



# THE TWOFOLD CHARACTER OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Word of God, and the Bible was written by human beings in ancient cultures. Both of these statements are true. The first is an affirmation of faith; the second is a matter of historical record. Both are important for the church.

The church looks to the Bible for truth because it is the Word of God. As the Word, the Bible is an authority; it reveals God. But God is always revealed in and through things around us: events (e.g., the exodus from Egypt), the rhythms of the natural world (see Ps. 104), phenomena such as storms (see Ps. 29), and so on. So it is not surprising that God is revealed in a book that is a historical artifact from ancient cultures—that the Word of God comes to us in and through the words of human beings.

It may seem strange that God would use ordinary things of the world as vehicles of revelation. Why doesn't God simply appear to us? The answer is that God does not appear. God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). God's revelation is thus always indirect. God's presence, even at its most vivid, comes to us by way of things in the world, as when Ezekiel "saw visions of God" in his experience of a mighty storm from the north (Ezek. 1) and when Jeremiah, in a moment of prophetic discernment, heard God speaking as he saw a potter working with clay (Jer. 18:1-11). Revelation, in other words, occurs when God takes something in the created world and uses it to make God's self known. We "see" God and "hear" God in our experience of ordinary things. So a Christian understanding of the Bible has to take account of the Bible's status as the Word of God and also its status as a historical, human artifact. It is this very human book that is, at the same time, God's Word to us.

We can see how the divine and the human come together in the Bible by thinking about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the perfect union of God and human nature. He is fully divine and fully human—not a half-and-half combination or a mixture. He is the incarnation of the divine Son. But he is also human in every sense of the word. As

divine, Jesus is the full, complete presence of God among us. As human, Jesus of Nazareth was just like the rest of us. He had a specific height and weight. He had favorite foods and foods he didn't much care for. When he stubbed his toe on a rock, it bled. When he picked up a cold virus, his throat hurt. And yet this man was God, the divine presence among us.

Thinking about Jesus tells us that God is able to use and transform human nature so that it becomes a fit instrument of God's will and revelation. In Jesus Christ this occurs through the union of the Son and human nature. This union creates a person who is fully divine and fully human. The divine nature does not compromise or diminish the human nature; the human nature does not compromise or diminish the divine nature. The two natures are united in the one person in a wonderful harmony.

Thinking about Jesus Christ in this way helps us understand how the Bible can be the Word of God and also the words of human beings. Like Jesus Christ, the Bible has a divine-human character. Of course, unlike Jesus, the Bible is not a divine-human *person*; the Bible is an analogy to Jesus Christ but only an analogy. But the Bible does involve God taking human things—thoughts, feelings, writings—and using them for revelation so that God's Word and these human words be-

come united and inseparable. The union of the divine Word and human words is why the New Testament sometimes attributes Old Testament writings to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), sometimes to the Spirit through a human being (4:25), and sometimes to the human writers (2:25). To think of the Bible as divine and human preserves the New Testament's conviction that the Bible is God's Word and also that it is, in every sense of the word, a fully human work.