

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #83: IS THE BIBLE A “TO BE CONTINUED” BOOK?

By John Temples

There are two schools of thought regarding the Bible. One is that it is a complete document, inspired by God, finished in the first century; and therefore self-contained, all-sufficient, and not subject to addition or revision. The other is that the Bible is an open-ended book, subject to additions and amendments--a “to be continued” book. Several denominations teach the latter view, including:

- The Roman Catholic church, which views certain declarations of the pope as inspired and equal with Scripture;
- The Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) church, which regards several books besides the Bible as Scripture (their “Book of Mormon” is described as “another testament of Jesus Christ”).
- The Society of Friends (the Quakers) openly teach continuing revelation. Here is a statement from one of their websites: “Because Friends believe that revelation is ongoing, we have no set creed or dogmas and we believe that new truth is revealed to us as we continue our spiritual journeys individually and with one another.”
(<https://www.pym.org/introducing-pym-quakers/quaker-faith/continuing-revelation/>)
- Many Pentecostal or charismatic churches claim continuing revelation.

Every time a TV preacher says, “God spoke to me,” or “God gave me this prophecy,” or “The Holy Spirit laid this on my heart,” he is claiming additional revelation, apart from and in addition to the Bible.

Which view is correct? Is the Bible “to be continued”? The position taken in this article is that the Bible is complete, finished, and self-sufficient. All that God wants us to know is found between Genesis and Revelation. Here are three reasons we believe this view is correct:

THE BIBLE CLAIMS COMPLETENESS AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16-17--"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." How could we be more than "complete" and "thoroughly equipped for every good work"? But, someone might say, "When Paul wrote this, the New Testament was not finished." True, but Paul wrote in inspired anticipation of the time when all the New Testament books would be finished AND accepted by the first-century church as inspired Scripture.¹

Peter, another inspired apostle, said in 2 Peter 1:3, "...His divine power has given us *all things that pertain to life and godliness...*" (2 Peter 1:3). Jude told the Christians of his era to "contend earnestly for the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Here's the dilemma faced by people who claim continuing revelation:

1. The majority of these individuals and churches proclaim that they believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God.
2. But the Bible writers consistently claim that the body of Scripture given in the first century, plus the inspired Old Testament books, constitutes the complete word of God.
3. So, to claim that "there is more to the word of God than just the Bible" is to say that *God misled the Bible writers*.

No, if the Bible is the word of God (which it is), then it would not make false claims of completeness!

THE BIBLE ALSO CONDEMNS ANY MODIFICATIONS OR ADDITIONS TO ITSELF

This is a second reason we know that God did not intend for the Bible to be an open-ended book. Moses warned the Israelites against tampering with, modifying,

¹ Note that Peter, writing later than Paul, called Paul's writings "Scripture" (2 Peter 3:16), indicating that those writings had already been accepted by the early church as inspired and worthy of inclusion in the canon of the Bible.

or adding to the God-revealed Old Testament Scriptures in Deuteronomy 4:2--"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." John the apostle soberly warned, "Whoever transgresses [goes beyond or adds to] and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (2 John 9). And the last warning of the Bible is this: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

Paul expressed his alarm concerning certain individuals in the first century who were already aspiring to modify or add to Scripture. He said in Galatians 1:6-9, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

THERE IS NO WAY TODAY FOR DIVINE REVELATION TO COME OTHER THAN THE BIBLE

There was a methodical and orderly process by which God delivered His word to us, and that process has been completed. Consider:

If there were to be extra-Biblical revelation today, it would not come from God. God ceased speaking to man when His Son began His ministry. The last time God ever spoke audibly to man was at the transfiguration. He spoke to Peter, James, and John, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him" (Matthew 17:5). God is now dealing with us through a Mediator, Jesus His Son (1 Timothy 2:5). And words could not be plainer than these in Hebrews 1:1-2--"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."

But also, if revelation or additional Scripture were to come today, it would not come through Jesus Christ. He turned the responsibility for revealing and teaching the gospel to the apostles. In John 17:8, we read that Jesus prayed to the Father, “I have given them [the apostles] the words which You have given Me.” In the Great Commission, Jesus charged the apostles with going and preaching His gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16).

In a very interesting special case, Jesus appeared in person to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. (This appearance was to qualify Saul/Paul to be an apostle, since one essential requirement for apostleship was having seen the resurrected Christ with one’s own eyes.) Saul became a believer in Jesus and asked Him, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:6a).

Pay close attention: here we have a case of the Lord Himself in direct, face-to-face conversation with a sinner who is asking how to get his sins forgiven. Incredibly, the Lord would not tell Saul the terms of pardon, but said to him, “Go into the city and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6b). Three days later, a certain disciple named Ananias came to Saul and told him to “arise and be baptized and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16). Once the gospel was put into earthen vessels, even the Lord Himself would not bypass that arrangement! If Jesus would not deliver God’s instructions to Saul after the Great Commission went into effect, do we think He would do it today? But also:

Additional Scripture or revelation will not come today through the Holy Spirit. Many people claim that the Holy Spirit speaks to them or reveals messages from God; but the New Testament consistently emphasizes that the Spirit delivered the word of God to the apostles, who wrote it down so that we would have God’s inspired message in an inspired book. In another interesting case, the evangelist Philip met an Ethiopian government official in the desert and preached the gospel to him. The Holy Spirit is twice said to have been present at this encounter (Acts 8:29, 39). *But the Spirit never once spoke to the sinner!* He arranged the meeting between the Ethiopian and Philip, and it was Philip who delivered the message of salvation to the sinner.

If neither God, nor Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, would bypass the use of human instruments in delivering divine revelation in the first century, surely they would not do it now. Once a rich man, having died and being in torment in Hades, pleaded for a dead beggar to be sent back to earth to warn his brothers. His request was denied. The reply was, "They have Moses and the prophets [that is, they have their writings]" (Luke 16:29). Today, "we have Christ and the apostles." We should respect God's arrangement and not seek or claim additional revelation.

Would an angel deliver additional divine instruction today? Go back to the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian treasurer and notice that an angel was also involved in this situation. Acts 8:26 says, "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south....'" But here again, all the angel did was direct the preacher to the sinner! Why did the angel not go to the sinner directly and tell him what he needed to hear? Because the gospel is now in an inspired Book, just as it was in inspired men at that time. Angels did play a part in bringing God's message to man, but an angel never preached the gospel to anyone. Remember Paul's declaration: "But if we, *or an angel from heaven*, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, *let him be accursed*" (Galatians 1:8). Think about that Scripture the next time a TV preacher says an angel spoke to him.

Furthermore, we have no inspired apostles or prophets today. The Bible gives clear tests for those who would claim such, and no one meets the tests today.

CONCLUSION: MODERN-DAY, CONTINUING REVELATION IS NOT GOD'S PLAN AND HAS NO WAY TO COME

It will not come from God; He gave all authority to the Son to speak for Him. It will not come from Christ; He gave the gospel (and full authority to speak it and write it down) to His apostles. It will not come through the Holy Spirit, because He guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). It will not come via an angel, for that angel would be under a curse for speaking anything different from or in addition to what we have in God's word, the Bible.

And finally, consider this: Many religions claim continuing revelation, yet they all preach contradictory messages. How can all these messages be from God? His word is truth (John 17:17). He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). You can mark this down about any new religious doctrine that comes your way: it is either more than the Bible, less than the Bible, or the same as the Bible. If it is more than the Bible or less than the Bible, it is condemned (2 John 9, Revelation 22:19). If it is the same as the Bible, it is redundant and unnecessary--it is no "revelation."

Do not be led astray by false claims that the Bible is "open-ended" or "to be continued." If it is, then divine truth is unattainable. We could never be sure we have the true gospel if it is subject to revision by men. John MacArthur writes, "Once a congregation sees Scripture as less than the final, complete, infallible authority for faith and practice, it has opened the doors to theological chaos. Anyone can claim to be speaking God's revelation—and almost anything can be passed off as divinely revealed truth. And make no mistake, some of the best-known charismatic leaders have abused their people's trust by claiming they are receiving new truth from God, when what they are really teaching are lies and fabrications."

(<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A366/does-god-still-give-revelation>)

The Bible is all-sufficient and complete. Nothing of divine origin has been added to it since John completed the book of Revelation late in the first century. The Bible is a closed system of truth, with no new revelation being given through modern-day "prophets" or "apostles." It will thoroughly furnish you to every good work and give you all things that pertain to life and godliness. Trust it and obey it. --John Temples