

God include not only the events of the original creation but also the continuing existence of all things, for Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ is continually "upholding the universe by his word of power."

2. God's Words of Personal Address. God sometimes communicates with people on earth by speaking directly to them. These can be called instances of God's Word of *personal address*. Examples are found throughout Scripture. At the very beginning of creation God speaks to Adam: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die'" (Gen. 2:16-17). After the sin of Adam and Eve, God still comes and speaks directly and personally to them in the words of the curse (Gen. 3:16-19). Another prominent example of God's direct personal address to people on earth is found in the giving of the Ten Commandments: "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me . . .'" (Ex. 20:1-3). In the New Testament, at Jesus' baptism, God the Father spoke with a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In these and several other instances where God spoke words of personal address to individual people it was clear to the hearers that these were the actual words of God: they were hearing God's very voice, and they were therefore hearing words that had absolute divine authority and that were absolutely trustworthy. To disbelieve or disobey any of these words would have been to disbelieve or disobey God and therefore would have been sin.

Though the words of God's personal address are always seen in Scripture to be the actual words of God, they are also "*human*" words in that they are spoken in ordinary human language that is immediately understandable. The fact that these words are spoken in human language does not limit their divine character or authority in any way: they are still entirely the words of God, spoken by the voice of God himself.

Some theologians have argued that since human language is always in some sense "imperfect," any message that God addresses to us in human language must also be limited in its authority or truthfulness. But these passages and many others that record instances of God's words of personal address to individuals give no indication of any limitation of the authority or truthfulness of God's words when they are spoken in human language. Quite the contrary is true, for the words always place an absolute obligation upon the hearers to believe them and to obey them fully. To disbelieve or disobey any part of them is to disbelieve or disobey God himself.

3. God's Words as Speech Through Human Lips. Frequently in Scripture God raises up prophets through whom he speaks. Once again, it is evident that although these are human words, spoken in ordinary human language by ordinary human beings, the authority and truthfulness of these words is in no way diminished: they are still completely God's words as well.

In Deuteronomy 18, God says to Moses:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. (Deut. 18:18-20)

God made a similar statement to Jeremiah: "Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth'" (Jer. 1:9). God tells Jeremiah, "Whatever I command you you shall speak" (Jer. 1:7; see also Ex. 4:12; Num. 22:38; 1 Sam. 15:3, 18, 23; 1 Kings 20:36; 2 Chron. 20:20; 25:15-16; Isa. 30:12-14; Jer. 6:10-12; 36:29-31; et al.). Anyone who claimed to be speaking for the Lord but who had not received a message from him was severely punished (Ezek. 13:1-7; Deut. 18:20-22).

Thus God's words spoken through human lips were considered to be just as authoritative and just as true as God's words of personal address. There was no diminishing of the authority of these words when they were spoken through human lips. To disbelieve or disobey any of them was to disbelieve or disobey God himself.

4. God's Words in Written Form (the Bible). In addition to God's words of decree, God's words of personal address, and God's words spoken through the lips of human beings, we also find in Scripture several instances where God's words were put in *written form*. The first of these is found in the narrative of the giving of the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments: "And he gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, *written with the finger of God*" (Ex. 31:18). "And the tables were the work of God, and *the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables*" (Ex. 32:16; 34:1, 28).

Further writing was done by Moses:

And 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. And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years . . . you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing . . . that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God. . . ." (Deut. 31:9-13)

This book which Moses wrote was then deposited by the side of the ark of the covenant: "When Moses had finished *writing the words of this law in a book*, to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, 'Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you'" (Deut. 31:24-26).

Further additions were made to this book of God's words. "And Joshua wrote *these words* in the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26). God commanded Isaiah, "And now, go, *write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book*, that it may be for the time to come as a witness for ever" (Isa. 30:8). Once again, God said to Jeremiah, "Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer. 30:2; cf.