

IN WHAT WAYS IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

Andrew Shead, Moore College

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Heb 1:1-3)

1. What is the Word of God?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Gen 1:1-2)

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:4-5)

The LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have just put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jer 1:9-10)

I will put my law within them, on their heart I will write it; then I will be their God and they shall be my people; no longer shall a person teach their neighbour or their brother, saying, 'Know the LORD!', for all of them shall know me, from the least to the greatest. (Jer 31:33)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

Some philosophical reflections:

- i. Is God's 'speech' a metaphor with no connection to actual speech?
- ii. Does 'God's speech' simply mean 'God's activity'?
- iii. Words which do not merely declare, but effect the contents of that declaration in the physical realm.

God thunders wondrously with his voice,
doing great things, we know not what.
For to the snow he says 'Fall to earth.' (Job 37:5-6a; cf. Ps 33:6-9)

iv. What has this to do with human speech?

The fact that the words of Jeremiah, or any other person, for that matter, are human words does not prevent them from conveying the word of God.

2. So what about the Bible then?

i. 'Words' and 'word' in Jeremiah

And Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: "Look! Hanamel, the son of Shallum your uncle, is coming to you to say, 'Buy *for yourself* my field in Anathoth, for yours is the right of redemption to buy it.'" Then Hanamel my uncle's son came in accordance with the word of the LORD to the court of the guard and said to me, "*Please* buy my field in Anathoth *in the land of Benjamin*, for yours is the right of *inheritance and yours is the* redemption. Buy it *for yourself*.'" Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.' (Jer. 32:6–8)

What can we say about the relationship between the words of Jeremiah and the word of God? Are they to be exactly identified with one another? In the normal usage of the book, the *word* of God is that which is heard, and the *words* of God are those which are spoken or written. The word heard is not necessarily spoken forth by the hearer in identical words to those that were given him, as the incident of Hanamel and the field indirectly demonstrates. After all, the words received are not magical incantations, but a message from a divine Person. And when the prophet relays that message, perhaps in identical words to those received, perhaps not, the hearers hear not the words of Jeremiah but the word of God.

– The determinative reality is the message, the word from God, and that the words can change without changing the word. More than this, Jeremiah would assert that all the words here, variable as they are, were the very words of God.

ii. From spoken word to written words: Jeremiah 36 (see P. 4)

A chapter about the preservation of spoken words to be spoken again.

1. The prophetic authorship of the words is crucial to their status as divine words.
2. There is a complete identity between spoken and written words.
3. In written form they are always words, never word.
4. When read, they have the same power as the words originally spoken by the prophet.
5. The hearer of Scripture read may hear the word of the LORD in the same way as the hearer of prophecy spoken.

3. Extending Jeremiah's doctrine of Scripture to the rest of the Bible

Jesus is the controlling Word which secures the human words of Scripture as the words of God. 'The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms testify to me.'

4. Reading the Bible as the word of God

i. The humanity of the words

ii. The perfection of the Word

iii. The perfection of the words

5. Conclusion

6. Questions, discussion

Jeremiah 36

¹In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²'Take a scroll, and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the time I first spoke to you during Josiah's reign until today. ³Perhaps, when the house of Judah hears about all the disaster I am planning to bring on them, each one of them will turn from his evil way. Then I will forgive their wrongdoing and sin.'

⁴So Jeremiah summoned Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah on a scroll all the words the LORD had spoken to Jeremiah. ⁵Then Jeremiah commanded Baruch, 'I am restricted; I cannot enter the temple of the LORD, ⁶so you must go and read from the scroll—which you wrote from my mouth—the words of the LORD in the hearing of the people at the temple of the LORD on a day of fasting. You must also read them in the hearing of all the Judeans who are coming from their cities. ⁷Perhaps their petition will come before the LORD, and each one will turn from his evil way, for the anger and fury that the LORD has pronounced against this people are great.' ⁸So Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him. At the LORD'S temple he read the LORD'S words from the scroll.

⁹In the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people of Jerusalem and all those coming in from Judah's cities into Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. ¹⁰Then Baruch read by means of the scroll [*bassēper*] the words of Jeremiah, in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's house, in the hearing of all the people, ¹¹and Micaiah the son of Gemariah, son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the Lord [coming] from the scroll [*mē 'al hassēper*].

¹²He went down to the scribe's chamber in the king's palace. All the officials were sitting there—Elishama the scribe, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. ¹³Micaiah reported to them all the words he had heard when Baruch read from the scroll in the hearing of the people. ¹⁴Then all the officials sent word to Baruch through Jehudi son of Nethaniah, son of Shelemiah, son of Cushi, saying, 'Bring the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come.' So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll and went to them. ¹⁵They said to him, 'Sit down and read it in our hearing.' So Baruch read it in their hearing.

¹⁶When they had heard all the words, they turned to each other in fear and said to Baruch, 'We must surely tell the king all these things.' ¹⁷Then they asked Baruch, 'Tell us—how did you write all these words? From his mouth?' ¹⁸Baruch said to them, 'From his mouth. He recited all these words to me while I was writing on the scroll in ink.' ¹⁹The officials said to Baruch, 'You and Jeremiah must hide yourselves and tell no one where you are.' ²⁰Then they came to the king at the courtyard, having deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and reported everything in the hearing of the king. ²¹The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe. Jehudi then read it in the hearing of the king and all the officials who were standing by the king. ²²Since it was the ninth month, the king was sitting in his winter quarters with a fire burning in front of him. ²³As soon as Jehudi would read three or four columns, Jehoiakim would cut the scroll with a scribe's knife and throw the columns into the blazing fire until the entire scroll was consumed by the fire in the brazier. ²⁴As they heard all these words, the king and all of his servants did not become terrified or tear their garments. ²⁵Even though Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah had urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶Then the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but the LORD had hidden them.

²⁷After the king had burned the scroll with the words Baruch had written by the mouth of Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸'Take another scroll, and once again write on it the very words that were on the original scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned. ²⁹You are to proclaim concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: This is what the LORD says: You have burned the scroll, saying: Why have you written on it: The king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land and cause it to be without man or beast? ³⁰Therefore, this is what the LORD says concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on David's throne, and his corpse will be thrown out to be exposed to the heat of day and the frost of night. ³¹I will punish him, his descendants, and his officers for their wrongdoing. I will bring on them, on the residents of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the disaster, which I warned them about but they did not listen.'

³²Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it by the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim, Judah's king, had burned in the fire. And many other words like them were added.