify stories and sayings within those works that are historically authentic. So, in theory, the NT scholar can apply these criteria to particular sayings or deeds of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and make probable (sometimes highly probable) judgments to the effect that, "Yes, Jesus really said (or did) that." The most commonly employed criteria of authenticity are as follows:¹⁷

1. *The criterion of multiple attestation.* This is perhaps the single most important criterion. It stipulates that a saying or deed of Jesus that is attested in more than one independent source is very likely authentic. This criterion is most often employed (and I will follow suit) in light of the Four-Source Hypothesis that holds that there are four independent sources behind the Synoptic Gospels: *Mark* (from whom Luke and Matthew borrowed), *Q* (the source for the material common to Luke and Matthew but absent from Mark), *L* (the source for the material unique to Luke), and *M* (the source for the material unique to Matthew).¹⁸ When one adds the material in John's Gospel and the testimony of Paul's epistles, there are six potential sources

¹⁷ These criteria and their rationale, as well as their benefits and shortcomings, are discussed in Charles Quarles's article in this volume, "Higher Criticism: What Has It Shown?" (p. 63). For a more detailed account, see Robert H. Stein, *Gospels and Tradition: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 153–87.

¹⁸ For more on the Four-Source Hypothesis and the evidence for it, see Robert L. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 37–47; Scot McKnight, "Source Criticism," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 137–72; and Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 158–75. For alternative views see Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); David A. Black and David R. Beck, eds., *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove,

for applying the criterion of multiple attestation. (Of course, my use of this criterion does not necessarily depend on the Four-Source Hypothesis; it can be adapted to other solutions to the Synoptic Problem.)

2. *The criterion of dissimilarity.* According to this criterion, if a saying of Jesus is different from what was taught in first-century Judaism and from what was taught in the post-Easter church, then it is likely authentic.
3. *The criterion of embarrassment.* A saying or deed of Jesus, or other report in the Gospels, that would prove awkward or embarrassing from the standpoint of the writer or the early church is probably authentic.
4. *The criterion of Palestinian environment.* This criterion allows that a saying or deed of Jesus that reflects an early Palestinian linguistic, cultural, or social context is likely to be authentic.¹⁹
5. *The criterion of coherence.* Not every saying or deed of Jesus in the NT passes the above criteria. But many that don't are similar in content or theme to those that do. On this criterion, a saying or deed of Jesus that does not pass any of the previous four criteria is plausibly authentic if it significantly coheres with sayings and deeds which do.

The basic point behind the use of these criteria is that individual stories, pericope, sayings, and deeds within the Gospels that meet these criteria may be said to be items of historical knowledge (or at least justified belief). And these items are known (or justified) apart from

IL: InterVarsity, 1992); and Robert L. Thomas, ed., *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

¹⁹ It might be thought that the use of this criterion as I've stated it would create a conflict with the criterion of dissimilarity, for the latter authenticates those sayings of Jesus that distinguish him from his Jewish cultural background (and the early church), while the former authenticates those that share ideas in common with Judaism. And if both criteria are used, then virtually all of Jesus' sayings will be authenticated! However, this problem arises only if one erroneously uses the criterion of dissimilarity to judge inauthentic those sayings that are not dissimilar. Or, put another way, there is a potential conflict between these criteria only if one assumes that the statements that pass the criterion of dissimilarity are those *most characteristic* of Jesus. But Robert Stein warns, "The tool does not claim to be able to arrive at what is 'characteristic' of Jesus' teaching, even if some scholars have falsely assumed that what is distinct was in fact the essence of his teaching. The tool is primarily concerned with ascertaining 'a critically assured minimum'" (*Gospels and Tradition*, 176). Indeed, it would appear to be a necessary assumption of the so-called "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus" that Jesus has more in common with his Jewish contemporaries than not (See Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995]; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 147–52; Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?" 25–28). So, without these false assumptions, we may plausibly surmise that those sayings and deeds which reflect a first-century Jewish cultural-theological background are authentic, along with some additional statements and deeds that identify unique characteristics of Jesus' life and teaching. This would not authenticate all of Jesus' sayings and deeds since those reflective of later distinctively Christian belief, as well as those that are consistent with ideas from multiple cultural settings, would fail to be authenticated by either criterion.

any assumption of the Gospels' divine inspiration or even historical reliability. The items that pass these tests are known on *purely historical grounds*—grounds accessible to believer and unbeliever alike.²⁰

Many Christian scholars are probably familiar with the use of these criteria in recent years in support of the biblical portrait of Jesus and his resurrection. Conservative NT scholars like Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, Craig Evans, Ben Witherington, and others, have used this historical methodology to authenticate a wide range of material in the Gospel tradition and to show that the historical Jesus was very much like what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John describe him to be.²¹ Furthermore, apologists such as William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and Michael Licona have utilized these criteria to make powerful arguments for the resurrection of Jesus by showing that the NT accounts of Jesus' resurrection are authentic.²²

²⁰ At this point we need to note that from the standpoint of logic, these criteria can only be used as positive, and not negative, tests for authenticity. That is, we can say with some confidence that New Testament texts that pass these criteria are authentic. But we *cannot* say that texts which fail to meet these criteria are inauthentic. It simply doesn't follow logically that texts that cannot be known by these means to be authentic must therefore be inauthentic. All we can legitimately say about texts that do not meet the criteria is that they are not known (on historical grounds) to be authentic. Sound historical method requires a withholding of judgment one way or the other on such texts. Yet, it is here that many liberal scholars—especially the Jesus Seminar—falter. They tend to approach the Gospels with the unwarranted assumption that they are guilty until proven innocent, legendary unless proven authentic. Armed with this assumption they automatically assume further that any text that fails to meet the criteria of authenticity must be a fabrication of the early church. (For documentation of this egregious approach to the NT Gospels, see Quarles, "Higher Criticism: What Has It Shown?" and the articles in Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*.) Another critical error in methodology that many liberal scholars commit is the inconsistent application of the criteria of authenticity. This results in many texts that ought to pass muster being dismissed as inauthentic. Such inconsistent application of the criteria appears usually to be motivated by a hidden Christological criterion that refuses to allow any text to be recognized as authentic if it supports a high Christology, whether or not it meets stated criteria of authenticity. As Darrell Bock puts it, this approach is not good historiography but philosophical bias (see Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 90–94).

²¹ See Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 310–21; idem, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); Scot McKnight, "Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Jesus Studies," in Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 51–72; Craig A. Evans, "What Did Jesus Do?" in *ibid.*, 101–15; idem, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Bock, "The Words of Jesus"; Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*; and Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend*.

²² William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1981); idem, *Reasonable Faith*, 255–98; "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 141–76; Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); and Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*. See also, N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); and Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 145–86.

Somewhat less known are attempts to argue for the divine inspiration of Scripture on the same grounds, utilizing the criteria of authenticity to establish the historical fact that Jesus taught the Bible's divine authority, and bolstering that teaching with the evidence for his resurrection and claims to deity. James E. Taylor is one scholar who gives a brief sketch of this approach but does not develop it. He writes,

If Jesus is the risen Son of God, then we can trust what he says. We have good historical grounds for believing that Jesus regarded the Old Testament as God's Word, and therefore we have good reason to believe that it is. In addition, to the extent that we have good historical reasons to think that Jesus really said what the Gospel writers report, we have good reason to regard those dominical sayings as the Word of God. Moreover, Jesus commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel about him to the world. He told them he would send the Holy Spirit to enable them to remember what he had taught them. Since we have good historical grounds for thinking that the New Testament documents were written by an apostle, someone closely associated with an apostle who would be able reliably to record his teaching, or at least someone who faithfully employed apostolic sources, it is reasonable to conclude that the New Testament is God's Word.²³

After giving a brief discussion of Jesus' teaching on the inspiration of Old and New Testaments from both a more traditional (i.e., HRV) stance and a critical one, Gary Habermas also provides a sketch of the structure of the whole argument:

Using both traditional and critical paths to determine that Jesus firmly taught inspiration, we may reassert our earlier assumption that if God raised Jesus from the dead, then the most likely reason was to confirm the truthfulness of Jesus' teachings. If we are correct in this, then the inspiration of Scripture follows as a verified doctrine, affirmed by God Himself when He raised Jesus from the dead.²⁴

This approach to defending the inspiration of Scripture by utilizing the criteria of authenticity to establish Jesus' belief in the Bible's inspiration, together with his teaching concerning his own deity and

²³ Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics*, 277–78.

²⁴ Gary R. Habermas, "Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture," 15.

the historicity of the resurrection verified by the same means, I will lay out in some detail in the remainder of this paper.

The Case for Divine Inspiration

The structure of the argument may be formalized as follows:

- (1) Jesus taught that he is God incarnate.
- (2) God authenticated Jesus' teaching by raising him from the dead.
- (3) Hence, Jesus is God incarnate.
- (4) Jesus (i.e., God incarnate) taught that the Old Testament is divinely inspired, and he promised the inspiration of the New Testament through his apostles.
- (5) Therefore, the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is divinely inspired.

In presenting this argument, no assertion or assumption is made that the NT is in general historically reliable. We will not assume but we will allow, for the sake of argument, that the NT Gospels may be comprised of large amounts of material about Jesus and his teachings that is legendary, the literary inventions of his early followers. The CV defends each of the premises—(1), (2), and (4)—by employing the criteria of authenticity. This clearly sets the CV apart from the HRV and shows it to be a stronger and potentially more persuasive argument. Let's consider now the premises of the argument in order.

Jesus Claimed to Be God

Much work has already been done by conservative scholars in showing that the historical Jesus made exalted claims about his identity.²⁵ I cannot rehearse all of that research here, but I will mention a few lines of evidence. First, it is impossible to explain the early church's worship of Jesus unless he made the claim to being divine. The apostle Paul, our earliest NT source, says that "the entire

²⁵ See, e.g., Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 299–327; Ben Witherington, "The Christology of Jesus Revisited," in Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland, *To Everyone an Answer*, 145–59; Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 166–71; and Craig A. Evans, "What Can We Know about the Historical Jesus?" *Areopagus Journal* 3, no. 4 (2003): 5–13. For more in-depth accounts, see Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. 256–82; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997); Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); and Michael F. Bird, *Are You the One Who Is to Come? The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ" (Col 2:9). He also declared that Christ,

existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. . . . For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 6:9–11)

All four Gospels and many of the non-Pauline epistles echo this theme, declaring the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. William Lane Craig spells out the problem: "[W]ithin twenty years of the crucifixion a full-blown Christology proclaiming Jesus as God incarnate existed. How does one explain this worship by monotheistic Jews of one of their countrymen whom they had accompanied during his lifetime, apart from the claims of Jesus himself?"²⁶

Second, it is well-known that Jesus' favorite self-designation was "the Son of Man." We know that Jesus used this title of himself, first, because it meets the criterion of dissimilarity. The title is used of Jesus only once in the New Testament outside the Gospels (Acts 7:56) and just as rarely in other early Christian writings. It was also not a title often given to the Messiah in ancient Judaism. The title also meets the criterion of multiple attestation, being found in every layer of the Gospel tradition (e.g., *Mark*: Mark 2:10; 10:45; 14:62 / *Q*: Matt 11:19=Luke 7:34 / *M*: Matt 13:37, 41 / *L*: Luke 18:8 / John 3:13). The significance of this title, first and foremost, is that it is connected by *Mark* (8:38; 13:26–27; 14:62) and *Q* (Matt 10:32–33=Luke 12:8–9; Matt 24:27–39=Luke 17:24–30) to the divine Son of Man figure in Daniel 7:13–14. In Daniel's prophecy we read of a person who is "like a son of man" (i.e., he appears like a man) who is presented to the Ancient of Days (i.e., Yahweh). But he comes "with the clouds of heaven" and he was "given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve [i.e., worship] Him." This "son of man" is obviously no mere mortal. And so, in Mark 2:10, the Son of Man has the power on earth to forgive sins, something that only God can do. In John 3:13–18, the Son of Man is the one who "came down from heaven"

²⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 300.

and is the “only begotten Son” of God (NKJV). Most dramatically, in response to the high priest’s question as to whether or not he is the Messiah, Jesus said, “I am, and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62 HCSB). The high priest’s response in tearing his robes and accusing Jesus of blasphemy strongly indicates Jesus’ claim to be divine.²⁷

It is also worth considering at least one line of evidence from Jesus’ fulfillment of OT prophecy. Though greatly disparaged by critical scholars, Jesus’ virgin birth in Bethlehem is multiply attested in narratives that present his coming as the culmination of Israel’s Messianic expectations (Matt 1:18–2:23; Luke 1:5–2:20).²⁸ In Matthew’s version, Jesus is called “Immanuel”—God with us (Matt 1:23); in Luke he is “the Son of the Most High” who will be given “the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:32). And these exalted claims for him are confirmed by the miraculous nature of his conception. These affirmations of Jesus’ deity do not come from the lips of Jesus, of course. But on the assumption of the authenticity of these texts,²⁹ we have here traditions concerning Jesus’ deity that are traceable to his mother and would surely have been embraced by Jesus himself.

So, as startling as it may seem, there is strong evidence that Jesus of Nazareth considered himself to be the incarnation of God.

God Raised Jesus from the Dead

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is well-attested and has been elaborated and defended ably by several Christian apologists as mentioned above. Those who defend the resurrection using the criteria of authenticity typically argue that there are a handful of facts established by the criteria that are best explained by the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.³⁰ Though lists vary slightly among scholars, they often include (1) Jesus’ empty tomb, (2) the

²⁷ For more on the authenticity of Jesus’ use of “Son of Man” and its significance, see Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 315–18; Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 233–62; and Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 314–15.

²⁸ The notion of Jesus’ virgin conception would also seem to meet the criterion of dissimilarity (see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 92).

²⁹ For a defense of which see *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), s.v. “Birth of Jesus” by Ben Witherington III; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994, 1996), 103–5, 199–201; D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1–12* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 71–73.

³⁰ See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 333–404; Davis, *Risen Indeed*, 62–84, 168–90; Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 43–77; and Licona, *The Resurrection of*

post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and (3) the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of Jesus. I will not rehearse the details of these arguments, either, but suffice it to say that each of these facts is multiply attested and passes other of the criteria of authenticity. It is important to emphasize, though, that there are no plausible naturalistic explanations for these facts. All the naturalistic proposals to date lack explanatory power and scope (i.e., no naturalistic hypothesis really explains the facts adequately, and no one naturalistic hypothesis explains *all* the facts). The hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead, on the other hand, has clear explanatory power and maximum explanatory scope. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then we can explain why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why they came to believe he was resurrected. And this one hypothesis accounts for all the facts together. Hence, we have strong evidence that God raised Jesus from the dead. The only obstacle to accepting this hypothesis is an unwarranted skepticism toward miracles.

The significance of Jesus' resurrection to our purpose should not be hard to see. Craig makes it explicit when he concludes, "Given the religio-historical context in which this event occurred, the significance of Jesus' resurrection is clear: it is the divine vindication of Jesus' radical personal claims."³¹ Being a divine miracle, Jesus' resurrection is *ipso facto* a divine endorsement of his teaching. We may reasonably surmise that God is not in the habit of raising false prophets from the dead. And Jesus certainly claimed to be a prophet and much more—he claimed to be God incarnate as we have seen. God's resurrecting him, then, must constitute a vindication of his teaching about himself. This point allows us to draw the inference in step (3) of the argument that *Jesus is God incarnate*.

Jesus Taught the Divine Inspiration of Scripture

Premise (4) of our argument carries the burden of showing that Jesus had something to say about the inspiration of Scripture. That burden can be met by citing texts in the Gospels in which Jesus teaches the inspiration of Scripture and showing that those texts meet the criteria of authenticity.³²

Jesus, 582–610. I should point out that the latter work by Licona is the most thorough and careful defense of the resurrection to date using this approach.

³¹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 399.

³² Much of what follows is adapted from John Wenham's seminal work on this topic, *Christ*

The Old Testament

We can be confident that Jesus acknowledged and embraced the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures held by his Jewish contemporaries. He referred more than once to the Hebrew Scriptures by the common phrase, “The Law and the Prophets” (Matt 5:17; 22:40), and at least once to the three-fold division of the Hebrew Old Testament, “Law, Prophets, and Psalms” (Luke 24:44). This should come as no surprise. These sayings aptly meet the criterion of Palestinian environment. Being a Jew in first-century Palestine, Jesus would naturally appeal to the same body of Scripture and have the same view of them as his contemporaries. And what view, precisely, would Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries have of the Hebrew Scriptures? Obviously, they would have thought of them as the Word of God. Even as skeptical a scholar as Bart Ehrman admits as much. He states that Jesus “maintained that God’s will was revealed in the books written by Moses, especially in ‘the Law’ that was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai.”³³ Jesus’ high view of Scripture, according to Ehrman, “is thoroughly rooted in our tradition [i.e., the layers of Gospel tradition]. It is therefore to be trusted as historical.”³⁴

This perspective on Jesus’ view of the Old Testament is corroborated in several ways in many texts throughout the NT Gospels. All of the major points below satisfy one or more of the criteria of authenticity.

Jesus’ Direct Testimony to the Divine Authority of the Old Testament. Jesus testified or alluded to the divine origin of the Hebrew Scriptures on numerous occasions. First, consider his use of the expression “It is written” during his temptations. That Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan is multiply attested in Mark (1:12–13) and Q (Matt 4:1–11=Luke 4:1–13). Mark does not include the details of the nature of Jesus’ temptations or his responses to them, but Q is considered to be an early reliable source. There, in answer to all three temptations, Jesus introduces an Old Testament quotation with the phrase, “It is written” (*gegraptai*, literally “it stands written”). Jesus also uses this expression to introduce OT quotations in several other places, most notably in Mark (e.g., 7:6; 11:17; 14:27) and elsewhere in Q

and the Bible, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). Wenham, however, did not explicitly appeal to the criteria of authenticity to justify his use of particular texts.

³³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 164.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

(Matt 11:10=Luke 7:27). These references provide us with multiple attestation of Jesus' use of *gegraptai* when quoting the OT. Moreover, Jesus' quotation of Scripture in response to the temptations fits well with the first-century Palestinian attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures.³⁵ The significance of this term is that it introduces a text that is taken to be absolutely authoritative. It is equivalent to "God says." As John Wenham puts it, the use of *gegraptai* implies that "here is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the Eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction."³⁶

Second, there are numerous places where Jesus introduces references to OT texts with an equally significant expression. For example, when challenged by the Pharisees for his disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus made an allusion to 1 Samuel 21:1–6, introducing it with, "Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when he was in need and hungry?" (Mark 2:25; cf. Matt 12:3; Luke 6:3).³⁷ Likewise, when his authority to preach is questioned, Jesus said, "Haven't you read this Scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" (Mark 12:10, Jesus quoting Ps 118:22; cf. Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17). In these and other texts, Jesus uses the expression, "Have you never read . . . ?" in order to introduce a quotation or an allusion to an OT text. John Wenham claims that this expression is equivalent in significance to *gegraptai* and means something like, "Don't you know that God's Word says . . . ?"³⁸ That he is correct in this assessment is confirmed

³⁵ See Bruce M. Metzger, "The Formulas Introducing Quotations of Scripture in the NT and the Mishnah," *JBL* 70, no. 4 (1951): 297–307; Michael Fishbane, "Use, Authority, and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 339–77; Devorah Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *ibid.*, 379–419; Yehoshua Amir, "Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo," in *ibid.*, 421–53; Louis H. Feldman, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus," in *ibid.*, 455–518; and Rimón Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *ibid.*, 547–94. Both Metzger and Fishbane specifically address the issue of introductory formulas such as *gegraptai*. Hebrew equivalents of *gegraptai* which are frequently used both in the Qumran literature and the Mishnah are *šn'mr* (the niphal of 'mr) and *šktób*.

³⁶ Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 28.

³⁷ The authenticity of this episode is supported by (1) the fact that it is part of a "Son of Man" text, meeting the criterion of dissimilarity (see discussion above); and (2) the proverbial saying that Jesus uses to justify both his and David's actions—"The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath"—echoes an earlier rabbinic teaching (Mekilta on Exod 31:12–17 [*Shabbat* 1]). Thanks to Craig Evans (*Fabricating Jesus*, 120) for this latter point.

³⁸ Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 33. Cf. B. M. Metzger who shows that the use in early Christianity and Judaism of such stylized formulas introducing quotations of the OT indicates that the writers "had the very highest view of the inspiration of the Scriptures which they quote" ("The Formulas Introducing Quotations," 306).

by the fact that in almost every case in which both “Have you not read . . . ?” and “It is written . . .” are used, Jesus quotes or alludes to the OT text in order to settle some controversy with his enemies. For example, in Mark 2:25, he alludes to 1 Samuel 21:1–6 to justify his disciples’ plucking grain on the Sabbath. In Mark 12:26, he quotes Exodus 3:6 to prove to the Sadducees that there is a resurrection of the dead. In Matthew 19:3–6, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 to settle a Jewish dispute over the grounds for divorce. Why would Jesus or his enemies think that quoting an OT text would (or could) settle these controversies? Surely it has to be because they believed that the OT Scriptures carried divine authority. Thus, the authenticity of Jesus’ use of this expression is established by the criterion of coherence with those texts in which he uses *gegraptai*. It is also multiply attested by its use in Mark (2:25; 12:10), M (Matt 12:5; 21:16), and L (Luke 10:26).

Third, Jesus frequently connects the OT Scriptures to his own life and ministry. For one thing, Jesus taught that the OT Scriptures bore witness to him. In Luke 4:16–21, we read of Jesus going to the synagogue in Nazareth and reading the words of a Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 61:1–2. After reading it, he declared, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” Later he says, “Listen! We are going up to Jerusalem. Everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31). Mark has Jesus saying at the Last Supper, “For the Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him” (Mark 14:21). And in John’s Gospel, Jesus rebukes the Jewish leaders, “You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me” (John 5:39). Jesus’ believing that his life and ministry fulfilled OT prophecy is seen to be multiply attested, these references coming, respectively, from L, Mark, and John. These texts also cohere nicely with his belief in his Messiahship and deity (see above). It should be no surprise that if Jesus thought of himself in such exalted terms that he would also see himself as directly fulfilling OT Messianic prophecies. For our purposes here, though, note that Jesus’ belief that he fulfilled OT prophecies strongly suggests his belief that these prophetic Scriptures were divinely inspired. His appeals to his prophetic fulfillments were made to justify his Messianic identity to his hearers or otherwise convince them to believe something. Such purposes would fail if Jesus and his hearers did not attribute divine authority to the prophetic Scriptures.

Jesus' belief in the authority of the prophets is even more strongly indicated in those texts where he mentions the necessity of their fulfillment. There are numerous places in the Gospels where Jesus uses the verb *deō* (literally "to bind" or "tie") in connection to the fulfillment of OT prophecies. It is invariably translated in these contexts as "must" or "have to," indicating necessity. I will mention only four texts from independent sources that provide multiple attestation for Jesus' attitude toward the fulfillment of OT prophecies. In Matthew 26:54 (an M text), in rebuking Peter for violently trying to prevent his arrest, Jesus asks, "How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it *must* happen this way?" In Luke 24:25–26 (an L text), Jesus tells the two men on the Emmaus Road, "How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken! Didn't the Messiah *have to* suffer these things and enter into His glory?" Later in the same chapter (v. 44), Jesus says to all his disciples, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms *must* be fulfilled." Finally, alluding to Judas's betrayal, John records Jesus saying, "I'm not speaking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the Scripture *must* be fulfilled: 'The one who eats My bread has raised his heel against Me'" (13:18; see also John 15:25; 17:12). The Johannine texts do not contain the verb *deō*, but instead the phrase *hina hē graphē plērōthē* ("in order that the Scriptures may (or might) be fulfilled") which for John carries the same connotation.³⁹ The question that we must ask, then, is why did Jesus think that the OT Scriptures *must* be fulfilled? If he thought of these prophetic Scriptures the way most people today think, say, of the prophecies of Nostradamus, he would not have attributed any necessity to their fulfillment. The only explanation is that he believed these prophecies originated from God who cannot utter false prophecies.

Fourth, there are several places where Jesus attributes the authorship of certain OT texts to God. Consider Mark 7:9–13:

He also said to them, "You completely invalidate God's command in order to maintain your tradition! For Moses said: 'Honor your father and your mother'; and 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or mother: Whatever

³⁹ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 483, 553–54.

benefit you might have received from me is Corban” (that is, a gift committed to the temple), “you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. You revoke God’s word by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things.”

In this text, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy in the way they treat their parents. The authenticity of this text is supported in part by Jesus’ use of the Aramaic expression *corban* in verse 11 (satisfying the criterion of Palestinian environment). In verse 10, Jesus quotes two OT texts that he attributes to Moses (Exod 20:12 and 21:17). However, although “Moses said” these things, for Jesus they are “God’s command” (v. 9) and “God’s word” (v. 13).

A second example from Mark is found in the text where Jesus asserts the lordship of the Messiah over David (12:35–37). Jesus introduces a quote from Psalm 110:1 with the words, “David himself says by the Holy Spirit.” Notice that he claims that David spoke the words of the psalm “by the Holy Spirit.” Consider also the Matthean parallel to Mark 10:1–12, Jesus’ teaching on divorce:

“Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female,” and He also said: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate.” (Matt 19:4–6)

When the Pharisees in the context question Jesus on divorce, their question derives from a debate in Jewish culture between Rabbis Shammai and Hillel. The former taught that divorce was prohibited except on narrow grounds. The latter said divorce was permissible for any reason. To settle the controversy (he essentially sides with Shammai), Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 (cf. Mark 10:5). In their original context, these words are a commentary by the writer of Genesis on the earlier words of Adam at being presented with Eve. Yet Jesus attributes these words to “He who created them” (i.e., God).⁴⁰

Lastly, consider Jesus’ words in John 10:34–36:

Jesus answered them, “Isn’t it written in your scripture, I said, you are gods? If He called those whom the word of God came to ‘gods’—and the Scripture cannot be

⁴⁰ We owe this insight to John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 34.

broken—do you say, ‘You are blaspheming’ to the One the Father set apart and sent into the world, because I said: I am the Son of God?”

The Jews were threatening to stone Jesus for claiming to be God when he spoke these words and quoted Psalm 82:6. Jesus here offers an *a fortiori* (from the lesser to the greater) argument to establish the appropriateness of his claim to deity. If God (notice the “He” in v. 35) called the earlier Jewish recipients of the Word of God “gods,” then it cannot be inappropriate for the One God the Father sent to call himself God. Jesus attributes Psalm 82 to God. He also refers to the corpus of Scripture received by the Jews as “the word of God.”

So, across a wide range of material that encompasses Mark, M, L, Q, and John, we find Jesus directly attributing the OT Scriptures to God and using those Scripture in ways that imply his belief in their divine inspiration. We should add that all of the texts cited in the last few paragraphs cohere with what we have already established with regard to Jesus’ use of phrases such as “It is written” and his beliefs about OT prophecy. If Jesus believed the OT to be divinely inspired (as our discussion in previous paragraphs already shows), then it should come as no surprise that he would occasionally make direct references to the OT’s divine authorship.⁴¹

Jesus’ Testimony to the Accuracy and Trustworthiness of the Old Testament. Also relevant to our purpose is the fact that Jesus uses and quotes OT passages with the conviction of their utter truthfulness. Even texts that many today would eye with suspicion, Jesus treats as being historically accurate and trustworthy. Consider again Mark 2:25–26:

He said to them, “Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when he was in need and hungry—how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the sacred bread—which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests—and also gave some to his companions?”

⁴¹ It is important to point out here that the point being made does not depend upon being able to demonstrate the authenticity of each cited pericope, many of which are disputed. All that matters is that the motif of Jesus attributing OT texts to God’s authorship is multiply attested in texts whose settings sometimes manifest an early Palestinian Jewish background. The best explanation for the pervasive existence of this motif in multiple layers of the Gospel tradition is that it traces back to the historical Jesus. But for defenses of the authenticity of these and other relevant pericope, see Bock, *Luke*; Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: B&H, 1992); idem, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*; idem *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*; and Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*.

Jesus refers to “what David did,” alluding to the account in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. If this pericope is authentic, then we learn here that Jesus assumes that the story about David and his men eating the bread of the Presence is a true story. This also implies that Jesus believed that David was a real person.⁴²

In a Q text, Jesus excoriates several cities for their rejection of him, among them Capernaum. The text reads:

“And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.” (Matt 11:23–24; cf. Luke 10:13–15)

As proof that the unbelieving inhabitants of Capernaum will be judged by God, Jesus speaks of the inhabitants of Sodom whose destruction is recorded in Genesis 19. They would have repented if they had seen Jesus’ miracles. And thus it will be “more tolerable” for them on judgment day than for Capernaum. These statements would have no force unless it is assumed that the account of Sodom and its destruction in Genesis 19 is historically reliable.

Jesus apparently thinks similarly of the account of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–7). In Matthew 24:37–39 (an M text), we read:

“As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. So this is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be.”

Here Jesus likens his coming to the sudden, unexpected nature of the flood which occurred “in Noah’s day.” The people then “were eating and drinking,” until “the day Noah entered the ark.” Again, these words have no meaning in context if it’s not assumed that Noah was a real person and the Flood a real event.

Consider another Q text as recorded in Matthew 23:34–36 (cf. Luke 11:49–51):

⁴² For solid evidence for the historicity of David and the United Monarchy, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Is the Old Testament Historically Reliable?” in this volume (p. 201); and K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 81–158.

“This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town. So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. I assure you: All these things will come on this generation!”

Jesus had accused the Pharisees of being of a kind with the OT Israelites who killed the prophets. He spoke of his sending “prophets and wise men and scribes” whom they would likewise kill. On them God will visit judgment “for all the righteous blood shed on earth.” Specifically, the blood of the prophets murdered “from innocent Abel to . . . Zechariah the son of Berechiah.” The book that records the murder of Abel is Genesis, the first book in the Bible. The most likely referent of the Zechariah Jesus mentions is the one attested in 2 Chronicles 24:20–22.⁴³ Second Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew canon. Jesus’ meaning, therefore, is “from the beginning to the end of the Bible, thus including the first to the last of the righteous martyrs of the OT, as well as all between.”⁴⁴ Not only do we have in these words an endorsement by Jesus of the parameters of the Hebrew canon, but he clearly authenticates the broad sweep of Israel’s rebellious history as recorded throughout the OT Scriptures.

⁴³ Identifying the Zechariah Jesus refers to in this text is notoriously difficult. He appears to refer, in accordance with Matthew’s wording, to Zechariah the prophet who is explicitly called “the son of Berechiah” (Zech 1:1). But there is no indication in the OT that this Zechariah was martyred (though there are some post-Christian rabbinic traditions that may indicate such—see Targum to Lam 2:20 and *Midrash Rabbah* on Eccl 3:16). Most scholars think that the correct referent is the Zechariah described in 2 Chr 24:20–22 and who was killed “in the courtyard of the LORD’s temple.” Yet this Zechariah is called “the son of Jehoiada.” Whether the discrepancy is due to a textual error (William Hendriksen, *Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 838), or Jehoiada being Zechariah’s grandfather and Berechiah his otherwise unknown father (D. A. Carson, *Matthew 13–28* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 485n), or an intentional literary conflation of the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah and 2 Chronicles’s Zechariah son of Jehoiada (Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 471; and Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 946–47), it seems best to understand this Zechariah as the son of Jehoiada described in 2 Chr 24:20–22. For a strong case for this view, see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 676–77. For some contrary views, see Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 246–48; and J. M. Ross, “Which Zechariah?” *IBS* 9 (1987): 70–73.

⁴⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 677. On the alternative view that Jesus refers in this text to Zechariah the prophet (Zech 1:1), he would be making an almost identical point, though his *inclusio* would be chronological rather than canonical. That is, he would be saying “from the beginning of human history (when Abel was martyred) to the time of the last martyred prophet (presumably Zechariah who ministered near the end of OT history).”

Hence, we have ample evidence that Jesus taught the divine inspiration of the OT. Now we turn to what he had to say about the NT.

The New Testament

We have no evidence that Jesus spoke directly of the New Testament Scriptures. But we do have strong indications that he anticipated their inspired production.

His Commissioning of the Twelve. We have significant multiple attestation that Jesus chose twelve disciples and authorized them to represent him and his teachings to the world. According to Mark, Jesus “went up the mountain and summoned those He wanted, and they came to Him. He also appointed 12—He also named them apostles—to be with Him, to send them out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:13–15). In M, Jesus tells Simon bar Jonah (one of the twelve), “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:18–19). Later he gives this same privilege to the rest of the apostles (Matt 18:18). At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus directly commissions them to represent him: “Then Jesus came near and said to them, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (28:18–20). In Q, Jesus tells them that in the future Messianic Kingdom, they “will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28=Luke 22:29–30). According to L, after his resurrection, Jesus “opened [the apostles’] minds to understand the Scriptures. He also said to them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:45–48; cf. also Acts 1:8). In John’s Gospel, Jesus tells the apostles, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (20:21).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ One might question the authenticity of these Lucan and Johannine texts on the grounds that they are post-resurrection narratives. In response, we first note that these pericope, even if

Scot McKnight points out that “[i]f Jesus called twelve to be his apostles, then it follows that he thought they would be the new leaders, the new tribal heads as it were, for the restoration of Israel.”⁴⁶ Craig Evans concurs, adding, “His apostles . . . were to act as heralds proclaiming both the dawning of the kingdom of God and the one who was to sit on a throne of glory in this new kingdom.”⁴⁷ So, the apostles of Jesus were commissioned by him to be the leaders of his church, the restored Israel of God. They were authorized especially to speak for him as his ambassadors and regents.

His Promise to Continue Guiding and Teaching Them through the Holy Spirit. Not only did Jesus appoint his apostles to speak authoritatively for him, he also promised to give them supernatural assistance in their task. For example, after he predicts that the apostles will be persecuted and brought to account before governors and kings, Jesus asserts, “So when they arrest you and hand you over, don’t worry beforehand what you will say. On the contrary, whatever is given to you in that hour—say it. For it isn’t you speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11; cf. Matt 10:19–20; and Luke 12:12). In connection with Jesus’ commission of them to be witnesses to his resurrection (see above), Luke’s Gospel reports that Jesus said, “And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high” (24:49). What the Father promised is the coming of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4–5), which Luke describes as taking place at Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 4, 33).

John’s Gospel also speaks of Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit’s empowerment of his apostles. What he says there is even more specific. In the Farewell Discourse, he says, “I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you” (14:25–26; cf. also 15:26–27). Notice that in this text, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would supernaturally empower them to remember what he taught them during his earthly ministry. Later in the Discourse he adds,

inauthentic, provide independent attestation to the theme of Jesus’ delegation of authority to the apostles found in Mark, M, and Q. Moreover, in the linear structure of my argument, the points being defended here come after we have already established the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection. So, one cannot deny the authenticity of these texts on the sole ground that they portray a post-resurrection (i.e., supernatural) Jesus.

⁴⁶ McKnight, “Who Is Jesus?” in *Jesus Under Fire*, 63.

⁴⁷ Evans, “What Did Jesus Do?” in *Jesus Under Fire*, 105.

“I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is Mine. This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you.” (John 16:12–15)

These words promise to go beyond a reminder of Jesus’ earlier teaching. There were further teachings that Jesus wanted to pass along to his disciples that they were as yet unable to bear. So, Jesus indicates that the Holy Spirit will teach them further divinely authoritative truths. That is, he promises them that they will be the recipients of additional divine revelation.

Concerning the authenticity of the Johannine references, Blomberg explains,

Jesus’ words cohere well with Luke’s emphasis throughout his Gospel on Jesus’ empowerment by the Spirit, and throughout Acts on the role of the Spirit as baptizing *all* of God’s people and indwelling them permanently. But none of that is spelled out at all explicitly here, as one would expect if a later Christian writer were freely inventing central doctrinal material.⁴⁸

Therefore, we have authentic testimony from Jesus—the risen God incarnate—in which he promises to guide, direct, and teach his apostles through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But what has this got to do with the New Testament Scriptures? Blomberg notes, “While Jesus’ promise encompasses more than simply inspiring his disciples to write further Scripture, it surely includes what John understood himself to be doing in producing this Gospel.”⁴⁹ Indeed, it is striking that many of those who penned NT documents understood that they were, as Jesus’ authoritative spokesmen, producing divinely inspired literature.

For example, Paul began most of his letters by announcing his apostolic authority.⁵⁰ He told the Corinthian church that he was writing them “in keeping with the authority the Lord gave me for building

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*, 201 (italics his).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵⁰ Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Philemon are the only exceptions.

up and not for tearing down” (2 Cor 13:10). He also declared, “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should recognize that what I write to you is the Lord’s command” (1 Cor 14:37). Paul’s conviction that he wrote with divine authority was grounded in his sense of being called as an apostle and that his gospel “was made known to [him] by revelation” (Eph 3:3). Indeed, the mystery of the gospel is “now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5). Therefore, all of the apostles “speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people” (1 Cor 2:13).

Peter had the same sense of his own authority. He told his readers that they “have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. . . . And this is the word that was preached as the gospel to you” (1 Pet 1:23, 25). In his second epistle, he writes, “Dear friends, this is now the second letter I have written to you; in both letters, I want to develop a genuine understanding with a reminder, so that you can remember the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the command of our Lord and Savior given through your apostles” (2 Pet 3:1–2).⁵¹ Peter equates his writing with “the command of our Lord and Savior” which came to his readers “through your apostles.”

John indicates his own sense of apostolic authority for his writings when he declares, “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). In his first epistle, he wrote,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

A few paragraphs later, he warned, “We [i.e., the apostles] are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from

⁵¹ On the authorship of 2 Peter by the apostle Peter, see Wegner, Wilder, and Bock, “Do We Have the Right Canon?” in this volume (p. 393).

God does not listen to us. From this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception” (1 John 4:6).

It is also very significant that Peter refers to Paul’s letters and groups them with “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16), and Paul quotes a passage from the Gospel of Luke, introducing it with the phrase, “For the Scripture says” (1 Tim 5:18). It is abundantly clear, therefore, that most, if not all, the NT writers claimed divine authority for themselves and their writings, sometimes even authenticating each others’ writings as such. What can explain this except their being convinced that Jesus had promised them the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that their teachings—both verbal and written—would be divinely inspired?

Acknowledging that Jesus did not explicitly refer to the New Testament documents, John Wenham nevertheless notes,

The last two promises quoted [John 14:26; 16:12–13] do not of course refer specifically or exclusively to the inspiration of a New Testament Canon, but they provide in principle all that is required for the formation of such a Canon, should that be God’s purpose. If God-given words are promised for the emergencies of persecution, how much more might they be expected for her abiding Scripture. If remembrance of the Lord’s words was necessary for the proper instruction of the infant church when many eyewitnesses were still alive, how much more when they were dead. It would be most natural to believe that the promises of remembrance and of guidance into new truth found their most far-reaching fulfillment in a New Testament Canon.⁵²

The naturalness of this belief finds confirmation in our last point under this heading.

The Expectation of a New Covenant Canon. We can be sure that Jesus thought of himself as inaugurating the new covenant that God promised through the OT prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer 31:31–34). The fact that he saw himself as instigating the restoration of Israel in the appointment of his twelve apostles virtually guarantees that he would have advanced the notion of the new covenant’s inauguration since these two concepts are thematically connected in the OT (cf. Jer 31:21–30). Also, as we have seen, Jesus believed himself to be Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. With him, the Messianic age begins. So, too, must the new covenant. Thus we read in all three Synoptics

⁵² Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 117.

and in Paul's writings his announcing the establishment of the new covenant at the Last Supper (Matt 26:26–30; Mark 14:22–26; Luke 22:14–23; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Interestingly, Matthew's version of this event follows Mark pretty closely.⁵³ However, Luke's version differs in significant ways that are closely paralleled by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. For his part, Paul indicates that the tradition of the Last Supper he "received from the Lord" (v. 23), presumably meaning that it was a saying of Jesus passed down to him by the Jerusalem apostles.⁵⁴ Given the verbal divergences between Mark/Matthew and Luke/Paul in the accounts of the Last Supper, we likely have two independent traditions that multiply attest the authenticity of Jesus' words inaugurating the new covenant.

Later NT writers confirm the likelihood that Jesus formally inaugurated the new covenant. As indicated, Paul quotes what he takes to be Jesus' words of institution which includes the line, "This cup is the new covenant established by My blood" (1 Cor 11:25). In another place, he claims that he and the apostles were made "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). And the author of Hebrews declares that Jesus "is the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15; see also 8:8–13 and 12:24). The Synoptic Gospel authors, of course, along with their audiences we may presume, also believed Jesus inaugurated the new covenant. The best explanation for this belief is that it traces back to the words of the historical Jesus.

The significance of this is that the inauguration of the new covenant very likely indicates an anticipation, on the part of Jesus and his apostles, of new covenant *documents*. In the ancient Near East, the practice of establishing suzerain-vassal treaties was always accompanied by documents that inscripturated the treaty. Meredith Kline explains,

In these treaties an overlord addressed his vassals, sovereignly regulating their relations with him, with his other vassals, and with other nations. The central role played by the treaty tablet in which the covenant was customarily inscripturated is attested by the fact that the preservation of these tablets was at times made the subject of a special document clause in the text of the treaties. Moreover, as such a clause would stipulate, copies of the text, duplicates of which were prepared for all the parties concerned, were

⁵³ See Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 771.

⁵⁴ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 267; and Bock, *Luke*, 1716–17.

to be deposited in the presence of a god, carefully guarded, and periodically read publicly in the vassal kingdom.⁵⁵

The covenant that God established with Israel followed this pattern precisely.⁵⁶ The tablets of the Decalogue, the legal writings that followed, and the book of Deuteronomy were explicitly called “books of the covenant” (Exod 24:7; 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut 10:1–5; 29:20; 31:9–13; 2 Kgs 23:2, 21; 2 Chr 34:30). The historical narratives of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets served as historical contexts for and extensions of the covenant. The Latter Prophets served to enforce the covenantal sanctions. The Psalter was “a part of Israel’s tributary obligations,” and the Wisdom literature functioned as “an explication of the covenant . . . by translating the covenant stipulations into maxims and instructions regulative of conduct in different areas of life and under its varying conditions.”⁵⁷ Thus the apostle Paul, a former Pharisee, “speaks of the Israelites’ reading of their Scriptures as a reading of ‘the old covenant’ (2 Cor 3:14).”⁵⁸ So, the old covenant was established and accompanied by covenant documents that were, in the minds of the Israelites (or at least first-century Jews), identified conceptually with the covenant itself.

It would be no surprise, then, if Jesus and his earliest disciples expected there to be covenant documents that accompanied the inauguration of the new covenant. As Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles put it,

Since the establishment of the old covenant was accompanied by covenant documents, it would seem to have been a reasonable expectation that there would be new covenant documents upon the institution of the new covenant. This expectation would not only explain the rapid reception of the NT writings in the churches but also the recognition that these documents were Scripture on a par with the OT in virtually contemporaneous documents (1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet 3:16). . . . [Thus,] the concept of a New Testament flows organically from the establishment of a new covenant, predicted by the OT prophets and instituted in and through the Lord Jesus Christ himself.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 27.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 35–38, 45–68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 63, 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁹ Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 30.

So, we have reason to believe that Jesus and his apostles, in light of the inauguration of the new covenant, expected the production of new covenant documents.

Therefore, while it is true that Jesus never explicitly spoke of any NT documents, the historical evidence shows that “Jesus in principle authenticated the New Testament.”⁶⁰ The fact that he appointed the apostles as his authoritative spokesmen, the fact that he promised them the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit both to recall his earthly teaching and deliver to them further divine revelation, and the fact that they and Jesus would naturally have expected the writing of new covenant documents, provide sufficient reason to believe that Jesus promised the inspiration of the NT.

Conclusion

We have seen that there is ample support for the truth of premise (4) of our argument for the inspiration of Scripture—the claim that Jesus taught that the OT is divinely inspired and promised the inspiration of the NT through his apostles. Given that Jesus also taught that he is God incarnate (premise (1)), and given that God authenticated Jesus’ claim by raising him from the dead (premise (2)), we may readily conclude, therefore, that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God.

Throughout this volume, the reader has been given evidence that claims implied by the divine inspiration of the Bible are also true. The texts of the Old and New Testaments have been remarkably preserved through thousands of years of copying; the historical assertions of both Testaments have been seen to be reliable; the ethical teachings and assumptions of Scripture are rationally defensible when rightly interpreted; the Bible’s teachings are consistent with the best contemporary science; and the canonization process faithfully delivered to the church a collection of new covenant documents that bear the apostolic imprimatur. What’s more, there are no proven contradictions in the Bible regarding either its historical or theological teachings. The Bible presents a consistent, unified message concerning the great drama of God’s redemption of fallen humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁶⁰ Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 113.

It is our humble prayer that through this book Christians may be strengthened in the confidence that the Bible is the perfect Word of God. May seekers and skeptics have obstacles removed that will enable them to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in saving faith and repentance.

â€œThe Scriptures: We believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God without error in the original writings, and the supreme and final authority in doctrine and practice.â€ Parade magazine had an article by Carl Sagan about his experience with cancer. He said he didnâ€™t believe in an afterlife. He said Christians, Moslems, Jews and Hindus had told him they prayed for him. â€œWhile I do not think that, if there is a god, his plan for me will be altered by prayer, Iâ€™m more grateful than I can say.â€ Carl Sagan has studied astronomy. He was the current authority on the cosmos. If the Bible is the Word of God, it changes everything â€” the way we view life, the way we live life, and the choices we make. If the Bible is the Word of God, then the Bible is true, and failure to follow, obey and trust it will have eternal consequences. To ignore God's Word is to ignore God Himself. God's love is proved by the existence of the Bible. God did not have to communicate to mankind, but He chose to so that we could know Him, enjoy fellowship with Him, and understand ourselves and the world. If He had not taken the first step to reveal Himself to us through His Word, we simply would not know Him, and we would be left to deduce what we could about the world from what we could sense. But God has graciously shown us the Truth, and it is contained in the Bible. The English word god comes from the Old English god, which itself is derived from the Proto-Germanic *ǥuđin. Its cognates in other Germanic languages include guđ, gudis (both Gothic), guđ (Old Norse), god (Old Saxon, Old Frisian, and Old Dutch), and got (Old High German). The Proto-Germanic meaning of *ǥuđin and its etymology is uncertain. It is generally agreed that it derives from a Proto-Indo-European neuter passive perfect participle *ǥuđ-tm. This form within (late) Proto-Indo-European itself...