

## **THE WORD GOD WRITES**

### **What is the Bible?**

How we interpret the Bible depends in large part on how we read the Bible.

Before we can discern what is in the Bible, we need to see what Scripture says about itself, so that when we come to read it our presuppositions about it, God, the world, and ourselves do not cloud our judgment or skew our vision. Such discussion takes us one step beyond our first question (Who is Speaking?) to the second question (What is the Bible?). If the Triune God is speaking to us and he has chosen to preserve his word in 66 books of the Bible, we must ask, what is this book?

### **General Hermeneutics**

Principles and practices for good reading that may be applied to all literature, i.e., Mortimer Adler's *How to Read a Book*.

### **Special Hermeneutics**

The unique approach of interpreting God's Word. Because Scripture is fully inspired (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21), progressively revealed (Hebrews 1:1–13), and unbreakably unified (John 10:35), we must not read it as any other book. The Enlightenment instinct to treat the Bible as any collection of literature fundamentally misshapes our reading.

Whereas general principles for interpretation (i.e., general revelation) may be employed, the nature of the text results in differing presuppositions and practices. For instance, we read Scripture as judging us (Hebrews 4:12–13). We do not ultimately judge it, even as we must render judgments about how to read it.

## **Q #1 – WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DO PEOPLE HAVE WITH GOD?**

**Arg. #1 – All people have (what the Bible terms) a covenantal relationship with God.**

### **1. To be made in the image of God is to be in covenant relationship with God.**

- a. Romans 5:12–12 – “In Christ” or “In Adam”
- b. Galatians 4:21–31 – An example of two sons (law vs. promise)

### **2. The redeemed of the Lord are always saved into covenant with God and one another.**

- a. New Covenant – Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:8–13 = Jeremiah 31:31–34
  - i. The covenant which all others find their resolution – all others typological
  - ii. This covenant defines itself by the old covenant (with Moses)
- b. Old Covenant (w/ Israel) – Exodus 24:1–8
  - i. This covenant points in 3 directions – (1) creation, (2) kingdom, (3) promise
    1. Exodus 19:5 – (back) to a special chosen people
    2. Exodus 19:5–6 – (forward) to a kingdom of priests
    3. Exodus 6:2–9 – (in continuity with) a people of promise
  - ii. This covenant was given to be taken away – Hebrews 8
  - iii. This covenant was given to prepare the way for Christ – Gal 3:16, 19; 4:4
- c. Covenantal Progression
  - i. Creation Covenants (w/ Adam and Noah) – Genesis 8:20–9:17
  - ii. Promissory Covenant (w/ Abraham) – Genesis 12–22
  - iii. Legal Covenant (w/ Israel, through Moses) – Exodus 19–24 and Deuteronomy
  - iv. Priestly Covenant (w/ Levi) – Numbers 25 and Malachi 2
  - v. Royal Covenant (w/ David) – 2 Samuel 7:9–14

### **3. The backbone of the Bible is covenantal**

- a. God created man to be in covenant with him
- b. Man broke God’s covenant and stands under judgment of that covenant
- c. Redemptive history is a tale of God restoring covenant with his people
- d. The covenants in Scripture are an unfolding of that covenantal plan

## #2 – WHAT KIND OF WORD MEDIATES THAT RELATIONSHIP?

**Arg. #2 – All covenants have canons and hence the canon of the Bible is (and has always been, in every stage of redemptive history) a covenantal document.**

The covenantal character of Scripture challenges the idea of the Bible as a textbook. 'For the Christian conception of God the Bible is our only textbook. In its pages we have the self-revelation of God.' Without doubt, the Bible teaches us about God. It has a key didactic function: if we are to respond to God in the area of truth, we need to be instructed in the truth. But we also need to do justice to its covenantal nature, its function of finding us and holding us for God through its promises. The promissory nature of Scripture means that it gives us information about the plans and purposes of God. The Bible is God's many-sided provision for his covenant people.<sup>1</sup>

– Peter Jensen –

In his book *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, Meredith G. Kline makes the case a canon is not a product of the church, but the product of God's people in an ancient Near Eastern context. In other words, *from the beginning*, the canon has been the covenant document between God and his people.

In the first chapter, Kline shows how ANE covenants had "canons."

To sum up thus far, canonical document [*sic*] was the customary instrument of international covenant administration in the world in which the Bible was produced. . . . While it has been acknowledged [by critical scholars] that the Israelites at a relatively early time recognized certain written laws as divine revelation, the meaning of this for the history of the canon concept in Israel has been obfuscated. (37, 39)

He argues that a better understanding of "covenant" will correct our doctrine of canon:

The origin of the Old Testament canon coincided with the founding of the kingdom of Israel by covenant at Sinai. The very treaty that formally established the Israelite theocracy was itself the beginning and the nucleus of the total covenantal cluster of writings which constitutes the Old Testament canon. (43)

From this covenantal origin, the canon grew as the covenants of God with his people developed over time. "Our conclusion in a word, then, is that canon is inherent in covenant, covenant of the kind attested in ancient international relations and the Mosaic covenants of the Bible. Hence it is to this covenant structure that theology should turn for its perspective and model in order to articulate its doctrine of canon in terms historically concrete and authentic" (43–44).

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 83. Citation: R. A. Finlayson, "God," in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *The New Bible Dictionary*.

## **What are the evidences that the Bible sees itself as a covenant?**

Kline, in his second chapter, shows from Scripture how the canon is a covenantal document, to be read as a progressively-developed whole, not a pastiche of various books later unified.

### **1. The New Testament speaks of an Old Covenant.**

- a. Paul speaks of reading the Scriptures as a reading of the 'old covenant' – 2 Cor 3:14
- b. Often Law, in the NT, is more than just the five books of Moses (see Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17; John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; Romans 3:19; 1 Corinthians 14:21). In these passages, "Law" consists of the whole OT. In taking this view, it identifies the whole OT as a law-covenant, for the Law of Moses was clearly a legal covenant (see Exodus 19–24, Deuteronomy).

### **2. God's authorship makes for a covenantal Bible.**

- a. Every relationship God has made with man is mediated by a covenant.
- b. If we take seriously the divine authorship of the Old Testament, as 2 Timothy 3:14–16 confirms, "we will see the Old Testament as more than an anthology of various types of literature produced by a series of authors across a span of centuries. We will understand that it all issued ultimately from the throne room of Israel's heavenly King and that all its literary forms possess a functional unity as instruments of Yahweh's ongoing covenantal oversight of the conduct and faith of his vassal people" (46).

### **3. Israel's authorship comes from the caste of covenant.**

And because the cultic and cultural structures of Israel which were the immediate *Sitz en Leben* [situation in life] of the various parts of the Old Testament were thus so thoroughly covenantalized, it follows that all the inspired literature deriving from it and related to that cult (the ritual legislation and hymns) and associated with that culture (like civil law, national history, diplomatic messages of prophets, and instruction of sages) served the covenant and inevitably bore its stamp. (47)

**4. The deposition of the covenant document signifies a covenant, as does the inscripturated curse.**

“The direction for the deposition of the Mosaic treaties are given in the documentary type of clause which is closely associated in the extrabiblical treaties with the inscriptural curse, the brand mark of canonicity” (36) (Deuteronomy 31:9–13; cf. 10:2; Exodus 25:16, 21; 40:20)

Moreover, “the duplicate tables of the covenant written at Sinai reflect the custom of preparing copies of the treaty for each covenant party.” (35) (Exodus 31:18; cf. 24:12; 32:15, 16; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 9:10, 11)

**5. The reading of the covenant signifies a people under covenant with God.**

**Deuteronomy 31:9–13** – Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup> And Moses commanded them, “***At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.***

<sup>12</sup> Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, <sup>13</sup> and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

“This periodic public reading of the text, which is a vassal obligation found in the international treaties too, was assigned to cultic officials (Deut. 31:9–13)” (50)

**6. The polyvalent nature of Scripture (i.e., its multiple genres) is best described as a covenantal document.**

The several major kinds of literature—history, law and wisdom, prophecy and praise—as they are employed in the Old Testament all function as extensions . . . of some main section or feature of the foundational treaties [i.e., covenant documents] . . . Our thesis is then that whatever the individual names of several major literary genres in the Old Testament, as adopted in the Old Testament their common surname is Covenant. (47)

**7. The seeds of Scripture are covenantal (e.g., the book of the covenant, Exodus 24:7); therefore, all documents arising from, depending on, fulfilling the promises of the “covenant seeds” will produce the wine of the new covenant.**

**8. Each of the various genres can also be described by and best understood in light of its covenantal context.**

**a. Law**

- i. Everything about the law (prologue, stipulations, sacrifices, blessings and curses, witnesses, deposition, inscription, etc.) was covenantal.
- ii. Exodus 19–24 and Deuteronomy both show covenantal shape.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a Covenant Document

- 1–4 Recounts God's History w/ Israel
- 5–26 Stipulations for their relationship with God
  - **General Stipulation (5-11)**
  - **Particular Stipulations (12-26)**
- 27–28 Establishes Blessings & Curses
- 29–30 Ratification of the Covenant
- 32–34 Moses Benediction

**b. History** – “The literary combination is a formal indication of the covenantal nature of the Pentateuchal narratives and legislation alike. For this unusual union history and law was distinctive in treaties” (53)

- i. **Human → ←Human** – individuals, groups (e.g., clans, nations, etc.), or a combination make an agreement with promises to fulfill and stipulations to follow.
  1. Personal – Genesis 2:24; 21:22–34; 31:44; 1 Samuel 18:3; 23:18;
  2. National – Joshua 9; 1 Kings 5:12; Jeremiah 34:8–10
- ii. **Divine → →Human** – God initiates a covenant with his chosen people
  1. Adam – Hosea 6:7; cf. Romans 5:12–14
  2. Noah – Genesis 6:18; 8:1–9:17; cf. Isa 54:9–10; Jer 33:19–20
  3. Abraham – Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22
  4. Israel – Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy
  5. David – 2 Samuel 7; Psalms 89:3, 28, 34, 39
- iii. **Human → →Divine** – a leader in Israel (or the people) makes a commitment to the Lord based upon God's previous covenant stipulations. Typically, the covenant comes after a period of waywardness by God's people.
  1. Individual - Jehoida (2 Kgs 11); Josiah (2 Kgs 23); Asa (2 Chr 15)
  2. Corporate – Josh 9:19 -24; 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Jews (Ez 10; Neh 9–10)

**c. Prophecy – see #9 below**

“Though the word ‘covenant’ is not prominently on display in [the prophet’s] writings, the complex of ideas associated with covenant is present as an invisible framework” (60, citing Hillers)

**d. Praise**

- i. The whole Psalter follows the covenantal history of David.
- ii. (Some have argued that) the five books of David are meant to function for David, like the five books of the Law did for Moses.
- iii. “The Psalter opens with an echo of the treaty blessings and curses...” (64)
- iv. The temple was the focal point of worship and the origination of many Psalms, hence “the covenant is the Psalter’s sphere of explanation” (62)

**e. Wisdom** – “The function of wisdom literature of the Old Testament is the explication of the covenant.” (64–65)

**i. Obedience to the Law covenant is for wisdom and displays wisdom.**

**Deuteronomy 4:5–6** – See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

**Deuteronomy 10:12–13** – And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

**ii. The Proverbs begin with ‘fear of the Lord.’**

**Proverbs 1:7** – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

**iii. The New Covenant promises fear of the Lord.**

**Jeremiah 32:40** – I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

**9. The prophets were emissaries of God and messengers of the covenant.**  
(58, cf. O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*)

- a. The prophets constantly appeal to Israel's covenant with God.

**General Uses** – *The Law is the Standard by which the prophets judged and preached*

**Isaiah 33:13-16** – *Blessing (v. 16) are dependent on law-keeping*

**Jeremiah 9:12-16** – *Forsaking the law (v. 13) leads to judgment and scattering*

**Ezekiel 22:1-12** – *Israel has broken all the commands*

**Daniel 9:5-6, 10-11, 13** – *Exile was a result of law-breaking (Ez 9:10; Neh 9:10-11ff)*

**Specific Uses of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21)**

- I. **No other gods before me** – Jeremiah 2:10-11, 13; Hosea
  - II. **No carved images** – Isaiah 40-48 (esp. 44:6-20); Isaiah 6:9-13 (cf Ps 115); Hosea 8:4, 6; 9:10
  - III. **No blasphemy** – Jeremiah 5:12; Amos 5:21, 23-24; Zephaniah 1:12;
  - IV. **Rest on the Sabbath** – Isaiah 58:13-14; Jeremiah 17:19-27; Amos 8:15
  - V. **Honor Mother and Father** – Ezekiel 22:7; Micah 7:5-6; Malachi 1:6
  - VI. **You shall not murder** – Amos 8:4; Micah 6:12; Habakkuk 1:2-4
  - VII. **You shall not commit adultery** – Jeremiah 5:7-8; Amos 2:7; Ezekiel 16 & 23 (esp. 23:47-48)
  - VIII. **You shall not steal** – Isaiah 1:23; 10:1-2; Habakkuk 2:6-7; Malachi 3:6-9
  - IX. **You shall not bear false witness** – Hosea 10:4; Jeremiah 5:12; 9:3-6, 8-9, 11
  - X. **You shall not covet** – Amos 2:6; 3:12, 15; 4:1; 5:11; 6:4-7; 8:4-7
- b. The prophets promise a “new covenant” – Jeremiah 31:31–34; cf. Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 54–55; Ezekiel 36–37; Joel 2:28–32

**10. Christ, the center-piece of Scripture, is born under the old covenant and dies in order to inaugurate a new covenant by putting to death the old covenant with its covenant curses (Hebrews 9:15–17).**

- a. The gospel is a covenantal message (Jensen, *Revelation of God*, 81–83)
- b. Baptism in the church is a public identification of a disciples submission to Jesus; hence it is the oath-sign of the new covenant.
- c. The Lord's Supper is a covenantal meal (Luke 22:22; 1 Corinthians 11:25)



## Closing Argument

The diverse Old Testament literature coheres in a covenantal pattern, with Genesis and Exodus serving as a historical prologue for the covenant. With God's mighty acts in history made known, the suzerain justifies the assertion of his rights over those whom he has liberated. The covenant proper is then stipulated, rehearsed in confessional praise (in the Psalter), and its curses invoked against wayward Israel in the prophets; the same prophets promise the Messiah more clearly and definitely. The New Testament, by its very designation, is understood as a ratification of this gracious covenant and the inauguration of its new covenant administration, with the apostles as "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6) who have, unlike the false prophets of Jeremiah 23:21 "stood in the council" of the Lord during his earthly ministry. Like the historical books, the Gospels expose the founding events that will establish "a new Israel" redrawn around the heavenly temple who has come down to earth. Thus these apostles are sent out as legally authorized witnesses and representatives of the divine court.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: A Divine Drama*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 135.

### #3 – WHO MEDIATES THE COVENANT?

**Argument #3 – The mediator of the covenant is also the content of the canon.**

**Who is the mediator of the new covenant?**

→ 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:5; 9:15–17; 12:24; 13:20–21

**What is his relationship to the rest of the Bible?**

#### Christ's Reading of Scripture

1. Luke 24:27, 44–49
2. John 5:39

#### Witnesses of Christ in the Old Testament

1. Abraham (John 8:56)
2. Moses (John 5:46)
3. Isaiah (John 12:41)
4. David (Acts 2:25–28)
5. Law and Prophets (John 1:45; Acts 10:42–43; 26:22)
6. Prophets (Acts 13:27)
7. **1 Peter 1:10–12**

#### Old Testament Prophecies

1. **Moses** – Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 22:18; Num. 21:9; 24:17; Deuteronomy 18
2. **Prophets** – 2 Sam. 7:12–16; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 50:6; 52:13–53:12; 61:1; Jer. 23:5, 6; Dan. 7:13, 14; 9:24–27; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 6:12; 9:9; 12:10; 13:7; [Acts 13:27]
3. **Psalms** – Psalm 2 (Acts 4), Psalm 16 (Acts 2), Psalm 110 (Hebrews)

*Are we accurately reading / interpreting the Bible if we miss Christ?*

1. Deut 21:22–23 . . . Galatians 3:10–13 / Deut 21:18–21 . . . Matthew 11:19 &
2. 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 . . . how do you read without connecting to NT and Christ?
3. Psalm 24 . . . read it like Paul read Psalm 68:15

#### #4 – WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT?

**Argument #4 – The nature of the covenant has always been promissory; hence, the structure of the canon has always been promise and fulfillment.**

**Acts 13:32–33** – promise and fulfillment is the basic pattern of the Bible

Matthew 1–2 – Matthew reads the Old Testament as being fulfilled in Christ

Old Testament: The Christ is Jesus (cf. Acts 5:42)

New Testament: Jesus is the Christ (cf. John 20:31)

2 Corinthians 1:20 – every promise is yes and amen in Christ

Galatians 3:10–13 – curses of OT are removed by Christ; blessings through Christ

Galatians 3:16 – promise of seed is mediated through Christ

Hebrews 1:1–2 – all that was promised now fulfilled in Christ

This promise-fulfillment structure leads to the Gospel.

Romans 1

1 Corinthians 15

Ephesians 2 – one new man is part of the gospel

We cannot read any part of Scripture without seeing how it fits into this larger category.

## #5 – HOW DO WE READ THE BIBLE?

**Argument #5 – As an inspired canon which reveals the promises and stipulations of Christ's covenant with humanity; hence, the Bible is a Christ-centered, covenantal canon that must be interpreted with respect to (1) it's revelation, (2) it's covenant, (3) it's Christ.**

### Three Contexts

1. **Textual** – Grammar and History
2. **Covenant** – Time in Redemptive History
3. **Christ** – How does this passage relate to Christ

If you say . . . it has no natural connection to Christ

1. How is that people?
2. Why?
3. What hope do you have to offer?

### Final Point

1. 2 Corinthians 4:4 – Salvation comes from seeing Christ
2. 2 Corinthians 3:18 – Sanctification comes from beholding Christ

### Questions

1. What happens when you replace Christ with Biblical Principles?
2. What happens when you make the Bible a textbook instead of covenantal document?
3. What happens when you read Scripture without awareness of 'what time it is'?