

# 'My Word': The Greatness of God's Word and its Relationship to His Dwelling Place

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## Part One: Greatness of the Word of God

### 1. Powerful

*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (ESV Gen 1:3).* Stated ten times in Gen 1.

*By the **word** of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the **breath of his mouth** all their host. (ESV Psa 33:6)*

*For he **spoke**, and it came to be; he **commanded**, and it stood firm. (ESV Psa 33:9)*

*...He upholds the universe by the **word of his power**. (Heb 1:3 ESV)*

*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the **word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (ESV Heb 11:3)*

*...the dead will hear the **voice** of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (Joh 5:25 ESV)*

*For the **word of God** is living and active, [KJV powerful] sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (ESV Heb 4:12)*

*Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in **power** and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction....(1Th 1:5 ESV)*

There is power resident in the word of God, spoken or written. It is not only truth it has inherent power in itself. This should encourage us to read it, quote it, preach it and teach it. The word of God has power to convict and convert sinners (Rom 10:17) and transform saints (1Th 2:13; 1Pt 2:2).

### 2. Preeminent

*"You have exulted above all things your name and your word". (ESV Ps 138:2)*

**a. The word of God excels the created universe.** C.H. Spurgeon said, "Revelation excels creation in the clearness, definiteness, and fullness of its teaching"(Treasury of David). The creation declares the glory of God with a very broad brush. The word of God reveals the mind of God in exhaustive and definite terms. The word of God is greater than the created universe because, unlike the present creation, it will never pass away, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*" (Mat 24:35 ESV)

**b. Foundation for faith.** How man responds to God's word has always been what determines his salvation or his damnation, his blessing or his cursing, his gain or loss. Man is not saved by seeing God and believing, or seeing miracles and believing, man is saved by believing the word of God, *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom 10:17).* The total number of years that miracles are prevalent in the Bible is only 60 years. God has given man His word throughout all of human history. God communicates to man through His Word and expects faith and obedience in response.

- God gave Adam and Eve His word, *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat (Gen 2:17 ESV).* They disobeyed and introduced sin and death into the world (Rom 5:12)
- Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter covering great heroes of faith in the Old Testament. What marked each one is that they believed God's word without seeing, "*Now faith is...the conviction of things **not seen***" (ESV Heb 11:1).

- *By faith Noah, being warned of God...(Heb 11:7)*
- *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called...(Heb 11:8)*

Every person listed in Hebrews 11 believed and acted on a word from God

- Israel did not enter the land of Canaan initially because of unbelief (Num 14:8-10)
- Israel was exiled because of disobedience to the Law of God (2Chr 36:14-21)

**c. The word of God is sufficient for faith.** We do not need to see miracles or to see God in order to believe. In Luke 16 the rich man in Hell asked that Lazarus be sent back from the dead to his five brothers lest they come to this place of torment. Abraham's response, "*But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"*(Luk 16:29-31 ESV).

The Lord Jesus told Thomas, "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (Joh 20:29 ESV)

**e. Having the word of God is more sure than seeing or hearing the supernatural.** *We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (2Pe 1:18,19 ESV).* Our assurance for salvation or the will of God in our lives must be grounded in the word of God. A faith founded on experience alone will be fragile.

**f. Obeying the word of God is greater than sacrifice.** *And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. (ESV Isa 15:22,23).* Our spiritual service to the Lord is displeasing to Him if it is done in disobedience to the word of God.

**g. Greater than gold.** Speaking of the words of God David says, *More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. (ESV Psa 19:10).*

**h. The Son of God is the Word of God incarnate,** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Joh 1:1,12 ESV).*

### 3. Prophetic

*Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. (22) Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. (23) Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods (Isa 41:21-23 ESV)*

**a. The prophecy of the Bible is unique.** The prophet Isaiah challenged other gods to "*Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods*" (ESV Isa 41:23). To this day, the challenge has not been met. The sacred books of world's religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) do not even make an attempt at prophecies. There are over 300 specific prophecies in the OT regarding the first advent of Christ that have been fulfilled perfectly.

#### **b. Fulfilled prophecy demonstrates three truths:**

- **The God of the Bible is the One and Only true God,** "*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.*" (ESV Isa 42:8,9). The ability to declare things with certainty before they occur, and to ensure that they occur, is a unique glory of the true God.
- **The Bible is the word of God.** If only God can foretell the future, than God must be the Author.
- **Jesus is the Messiah.** It proves that Jesus, who perfectly fulfilled over 300 prophecies –and every prophecy written of him, is truly the Christ the Son of the living God.

**b. Prophecy is not merely God knowing in advance what will happen, it is determining what will happen.** Peter in Acts 2:23 calls this "*the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.*" It is not merely that God knows in

advance how things will turn out and therefore can guide men to write about them. He not only knows; He has the power to arrange human affairs so that the prophecies will be fulfilled. *I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father (1Ki 6:12 ESV)*. In doing so, He does not force people to act in certain ways. Those who crucified the Son of God did so of their own free will, *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Act 2:23 ESV)*.

**c. Apologetic tools of the Apostles.** The OT prophecies were used extensively by the Apostles to prove that Jesus was the anticipated Messiah of the OT, who suffered, died, and rose again. They tied historical eyewitness events to clear prophetic statements of scripture (Acts 2:17-21,25-28,34; 8:21,33;13:16-47;17:2,3;17:11;26:23;1Cor 15:3,4).

Today we should acquaint ourselves with the great prophecies of scripture. In a day when Christianity is viewed as just another religion that is no more valid than Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism, the prophecies of scripture demonstrate that the Bible alone is the authoritative word of God. There is a second purpose of the prophecies and the promises of scripture and that is to give comfort and hope to the believing heart.

#### 4. Preceptive

*But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (ESV Mat 4:4)*

If we had no other scripture in all of the Bible that spoke of man's obligation to order his life by the word of God this would suffice.

- **It is universal, "man"**
  - It was not merely a precept for the children of Israel; it is a rule for mankind. The Lord Jesus quotes this statement from Deu 8:3 demonstrating that He lived by this rule Himself.
- **It is preceptive, "shall"**
- **It is comprehensive, "every word"**
  - We can't pick and choose what scriptures to live by
  - We cannot classify truth as essential and non essential
  - We cannot say something in scripture is not very important because it is only mentioned once. For example only once in all of the Bible is long hair for women and short hair for men mentioned. But if we are to live by "every word" then one statement should be enough.
- **It is not second hand, "from the mouth of God."** We don't just have God's thoughts, his general will, we have words that come from His very mouth. This imagery conveys the idea that we got the words from the very Source. His word has come to us undiluted and untainted. We use the expression today of wanting to 'hear it from the horse's mouth'. What we mean is we don't want it second hand. The word of God we hold in our hand is from the mouth of God. We have His word first hand and it must be the rule for our lives, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,(2Ti 3:16 ESV)*.

### **Part 2: The Word of God and God's Dwelling Place**

In part 2 we will examine the importance of the word of God in relation to God's dwelling place in the OT and observe how the same importance is carried through to God's dwelling place in the NT.

#### **1. The word of God in written form coincides with the establishment of God's dwelling place among His people –the tabernacle.**

##### **a. God's written word to Israel**

For approximately the first 3,000 years of human history God did not give man His word in scripture form (scriptures is the common NT word to refer to the word of God in written form). It wasn't until the time of Moses around 1500 B.C. that God's word took a written form. From the time of Adam until Moses, the word of God was oral and it was spoken to individuals (Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham etc...). What prompted the change from oral form to written form? It coincided with a change from God dealing with individuals to dealing with a redeemed people, a people identified with His Name, among whom He would dwell.

*I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Lev 26:11, 12 ESV)*

*"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deu 7:6 ESV)*

As a people identified in the world as God's own people and as a people He would dwell among, they must be holy, "holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore." (Psa 93:5 ESV). The spoken word to individuals will no longer suffice. They must know and live by the requirements of a Holy God.

### **b. God's written word to the Church**

Now let's examine a parallel in the NT. With the advent of Christ and His rejection by the nation of Israel, God set aside the nation of Israel. Yet God still has a people and a dwelling place today.

- **God's people is the Church, the Body of Christ.** It is composed of all those saved from the day of Pentecost until the rapture.
  - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Pe 2:9 ESV)*
  - *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22 ESV)*
- **God has a dwelling place today among His people.**
  - The body of Christ is being built together into a dwelling place for God (Eph 2:21,22). Presently the Spirit dwells in each individual believer. In the future when the Church is with Christ He will dwell in her midst (Rev 21:2,3).
  - Presently, God has a dwelling place among His people, He dwells in the local church:
    - *For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them (Mat 18:20 Darby).*
    - *Do you not know that you [assembly at Corinth] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (ESV 1Co 3:16-17)*

Just as God had a written charter for the nation of Israel, God has a written a charter for His people today. It is the NT scriptures. They are the authority for how we gather as a local church, "I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth." (1Ti 3:15 ESV).

The local church does not define its own doctrine and practice; it holds and practices that Apostles' doctrine embodied in the canon of NT scriptures.

### **c. The transmission of God's word.**

The Lord Jesus had an oral ministry. He left no writings of His own. The Apostles, and some closely associated with the Apostles, would take up their pens a few years later and write four accounts of His ministry. They would also write authoritative letters to young churches and to individuals like Timothy and Titus who were sent to help young churches. How do we know that these writings were God-breathed? The Lord Jesus assured His disciples in John 14 and 16 that they would not be left to their own poor memories to remember His teachings. Nor would they be left to just develop church doctrine and practice on their own. The Holy Spirit would be their guide.

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** (Joh 14:26 ESV)*

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (13) When the Spirit of truth comes, **he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Joh 16:12-14 ESV)*

How do we know that God-breathed writings have not continued to be written down through the centuries of the Church age? After all, wasn't the Old Testament written over a period of some 1000 years? First, the Lord's promise implies that the Apostles would be the recipients of 'all truth' given by the Holy Spirit. If that is not convincing Jude 3 leaves us no doubt, *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common*

salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for **the faith** that was **once for all delivered to the saints**. (ESV Jud 1:3 )

The first local church in the NT followed the charter; “they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine...**” (Acts 2:42). The Apostles received this doctrine from the Holy Spirit.

## 2. God’s dwelling place was to be exactly according to the pattern

*And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. (9) **Exactly** as I show you concerning the **pattern** of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Exo 25:8-9 ESV)*

*They serve a **copy** and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything **according to the pattern** that was shown you on the mountain.” (Heb 8:5 ESV)*

*You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.(Deu 4:2 ESV)*

God did not allow for any deviations from the pattern –no additions, no subtractions. Nothing was left to human invention. This was true not only of the tabernacle itself but also to all of the ceremonies and feasts associated with God’s dwelling place. There were seven feasts of Jehovah, not six or eight. There were five offerings not four or six. The Tabernacle was to be erected on the first day of the first month, not the second day.

David would later institute singers and music into the Temple worship. This was not an addition he dreamed up on his own. He was following a commandment from the LORD (2Chr 29:25).

There is a definite pattern that God has laid out in the NT regarding His dwelling place, the local church. We can see the pattern by precept and by example:

- **Precept**
  - *The women **should** keep silent in the churches. For they are **not permitted** to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. (1Co 14:34 ESV)*
- **Example**
  - *On the **first day of the week**, when we were gathered together to **break bread**.... (Act 20:7 ESV)*

The examples are part of the pattern because the assemblies were practicing based on the Apostles doctrine. As we have seen before, the Apostles doctrine was what was taught to them by the Holy Spirit (Joh 16:12-14).

## 3. God came to dwell in the tabernacle after, and only after, they did everything that the Lord commanded.

**a. God’s presence in the tabernacle.** Exodus 40 is God’s instruction to Moses on how to erect the tabernacle. This chapter demonstrates clearly that God’s presence among His people is conditioned on their obedience to His word.

- **Precept:** In verses 1-15 God states, ‘**you shall**’ sixteen times  
*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (2) "On the first day of the first month **you shall** erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. (Exo 40:1-2 ESV)*
- **Obedience:** In verses 16-33 the words ‘**as the LORD commanded Moses**’ occur eight times  
*This Moses did; **according to all that the LORD commanded him**, so he did (Exo 40:16 ESV).*
- **Presence:** Verses 34-38 describe the presence of the LORD that resulted  
***Then** the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exo 40:34 ESV)*

Formula: ‘You Shall’ + ‘according to all that the LORD commanded, so he did = ‘Then...the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle’

**b. God’s presence in the local church.** The formula remains valid for the NT assembly, *For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them.(Mat 18:20 Darby).* The Lord’s presence is

conditioned upon gathering unto His Name. What does it mean to gather unto His Name? It is not merely a claim. It means owning His lordship in the assembly. His name equates to His person and everything that He stands for – His teaching which is embodied in the Apostles doctrine.

**c. A word of warning.** Gathering unto His Name and continuing in the Apostles' doctrine is not merely a form. The inward spiritual condition of those composing the church is vital.

- Some of the Lord's sharpest rebukes were to those who had an outward form, but whose hearts were far from God. *And he [Jesus] said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mar 7:6 ESV).*
- The church of Ephesus was zealous for right doctrine and were intolerant of false teachers, but they had left their first love. Because of that the Lord Jesus warns, *I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev 2:5 ESV).*

#### **4. There is an inextricable link between the value placed on the word of God and the value placed on His dwelling place**

##### **a. David**

- *I have found David ... a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will (Act 13:22).*
- He wanted to build a house for God (1Ch 17:1) and in several Psalms expressed his love for the house of God, *O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.(Psa 26:8 ESV) One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.(Psa 27:4 ESV)*

##### **b. Josiah (2Ki 22,23)**

- Did what was right in the eyes of the LORD.
- He discovered the Law of God which prompted one of the greatest restorations to scriptural practices in the House of God –albeit short lived

##### **c. Ezra and the exiles**

- The first thing the exiles did upon returning from Babylon was to build an altar (Ezr 3). Following that they built a temple (Ezr 3-6). The focus of the scriptures dealing with the returned exiles was the establishment of the temple and proper worship,
- Along with a focus on the temple was a focus on the word of God (Ezr 7). Neh 8 is about an ancient 'Bible' conference. Ezra stands on a platform and reads and expounds the scriptures. The people are attentive and responsive to the teaching of the word of God.

##### **d. The Incarnate Word: His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." (Joh 2:17 ESV)**

##### **e. Paul: ... that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2Co 11:28).** Paul's God-breathed letters were written either to churches or contained church teaching.

If we truly love all the word of God, we will love the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

#### **5. Teaching the word of God is vital for preservation of God's dwelling place.**

##### **a. OT Emphasis**

*"You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (19) You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (20) You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, (21) that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. (Deu 11:18-21 ESV)*

##### **b. NT Emphasis**

*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2Ti 2:2 ESV).*