

DIVINE ORIGINS: THE NATURE OF REVELATION



Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. — Hebrews 1.1-2

Launching Truths

1. God chooses to reveal Himself to mankind
2. God reveals himself primarily through speaking (Isaiah 55.10-11)
3. God's revelation of Himself throughout history is progressive, culminating in His Son

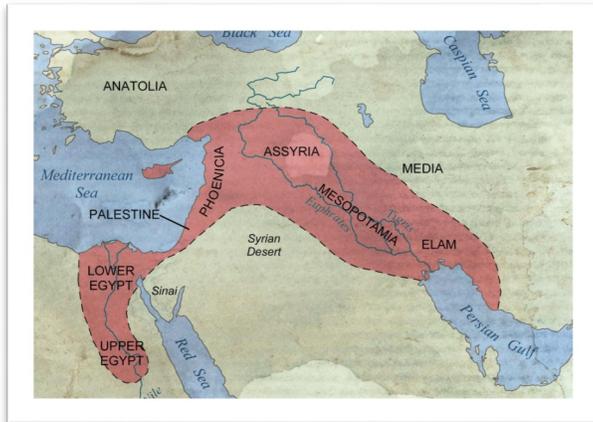
I. "Long Ago..." The Age of the Prophet



But you stand here by me, and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess. — Deuteronomy 5.31

Before Moses there were many prophets who received revelation from God and spoke to their generation (such as Abel, Enoch, Noah and Melchizedek). These prophets did not, however, record the messages they received from God in writing. Why not?

Moses (c. 1520) was the first prophet to record in writing the revelations God gave him. Why?



The Fertile Crescent describes an area that ran northwest from the Persian Gulf, following the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (Mesopotamia), then made its way south along the Levantine coast and into Egypt along the Nile River. It is regarded as the birthplace of civilization. Each region developed a form of writing:

Cuneiform (from Latin *cuneus* form, "wedge shaped", c. 3200 BC, Mesopotamia)

Hieroglyphics (from Greek *hieroglyphē*, "sacred carving", c. 3200 BC, Egypt)

Alphabet (from Greek *alphabētos*, the first two Greek letters, c. 1500 BC, Levantine)



Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was mighty in his words and deeds. — Acts 7.22

Why did the prophets write?



For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. — Romans 15.4



Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully... It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.
— 1 Peter 1.10, 12

II. “These Last Days...” The Age of the Apostle



It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard. — Hebrews 2.3

You should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. — 2 Peter 3.2

“For the early Christians the supreme authority was not the Old Testament but Jesus Christ, their true Master and risen Lord. The apostles and their helpers did not preach the OT; they bore witness to Jesus Christ. In the early church, the words of Jesus were treasured and quoted, taking their place beside the OT and being held as of equal or superior authority to it. It is natural that when *the remembered words of Jesus* and *the apostolic explanations of his life and work* were drawn up in written form, the documents would be circulated and read in services of worship.” †

The apostles were commissioned to “go and preach” (Mark 16.15), to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28.19), and to be “witnesses” of Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8). This, coupled with the belief that Christ would return in their lifetime (James 5.8-9), resulted in the apostles being slow to record their teaching in written form. The period c. AD 30-60 was primarily one of oral transmission, with the spoken word of the apostles guiding the new church. Most of the apostles’ letters were written during the latter half of this period. Still, it should be remembered that these were considered a supplemental source of instruction, meant to reinforce their verbal teaching.

During the period c. AD 60-90, the realization that the apostles’ deaths might precede Christ’s return (see 2 Peter 1.14-15 and 3.4, 10) caused several of them to set forth in writing their remembrances of Jesus (John 21.25). These are our four gospel accounts, traditionally attributed to Matthew, Mark (Peter), Luke (various sources, see Luke 1.3), and John.



Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard. — Hebrews 2.1, 3

III. Additional Resources

Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (3rd Edition), pp. 309-319

Professor Luke Timothy Johnson, *The History of Christianity: From the Disciples to the Dawn of the Reformation*, Lecture 10: The Shaping of Orthodoxy (The Great Courses)

† Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (3rd Edition), p. 310