

THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE

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Scripture is necessary because God willed to provide it and because mankind's condition required it. The image of God in man requires communication between God and human beings. God's incomprehensibility is another reason for the necessity of Scripture. Natural revelation's insufficiency to teach the nature of God makes Scripture indispensable. The complexity of divine truth would have eventually required a written revelation even for Adam had he remained in his unfallen state. The fall of man made comprehension of divine truth in an oral form impossible, because corrupt mankind is always prone to distort what is oral. God's special revelation had to be in written form. The work of God also makes written Scripture a necessity, since Scripture is the means that God has chosen to do His work in human lives. Without Scripture much would be left undone. There can be no question that Scripture is necessary.

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Introduction

Lord Byron (1788-1824), the great British Romantic poet, presented his publisher John Murray with a handsomely bound Bible containing a flattering inscription. Understandably, Murray was favorably impressed and placed it on a table where his guests would see it. Eventually a visitor admired the book enough to pick it up and thumb through it. While doing so, he noted an alteration of the text at John 18:40. In the sentence "Now Barabbas was a robber," Lord Byron had deleted "robber" and substituted the word "publisher." Byron's purpose in giving the Bible had finally come to light. Obviously, Murray no longer displayed Byron's gift on his table.¹ Why did Byron give Murray that Bible? It would appear that he desired to make a statement, but did not want to do so too openly or directly.

God's gift of Scripture to mankind also makes a statement, but it is made openly and directly. Purpose (making a statement) and necessity, however, are two different concepts. Was it necessary that Byron give the Bible to Murray? Was it

¹Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985) 91-92.

necessary that he reveal his low opinion of his publisher in this fashion? Byron did not act under any necessity. He could have chosen a variety of means at his disposal to fulfill his purpose in letting Murray and others know how he felt.

This study asks the same questions about Scripture: Why did God provide Scripture? Was it a matter of necessity? In order to pursue this latter question theologically one must establish the meaning of *necessity*. What does the theologian mean by *the necessity of Scripture*? What does Scripture itself say about necessity?

Necessity Defined

By dictionary definition, *necessity* is that which is dictated by constraining circumstances.² Jude wrote, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity [ἀνάγκη] to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).³ Jude claims to have been compelled to write his epistle. Ἀνάγκη refers to some necessity imposed either by circumstances, law, or duty.⁴ Jude’s sense of compulsion related to the inscription of divine revelation. From Jude’s perspective, the compulsion to write resulted either from what he observed in the lives of the recipients of his letter or from the Spirit of God impelling him to write. Jude wrote his epistle in order that it might meet a need in the lives of a group of believers. Meeting the need for instruction in godly living is but one purpose for written revelation. In what way might such a purpose be related to the necessity of Scripture? How does the necessity of Scripture compare, for example, to the necessity of gospel preaching concerning Christ⁵ or the necessity of Christ’s death and resurrection?⁶ In the biblical view, such necessity “no longer expresses the

²William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979) 877.

³Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are cited from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, Calif.: Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁴“Both in the OT and Josephus ἀνάγκη has the meaning of constraint” (Walter Grundmann, “ἀναγκάζω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 1:345). “It expresses a situation of need” or even “a divine constraint which [Paul] cannot escape” (ibid., 1:346). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 52, define ἀνάγκη as “necessity, compulsion of any kind, outer or inner, brought about by the nature of things, a divine dispensation, some hoped-for advantage, custom, duty, etc.” See also, Robert Morgenthaler, “Necessity, Must, Obligation: ἀνάγκη,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., ed. by Colin Brown, 2:663-64 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

⁵See Acts 13:46, “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary [ἀναγκαῖος] that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’” The term ἀναγκαῖος has the same range of meaning as ἀνάγκη (see n. 4, above).

⁶See Luke 24:26, “‘Was it not necessary [δεῖ] for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’” Δεῖ “expresses the ‘character of necessity or compulsion’ in an event. . . . In most cases the word bears a weakened sense derived from everyday processes. It thus denotes that which in a given moment seems to be necessary or inevitable to a man or group of men” (Walter Grundmann, “δεῖ,” *TDNT* 2:21). According to Arndt and Gingrich, δεῖ means “it is necessary, one must or has to, denoting

neutral necessity of fate. Instead, it indicates the will of God declared in the message.”⁷

Normally the word “necessary,” when applied to some event, indicates that anything opposed to it is not successful in altering or preventing its occurrence. An event (like the giving of Scripture) is said to be necessary when it comes to pass notwithstanding any possible opposition to it. That which is necessary is something that cannot be frustrated regardless of any attempt or desire to the contrary. In the natural realm, for example, the sun will set no matter what anyone does or prays. It is a natural necessity rather than a moral necessity.⁸ According to Samuel Storms,

[M]oral necessity refers to the cause/effect relationship *within* the will itself, whereas natural necessity refers to the cause/effect relationship *external and prior to* the will. Thus when it is said that a man lied because of a moral necessity to lie, he is to blame, for the cause of such an action was *wholly his, being within the will itself*. If he should lie because of a natural necessity, i.e., if the cause which issues in lying be external to and *compelling upon* the will, his action is then not wholly his and he is thus excused from blame.⁹

In the realm of theology, the topic of necessity is best approached with care lest we limit God’s power and/or wisdom by means of some constraint we might lay upon Him. The necessity of Scripture falls within the category of moral necessity rather than natural necessity. God sovereignly willed the inscripturation of His Word. This means that God was not and is not under any obligation or any compulsion outside Himself to provide revelation (general or special) so that mankind might know Him or experience His saving grace. In other words, “God owes sinners nothing.”¹⁰ Why, then, did God choose to provide Scripture?

When it comes to the necessity of Scripture, the necessity is due more to mankind’s condition than to some form of constraint on God.¹¹ The Creator willingly chose to address human beings, who possessed no power to compel Him to communicate with them.

Necessity Involving the Image of God in Mankind

The necessity of Scripture, as a topic of theological discussion, has received

compulsion of any kind. . . . of divine destiny or unavoidable fate . . . of the compulsion of duty . . . of the compulsion of law or custom . . . of an inner necessity, growing out of a given situation . . . of the compulsion caused by the necessity of attaining a certain result . . . of the compulsion of what is fitting” (δεῖ in *Greek-English Lexicon*, 171). See also, Erich Tiedtke and Hans-Georg Link, “Necessity, Must, Obligation: δεῖ,” *NIDNTT* 2:664-66.

⁷Grundmann, “δεῖ,” *TDNT* 2:22.

⁸I am indebted to C. Samuel Storms, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” *Trinity Journal* 3/2 (Fall 1982):143, for the concepts expressed in this paragraph.

⁹*Ibid.*, 145 [emphasis in the original].

¹⁰James I. Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word,” in *The Bible—The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) 38.

¹¹*Ibid.*

little attention in the last century even though, according to J. I. Packer, a “pervasive conviction of the necessity of Scripture lies at the heart of evangelicalism.”¹² It is surprising that so few theologies discuss the topic.¹³ Those few who mention it tend to speak of the necessity of revelation rather than the necessity of Scripture. There is a difference. All Scripture is revelation, but all revelation was not inscripturated. Scripture does not comprise the totality of special revelation. Some of God’s speeches to mankind have not been preserved in Scripture (e.g., instructions to Abel regarding sacrifice).

In his *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) touched briefly upon the necessity of Scripture. He indicated that we must give due consideration to the image of God in mankind in order to find the reason for the necessity of Scripture:

Having made man in His own image and having endowed man with the capacity to commune with Himself, it is reasonable to expect that this competency in man would be exercised; that in due time God would disclose to man truth concerning Himself and His purposes, also man’s true place in the divine plan of creation—his relation to God, to eternity, to time, to virtue, to sin, to redemption, as well as to all other beings in this universe in which man’s life is cast.¹⁴

René Pache pursues this concept further by declaring that God created mankind in His image “so as to have creatures who could respond to Him, beings who could love and glorify Him.”¹⁵ Proverbs 8:31 describes God’s delight in mankind as follows: “Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And *having* my delight in the sons of men.” This delight was impetus for fellowship, a mutual interpersonal relationship.

Fellowship is the kind of interaction that is characteristic of personhood. It is one of the means by which mankind exhibits the image of God. From “the fact that God blessed human beings and gave them a mandate ([Gen 1:] v. 28), we may infer that humans also resemble God in that they are persons, responsible beings, who can be addressed by God and who are ultimately responsible to God as their Creator and Ruler.”¹⁶ John MacArthur develops this line of reasoning when he writes that “He *wants* us to know Him. Because God is a person, He wants to have fellowship with us.”¹⁷

¹²Ibid., 37.

¹³Theologians as early as John Calvin were discussing this topic. Although Selden claimed that “At the outset of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued for the necessity of scripture” (Jonathan Selden, “Aquinas, Luther, Melancthon, and Biblical Apologetics,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5/2 [Fall 1984]:186), I was unable to confirm it by my own reading of *Summa Theologica*, 1.5-6.

¹⁴Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947) 1:48.

¹⁵René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. by Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 12.

¹⁶Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 14.

¹⁷John MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God's Word* (Dallas: Word, 1997) 13 [emphasis in the original].

In addition, the image of God includes the ability to speak and communicate in that our “gift of speech is an imitation of him who constantly speaks to us, both in this world and in his word.”¹⁸ One aspect of the power of speech displayed by Adam is the ability to name persons and things (Gen 2:19-20, 23). He was replicating the naming activity of his Creator (1:5, 8, 10). The personhoods of both God and man necessitate communication, because God created human beings with the ability to communicate with one another and with their Creator. Unless God speaks to mankind, that interaction is incomplete. The written Word is one means by which the Creator reveals Himself and enables human beings to know Him more fully.

Necessity Involving the Incomprehensibility of God

Mankind’s inability to comprehend God fully is not the result of the Adamic fall. It antedates the fall of man. Inability to understand God fully is related even to the perfect man’s finitude at creation. As Erickson notes, “Because man is finite and God is infinite, if man is to know God it must come about by God’s revelation of himself to man.”¹⁹ Even the unfallen Adam needed divine revelation to begin to perceive the fringe of God’s ways and the edges of His being (cf. Job 26:14).²⁰ Pache concurs with this kind of reasoning. He observes that,

*God is, by definition, inaccessible to the creature. His omnipotence, eternity and absolute perfection are by their very essence inconceivable to our limited minds. . . . It is evident, moreover, that for man to conceive of the Supreme Being in His absolute nature, he would have to be God Himself!*²¹

Through the prophet Isaiah, God explained the situation with these words: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (55:9). The Lord, however, “takes pleasure in revealing Himself.”²² Therefore, God is knowable in spite of His incomprehensibility. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) sought to explain this apparent oxymoron as follows:

[T]hat which God reveals of himself in and through creatures is so rich and so deep that it can never be fully known by any human individual. In many respects we do not even understand the universe of created beings, which again and again confronts us with enigmas and mysteries. How then should we be able to understand the revelation of *God* in all its riches and depth? But by admitting all this we by no means deny God’s knowability. God’s incomprehensibility, instead of abrogating his knowability,

¹⁸Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* 71.

¹⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 153.

²⁰“Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?”

²¹Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* 11-12 [emphasis in the original].

²²*Ibid.*, 12. Cf. Exod 6:3; Num 12:6; Ezek 38:23.

presupposes and affirms the same. The unsearchable riches of the Divine Being constitute a necessary and important element of our knowledge of God.²³

God is knowable to unbeliever (Rom 1:19-21, 28) and believer alike. Scripture writers employ the word “know” with several different meanings. For example, knowing God in salvation is not the same as knowing God through natural revelation.²⁴ As accurate as knowledge gained from natural revelation can be, it is not the equivalent of a saving or intimate knowledge of God. The following chart maps the semantic range of the words “know” and “knowledge” as employed in Scripture:²⁵

General Knowledge	Intimate Knowledge	Saving Knowledge	Perfect Knowledge
Unbelievers “knew God” (Rom 1:21) and even demons know Christ (Mark 1:34).		“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).	“no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal <i>Him</i> ” (Matt 11:27).
	Christ “never knew” the wicked (Matt 7:23).		But, He “knew all men” (John 2:24) and He knew Judas (John 13:11).
“That disciple was known to the high priest” (John 18:15).	“the world does not know us” (1 John 3:1).		
	“Adam knew his wife again” (Gen 4:25, NKJV).		

Thus it is possible to say of an individual that “he knows God” and, at the same time, “he does not know God”—both statements can be true of the same person (whether believer or unbeliever) at the same time. The believer has saving

²³Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. and ed. by William Hendriksen (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 reprint) 41-42 [emphasis in the original].

²⁴We must keep in mind that natural revelation includes creation and conscience (cf. Rom 2:14-15). “Natural revelation is not confined to the creation which is external. Natural revelation also comes through our conscience. This is internal. . . . People today, because of what they have on the inside, are conscious that God exists. . . . In order for the fool to say the word *God*, however, he must have a concept of God. And if he has a concept of God, that implies that God is. It is impossible to think of something that is not, therefore, he is trying to eliminate something that his very reasoning powers tell him exists” (MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God's Word* 17). Shedd emphasizes the source of such knowledge: “the idea of God is not man's product, but that of God. . . . Whatever worth or merit, therefore, there may be in this mental possession, is due to God not to man” (William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971] 1:208).

²⁵The chart displays the logical and chronological order of the four types of knowledge. The most basic and earliest knowledge is on the left and the most advanced and latest on the right.

knowledge of God, but does not know God fully. An unbeliever may “know” (= know about) the God of the Bible from both natural revelation and special revelation, yet still not have saving knowledge of God.

The point here, however, is that the incomplete nature of the knowledge of God obtained by natural revelation necessitates the addition of special revelation. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin (1509-1564) devoted Chapter 6 of Book 1 to the necessity of Scripture.²⁶ He entitled it “The need of Scripture, as a guide and teacher, in coming to God as a Creator” (I vi). According to Calvin, the Word is for God “a surer and more direct means of discovering himself” (I vi.1). Natural revelation lacks the efficacy of special revelation: “God, foreseeing the inefficiency of his image imprinted on the fair form of the universe, has given the assistance of his Word to all whom he has ever been pleased to instruct effectually” (I vi.3). Indeed, inscripturated revelation clarifies and supplements natural revelation (I vi.1). Closely related to the incomprehensibility of God and the insufficiency of natural revelation is the complexity of divine truth.²⁷

Necessity Involving the Complexity of Divine Truth

As indicated at the start of the preceding discussion regarding the incomprehensibility of God, unfallen Adam needed revelation beyond what was contained in natural revelation even in a perfect creation. Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) expounded the concept this way:

[T]he revelation of God in Eden was not merely “natural.” Not only does the prohibition of the forbidden fruit involve a positive commandment (Gen. ii. 16), but the whole history implies an immediacy of intercourse with God which cannot easily be set to the credit of the picturesque art of the narrative, or be fully accounted for by the vividness of the perception of God in His works proper to sinless creatures.²⁸

Comparing unfallen mankind with fallen mankind, Chafer concludes, “if unfallen man needed the impartation of knowledge, how much more does fallen man, whose whole being is darkened, need to be taught of God!”²⁹ The fallen condition makes for even greater complexity. Complexity “in its full NT presentation, makes it inconceivable that the Church could retain it intact were not the revealed Word constantly at hand to be pored over and consulted in cases of doubt and uncertainty, and as a safeguard against forgetfulness.”³⁰

Thus, the complexity of divine truth necessitates a fuller revelation than that

²⁶John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1599; online edition, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 1996-2002). Available online at <http://www.reformed.org/books/institutes/bk1ch06.html>.

²⁷Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 42 [emphasis in the original].

²⁸Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. by Samuel G. Craig (reprint of 1948 ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 76.

²⁹Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 1:48. Cf. Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* 12.

³⁰Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 45.

of creation or conscience and that complexity has only been augmented by the fall. Biblically (and thus theologically), the most significant factor in this discussion of necessity is the fall of mankind.

Necessity Related to the Fall of Mankind

Millard Erickson answers the question about the necessity of inscripturated revelation³¹ by pointing to mankind's fallen condition and the attendant necessity of regaining a fuller knowledge of God in order that they might be restored to fellowship with God:

The problems of sin, guilt, and depravity had to be resolved; means of atonement, redemption, and reconciliation had to be provided. And now sin diminished man's comprehension of general revelation, thus lessening its efficacy. Therefore, special revelation had to become remedial with respect to both man's knowledge of and his relationship to God.³²

The key concept lacking in natural revelation was that of redemption and the Redeemer. That fact propelled Calvin's arguments dealing with the effects of fallen humanity. Packer summarizes Calvin's discourse in two assertions: (1) Scripture is necessary because God has appointed it to be so and (2) the mind of fallen human beings cannot know God apart from Scripture.³³ According to Calvin, inscripturated revelation is necessary due to the tendency of the fallen mind to corrupt divine revelation as a result of forgetfulness, error, fiction, neglect, and presumption.³⁴

These same arguments were developed in greater detail by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) in his discussion of the necessity of Scripture.³⁵ Inscripturated revelation is necessary, first of all, because of the untrustworthiness of memory. Apart from the written page, divinely imparted knowledge cannot be retained with any permanency.³⁶ Thought and speech, without the stability of the written word, can be manipulated in the same way the serpent manipulated Eve.³⁷ As wonderful and efficient as God's gift of language is for mankind, language alone (in thought or speech) is inadequate:

But *language* by itself would only accomplish this task within the bounds of a very limited circle and for a brief period of time, if it had not received the means of

³¹Erickson, *Christian Theology* 176.

³²Ibid., 177.

³³Packer, "The Necessity of the Revealed Word" 36.

³⁴Calvin, *Institutes* I vi.3.

³⁵Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. by J. Hendrik de Vries (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), especially §74 ("The Special Principium and the Written Word"), and *idem.*, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri de Vries (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 60-64.

³⁶Kuyper, *Principles* 84 (§40).

³⁷Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* 61.

perpetuating itself in *writing* and in *printing*. . . . [T]he full, rich content of what the human consciousness had grasped, experienced and thought out could only be made æcumenic and perpetual with any degree of accuracy and completeness, when wondrous *writing* provided the means by which to objectify the content of the consciousness outside of self and to fix it.³⁸

Kuyper argues that the necessity of written revelation involves four characteristics of the written word: durability, catholicity, fixedness, and purity.³⁹ For the first two of these characteristics, “it cannot be said that writing is a need which has only come as a consequence of sin; even though . . . the need of writing has been *intensified* by sin.”⁴⁰

Since God intended His Word for all mankind, the written Word would be the best means by which to perpetuate and disperse it even in an unfallen world.⁴¹ For fallen humanity the written revelation is all the more necessary: “The chief virtue of this masterpiece was so to enfold God’s thoughts in our sinful life that out of our language they could form a speech in which to proclaim through the ages, to all nations, the mighty words of God.”⁴²

Fallen human beings are incapable of preserving oral tradition without corruption. Falsehood is one of the causes of such corruption. Falsehood can be a malfunction of memory, observation, or reasoning, as well as suppression (conscious or unconscious). It could even be intentional corruption. However, it is definitely a result of the sinful condition of mankind. In fact, as Kuyper explains, “Since Divine revelation directs itself against the mind and inclination of the sinner, sinful tendency could not be wanting, to represent that revelation differently from what it was given.”⁴³ In other words, there is an innate antagonism in the sinful nature to divine truth about mankind’s lost condition and the divine remedy for sin. In the light of human failings and the antipathy of sinners, Scripture is the most certain safeguard against the corruption of special revelation.⁴⁴

Thus preservation of special revelation without corruption is one of the chief purposes of inscripturation. For example, God commanded Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Exod 17:14), so that the account concerning the Amalekites would be preserved.

Meditation is another reason for the inscripturation of special revelation. In order to meditate upon God’s instruction privately, the believer needs the inscripturated revelation. Even in OT times God made provision for the copying of

³⁸Kuyper, *Principles* 87 [emphasis in the original].

³⁹Ibid., 405 (§74).

⁴⁰Ibid., 406 [emphasis in the original].

⁴¹Ibid., 408-9.

⁴²Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* 64.

⁴³Kuyper, *Principles* 411.

⁴⁴These paragraphs regarding Kuyper’s theological reasoning can be supplemented by the excellent discussion of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 44/2 (Fall 1982):250-89.

the written Word for private meditation and study: “‘Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests’” (Deut 17:18).

Public attestation is yet another reason for the provision of a written revelation. The Lord told Isaiah that the writing of revelation in an accessible form would “serve in the time to come as a witness forever” (Isa 30:8). According to Habakkuk, a legible public record served much the same purpose: “Then the LORD answered me and said, ‘Record the vision And inscribe *it* on tablets, That the one who reads it may run’” (Hab 2:2). Inscripturated revelation proved to be the best means for Jeremiah to insure that Jehoiakim would hear the Word of the Lord when the prophet himself had been restricted in his movements:

And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, “I am restricted; I cannot go into the house of the LORD. So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD's house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all *the people of Judah* who come from their cities. Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people” (Jer 36:5-7).

Thus, written revelation allowed for delivery of the Lord's words even when the prophet himself could not proclaim them personally. This phenomenon is not limited to the OT. In the NT Paul emphasized the need for a public reading of the inscripturated Word at Thessalonica (“I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren,” 1 Thess 5:27), Colosse and Laodicea (“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea,” Col 4:16). Likewise, on the island of Patmos a voice instructed John to “Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev 1:11; cp. v. 19). Noting this matter of public record and its relationship to the necessity of Scripture, Calvin wrote that it was God's “pleasure that the same oracles which he had deposited with the fathers should be consigned, as it were, to public records”⁴⁵ to insure that God's people would be without excuse in categorizing God with false deities.

The witness provided by written revelation provides a testimony against those who choose to ignore or reject it. That was the intent of the Song of Moses: “Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel” (Deut 31:19). Again, in the days of Josiah, the written Word testified against Judah's wicked kings (2 Kgs 22:16; 2 Chr 34:24).

Such witness was not borne solely against God's chosen people. In Jer 51:59-64 written revelation bore witness against the pagan nation of Babylon:

The message which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the grandson of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the

⁴⁵Calvin, *Institutes* I vi.2.

fourth year of his reign. . . . So Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon, *that is*, all these words which have been written concerning Babylon. Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, and say, ‘Thou, O LORD, hast promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.’ And it will come about as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, ‘Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again, because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.’”

Does the necessity of Scripture change when a person has been regenerated? No. Regeneration fails to nullify the necessity, since human limitations, deception, forgetfulness, and simple error all continue to occur even after the new birth. Once fallen people have been restored to a right relationship with God, the written Word is still necessary for the periodic renewing of individuals and churches.⁴⁶ Erring believers and erring churches require recovery from their “constant decline.”⁴⁷ Scripture is also necessary in forming the foundation for the life of faith.⁴⁸ Packer explains that it “is evident that both the enjoyment of a restored status and the practice of rational righteousness presuppose knowledge of the will, works, and ways of God.”⁴⁹ Ezra perceived this necessity and made certain that the people heard the Word of God so they might determine the will of God (Neh 8:8; cp. Ps 119:169). The apostle Paul clearly understood the connection between the written Word’s revelation of the divine will and a believer being spiritual: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor 14:37; cp. Eph 5:17).

Divine instruction necessitates written revelation to bring people along in their spiritual journeys. This is as the apostle had declared to Timothy: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:14-15). For Christians, the knowledge of God’s will comes only through the Scriptures.⁵⁰ Such is the message of 2 Tim 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Equipping involves a good deal of correction, clearing the believer’s mind of erroneous concepts gained while unregenerate. Beyond the corrective is the historical instruction of believers in the history of God’s dealings with mankind. Listen to Packer again:

⁴⁶Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 45 [emphasis in the original].

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* [emphasis in the original].

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰See Chuck Deveau, “The Sufficiency of Scripture and God’s Will: 2 Timothy 3:13-17,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 1/2 (Summer 1995):3. Deveau observes that there is no necessity for God to give believers extrabiblical revelation to know His will (3-4).

The Bible indicates that to enable men to rise to these thoughts when Jesus came, God spent literally centuries preparing the way by teaching the Jewish people through the instruction of priests and prophets, through typical institutions of ministry, leadership, and worship, and through the revealed Word of the Old Testament writings, the basic concepts that they needed for this task.⁵¹

God provided written revelation to OT believers so they might obey Him: “And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write *it* in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes, and do them” (Ezek 43:11). The identical purpose exists also in the NT: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev 1:3).

Both testaments require the public reading, proclamation, and exposition of written revelation: “when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing” (Deut 31:11) and “Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).

The believer needs the Scriptures in order to replicate the faith of Abraham “which Paul proclaimed as a standard and a model,” that “was essentially an unyielding trust in God’s promise.”⁵² Of course, God’s promise is found only in the Scriptures.

Necessity Related to the Work of God

How does God work in His created world? According to John Behr’s study of second-century theologians, the early church strongly affirmed that

*God is present and active, and, more specifically, that He is active and present through His Word—a Word which entails a breath, His Spirit—and that this is the Word by whom all things were created, who spoke with Abraham and Moses, who spoke through the Prophets, who was embodied in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as preached by the Apostles.*⁵³

Although Christianity is often referred to as the religion of the Book, such a description is too general and lacks clarity regarding our faith’s relationship to the Scriptures. If God indeed acts through His Word, “then that Word needs to be heard, to be read, to be understood.”⁵⁴ Without Scripture, human beings are left without the means by which God has chosen to work.

One example of the overlap of God’s Word and God’s work can be seen in the covenant relationship that God chose to establish with His people. In order to

⁵¹Packer, “The Necessity of the Revealed Word” 44.

⁵²Ibid., 48.

⁵³John Behr, “Scripture, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 43/3-4 (1999):229 [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁴Ibid.

promulgate that covenant relationship, His Word was necessary: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’” (Exod 34:27).

Related to the use of the Word to promulgate a covenant is the use of the Word to confirm its own truthfulness and trustworthiness. The prophet Isaiah gave special revelation as evidence of the dependability of his prophecies: “Seek from the book of the LORD, and read: Not one of these will be missing; None will lack its mate. For His mouth has commanded, And His Spirit has gathered them” (Isa 34:16). Jesus Himself repeatedly directed the attention of His hearers to the inscripturated Word (e.g., “Have you not/never read?” in Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3). In the Apocalypse the Father commands inscripturation as proof of truth: “And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true’” (Rev 21:5).

Conversion itself is a work of God accomplished by means of His inscripturated Word: “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring⁵⁵ the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps 19:7). The NT counterpart of Psalm 19:7 is 2 Timothy 3:15: “and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” God commanded that His Scriptures be proclaimed to all nations, because they would lead those nations “to obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26; cf. 1 Pet 1:23).

Conclusion

Although God was absolutely free from natural necessity to provide written revelation to mankind, His very nature supplied a moral necessity for inscripturating His Word. Written revelation is in accord with God’s plan to create mankind in His own image. By divine design communication is a prime element in the personhoods of both God and mankind.

Human inability to understand God fully is related to the finitude of human beings even in their perfection at creation. The incomprehensibility of God also necessitates inscripturated revelation. God is knowable in part by natural revelation, but such knowledge is incomplete and insufficient for salvation.

The necessity of Scripture is also related to the complexity of divine truth.

⁵⁵The sense is best taken as “converting.” It is important to note the parallel line (the second half of the verse) and compare this verse with 2 Tim 3:15. In his discussion of Ps 23:3, Kidner provides the following explanation regarding the verb “restore/return”: “It may picture the straying sheep brought back, as in Isaiah 49:5, or perhaps Psalm 60:1 (Heb. 3), which use the same verb, whose intransitive sense is often ‘repent’ or ‘be converted’ (e.g. Ho. 14:1f.; Joel 2:12). Psalm 19:7, by its subject (the law) and by the parallel verb (‘making wise’), points to a spiritual renewal of this kind, rather than mere refreshment. On the other hand, *my soul* usually means ‘my life’ or ‘myself’; and ‘restore’ often has a physical or psychological sense, as in Isaiah 58:12, or using another part of the verb, Proverbs 25:13, Lamentations 1:11, 16, 19. In our context the two senses evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973] 110).

Inscripturated revelation is necessary because of the inability of sinners to preserve oral tradition without corruption. Malfunctions of memory, observation, or reasoning can impact the integrity of divine revelation given into the care of fallen mankind. A written revelation is in accord with God's determination to work through His Word to accomplish the program of redemption.

Practically speaking, the foremost factor involved in the necessity of Scripture is the fallen condition of the Adamic race. The fall increased human inability to comprehend God fully and amplified the complexity of divine truth. Fallen mankind is incapable of preserving oral tradition without corruption. Inscripturated revelation provides the ultimate witness by means of its durability, catholicity, fixedness, and purity.

Inscripturated revelation serves as a testimony against those who disobey the revealed will of God and as a testimony on behalf of those who obey His Word. More than this testimony, however, the presence of written revelation in its public reading and exposition provides the foundation for knowing and living the will of God. Inscripturated revelation equips the believer for every good work (2 Tim 3:17). It is God's design that Scripture be the instrument to advance people in their spiritual journeys, because obedience to God's Word is the core principle in spiritual maturity (1 Cor 14:37; Rev 1:3).

God acts through His Word. Therefore, His Word needs to be heard, read, and understood. Without Scripture, humans are left without the means by which God has chosen to work. Thus, Scripture is necessary. Inscripturated revelation bears self-witness to the truth and trustworthiness of Scripture. A dependable record of divine truth provides assurance that a person is converted by the Word of God. Therefore, because of the way the sovereign God has chosen to reveal Himself and work out His plan, the Scriptures are necessary.