

## **The Interplay Between Written and Spoken Word in the Second Testament as Background to the Emergence of Written Gospels**

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Christianity is a faith rooted in the written and the spoken word. However, the precise relationship between the written and the spoken word in the period of Christian origins has been a matter of much debate. Past studies have viewed the written and the spoken word as belonging to differentiated social worlds and modes of thought (e.g., Ong 1982; Kelber 1983). In recent years a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between written and spoken words and worlds has begun to emerge (e.g., Byrskog 2002; Jaffee 2001; Kirk 2008). Following this trend, I attempt, in this essay, to draw a kind of “contour map” of the textual world of the Second Testament with respect to written and spoken words, tracing where and how references to written and spoken words occur and the interplay between them. To assist in charting this territory, I employ as a compass references to the uses of written and spoken word found in Greek and Roman sources. My focus, then, is on primary sources rather than studies of these sources in secondary literature. While I include the broad range of texts in the Second Testament, the cornerstone of my study is Luke-Acts. The goal of this exercise is to gain insight into the different ways written and spoken words were perceived, encountered, and experienced in early Christian communities, and to explore what insight this may offer into the emergence of written gospels. This is self-consciously only an initial exploration of the territory, intended to lay the groundwork for a larger and more comprehensive project.

### **Words Spoken and Written**

The complex relationship between spoken word and written word was recognized and commented on in the first century CE Mediterranean world. Quintilian observed that writing, reading, and speaking “are so intimately and inseparably connected that if one of them be neglected, we shall waste the labour which we have devoted to the others” (*Institutio oratoria* X. 1.2, from Butler 1980). Theon similarly encouraged the young *rhetor* both to listen to written words read well and develop skill at crafting spoken words through the practice of writing words (*Progymnasmata*, in Kennedy 2003:5-6). These comments, of course, are addressed to orators, members of the social and literary elite, whose goal is to attain eloquence in speaking.

Nonetheless, they suggest that when we encounter a written text, such as the Second Testament, it is important to consider how these written words stand in relation to spoken words, and what this relationship may tell us about how both written and spoken words are perceived, encountered, and employed.

Illustrations of the close relationship between written and spoken words are found within the Second Testament itself. Written texts “speak”: “Now we know that whatever the law says [λέγω] . . . it speaks [λαλέω] so that every mouth might be silenced” (Rom 3:19).<sup>1</sup> Reading is not a silent activity, but a re-oralization of written words: “Philip, running up [to the chariot] heard him reading . . .” (Acts 8:30; see also Rev 1:3). Spoken word is employed to corroborate written word: “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas who themselves by word of mouth will announce the same things [written in this letter]” (Acts 8:17). In these examples, the boundary between written and spoken words is porous. The written word is perceived as having voice, a voice that is vocalized in the act of reading. Yet it is a voice that is dependent on living voices in order to assume agency, which is demonstrated by the third example.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that written word is perceived as being, more or less, an extension of spoken word. Additional examples of this complex relationship between written and spoken word are found in Luke-Acts: for example, writing on a tablet (πινακίδιον) is substituted for the voice (Luke 1:63) while letters are written in the absence of physical presence (ἐπιστέλλω; ἐπιστολή [Acts 15:20, 30; 21:25; 23:25, 33]).

If written word is encountered as an extension of spoken word, the question then arises whether the reverse is also true: that is, is spoken word perceived as being, more or less, an extension of the written word? There are notably few examples to suggest that this is the case. One is found in Acts 12:21 where Herod Agrippa delivers a public address (δημηγορέω). The instructions of Theon and Quintilian to orators suggest that such an address may have its source in the careful practice of writing. Thus this particular spoken word may be perceived and encountered as an extension of written word. Elsewhere, in Luke 24:27, Jesus interprets (διερμηνεύω) the events of his passion in relation to scripture. The correlation between Jesus’ life and the scriptures is intended to demonstrate continuity. It could be argued, then, that here also spoken word is both perceived and encountered as an extension of written word. It is less clear that this same claim could be made when, for example, Paul engages in debate on the basis of the scriptures (διαλέγομαι [Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19: 8, 9]). In the latter instance, there are competing claims over the interpretation of the written text, thus emphasizing the distance between written word and spoken word.

In contrast to the few examples cited above, the prominent and distinctive place of spoken word (independent of written word) is revealed in the rich and varied vocabulary dedicated to speech acts. While the speech delivered by Herod in Acts 12:21 may well be an extension of written word, other speeches are marked by their distinctly oral aspect: e.g., προσφωνέω “to call out” (Luke 23:20; Acts 21:40; 22:2) and ἀποφθέγγομαι “to express oneself orally with focus on sound rather than content” (Acts 2:4, 14; 26:25) (Danker 2000:887, 125). This oral aspect is emphasized also in teaching (διδάσκω [e.g., Luke 4:15; 5:3; 13:32; Acts

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of the Greek New Testament are by the author.

<sup>2</sup> The written text expresses agency to the degree that it demonstrates a point of view; however, this agency is limited unless the point of view is taken up by living voices.

5:42; 11:26]), proclamation (κηρύσσω [e.g., Luke 4:44; 8:39; Acts 8:5; 15:21]), debate (διαλέγομαι [e.g., Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8, 9]), discussion (διαλάλέω [Luke 1:65; 6:11]), storytelling (Luke 16:1-9; 11:1-7), and the circulation of rumors (e.g., Luke 7:17; Acts 9:42). Acts 17:21 offers a particularly vivid description of this oral/aural environment from the view on the street: “Now all the Athenians and the foreign visitors took pleasure in nothing more than telling or hearing something new.” Collectively, these references draw attention not only to the dominant role of spoken word within the narrative world of Luke-Acts, but also the range of functions associated with spoken word. It constitutes the primary way in which words are both encountered and employed.

While spoken word sometimes finds expression through written word, there are instances where written word appears to be encountered as just that—written word. In these instances, emphasis is placed on written word as a witness or record: scrolls (βίβλια) preserve words so that the same words can be read in different contexts (Luke 4:16-20), magic spells are recorded for consultation in books (βίβλος [Acts 19:19]), debts are recorded in promissory notes (γράμματα [Luke 16:6, 7]), censuses are compiled for the purposes of taxation (ἀπογραφή [Luke 2:2; Acts 5:37]), inscriptions identify the status of objects such as coins (Luke 20:24), an edifice (ἐπιγραφή [Acts 17:23; cf. Rev 21:12]), and a cross (ἐπιγραφή [Luke 23:38]). It could be argued that, in these examples, a reversal of roles between written and spoken word is found from that described earlier: where Judas and Silas corroborated written word (Acts 15:26), in the examples cited here, the stable witness of written word functions to corroborate spoken word. This suggests a stability to written word that may be perceived as absent in spoken word.<sup>3</sup>

These introductory comments highlight the complex relationship between written and spoken word. At times this relationship is porous, the one mode of verbalization being perceived and encountered as an extension of the other. At other times, the two words function independently of one another. The dominant role, however, resides with spoken word; it is as spoken word that most words are encountered and employed. While spoken word may find expression as written word, it is, more often than not, written word that is perceived, encountered, or employed as an extension of spoken word.

### **Social Dimensions of Spoken and Written Word**

As the description in the preceding section suggests, references to written and spoken word are not merely descriptive of media worlds and their functions; they also point to social divisions that are attendant in expressions of spoken and written word. The range of activity undertaken as spoken word in Luke-Acts, for example, reveals a hierarchy of speech determined by a convergence of power, status, and access within specific social contexts. Herod, for example, is depicted addressing a public forum (Acts 12:21), while Pilate uses public speech to exercise crowd control (Luke 23:20). These speech acts demonstrate that these two figures not only hold positions of status that grant them access to the crowds, but also power associated with that status to command the attention of the crowds. So, too, does Paul within the context of the

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<sup>3</sup> Stability is not to be confused with reliability. Stability refers to a fixed text.

synagogue, where he is said to speak out boldly (παρρησιάζομαι [Acts 14:3; 18:26; 19:8]). In Athens, however, he speaks [φημί] with little persuasive effect, while in Ephesus the town scribe (γραμματεὺς) must intervene in order for Paul to address a crowd in the context of a public forum. In these social contexts, Paul has access, but little status and even less power.

Teaching takes place largely within specific communities (e.g., synagogues [Luke 4:31; 6:6], the Temple in Jerusalem [Acts 4:2; 5:21, 25, 42], the ἐκκλησία [Acts 11:26; 15:35; 18:11]), by individuals who have acquired status within those communities (e.g., Jesus, Stephen, Peter, Paul). Here the example of Apollos is interesting (Acts 18:24-28). He is described as “eloquent,” “well versed in the scriptures,” and an effective debater; yet Priscilla and Aquila find his initial proclamation to be not wholly accurate and offer correction. Thus, Apollos has power (as a speaker and debater) and access, but his status is limited because of the faulty content of his speech. Proclamation, in contrast to teaching, is represented as a more public activity, broadcast for those “with ears to hear” (Luke 3:3; 8:1; 9:2; 12:3; 24:47; Acts 8:5; 28:31). Although proclamation, too, tends to be associated with persons who have acquired status within the community, converts also may bear witness to their experience through proclamation; so, for example, the leper whom Jesus heals (Luke 8:39 par. Mark 1:45; cf. Mark 5:20; 7:36). Here power resides not so much in the person as in his or her testimony, which may, ultimately, accrue power to the person as he or she gains status on the basis of said testimony.

Spoken word is not limited to individuals. Questioning, discussions, and debates occur within groups, small and large, and point to the collective nature of spoken discourse. These activities are sometimes employed within narratives to give special prominence to individual voices by calling attention to them; that is, those voices that raise questions, spark controversy, or prompt discussion invite our attention as well. Within groups, spoken word also finds expression through storytelling. This activity is often only alluded to: for example, someone comes to Jesus for healing, presumably because he or she has heard stories of other healings, or word spreads through the countryside, perhaps as rumor, but told as story. As in Athens, people are eager to be the first with new words to speak to one another, particularly when there is something exciting or controversial to capture their attention. This can, for a few brief minutes, accord an otherwise anonymous individual status, by virtue of access to an audience and power, if their story or testimony is accepted as credible. Nonetheless, such informal storytelling was not limited to the illiterate masses; it was a prominent and popular form of spoken word that crossed class boundaries (Hearon 2008; 2004:43-100).

Although spoken word as a medium is universally accessible to those who are able to speak, it is nonetheless circumscribed by a convergence of social context, power, status, and access. Not everyone has the power, status, or access to speak in every context. Certain speech acts are restricted: a leper may proclaim, for example, but not deliver a public address (δημηγορέω). Paul may teach within a community of believers (διδάσκω [Acts 18:11]), but facing a crowd in the Areopagus he proclaims (κηρύσσω [Acts 17:23]), not as one who has status but, like the leper, as one whose status will be based on the perceived credibility of his testimony.

Written word, like spoken word, reflects social divisions. Among the *different kinds* of written texts named, the greatest number consists of legal documents of the sort necessary for the administration of government and social relations. Some references, such as the promissory note

cited above (γράμματτα [Luke 16:6, 7; cf. Matt 25:19]), reflect exchanges that would have been engaged in on a day-to-day basis by those in trade or small business owners. Others include the census identified above in Luke-Acts; elsewhere in the Second Testament are references to a bond of indebtedness (χειρόγραφον [Col 2:14]) and a certificate of divorce (ἀποστάσιον [Mk 10:4 par. Matt 19:7; cf. 5:31]).<sup>4</sup> Letters could also serve administrative functions, providing introductions, or offering commendation (e.g., Acts 9:2; 15:30; 23:25, 33; cf. Rom 16:1-3; Phil 2:19-24). These various written texts represent public records of one kind or another that define social relationships, marking out the boundaries between them. This is true whether or not those bound by the documents can read them. In this respect, the documents are perceived and encountered as something more than words written; like inscribed coins and edifices, they function like a seal and imbue the written word with the power and authority of the person who issues or authorizes the document (so also Jaffee 2001:16).

This is reflected in the way in which the words used to identify these documents are taken over and employed to describe religious images and ideas. For example, the writer of Colossians says that Christ has erased the “record” (New Revised Standard Version) that stood against them, using a technical term for a bond of indebtedness (χειρόγραφον [Col 2:14]). The word ἀπογράφω, used for taking a census in Luke 2:1-5, describes in Hebrews 12:23 the list of the firstborn who are enrolled in the heavenly Jerusalem. Similarly, names of the saints are said to be recorded in the “book of life” (βίβλος ζωῆς [Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 20:12, 15]).<sup>5</sup> Employing the image of a letter of commendation, Paul writes: “You reveal that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:2; cf. 2 Cor 3:7). In the same way, the language used of inscriptions on coins, signs, and edifices, ἐπιγραφή / ἐπιγράφω, describes how the law is inscribed on human hearts (Heb 8:10 and 10:16, quoting Jer 31:33 LXX; cf. Rom 2:15). In these instances, written word represents something more than words written; rather the words represent the power to effect what is written. It is not the words, however, that have this power; rather the power resides with the one who cancels the bond of indebtedness and writes the names in the book of life.<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that when these written words are taken over as religious images, they are translated into positive images, perhaps because they represent a challenge to imperial power.

Not all written word assumes the iconic status represented by these examples. The letters of Paul, it may be argued, more nearly resemble day-to-day exchanges than administrative directives, despite Paul’s status as an apostle.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is striking that, in terms of the *kind of written words that are named* in the Second Testament, it is these administrative documents

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper I am engaging in only a cursory way the genre represented by the texts of the Second Testament.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the book cited in Acts is a “book of magic,” that is, a text that contains words of power.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation is a quintessential example of this phenomenon. John is instructed by Jesus to write what he sees in a book, the words of which are described as a prophecy (1:7); if anyone takes anything away from the prophecy, they forfeit their share in the tree of life (22:18-19). Within the prophecy a scroll is opened that unleashes judgment upon the earth (5:1f).

<sup>7</sup> Only 2 Peter (3:16), a late text, begins to ascribe to the letters of Paul an iconic status as scripture.

that dominate: written words that in one way or another give order to life and underscore the patterns of authority that are embedded in the social structure. That the references to these administrative documents are few in number is a reminder that the authority to order social life also was embedded in a very few persons. Therefore, and in contrast to spoken word, the *kinds of written word* named in the Second Testament are not universally accessible, but are even more narrowly circumscribed by power and status.

Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that not all written texts are viewed the same way. The mere fact that something is written says little. It is important to understand how the particular written word is perceived, encountered, and employed. Within the texts of the Second Testament, the majority of the kinds of written word that are named are perceived and encountered less as written word than as a symbol that is closely tied to the power and status of the person who “speaks” the word written.

### **The Hebrew Scriptures as Written and Spoken Word**

Without doubt the greatest number of references to written word occur in relation to the texts that constitute the Hebrew Bible.<sup>8</sup> The variety of expressions employed to identify these texts points to the different ways in which they were perceived and encountered. Notably, in only two instances is reference made to the physical or material nature of the Hebrew scriptures as written word. In Luke (4:17-20), Jesus is handed the scroll (βιβλίον) of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolls the scroll, finds “the place where it was written” (εὗρεν τὸν τόπον οὗ ἦν γεγραμμένον), rolls up the scroll, and returns it to the attendant. A similar passage in Acts (8:26-35) offers a study in contrast. Here the emphasis is placed on reading, yet no reference to the physical nature of the written word is made. The eunuch is described, instead, reading a “passage of the scripture” (ἡ περιοχὴ τῆς γραφῆς). The eunuch asks Philip about whom the prophet speaks (λέγω), Philip “opens his mouth” (ἀνοίξας . . . τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ) and goes on to proclaim the good news (εὐαγγελίζομαι), beginning with the scripture (ἡ γραφή). Although reading occurs in both passages, only in Luke is this act linked to a tactile experience of the scroll.

Hebrews 9:19 also contains a reference to a scroll (βιβλίον) (of the law). Here, however, it is not the contents of the scroll to which attention is drawn, but what the scroll represents. The writer states that Moses sprinkled both the scroll and the people with blood to seal the (old) covenant between God and the people; in the same way, Christ, through his own blood, seals the (new) covenant. The scroll, in this passage, serves an iconic function, an image of the old that is replaced by the new (Christ). The Lukan passage, in contrast, brings Jesus and the scroll together

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<sup>8</sup> Of the remaining references to written word, the majority are found in the letters of Paul (e.g., “I wrote to you”).

in order to underline that the one is the fulfillment of the other (so Luke 24:44). The physical presence of the scroll provides a “body” for the “voice” of the written text.<sup>9</sup>

In a relatively few places the written word is referred to as a book (βίβλος): of Moses (Mark 12:26), of the prophet/s (Luke 3:4; Acts 7:42), of the psalms (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20). In these instances the emphasis is less on the physical aspect of the written word than on the kind of composition it represents (Danker 2000:176).<sup>10</sup> Although the references to “book” would seem to describe the text as a whole, in these examples particular verses are singled out for quotation in a verbal exchange or discourse, drawing attention to the “voice” of the text. This dimension of written text is highlighted particularly in Luke 20:42, where the writer states “as David says [λέγει – present tense] in the book of Psalms.” Thus “books” may contain written words that speak as a living voice.<sup>11</sup>

This dimension of “voice” is picked up in references to “oracles” or “sayings.” In Acts 7:38, Stephen speaks of the “living oracles” (λόγια ζῶντα) received by Moses in order that he might give them “to us,” while Paul speaks of the Jews having been entrusted with the “oracles of God” (λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ [Rom 3:2; see also Heb 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11]). In each instance, the expression assumes that what is written is encountered as an active voice, speaking in and to the present. Thus the written word transcends time and space; but more than that, it is represented not so much as a written word as a “living voice.” Since these examples do not single out specific passages or words as “living oracles” (in contrast to the examples in the preceding paragraph), the phrase (perhaps in contrast to βίβλος) is shown to connote the nature of the written word as a whole. In this respect, it speaks to how the written word is perceived and encountered broadly as spoken word rather than to the function of specific words.

A similar idea is expressed in the phrase “that which is spoken through the prophet,” which is encountered numerous times, and most particularly in Matthew (e.g., Matt 3:3; 8:17; 12:17; 21:4; cf. Luke 1:70; Acts 2:16; 3:2; John 1:23). It may be worth noting that Matthew employs the phrase “written by the prophet” only twice. One instance is a parallel passage shared with Mark (11:10, par. Mark 1:2). The other is found only in Matthew (2:5). The latter stands out because it occurs in the midst of a series of fulfillment quotes surrounding the birth of Jesus, all of which are “spoken through the prophet(s)” (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23) and given (written) voice in the context of the narrative by the narrator. In 2:5, however, the chief priests and scribes report to Herod what has been “written by the prophet” concerning the birth of the Messiah. This suggests that spoken word and written word are being played off one another. Since all of these words are considered true from the perspective of the narrator, the distinction is to be found in the speaker and audience: that is, those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah versus those who do not. In this

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews refers to a scroll (κεφαλίδι βιβλίου) in a quote from the Psalms (41:7-8 LXX). The sole reference to the “book of the law” (βιβλίον τοῦ νόμου) is found in a quote from Deuteronomy 26:27 in Galatians 3:10. It is unclear whether the reference in 2 Tim 4:13 to “scrolls” (βιβλία) refers to books of the Bible. Although normally translated as “book,” both John 20:30 and 21:35 employ the word (βιβλίον), elsewhere translated as scroll.

<sup>10</sup> This is brought out by comparison with Acts 19:19, which employs βίβλος in reference to books of magic. The nature of the book is defined by “magic” rather than “book.”

<sup>11</sup> Fitzmyer (1971:10-12) notes that the language of “speaking” functions as an introductory formula for Old Testament quotations in both the Qumran texts and New Testament.

instance (2:5) Herod does not believe that Jesus is the Messiah; thus the scriptures remain a written word, bearing no living voice that speaks to the present.<sup>12</sup> This same idea may be signaled by the phrase “the one who has ears, let him hear” (e.g., Matt 11:15; 13:9 par. Mark 4:9 and Luke 8:8; 13:16 par. Luke 10:24; 13:43). Luke (9:4) offers a more emphatic rendition: “you! put these words in your ears.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the most frequent designations of the Hebrew Scriptures is as writing. Here a cluster of expressions is found: e.g., the writing (ἡ γραφή); the writings (αἱ γραφαί); the written code (τὸ γράμμα);<sup>14</sup> Moses wrote (Μωϋσῆς ἔγραψεν); it is written (in the law; in the prophets) (γέγραπται; ἐστὶν γεγραμμένον); the things written (τὰ γεγραμμένα).<sup>15</sup> Alongside these expressions is a large number of references to the reading of scripture. Together, these expressions and references seem to describe a context in which scripture is encountered and engaged specifically as written word. Yet a closer examination of these references reveals a more complex picture.

The majority of references to reading in the Second Testament involve the reading of scripture;<sup>16</sup> of these nearly half describe scripture being read aloud on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:15, 27; 15:21; cf. 2 Cor 3:14, 15) or in public (1 Tim 4:13). With the exception of Luke 4:16-17, the reader is not identified. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the text that is being heard. In one instance the reading of scripture occurs as an act of private devotion (Acts 8:28, 30, 32) by a high-status retainer; nonetheless, it is read aloud and becomes an opportunity for interpretation by another. The other references to reading occur in oral contexts where Jesus, engaging others in debate, asks “have you not read?” (Mark 2:25 [par. Matt 12:3, 5, Luke 6:3]; Mark 12:10 [par. Matt 21:42]; Mark 12:26 [par. Matt 22:31]; Matt 19:4; Luke 10:26). In each instance, those engaged are religious leaders: Pharisees, chief priests, scribes, elders, Sadducees. In other words, those who are identified as readers belong to the retainer class. Thus those who encounter “that which is written” as a written word on a scroll are a small and well-defined group. Further, it is not clear that the phrase “have you not read” means “have you not (literally) picked up the scroll and run your eyes over the words?” It could mean “have you not heard read,” since the scriptures are consistently described as being encountered as written word read aloud. A different but perhaps not dissimilar situation is represented by the letters of Paul. Here “that which is written” is reinscribed as written word within the letter. Yet the letter will be read

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<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Matthew will use the phrase “that which is written” (e.g., 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31).

<sup>13</sup> Werner Kelber (1983:140-83), in his analysis of orality and textuality in Paul, sees a similar dynamic at work.

<sup>14</sup> In Paul, γράμμα always has a negative connotation (Rom 2:27; 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6-7). 2 Timothy (3:15), in contrast, speaks of the “holy writings” (ἱερά γράμματα) (cf. Rom 1:2), an expression that comes to the fore following the first century CE (Schrenk 1964:i, 763-64).

<sup>15</sup> This language functions formulaically, as evidenced by the presence of parallel language in the Qumran texts (Fitzmyer 1971:7-10).

<sup>16</sup> Other references are to reading letters (e.g., Acts 23:34; 2 Cor 1:13; Eph 3:4). In three instances, context indicates that the letters are to be read aloud (Acts 15:31; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27); so too the final reference to reading: Rev 1:3.



aloud (1 Thess 5:27; Col 5:16). Thus the written word appears to be experienced most often as spoken word.

This picture is underscored when other references to the Scriptures as written word are brought into consideration. The passages cited above where the phrase “have you not read?” occurs identify the scriptures as written word, but give them voice as spoken word in the context of oral debate (see also Luke 20:17). Similarly, Paul is described arguing over the scriptures in a synagogue (διαλέγομαι [Acts 17:2]), while Apollos confutes the Jews, demonstrating from scripture that Jesus is the messiah (ἐπιδείκνυμι; διακατελέγχομαι [Acts 8:28]). Apollos is described as “competent” in the scriptures (δυνατός [Acts 18:24-25]), a term more nearly associated with exhortation than education (Danker 2000:264). Elsewhere the Jews “search” (ἐραυνάω [John 5:39 (cf. 7:52)]) or “examine” (ἀνακρίνω [Acts 17:11]) the scriptures. This does not necessarily assume access to or reading of a written text. Quintilian describes how memorization of a text can occur through hearing as well as reading (*Inst.* XI. 2.33-34). Elsewhere, he identifies one of the purposes of memorization as ongoing reflection on the text, so that what is memorized is “softened and . . . reduced to pulp” (*Inst.* X.1.9). Thus, oral engagement of words “written” on the memory may well be what is described here. This appears to be what is taking place in John, when the crowds engage in discussion over what the scriptures say (7:40-42), and in Luke, when Jesus opens the disciples’ minds to the scriptures (διανοίγω [Luke 24:45]), interpreting the things about himself written there (διερμηνεύω [Luke 24:47; see also Acts 8:35]).

Thus, although the scriptures are described as written texts, this designation has less to do with how they are encountered or employed than how they are perceived: that is, as a stable text (in the sense of permanent rather than fixed) that can be appealed to as a common basis of identity. As written word, the Hebrew Scriptures may share the iconic status identified above that appears to be distinctive to some kinds of written word. Alongside this perception of the text as “written,” however, is the experience of the written text as, principally, a spoken word that is read aloud, heard, and remembered. This is also how the text is most often employed: it is quoted in discourse and appealed to in debate. Equally strong is both the perception and encounter of the text as a living voice that continues to speak to the present (so Luke 20:27, “Moses wrote for us . . .”; Rom 15:4 “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction . . .”). The Hebrew Scriptures, therefore, are representative of the complex relationship between written and spoken word. They are perceived of as both written word and spoken word (as having “voice”), yet they are most often encountered and employed as spoken word. This is an important insight to hold onto.

### **The Written and Spoken Word in Proclamation and Teaching**

An understanding of how the Hebrew Scriptures are perceived, encountered, and employed is important for assessing the relationship between written and spoken word in proclamation and teaching. It was asserted earlier that these activities are lodged firmly in the sphere of spoken word. This is because proclamation and teaching are, themselves, encountered and employed as spoken word. However, proclamation and teaching, in some instances, also

engage the Hebrew Scriptures. The question arises, then, of how the relationship between written and spoken word is understood in these contexts.

The language of proclamation refers principally to the activity (as opposed to content) by which “good news” is proclaimed broadly (e.g., Mark 13:10; 14:9; Matt 10:27 par. Luke 12:3; Rom 10:14-15).<sup>17</sup> Although it is intended to invite a response, within the world of the narratives proclamation is presented as an open-ended invitation, with no explicit response recorded (but see Heb 4:6). While most often it is those in designated positions of leadership (e.g., Jesus, disciples) who are depicted proclaiming the word, those who have received God’s beneficence may themselves become proclaimers of the good news (Mark 1:45; 5:20; Luke 8:39).

In Acts 8:35 Philip proclaims the good news about Jesus “beginning with the scriptures.” Here, the written word becomes the basis for the spoken word or proclamation. Similar examples are found in Luke 4:18, where scripture becomes the basis of Jesus’ proclamation concerning himself (cf. Luke 24:44-45), and Matthew 3:1, where John grounds his proclamation in a quote from Isaiah (cf. Rom 10:8, 15). In the examples from Luke 4:18 and Acts 8:35 the scriptures are read aloud, while in Matthew 3:1 they are quoted from memory. Thus in all three instances both the scriptures and the proclamation are encountered as spoken word. Yet the scriptures represent a stable word, which the proclamation (as a spoken word that exists only in the moment) does not. However, by rooting the proclamation in a written word, the word proclaimed is linked to the voice generating the written word (that is, the one who has the power to effect the words written; see the earlier discussion).

A different kind of example is found in Acts 15:21. Here it is said, “For Moses from generations of old in every city has had those who proclaim him in the synagogues on every sabbath *because* [emphasis added] he is read aloud” (ἀναγιγνωσκόμενος, read as a causal participle). In this instance the reading of the written word is itself viewed as a form of proclamation. This stands in contrast to the examples in the previous paragraph where the written word forms the *basis* for the proclamation. A similar relationship between written and spoken word may be evidenced in the Gospel of Mark. The opening verse of that Gospel identifies what follows as “good news” (εὐαγγέλιον); that is, an announcement or proclamation. Using Acts 15:21 as an analogy, it is the speaking of the word that transforms the written word into proclamation, a spoken word (“because he is read aloud” [Acts 15:21]). The Gospel of Mark, then, when read aloud, would itself be viewed as a form of proclamation. That the written text itself would be perceived as proclamation is less clear. The example from Acts suggests that proclamation requires the agency of a living voice.

Proclamation may be linked directly to teaching (see espec. Matt 4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1), which is often explicitly associated with the Hebrew Scriptures. Scripture is described as useful for teaching (2 Tim 3:16); Jesus admonishes the crowds to both teach (διδάσκω) and do the commandments (ἐντολαί [Matt 5:19; cf. 19:16 par. Mark 18:19 and Luke 18:18]); Paul asserts that “those things written” in the law (νόμος) were written for our instruction (νουθετέω [1 Cor 10:11; see also Rom 15:4: διδασκάλιον]); Paul debates (διαλέγομαι) those in the synagogue “from the scriptures” (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8, 9; 20:7,9; 24:12, 25; cf. 18:28), while the

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<sup>17</sup> The content of proclamation is variously described as “good news” (e.g., Matt 4:17; 10:7; Luke 8:1; 9:2), forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47), the Messiah (Acts 8:5; 10:36), Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23).

Jews “examine” (ἀνακρίνω) the scriptures to see whether what Paul says is true (Acts 17:11). In addition, people identified as “teachers of the law” are among those present when Jesus is teaching (νομοδιδάσκαλος [Luke 5:17; cf. Acts 5:34; 1 Tim 1:7: “those who desire to be teachers of the law”]), Paul is described as one instructed (παιδεύω) in the law (Acts 22:3), while in Romans 2:18 Paul identifies his imaginary interlocutor as one who is instructed in the law (κατηχέω [cf. Rom 2:21; Luke 1:4]), and Hebrews 5:12 admonishes the readers, saying that although they ought to be teachers (διδάσκαλοι), they need instead someone to instruct them (χρείαν ἔχετε τοῦ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς) in the oracles of God.

Among these references to teaching, few explicitly demonstrate how the scriptures are engaged in teaching. This picture must be gleaned by inference. Apart from the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-28), the reading of scripture is always described as an oral event in a public setting (e.g., Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:27; 15:21; 1 Tim 4:13). Similarly, although Luke depicts Jesus reading from the scroll in the synagogue (4:16-17), elsewhere Jesus is universally described as quoting from scripture, making scriptural allusions, or directing people to consider what they have “read” in the law in exclusively oral contexts. There is nothing to point to the consultation of the physical text. Thus it appears that the scriptures are encountered through words read aloud, remembered, spoken, debated, refuted, and exchanged.

In writing about education Quintilian observes: “For however many models for imitation he may give them from the authors they are reading, it will still be found that fuller nourishment is provided by the living voice, as we call it, more especially when it proceeds from the teacher himself who . . . should be the object of their affection and respect” (*Inst.* II.2.8). Loveday Alexander also concludes from her studies of scientific manuals that the “oral teaching tradition is more important than written sources” (1993:205; cf. 82-85). This would appear to be supported by the examples cited above. Thus, although there is a clear relationship between written and spoken word within the broader context of teaching, in the case of teaching the scriptures it could be ventured that spoken word translates the written word into a living voice (Jaffee 2001:8, 25). That is to say, the written word is encountered and experienced as, literally, a living voice that cannot be separated from the authority of the person who gives the written word “voice.” Further, the discussion and debate that surrounds this written word now spoken suggests that although the written word (scripture) represents a stable word, it is the interpretive dimension that is worked out as spoken word that is of primary concern.

An interesting example of the complex relationship between written and spoken word in teaching and proclamation is found in connection with the phrase “word of God” (λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). In a few texts, the phrase unambiguously refers to Torah: Mark 7:13 par. Matt 15:3; John 10:35; Rom 9:6. In each of these texts, emphasis is placed on the “word” as that which cannot be set aside (that is, it is a stable word). The book of Revelation appears to distinguish between written and spoken word by making a clear distinction between “the word of God and the *testimony* [emphasis added] of Jesus” (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4).<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, the phrase “word of God” refers to the gospel/good news—that which is proclaimed—(e.g., John 1:14; Acts 6:7; 17:13; 1 Cor 14:36), and it is as “the good news” that the word of God is taught (but only in Acts 15:36;

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<sup>18</sup> I say “appears” because the distinction may in fact be between a stable or fixed word on the one hand and a proclaimed word on the other.

16:32; 17:13; 18:5; 18:11). This dual function of the phrase “the word of God” likely arises from scrutiny of the scriptures in order to interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus (e.g., Luke 24:45; 1 Cor 15:3-4). The result, however, is oral teaching and proclamation. The active force of the phrase is brought out in two additional texts: Hebrews 4:12, where the “word of God” is described as “living,” and 2 Peter 3:5 and 7, where it is described as the generative power that gave birth to creation.

An examination of the language of tradition (παράδοσις; παραδίδωμι) gives additional support to the contention that this teaching of the gospel as “word of God” is a primarily oral enterprise (Hearon 2006). This language occurs rarely and almost exclusively in polemical contexts (e.g., Mark 7:13 par. Matt 11:27; 1 Cor 11:17-26; 15:1-8; 2 Thess 3:6). Writers employ the language of tradition when they are defending themselves against the teachings of others, attempting to establish group identity, make a claim for continuity, or reinforce community boundaries. In nearly all of these instances, reference to specific traditions is notably absent. It is not the content of the tradition that is persuasive, then, but the appeal to tradition as something held in common and, by extension, the interpersonal relationships it references. Thus the language of tradition serves its own distinct rhetorical function. This function is further signaled by the association of tradition or traditions with individuals. Here it becomes evident that it is not simply traditions or teachings that are in competition with one another; the honor and authority of individuals are at stake as well. The polemics in which the language of tradition is employed, therefore, are polemics that are not “primarily concerned with content, but with interpersonal relationship” (Tannen 1982:2-3).

This emphasis on persons is reflected in the references to conflicts that arise over teaching within the narrative world of the Second Testament. In many instances the conflict occurs between Jesus and religious leaders, variously identified as the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees (e.g., Mark 12:13-14; Matthew 16:12; Luke 23:4; John 7:35). However, there are also numerous examples of conflicts that arise between competing groups within the Jesus movement. For example, Paul warns the Romans to “keep an eye on those who cause offenses and dissensions contrary to the teaching that you learned” (16:7); the writer of Titus complains of those who are “upsetting households by teaching that which is not fitting” (1:11); and John of Patmos brings charges against those “who hold to the teaching of Balaam” (2:14) and of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:15).<sup>19</sup> Among those about whom concerns are raised are women. The author of 1 Timothy writes, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent” (2:12), while the author of Titus issues a positive command, counseling older women to be “teachers of what is good,” teaching young women to “love their husbands, love their children, to be temperate, pure, good household managers, and obedient to their husbands” (2:3-5). The prohibition against women teaching indicates, almost certainly, that women are in fact teaching men as well as women (see the earlier example of Prisca). In contrast, the instructions concerning what older women should teach younger women suggest an attempt to regulate both what women teach and whom they teach. This, in turn, suggests that

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<sup>19</sup> Other examples are found in Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:1, 11; 6:2, 3; 2 Timothy 4:3; Hebrews 13:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 9, 10.

women are transmitting traditions that are accepted by some as authoritative and viewed as generative of sound faith and practice (Hearon and Maloney 2004).

This competitive environment, in which teachers and their teachings are pitted against one another, perhaps offers a context for the movement from spoken to written word. In the opening verses of the Gospel of Luke, the author says that what is written represents those things in which “Theophilus” has already received instruction (κατηχήθης). According to Alexander, the written word was often “regarded simply as a more permanent form of the teaching already given orally” and was to be distributed among those who had already received this teaching (1990:234). From this perspective, the Gospel of Luke is not an end in itself, but a written word that is intended to support and be engaged in tandem with spoken word. Something like this may be suggested in Mark 13:14, where the narrator addresses the reader with the words “let the reader understand” (par. Matt 24:15). It is possible that here the reader is also being engaged as interpreter or teacher in a context where the written word is read aloud to a group. The writer of Luke states that he has employed both written (ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν) and oral sources (αὐτόπται) in composing the Gospel. What the written sources are remains a mystery—possibly “Q,” but perhaps also scripture.<sup>20</sup> The oral sources are described as “eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” Alexander proposes that αὐτόπται is best understood as a reference to “those who know the facts at first hand” rather than to forensic witnesses (1993:120-22). This would support the idea that the Gospel represents not a transcript of the teachings of Jesus, but a memory-log of the teachings as represented by those reputed to know these teachings at first hand.<sup>21</sup> Imbedded in this passage may be an attempt to correct those who, like Apollos, know “the Way,” but not quite accurately.

While caution should be exercised in lumping together the four Gospels under a single heading, it is worth noting that all four do show some signs of functioning within this teaching model. As in the Gospel of Luke, the writer of John’s Gospel draws attention to the written nature of the text (John 20:30-31; 21:24-25). However, it is striking that, with one exception (19:20 [reading the sign on the cross]), there are no references to reading anywhere in John’s Gospel. Rather, the writer speaks of the disciples remembering the scriptures and the words that Jesus has spoken (2:17, 22; 12:15; 15:20; cf. Acts 11:16; 20:35; Jude 1:17; Rev. 3:3). In contrast to Luke and John, Matthew and Mark draw no attention to their texts as written word.<sup>22</sup> However, in each of these Gospels emphasis is placed on Jesus’ role as teacher (e.g., Mark 2:13; 4:2; 6:1-6 par. Matt 13:53-58; Matt 4:23; 23:10). It is the language of teaching, for example, that is used in the stories that inaugurate Jesus’ ministry in each Gospel: “and they were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority” (Mark 1:22); “and opening his mouth he began teaching them and said” (Matt 5:2).

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<sup>20</sup> This may be suggested by the repetition of the word ὑπηρέτης in Luke 4:20—its only other occurrence in the Gospel—where it is used to describe the one who attends the scroll.

<sup>21</sup> Quintilian writes in this regard: “For our whole education depends upon memory, and we shall receive instruction all in vain if all we hear slips from us” (*Inst.* XI.1.i.).

<sup>22</sup> I take the language in Matthew’s opening verse as an echo of Genesis 5:1 (βίβλος γενέσεως) referring to a list, or account, of the genealogy of Jesus.

Quintilian may offer here an interesting possibility for viewing the relationship among the Gospels. Commenting on the importance of learning to paraphrase, he writes: “But I would not have paraphrase restrict itself to the bare interpretation of the original: its duty is to rival and vie with the original in the expression of the same thoughts” (*Inst.* X.5.v; see also Theon 62-64). This remark invites consideration of the possibility that Matthew and Luke, and perhaps even John, should be viewed as paraphrases that “rival and vie” with the Gospel of Mark. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, the context of teaching offers one possible impetus for the movement within early Christian communities from spoken to written word. It is a context that is, at the least, consistent with the interaction between written and spoken word as evidenced within the texts of the Second Testament.

## Conclusions

To return to the image of a “contour map” with which I began this article, what might such a map of spoken and written word in the texts of the Second Testament look like? Recognizing that any construct of this sort is imperfect at best, I would propose that such a map could be constructed by representing spoken word as water and written word as dry land. On this map one would find a world with very little dry land and a great deal of water. There would be a few mountains representing written texts whose function is primarily iconic. There would also be some marshland where spoken word engages or becomes an extension of written word. At some points this land might be fairly extensive; at other points, quite sparse. However, the prevailing impression made by the map would be of a vast expanse of lakes and waterways, edged around by marshland giving way to a very few islands of dry land, punctuated only occasionally by a mountain.

It is the marshland that has been the primary focus of this paper. In order to gain insight into the relationship between written and spoken word as described in the texts of the Second Testament, I have examined closely how written and spoken are perceived, encountered, and employed. What this examination has revealed is that written word overlaps spoken word in significant ways: it is perceived as having “voice,” yet it is a voice that is ultimately dependent on living voices (spoken word) for vocalization, agency, and corroboration. “Agency” and “corroboration” may extend from confirmation, to explanation, to (in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures) proclamation and teaching. At what point, however, does the “voice” of the text become the “voice” of the speaker? Here the perceived relationship between written and spoken word becomes very porous. The written word may represent no more than a template, a reference point, or a starting point for the agent of the spoken word. Further, for many people the written word would not be a part of experience or consciousness. To the degree that written word is in view, its perceived stability may project authority onto the word spoken and proclaimed, assigning, by extension, a status to the speaker greater than s/he might otherwise experience.

In terms of encounter, written word, as described in the texts of the Second Testament, is encountered almost exclusively as a spoken word that is read aloud or recited from memory. Very little attention is given to the physical or visual dimension of written word. Rather, words that might be seen as describing physical dimensions of the written word reference other aspects

of the text. For example, the word “book” (βιβλος) is always modified (e.g., “of Moses”), so that emphasis is placed on the kind of composition rather than the physical aspect of the composition. The Hebrew Scriptures as “the writings” are often read, but they are read aloud, “read” from memory, interpreted, and debated. Thus, although they are described as written word, they are encountered and employed as spoken word. I propose, therefore, that their designation as written word or “writings” has less to do with how they are encountered or employed than with how they are perceived: as a word that is stable. In the few instances where a written word is not described in relation to voice or vocalization, it seems to assume an iconic function. In these examples the written word serves administrative functions (e.g., a bill of divorce, a record of debt) or as an identity marker (e.g., on a coin). In these instances emphasis is placed on written word as a permanent record. It is possible that the Hebrew Scriptures serve in this way as well; yet the degree to which the Scriptures are debated, interpreted, and reinterpreted underscores the “living” dimension of the voice that is ascribed to the text.

In terms of how written word is employed, we again find overlap with spoken word. There are some instances where the emphasis appears to be on writing as inscription to the extent that the “written word” is employed as a permanent record or stable word. However, in the contexts described in the texts of the Second Testament, that which is written is most often employed as a point of engagement for spoken word that goes beyond that which is written. This would be the case, for example, in the speech that Herod delivers (Acts 12:21) or the letter that is delivered by Judas and Silas (Acts 8:17). It is most clearly the case in proclamation and teaching. In these instances written word is employed as the basis of and in the service of spoken word. The ascription of voice to written word suggests that some written word is perceived as an extension of spoken word, pointing to the dialectic between the two. It is also the case that spoken word may be perceived as an extension of written word; yet when there are competing interpretations, teachings, or proclamations, it is possible that the spoken word may be perceived as at some distance from the written word. In these instances, the stable nature of written word comes to the fore. The authority given to the spoken word in relation to written word may, in these cases, be dependent upon the convergence of power, status, and access enjoyed by any one individual (or written text) within a specific social context.

What can these insights into the complex relationship between written and spoken word offer in terms of our understanding of the emergence of written gospels within early Christian communities? First, they suggest that we need to view these written texts as being closely intertwined with spoken word. They reflect, on the one hand, the engagement of the Hebrew Scriptures (written word) as words read aloud and remembered, and as spoken word that is taught, proclaimed, and debated. They also reflect spoken word (proclamation and teaching) that finds its basis in experience recounted as spoken word; that is, spoken word that is independent of written word. Nonetheless, it is possible that this spoken word engages themes or images recorded in written word (the Hebrew Scriptures) that are encountered and employed primarily, if not exclusively, as spoken word, depending on the social context. Second, they suggest that these written texts would have been perceived as in some way an extension of spoken word. I propose that at one point the Gospel of Mark may have been perceived as a form of proclamation *when it was read aloud*. The work of Alexander, echoing Quintilian, argues that the written Gospels also may have served as an extension of spoken word by supplementing the living voice

of the teacher. In this respect, the different gospels may reflect the divergent voices of teachers within early Christian communities. This view is consistent with the context of teaching described within the texts of the Second Testament. Third, and finally, our findings suggest that we should exercise caution in ascribing iconic or canonical status to the written gospels prior to fourth- and fifth- century debates. Rather, we should assume that these written texts continued to be employed in a complex, dialogical relationship with spoken word in a variety of social contexts that would have brought to the fore competing voices seeking to understand how the voice of the written text might engage and be engaged by the living voices of the day.

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