WTJ 73 (2011): 1-22

SPECIAL LECTURE

CAN THE BIBLE BE COMPLETELY INSPIRED BY GOD AND YET STILL CONTAIN ERRORS? A RESPONSE TO SOME RECENT "EVANGELICAL" PROPOSALS

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There has been much literature written over the past fifty years on the topic of the authority of the Bible, especially discussions within so-called "evangelicalism" concerning the nature of the notions of infallibility and inerrancy. Recent writers have especially questioned the traditional understanding of inerrancy. In particular, a central idea underlying inerrancy has been that since God is true and without error and, therefore, his oral word is true and without error, consequently, his word in Scripture is true and without error. This implication or theological inference that reasons from God's flawless character to flawless Scripture has been challenged, and it has been argued that it is a logical deduction that is never made in the Bible. Accordingly, it is argued that though God, of course, is true and without error, he can, and indeed has, inspired *all* of Scripture in such a way that, nevertheless, the marks of human fallibility are woven into it. Thus, there are what we would consider to be "errors" in the biblical text, but God has inspired even those "errors" to form a part of his message to his people.

There have been recent books that have argued this.[1] But perhaps the clearest example is A. T. B. McGowan's recent book, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*.[2] McGowan says, for example:

> The basic error of the inerrantists is to insist that the inerrancy of the *autographa* is a direct implication of the biblical doctrine of inspiration (or divine spiration). In order to defend this implication, the inerrantists make an unwarranted assumption about God. The assumption is that, given the nature and character of God, the only kind of Scripture he could "breathe out" was Scripture that is textually inerrant. If there was

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[1] For instance, I think this is an implication of Peter Enns's book, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), e.g., see the implication of pp. 48-49. For an extensive review of Enns's book see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 25-122.

[2] A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007).

> even one mistake in the *autographa*, then God cannot have been the author, because he is incapable of error.[3]

Again he says that the inerrantist argument is that

> Since God is perfect and does not mislead us and since God is all powerful and able to do all things, it is inconceivable that he would allow mistakes in this process of Scripture-production. . . .
>
> One can see the logic of this progression from biblical proposition (Scripture is God-breathed) to implication (therefore Scripture must be inerrant) by means of a conviction about the nature and character of God (he is perfect and therefore does not lie or mislead).[4]

This inerrantist presupposition sets McGowan's agenda for this part of his book, as he says:

> First, I shall demonstrate that inerrancy is, at best, an implication rather than a biblical doctrine. Second, I shall demonstrate that it is rationalist. Then, third, I shall demonstrate that the underlying assumption underestimates God and undermines the significance of the human authors of Scripture.[5]

According to this view then, one should believe that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired but not that the Bible is without error.

My article will attempt to respond from the book of Revelation to views like that of McGowan. I will contend the following: (1) that John is more explicit about the doctrine of inerrancy than many think; (2) that John, in particular, explicitly refers to Christ's character as "true" and then applies the attribute of "truth" from Christ's character to the written word of Revelation as being "true." Thus, I will argue that John repeatedly sees a clear connection between the flawlessness of Christ to that of Scripture in Revelation. In the conclusion, I will reflect on whether this is a unique feature of John's Apocalypse and other apocalyptic books like Daniel and Ezekiel or whether there are some pointers in Revelation itself that apply John's notion of the full truth of his book to that of other books of the OT. There will also be comment on the "word/concept" confusion concerning whether or not the actual word "inerrancy" has to be used in Scripture for the concept to be a biblical concept. I will argue that while the precise word "inerrancy" does not appear in Scripture, the concept explicitly does. This does not make the doctrine an implication unless one violates the "word/concept" distinction.

There are three major parts of this article, the first two of which are crucial background against which to view the third section, which is the main response to McGowan's thesis. In the first part of the article, I argue that John was given the same prophetic commission to write God's word as was Ezekiel the prophet. Second, I look at the significance of Rev 22:18-19 for the prophetic authority of

[3] Ibid., 113.
[4] Ibid., 114.
[5] Ibid.

the written form of Revelation, where John puts his writings on an authoritative par with Moses' Scripture.

With these two introductory ideas that demonstrate that John puts his writings on a par with those of Ezekiel and Moses, I will then proceed to address the main topic of the article: does John make the explicit and necessary connection between God's "true" character or Christ's "true" character and the "true" character of Scripture?

I. *John's Prophetic Commission to Write Is Based on the Prophetic Commission of Ezekiel to Write*

There are repeated commissions of John within the Book of Revelation, which are based on the repeated prophetic commissions of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel	Revelation
2:2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet 3:12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me 3:14 So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away . . . and the hand of the LORD was strong on me. 3:24 The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me 8:3 and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem . . . Ezek 8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there 11:1 Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the LORD's house 11:24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. 37:1 He [the Lord] brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley 43:5 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.	1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 17:3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness 21:10-11 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem . . . having the glory of God

The introduction of John's commission in 1:10 is coined in the language of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit, thus identifying John's revelation with prophetic authority like that of Ezekiel. Uppermost in mind are the references from Ezek 2–3 (especially 3:12), though the other references may be included.[6]

The phrase concerning the "trumpet" in Rev 4:1c followed by the rapture in the Spirit (4:2a) shows a link with ch. 1, since the same combination occurs in the commissioning section there (1:10-11ff.) and John refers to the "first voice" which he had heard (cf. 1:12, where it appears to be the voice of Christ). This link to ch. 1 shows that John is continuing to fulfill the prophetic commission to write by recording the following visions. The introductory section of 4:1-2a concludes with a reflection of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit, further identifying John's prophetic commission with that of Ezekiel's.

In the beginning of Rev 17:3, an angel "carried" John "into the desert in the Spirit" in order to transport him to another dimension where he could view the vision. The phrase "in the Spirit" expresses instrumentality and sphere: "in and by the Spirit." This is a formula of a prophetic commission, which is based on the similar formulas expressing Ezekiel's repeated prophetic commissions (especially Ezek 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5, though Ezek 2:2 and 3:12, 14, 24 likely collectively contribute to the picture). In each case, Ezekiel is caught up by the Spirit to emphasize that his message is from God. Similarly, John's transport into the realm of the Spirit underscores his prophetic commission and authority, as already seen in Rev 1:10 and 4:2. The same allusion to Ezekiel's prophetic commissioning occurs in Rev 21:10.

Particularly significant is the commission in Ezek 43:5: "The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold the glory of the Lord filled the house." Since Ezekiel has been transported into the inner court, he stands in the midst of this divine glory. Part of his prophetic commission in this context is "to describe the temple to the house of Israel" by "writing it in their sight" (43:10-11). This is likely the tip of the iceberg that reveals that Ezekiel's prophetic commission entailed the entire written form of the book attributed to him. Consequently, his prophetic commission extends not merely to his prophetic speech to Israel but to his conveying God's message in written form. Likewise, John's commission entails not only seeing visions from God and hearing God's word but also putting these visions and divine words into written form.[7]

There is one more extended reference to Ezekiel's commissioning that is applied to John's:

[6] This identification with prophetic authority is enforced by the additional description of the voice which John heard as "a great voice as a trumpet," evoking the same voice which Moses heard when Yahweh revealed himself on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16, 19-20).

[7] See Rev 1:10-11, 19, which refer to the writing of the entire book, as well as 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 12, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5, which refer to the writing of parts of the book.

Ezekiel 2–3	Revelation 10
2:8 "Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."	
2:9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll *was* in it.	10:8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven, *I heard* again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land."
2:10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.	
3:1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."	10:9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."
3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll.	
3:3 He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.	10:10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.
3:4 Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.	10:11 And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

The seer's reception of the book symbolically connotes his prophetic call. The command and the carrying out of the command to take the book and consume it is a picture portraying his formal re-commission to become a prophet. As we have seen, this has already been stated in Rev 1:10 and 4:1-2 by means of allusion to the prophet Ezekiel's prophetic commission. In the same manner, the Ezekiel allusion is applied again with the identical idea of issuing a prophetic commission to John. The precise reference is clearly to Ezek 2:8–3:3. The prophet Ezekiel, like John after him, is commissioned by being told to take a scroll and to eat it, with the result that its revelatory message "was sweet as honey in my mouth." The prophet's eating of the scroll signifies his identification with its message. He is the appointed minister of God not only to deliver the message of warning, but especially to announce the judgment upon which God has already decided, though a remnant will respond and repent (e.g., Ezek 3:20; 9:4-6; 14:21-23).

Ezekiel's eating of the scroll is applied to John with the same meaning, although the historical situation is different. Though there are some differences between the details of Ezekiel's and John's commissioning,[8] the metaphorical

[8] For fuller explanation of the use of Ezek 2:8–3:3, see G. K. Beale, *Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 550-53.

eating of God's word represented for both prophets their total identification with and submission to the divine will as a qualification for their being suitable prophetic instruments in the hand of God. Their message carries with it the power of God's word because it is God's word, and it is this that they are commissioned to deliver. In contrast to Ezekiel, John is warning, not Israel, but the church against unbelief and compromise with the idolatrous world, as well as warning the world of unbelievers themselves.

The point of repeatedly applying Ezekiel's commission to that of John's throughout the Apocalypse is to underscore that he has the same prophetic authority as Ezekiel the prophet. As we have seen in the case of Ezekiel, John not only speaks God's word but God commissions him to put the divine word into written form (see Ezek 43:11 [cf. 24:1-2], Rev 1:10-11, 19, and the introduction to each of the seven letters; likewise note the implication of Rev 22:18-19). In fact, the idea of an authoritative prophetic commissioning that extends to the written form of a prophet's message has its roots in the OT. In particular, the command to "write in a book" (γράψον εἰς βιβλίον) in Rev 1:11 is reflective of the charge given by Yahweh to his prophetic servants to communicate to Israel the revelation they had received (so LXX of Exod 17:14; Isa 30:8; Jer 37:2; 39:44; Tob 12:20). All such commissions in the prophets were commands to write testimonies of judgment against Israel (so LXX Isa 30:8; Jer 37:2; 39:44; cf. also Exod 34:27; Isa 8:1; Jer 36:2; Hab 2:2). For example, Jer 37:2 (LXX) says, "Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book." Much of John's message likewise is concerned with announcements of judgment, as apparent through observing the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, as well as other descriptions of judgment found in the book.

In the light of contemporary debates over "infallibility" vs. "inerrancy" or debates about the very definition of "inerrancy" itself discussed in the introduction, is it an unsuitable modern question to ask about the nature of Ezekiel's and John's commission to write down the word of God? That is, is it conceivable that their written word contains a mix of fallible matter with inerrant material, however so slight the former? Or, is their written word to be seen exhaustively in all its details to be God's flawless word? This issue will first be addressed in Ezekiel in order to ascertain how it may help to answer this question in Revelation. Then I will focus only on the evidence of Revelation itself to determine if it may shed light on this thorny issue.

The very first time Ezekiel's commission is stated (Ezek 2:2), one of its purposes is that Israel "will know that a prophet has been among them" (2:5; so also 33:33). The summary of what Ezekiel is to say as a prophet is "you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'" (2:4; likewise 2:7, "you will speak my words to them"). Recall that Ezekiel's commission includes putting these divine words into written form. Significantly, Ezekiel's words are contrasted with the "false" and "lying" words of false prophets in Israel (12:24; 13:7, 9, 23; 21:23, 29; 22:28). For example, the false prophets prophesy that there will be "peace" in Israel, despite the nation's sin (13:10, 16). Their prophecy will be shown to be "false" and Ezekiel's prophecy that destruction is coming for Jerusalem because of her apostasy will come true, which

shows he is a true prophet: "So when it comes to pass [Ezekiel's prophecy]—as it surely will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst" (33:33). The false prophets speak error because they "prophesy from their own heart" and "they follow their own spirit" in their prophesying (13:2-3).

Thus, the contrast between Ezekiel and the other prophets is that the former speaks and writes only God's word, whereas the latter prophesy from themselves and speak mistakenly. There is no hint of entertaining anything fallible, false, or untrue in Ezekiel's word or of sifting out the impure from the pure divine word in Ezekiel's writings. Rather, there is an absolute contrast between the prophet Ezekiel and the false prophets. This background is part of John's appeal to the repeated prophetic commissions of Ezekiel,[9] which can be seen even from the repeated commissions for John to "write," which are placed in contrast to false prophets in the midst of the churches.[10] We will see the issue of false teaching in contrast to John's written word arise again in the book.

II. *The Significance of Revelation 22:18-19 for the Prophetic Authority of the Written Form of Revelation*

Verses 18-19 summarize the Book of Revelation as a new law code to a new Israel, which is modeled on the old law code to ethnic Israel. Though many commentators note only Deut 4, John alludes to a series of warning passages throughout Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy	Revelation 22:18-19
hear the statutes . . . you shall not add to the word . . . nor take away from it (4:1-2; likewise 12:32); and it will be when he hears the words . . . every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven (29:19-20).	I testify to everyone who hears the words . . . if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which have been written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book . . . , God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city . . .

[9] See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 150-59, who also acknowledges the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel as the background for John's commissioning in Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. Though he does not focus on the written form of either Ezekiel's or John's prophecy, he does say that John's claim that "the whole revelation [that] came to him ἐν πνεύματι" was "for the purpose of passing on the revelation" (158), and that "the authentication of John's message therefore lies not in the experience as such but in the claim that it took place under the control of the Spirit and came to him through Jesus Christ from God" (159). Likewise, the Spirit "inspired John's reception [of the message], in the Spirit, of a prophetic message to be given to others" (159).

[10] See Rev 2:12 in relation to 2:14-15 and 2:18 in relation to 2:20-24; recall also that these commands to write are extensions of 1:10-11, which partly appeals to Ezekiel's prophetic commission.

Further similarities enhancing the link between Deuteronomy and Rev 22:18-19 are:

(1) in the light of the directly preceding and following contexts of each of the three Deuteronomy passages, it is clear that all three are specific warnings against idolatry, as is the case in Rev 22 (cf. 21:8, 27; 22:15);
(2) a positive response to both the OT and NT warnings results in the reward of life in the new land (Deut 4:1; 12:28-29; cf. Rev 21:1–22:5 with 22:14, 17-19);
(3) both also use the terminology of "plagues" to describe the punishment for unfaithfulness (see τὰς πληγάς in Deut 29:21 and Rev 22:18).

What is the meaning of "adding to" and "taking away from" the revelatory words? The answer must be sought in Deuteronomy. In both Deut 4:1-2 and 12:32 the language serves as a twofold warning against deceptive teaching that affirmed that idolatry was not inconsistent with faith in the God of Israel (see Deut 4:3, which alludes to the Baal-Peor episode of Num 25:1-9, 14-18, and Deut 13). Those who deceive in this way are false prophets (so Deut 13:1-2ff.); note that Deut 12:32 of the English text and of the LXX (also = 13:1) is placed by the Hebrew Bible and the Targums (Onqelos and Neofiti) as the first verse of ch. 13, which introduces the subject of false prophets (cf. the false prophet Balaam who was behind the deception of Baal-Peor: also see Rev 2:14). Such false teaching amounts to "adding to" God's Law. Furthermore, it is tantamount to "taking away from" God's Law, since it violates the positive laws against idolatry, consequently nullifying their validity. The disobedience of following this false teaching is probably included in the dual warning of Deut 4:2 and 12:32, as Deut 29:19-20 confirms.

Therefore, "adding and taking away" refers not to mere, general disobedience to the divine word, but to false teaching about the inscripturated word and following such deceptive teaching. Belief in the abiding truth of God's word is the presupposition for positive obedience to it: cf. Deut 4:2, "you shall not add . . . nor take away *in order that* you may keep the commandments of the Lord."

The ancient Near Eastern treaty documents, after which Deut 4 is modeled, also were protected against intentional alterations by means of inscriptional sanctions and curses.[11] The written form of such treaty documents was absolutely authoritative and inviolable, as were the concepts expressed in them. A curse would come upon anyone who altered any part of the written form of the record or if one did not fulfill any part of the obligations. For example, in the treaty of Tudhaliyas IV with Ulmi-Teshub the following inscriptional curse is expressed: "Whoever . . . changes but one word of this tablet . . . may the thousands of gods of this tablet root that man's descendants out of the land of Hatti."[12] Not only was there prohibition against "changing the wording" or "altering" but if one did "not fulfill the words of this treaty . . . the gods . . . of the oath will blot you out."[13]

[11] Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 27-38.
[12] Ibid., 29.
[13] See ibid., 30, for the primary sources of these quotations.

That gods would enforce the penalty of breaking such treaties implied the treaties themselves, down to their very words, possessed divine authority. Likewise, the related magical incantations of Egypt were said to be ultimately authored by various gods.[14] That the authority of these ANE documents extended not merely to the concepts expressed in them but down to their very words is also a background to the Deuteronomy treaty written for Israel and given to them by God through Moses. This is the most probable way to take Deuteronomy's statement that " you shall not add . . . nor take away in order that you may keep the commandments of the Lord" (Deut 4:2) and the conceptually oriented warning in Deut 29:19-20: "and it will be when he hears the words . . . every curse which is written in this book will rest on him [who has disobeyed the commands written in the book], and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven (29:19-20)."

The twofold warning of 22:18-19 is directed against those who foster or follow such seductive teaching. This Deuteronomic background is remarkably suitable to Rev 22:18-19, since the descriptions in the three vice lists of 21:8, 21:27, and 22:15 all conclude by emphasizing the deceptiveness of the ungodly in connection with idolatry. Consequently, "to add" to the words of John's prophecy is to promote the false teaching that idolatry is not inconsistent with faith in Christ. "To take away from the words of the book of this prophecy" is also to advance such deceptive teaching, since it would violate and vitiate the validity of Revelation's exhortations against idolatry. And, as in Deutereronomy (and enforced by its ANE background), both the very words and the concepts or commands expressed by those words were inviolable and carried absolute authority.

Remarkably analogous is *1 En.* 104:11, where not "to change or take away from my words" means the readers should not "lie," should not "take account of . . . idols," not "alter and pervert the words of righteousness" and not "practice great deceits." The *1 Enoch* text is part of the Deuteronomic tradition into which John also has tapped.

In strikingly similar fashion, Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* i.42-43) alludes to the same wording of Deut 4:2 and sees it as a warning against doctrinally malicious scribes as well as any Israelite who would think about not regarding the entire OT "as the decrees of God," not abiding by them and uttering "a single word against them." Both *1 Enoch* and Josephus also see that both breaking the conceptually expressed commands of Deuteronomy and merely altering the very individual words are being warned against.

This analysis fits well also with the situation of the churches portrayed in chs. 2–3 of Revelation, which depict all the churches confronting idolatry to one degree or another, though often not successfully. Strikingly, some of the false teachers and their followers encouraging idolatry in the church of Pergamum are identified as those "who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling-block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit immorality" (see 2:14). The same deceptive teaching was also prevalent in the church of Thyatira (see 2:20-23). Such false prophets who

[14] Ibid., 31.

distort the truth are either adding false theology or taking away from the revealed truth. Even one who would intentionally change the very words is likely in mind, since such an intention would probably be related to false teaching.[15]

In contrast, "the words having been written in this book" by John are truth and utterly trustworthy.

III. *John's Prophetic Commission to Write True Words Is Based on the Truthful Character of God and Christ from Whom the Words Come*

In addition to the background of Ezekiel and Rev 22:18-19, which I addressed in the first two sections of this article, how does the Book of Revelation itself attest more specifically to the nature of John's written record? We have seen in the first two sections above that Rev 22:18-19 shows that the written form of Revelation is absolutely inviolable, and we have seen that the repeated commands to "write" at the beginning of each of the seven letters is a direct development of the initial prophetic commission in 1:10-11. We have also seen that the Ezekiel commission involved the prophet speaking and writing down God's very words, and that John's commission is defined in the same manner.

A little more reflection on John's commission "to write" unswervingly truthful words may be further illuminating, especially as this is linked to the flawless character of God and Christ. The imperative to "write" in the letters carries this idea. After each command to John to "write," the following message becomes the very words of Christ, which at the end of each letter is also said to be the words of the Spirit: "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Thus, John's written word is also the word of Christ and of the Spirit. Can any of these seven epistolary messages contain human error on John's part mixed with the true message of Christ and the Spirit? There is certainly no hint in the letters that this could be the case. In fact, after the command to "write" in each of the letters, there follows immediately a self-introduction by Christ, drawing on some feature by which he was portrayed in ch. 1 in his act of giving John his prophetic commission. Some of the features in ch. 1 and in chs. 2–3 describe Jesus as a divine being.[16] As divine being, it is hard to imagine that Christ could commission John to "write" his (Christ's) words and to countenance that John's words would not represent at every point Christ's words. That is, John's carrying out of Christ's commission cannot contain any human flaws that would obfuscate Christ's message at any point.

It is true that this conclusion about John's flawless message, however, rests technically on logical deductions, which I think flow directly out of the data in Ezekiel, Ezekiel's use in Revelation, and in Rev 22:18-19 so far examined. These inferences are, indeed, inferences not merely drawn by later interpreters of Revelation (such as myself) but I will contend that they are inferences also explicitly

[15] This preceding section on Rev 22:18-19 is based on Beale, *Revelation*, 1150-54, on which see further.

[16] On which see the commentary on Rev 1:8, 14, 17, and 3:7, 14 in Beale, *Revelation*, in loc.

and exegetically deduced later in Revelation itself. These explicit inferences will now be addressed.

The remainder of this article will argue the following: (1) that John is commanded to "write" down the oral "words" from God and Christ in a "book," (2) and the written words will be "faithful and true," (3) *because* they come from Christ and God, who are "faithful and true." (4) And because John writes under prophetic inspiration and authority, what he writes unswervingly represents what he has heard God or Christ say. Therefore, the character of God and Christ as unswervingly "true" is given as the basis of John's written word in Revelation as being unswervingly "true." Thus, the logical deduction about the nature of Scripture that is today increasingly being called into question is the very deduction that I will conclude is being made in Revelation.

There are four passages in Revelation that together demonstrate that John's written word is entirely "true" because it is from the God who possesses the attribute of absolute truth:

> Rev 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:"
> Rev 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."
> Rev 21:5 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 22:6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

1. *Revelation 3:14*

Revelation 3:14 focuses on the truthful divine character of Christ, and chs. 19, 21, and 22 apply this divine attribute to why John's written word is to be considered true. In fact, the statements in Rev 21:5 and 22:6 are a direct development of Rev 3:14, since they all contain the statement "faithful and true" (and, as we will see, Rev 19:9 is probably also linked to the later statements in chs. 21 and 22). Furthermore, the link between Rev 3:14 and that of 21:5 and 22:6 is strengthened by observing that all three of these passages allude to Isa 65:16:

> Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of *truth*; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of *truth*; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!

This allusion to Isaiah first needs to be established in Rev 3:14, and then it can be seen how the other passages are dependent on both Rev 3:14 and its reference to Isaiah. That Isa 65:16 is the primary source for Christ's titles in Rev 3:14 is supported by several lines of evidence, which will be summarized here.[17] First, ὁ ἀμήν ("the Amen") is a Semitic equivalent to the Greek "faithful" (πιστός), as

[17] These lines of evidence are expanded upon in ibid., 297-301.

well as "true" (ἀληθινός), which is evident from the Septuagint's typical translation of verbal and nominal forms of the root אמן ("to be faithful") mainly by πιστός, but also sometimes by ἀληθινός.[18] Therefore, the threefold name in Rev 3:14 could be an expanded translation of Isaiah's "Amen." Such an amplification of Isaiah's "Amen" is pointed to further by recalling that the Hebrew text refers twice to God as "the God of truth [אמן]," which is translated in the following ways by different versions of the Greek OT:

Isaiah 65:16	Revelation 3:14
"the God of amen . . . the God of Amen."	(Christ is) "the amen, the faithful and true witness,"
(Early Greek Bibles have at this point "the God of amen" (ἀμήν), others have instead "the true [ἀληθινόν] God," and still others the "faithful [using a nominal participial form of πιστεύω] God.")	ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός

In this light, the title "the faithful and true witness" in Rev 3:14 is best taken as an interpretative translation of "Amen" from Isa 65:16.[19] Thus, the four Greek versions of Isa 65:16 together have virtually the same amplified renderings as that of Rev 3:14. Nowhere else in Scripture are these three words, "Amen, faithful, and true," found in combination, and this is true even with the combination of "faithful and true."[20]

Another feature pointing to an allusion to Isa 65:16 is that "Amen" in both the OT and NT usually is a response by people to a word from God or to a prayer, and it sometimes refers to Jesus' trustworthy statements. However, an observation underscoring a further link between Isa 65:16 and Rev 3:14 is that these are the only two passages in the entire Bible where "Amen" is a name. Finally, the "blessing" of the "God of truth," which is only generally referred to in Isa 65:16, is precisely understood in the following verse to be that of the new creation which he

[18] See Hatch and Redpath, *Concordance to LXX*, in loc.

[19] The Septuagint has "the *true* God" (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν, LXX); the versions of Theodotion and Symmachus support the translation of "the God of *Amen*" (ἀμήν); Aquila, Jerome, and MS 86 support the basic reading of "the God of *faithfulness*" (Aquila reads ἐν τῷ θεῷ πεπιστωμένως, which employs the adverbial form "faithfully" as part of the fuller phrase "by which the one blessing himself in the earth will be blessed faithfully by God").

[20] Dan 2:45 (Theod.) also a bit more loosely combines the two words ("true is the dream and faithful is its interpretation" [ἀληθινὸν τὸ ἐνύπνιον καὶ πιστὴ ἡ σύγκρισις αὐτοῦ]), but there is no mention of new creation there as there is in Rev 3:14 (though see the possible secondary relevance of Dan 2:45 in the discussion of Rev 22:6 below). See also 3 Macc 2:11 where God is referred to as "faithful . . . true" (πιστὸς . . . καὶ ἀληθινός), but in this reference there is nothing about creation or new creation but God's faithfulness in eventually executing judgment. If this were in mind, it would still be making the same point about God's character. The Daniel and Maccabees texts themselves may well also be allusions to Isa 65:16.

will bring about: "For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:17). Likewise, the directly following clause in Rev 3:14 after "The Amen, the faithful and true witness" is "the beginning of the creation of God," which probably refers, not to the beginning of creation in Gen 1, but to the resurrected Jesus as the beginning of the new creation. The common pattern appears as follows:

Isaiah 65:16-17	Revelation 3:14
"the God of amen . . . the God of Amen."	(Christ is) "the amen, the faithful and true witness,"
"for behold, I create new heavens and a new earth"	(Christ is) "the beginning of the (new) creation of God."

Thus, just as in Isa 65:16-17, so in Rev 3:14 the divine attributes of "Amen" (= "faithful and true") are followed by reference to new creation. This unique two-fold pattern points even further to Rev 3:14 being a development of Isa 65:16-17.

That Christ as "the beginning of the creation of God" refers to the new creation is also apparent from recognizing that Rev 3:14 is a development of Rev 1:5:

Revelation 1:5	Revelation 3:14
"the faithful witness," "the first-born from the dead"	"the amen, the faithful and true witness," "the beginning of the creation of God."

The first parallel in Rev 1:5, Christ as "a faithful witness," is directly followed by his being "first-born from the dead," just as in 3:14 Christ as "a faithful witness" is directly followed by "beginning of the creation of God." Hence, this parallel shows that the "beginning of the (new) creation of God" is begun in Jesus' resurrection (see the chart above). This parallel is demonstrated further by recalling that every one of Christ's self-introductions in each of the other letters in Rev 2–3 is either a restatement or development of something in ch. 1. It is unlikely that the phrase "the beginning of the creation of God" is the only part of Christ's seven self-introductions that is not derived from ch. 1. It is probable that this phrase "the beginning of the creation of God" is not alluding to the first creation in the book of Genesis but is an interpretative paraphrase of Jesus as "the first-born of the dead" in 1:5. In this light, Rev 3:14 has developed Rev 1:5 through understanding it as a beginning fulfillment of Isa 65:16-17.

It needs to be underscored and clarified at this point that the "blessing" of the "God of truth" [or "amen," or "faithfulness"], which is only generally referred to in Isa 65:16, is precisely understood in the following verse to be the promised blessing of the new creation which he will bring about: "For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:17; note also the identity of Isa 65:16 with

65:17 in the repeated phrase of the second line of each verse, "the former troubles [things] are forgotten [shall not be remembered]." This name of God is His guarantee that he will surely bring about a new creation, which he promises to do in Isa 65:17. *Therefore, God promises in Isa 65:16-17 to create a new earth, and he gives assurance in v. 16 that he will fulfill this promise because he is completely trustworthy, dependable, reliable, and true. God's word of promise is true and it cannot be broken or nullified nor can he be seen to be mistaken in making this promise.*

The main point of what I want to say about Rev 3:14 is that Christ is identified with the "true, faithful, and amen God" of Isa 65:16. Since Jesus is identified with the God of Isaiah, he is just as trustworthy, dependable, reliable, and true[21] in his character and spoken word (Rev 3:7 also affirms that Christ's character is "true" [ὁ ἀληθινός], also by way of associating him with the God of Isaiah[22]).

I would hope that no Christian theologian would think that God's and the divine *resurrected* Christ's attribute of "truth" could contain any mixture of error.

But the question arises, while the character and spoken word of God and Christ are true, that is, flawless, could not some inaccuracies enter into the human recording in Scripture of this spoken word? Would not such fallibility in part of the recording of Scripture reflect the human facet of the Bible? In the case of Revelation, I think we have an answer to this question.

2. *Revelation 21:5*

God commands John to "write" the announcement of v. 5a "because these words" about the coming new creation "are faithful and true" (πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί), a phrase rooted in Isa 65:16, as we have seen above in the discussion of Rev 3:14. Against this background, the expression of 21:5 is to be seen as an interpretative translation of אָמֵן from Isa 65:16. Accordingly, Rev 21:5 is a development of Rev 3:14, which interprets Isaiah's "Amen" in the same way and is also directly connected to an expression about the new creation.

Revelation 3:14	Revelation 21:5
Christ is "the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God."	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."

[21] See BAGD, 43, which gives the following ranges of meaning for ἀληθινός: (1) pertinent to being in accord with what is true, *true, trustworthy*; (2) pertinent to being in accordance with fact, *true*; (3) pertinent to being real, *genuine, authentic, real.* BAGD, 820-21, gives the following for πιστός: (1) pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, *trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith*; (2) pertinent to being trusting, *trusting, cherishing, faith/trust.*

[22] On which see Beale, *Revelation*, 283, where Christ as the holy, the true occurs, the former title "the holy" likely deriving from the repeated reference in Isaiah to God as "the holy one of Israel."

An allusion to Isa 65:16 is also corroborated by Rev 21:5 where the one "on the throne" says ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα ("Behold, I make all things new"), a reference to Isa 43:19 and 65:17, and then he refers to this declaration as "faithful and true." This declaration itself is a development of the earlier allusion to Isa 65:17 in Rev 21:1 ("And I saw a new heaven and a new earth"). All of this further cements a direct link between Rev 3:14 and 21:5. A difference between Rev 3:14 and that of 21:5 is that in the latter the words are in the plural. The likely reason for the difference is that the focus in 3:14 is on the character of the singular Christ, whereas in the latter the focus is upon God's written "words" (plural) that John is commanded to write down.

Thus, Rev 21:5 takes the statement about Christ's character and word in Rev 3:14, along with its allusion to Isa 65:16-17, and applies it now to John's writing down of God's (or Christ's)[23] words, "Behold, I am making all things new." In particular, the expression "these words are faithful and true" provide the reason ("because," ὅτι) for why John is commanded to put into writing God's words: "write, because these words are faithful and true." In other words, the affirmation about Christ's unswervingly true character and spoken word in Rev 3:14, as we have seen in that text and in Isa 65:16 to which it alludes, is applied to the nature of God's/Christ's words in written form, which John is commissioned to "write." The inference that is being made from 3:14 is that just as Christ's divine character and spoken word are flawless, so is John's recording of the divine words in written form. He is to write such unswervingly true divine words that he hears in order that the churches may have a pure and undoubted divine word addressed to them in writing.

3. *Revelation 22:6*

Note the parallels again with Rev 3:14:

Revelation 3:14	Revelation 22:6
Christ is "the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God."	And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true:" and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

[23] The person speaking in Rev 21:5 is likely God (so Beale, *Revelation*, 1052), though it is possible that it is the exalted Jesus, since the saying "first and last" in 21:6 is spoken by Christ in 1:17 and Christ is the one who "guides them to springs of the water of life" in 7:17, so that 21:6 refers to Christ who says, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life." Whether or not these are God's or Christ's words is not significant for our purposes, since we have already seen that in Rev 3:14 Christ speaks the words of Isa 65:16, which there are spoken by God. Thus, Revelation, on the basis of an "identification with God" Christology, could easily move from God to Christ and back to God again as the speaker of these words.

Revelation 22:6 serves as a concluding statement for both the vision of 21:1–22:5, as well as for the whole book. The speaker could be Jesus, since v. 7 continues the statement (note the conjunctive "and" [καὶ]), where also Jesus is clearly the speaker. The speaker could just as well be an angel in line with the identification of the third person "he" in introducing the visions in 21:9-10 and 22:1.

Verse 6 summarizes the preceding vision of the New Jerusalem, which is apparent from its placement immediately after that vision and its verbal repetition of 21:5b, "These words are faithful and true" (οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί). As we have seen from the discussion of 21:5, the phrase is based on Isa 65:16, which expresses confidence in God's forthcoming act of new creation, which will come true because God's word of promise is true and cannot be nullified or be seen to be mistaken. Indeed, the clause in 21:5 connotes precisely the same idea in conjunction with allusions to Isa 43:18-19, 65:17, and 66:22. The same wording in 22:6 thus repeats the same idea of certainty about God's statements in 21:6–22:5 about his future act of new creation. The purpose of the repetition is to emphasize this idea. Accordingly, the same conclusions about Rev 21:5 are present here: Christ's unswervingly true character and oral word in Rev 3:14 are applied to the nature of his words in written form (though his words may be spoken by an angel). The inference that is being made from 3:14 is that just as Christ's divine character and spoken word are flawless in 3:14, so it may be inferred that John's writing down of the divine words results in a flawless record of those words for the seven churches. Though there is not reference explicitly in 22:6 to the written form, it is likely in mind because of the parallel with 21:5 and because the following context refers to "the words of this book" (22:9) and "the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:10, and likewise 22:18-19). John "heard and saw these things" (22:8) and wrote them down in a "book."

Together with the Isa 65:16/Rev 3:14 background, there may also be an echo of Dan 2:45b (Theod.) standing in the background of the phrase "the words are faithful and true": "the dream is <u>true</u> [ἀληθινόν], and the interpretation of it is <u>faithful</u> [πιστή]." The clause in Dan 2 is the conclusion to a prophetic vision about the victorious establishment of God's kingdom, and it inspires certainty that the prophetic vision has divine authority and, therefore, its contents are true and reliable. The allusion to Dan 2 has the same meaning here.[24] The vision that Daniel saw and what he heard he communicated orally to the Babylonian king, and this is now applied to what John saw and heard and put into writing. Could there be anything in Daniel's oral communication of the vision to the king that was inaccurate perhaps in a few details? Daniel's concluding words, "the dream is true and the interpretation of it is faithful," make this improbable, so that the Dan 2 echo, if it is in mind, enforces the idea of absolute infallibility in the written form of Revelation.

[24] For further discussion about the validity of this Dan 2 allusion, see Beale, *Revelation*, 1124.

4. *Revelation 19:9-11*

Once again verbal correspondences between Rev 3:14 are observable:

Revelation 3:14	Revelation 19:9-11
Christ is "the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God."	Rev 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Rev 19:10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

John is commanded, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" The angel then immediately adds, "These are true words of God." This second statement is likely a reason undergirding the first. That the second assertion is the ground for the first is also pointed to by the connection between the very similar sayings in 21:5, where John is first commanded to write about the coming new creation, and then it is immediately added "for these words are faithful and true." It is less apparent in 19:9 that there is allusion to Isa 65:16 or Rev 3:14, but the reference to "true" may be an abbreviation of "faithful and true" from these other two passages. Regardless, the meaning is effectively the same: John is to put in written form God's words through the angel because they "are true words of God." The phrase "of God" indicates that they derive from or have their source in God. That is, these words are true because they come from God who is true. It is likely not coincidental that only one verse later "the witness of Jesus" is referred to (19:10), and then Christ is "called faithful and true" (19:11). If so, Christ's "faithful and true" character is at least partly related to John's written word being faithful and *true* (19:9) and lies behind the reliability of his "witness" (19:10). The character of the *divine* Christ,[25] may well be part of what is behind the phrase in 19:9, "These are true words of God."

[25] Rev 19:16 clearly affirms Christ's deity as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, especially in light of its allusion to Dan 4:37 (LXX), where the title is applied to God.

Verse 10 affirms that what John is writing is part of "the testimony [or 'witness'] of Jesus," which "is the Spirit of prophecy." Mention of πνεῦμα may mean that it is a prophetic testimony inspired by the Spirit: τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας as an objective genitive, "the Spirit inspiring prophecy."[26] Thus, John's written words are faithful and true also because he is a prophet inspired by God's Spirit. In addition to the letters of Rev 2–3, that the Spirit inspires John is apparent also in Rev 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" John is commanded to "write," and what he writes is affirmed by the Spirit to be true and dependable ("yes, says the Spirit"). Bauckham adds with respect to this verse, "The words of the Spirit are the Spirit's response, speaking through John, to the heavenly voice. As John obeys the command to write the beatitude, the Spirit inspiring him adds an emphatic endorsement of it."[27]

IV. *Reflection on the Significance of the Reference to the Written Words of Revelation Being Referred to as Authoritative*

Revelation 19:9, 21:6, 22:6, 18-19 all refer to the written words of the book as "true" or "faithful and true" or as inviolable. The fact that not mere concepts but the very written words are to be seen as without mistake is apparent in noticing especially the specific references in 19:9 and 21:9. There only one sentence is spoken by God or an angel and then the sentence is referred to as "these words." It is implausible that there is reference here only to an unerring concept that is expressed through a mixture of perhaps just one or two imperfect words. It is really pedantic even to pose such a question, but the present debates over the inerrancy of Scripture call for posing such a question. Thus, both the concept expressed by the words and each of the individual words themselves are absolutely authoritative, so that words cannot be separated from concepts.[28] In the same manner, all "the words of this book" (Rev 22:9-10, 18-19), the entire written form of Revelation, carries the same exact notion.

[26] Cf. Zerwick and Grosvenor, 772; NEB. See likewise G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 233. Alternatively, the phrase may mean that those giving such a testimony are considered "prophetic people." Along these lines, πνεύμα would be a collective or distributive singular and τῆς προφητείας would be a descriptive genitive: "prophetic spirit[s]" or "prophetic soul[s]" = prophets. This alternative would still see the words to be "prophetic"; the prophets possess a spirit that receives inspiration from God. See further discussion in Beale, *Revelation*, 947 and 1124-25.

[27] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 160.

[28] Of course, there can be words randomly expressed in a writing that are jibberish and express no concept. We are conceiving of the written words in Revelation being organized by John in such a way as to express concepts, which is a communicative speech act, but to think that the individual words are somehow separated from the precisely true concepts is a question that John would never have entertained, since he understood that the words that he was commissioned to write were God's very words.

V. *Conclusion*

If absolute flawlessness be granted about God's character and spoken word, then the same should be granted about John's written word. This inference is the same inference that John draws: since Christ's character and spoken word are impeccable, John is commissioned to record Christ's (God's) words because they come from the divine being whose character is without flaw, including his knowledge of all things.

One might conclude that what Revelation teaches about its written nature cannot be applied to other parts of Scripture. But several observations militate against this: (1) in one of the key texts examined above, Rev 22:6, John is grouped with other prophets: "the Lord, the God of the spirits of prophets, sent his angel to show . . . ." This likely includes not merely NT prophets but likely OT prophets, especially since the phrase "the spirits of the prophets" appears to be an allusion to Num 27:16 ("the Lord God of spirits"), where it refers to God's role of replacing Moses with Joshua, who would now be the prophetic spokesman for God's people (cf. Num 27:12-21). (2) John is repeatedly given the same commission as a prophet as was Ezekiel the prophet. (3) The totality of John's written record in Revelation is seen to be "faithful and true" in the same way that God prophesied that the new creation would definitely occur because Yahweh as "faithful and true" had prophesied it. (4) The concluding phrase of Rev 22:6, "God sent . . . to show . . . what must come to pass quickly," is a clear reference to Dan 2:45, which records the conclusion of the prophet Daniel's report of his vision in Dan 2. (5) Since John's clearest affirmations about the unswerving truth of his own book are explicitly based on other apocalyptic OT works (e.g., Ezekiel and Daniel) with which he puts his book on a par, would not John's affirmation about Scripture's full truth be a claim that can only be made about apocalyptic books in the canon in which the apocalyptists received their revelation directly by vision and audition from God? But it needs to be remembered that John did not write down as a secretary taking dictation, but after his visions he put pen to paper and likely himself added some OT allusions in various places, so that the book is a mix of vision and literary production. Furthermore, that John's appeal goes outside the apocalyptic OT genre is clear from recalling that he puts himself on a par with the authority of Moses in Rev 22:18-19, where he clearly applies Deut 4:1-2 and 29:19-20 to his own book. In addition, John makes reference to the OT more than any other NT writer, which implies that, since he clearly puts himself on a par with several of these OT writers—Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel—that he would not only have the same view of their writings as he does of his but also it implies that he would have the same view of other OT writings to which he alludes outside of Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel. It is likely for this reason that John alludes to all the various OT books that he does, since they hold the same status of authoritative Scripture for him.

In fact, much like Rev 19, 21, and 22, Ps 119:137-142 refers to God's character as "righteous" and makes the conclusion that, therefore, his written Scripture is also "righteous," "pure," and "true":

Ps 119:137 Righteous are You, O LORD,
And upright are Your judgments [= Scripture].
Ps 119:138 You have commanded Your testimonies in righteousness
And exceeding faithfulness.
Ps 119:139 My zeal has consumed me,
Because my adversaries have forgotten Your words.
Ps 119:140 Your word is very pure,
Therefore Your servant loves it.
Ps 119:141 I am small and despised,
Yet I do not forget Your precepts.
Ps 119:142 Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
And Your law is truth.

It is further interesting that in narrating his prophetic call according to the pattern of Ezekiel's (Rev 10:1-10), John also weaves Ps 119:103 ("how sweet are your words to my palate, sweeter than honey to my mouth") into Rev 10:9-10 ("in your mouth it [God's word] will be sweet as honey," found in both verses). In the Psalm, this is then directly followed by the Psalmist contrasting "understanding" from God's "precepts" with "every false way" (Ps 119:104). Perhaps also Ps 19:10 is included in the allusion: God's written Law is referred to as "sweeter also than honey," and compared with "the judgments of the Lord are true" (Ps 19:9) and contrasted with "errors" (Ps 19:12: "Who can discern his errors?").

Likewise, Rev 16:5, 7 compares God's righteous character with his "righteous judgments," which against the background of the combined OT allusions,[29] refers to God's word in Scripture:

5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;
7 And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

Psalm 119:37 may be included in these OT allusions (e.g., see the margin of NA[27]): "Righteous are you . . . and righteous is your judgment(s)."

Some might object to my overall argument by saying that nowhere does John or the OT refer to the actual word "inerrancy" in application to Scripture, but this would be making the "word/concept" confusion. I have tried to show that the words used by John in chs. 19, 21, and 22 ("true," "faithful") are essentially about the same concept as God's word being without error. In fact, some of John's very allusions to the OT, as in Pss 119 and 19 contrast God's word as "true" and "sweet" to "false" and "error." In this regard, it is also instructive to compare the reference in 2 Pet 1:20-21 to "Scripture" not "made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God," which is immediately contrasted with "false prophets," who "malign the way of truth" and speak "false words" (2 Pet 2:1-3). The great "God-breathed" text of 2 Tim 3:16 is also placed in the same kind of contrast with false teaching.

[29] In addition to Ps 119:137 below, see also Ps 144:17 and Deut 32:4 for Rev 16:5 and Dan 3:27 (OG), the latter of which may be pulling together Pss 119 and 144 and Deut 32 in the same way that Rev 16:5 and 7 are doing.

Perhaps I come closest to basing my argument on an "implication" when I assume that God's character and the resurrected Christ's character are without error, even incidental error in their absolute and exhaustive knowledge of even the most apparently unimportant facts about creation or humanity or about the past, present, or future. But even this is a presupposition that is pieced together on the basis of scriptural testimony (e.g., see Ps 119 above; Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Isa 46:10; 48:3-8; Job 11:11; 23:10, 23; 34:25; Pss 1:6; 37:18; 44:21; 69:5; 94:11; 103:14; 138:6; 139:1-18, 23-24; Prov 24:12; Dan 2:19-23; Matt 6:8, 32; Luke 16:15; Acts 15:8; Rom 8:27; 1 John 3:20).

Finally, to repeat, the theological inference which some "evangelicals" are saying is unbiblical is, in fact, the very inference that John and other parts of Scripture repeatedly make: since God's character is unswervingly true, his written word of Scripture is unswervingly true. My own understanding of the inerrant truth of Scripture is elaborated on in various ways in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Some might respond to my view of Rev 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 by saying that "faithful and true" (especially in the last two texts) refer precisely only to the oral words of Christ and not specifically to the written form of those words. Accordingly, even though John is commanded to "write" the words he hears, could there not have been some slippage in John's not exhaustively and precisely recording what was said, so that some small degree of error could have crept into the written form of the words?

My response to this is the following: (1) Would God "command/commission" John as a prophet to "write" his words knowing ahead of time that his prophetic word would be inaccurately recorded? We have seen that John writes with the authority of an OT prophet, and this would seem to carry the same authority as God speaking through a prophet. For example, John speaks and writes as a prophet: note that 19:10 says, "the Spirit inspires prophecy," which has in mind John's writing as a prophet in 19:9. And Rev 22:6b clearly places John as one among "the spirits of the prophets," who has received a revelation that is "faithful and true" (22:6a), which is directly referred to in recorded form as "the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:7 and 22:18; so identically Rev 22:10) and "the words of the book of this prophecy" (22:19; see similarly 22:9).

(2) The very link between "faithful and true" and "write" indicates or assumes a link between these attributes and the written form.

(3) That point # 2 is valid is evident from the intertextual link between "write" in 1:9-10 and in the repeated command to "write" in the letters of chs. 2 and 3. John writes and then the written form is said to be the words of Christ *and* of the Spirit. At the least, the written form of the letters is presented to the churches as the words of the "Spirit."

(4) The intertextual link between "write" in 1:9-10 and chs. 2–3 and 19:9 and 21:5 enforces the spirit-inspired nature of John's apocalyptic writing task. That John's spirit-inspired and directed prophetic task of recording what he has seen and heard results in a prophetic book is clear, as we have just seen, from Rev 22:7, 10, 18, and 19, which form an inclusio with Rev 1:3. Thus, the written record of

the vision and audition is equally prophetic; since the prophetic vision and oral audition are "faithful and true," so is the written prophetic form "faithful and true." This is just what Rev 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 are affirming.

In the light of these four points, it would be a minimal conclusion (and an example of "thin description") to say that 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 refer only to Christ's oral words being "faithful and true" and not view these verses as extending to the written prophetic form also being "faithful and true."

Thus, can the Bible be fully inspired by a perfect God and yet still contain errors? John and other scriptural writers say "no."

The Westminster Theological Journal
Est. 1938

(ISSN: 0043-4388)

PO Box 27009

Philadelphia, PA 19118

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Published by Westminster Theological Seminary

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