

Let God Be True. Perspectives on Romans 3.

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Dedicated to Martin Webber on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday.

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**Chapter 12.
The Words of God:
Perspectives on Romans 3:2 in Light of the Old Testament**

Mart-Jan Paul

Introduction

In Romans 3, the apostle Paul indicates that the Jews have all kinds of privileges. Verse 2 reports: “First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.”¹ This means that the Jewish people have the content of words that God has spoken in the past, while other peoples do not. Those words were spoken in earlier times, but have been handed down and, according to the apostle, have a lasting value for later generations.

I would like to elaborate on this subject, as a gesture of thanks for the good cooperation with colleague Dr. Martin Webber. Within the Evangelical Theological Faculty we recognize ourselves to be occupied fundamentally with the meaning of these “words of God” for the benefit of students and scholars alike. In research and education, we try to discover and pass on their richness.

This article explores Paul’s view on the message of God and the ways it was given to Israel. We first consider “the words of God” in Romans 3, and then some of the ways God spoke in the Old Testament. His words are recorded in writing and were taken as a reliable tradition. In current scientific research, this is often thought of differently. Yet it remains important to take the words of God to heart.

¹ Translation NIV of the Greek *lógia*. Several other translations have “oracles” (KJV, NET Bible, NRSV) – perhaps less adapted to modern language; if we only understand that “words” does not mean separate words (*onómata* or the like).

1. Paul on “the words of God”

After describing the position of the Jews in Romans 2:12–29, it emerges that Israel has a great privilege over the other nations. In the first place because this people has been entrusted with the *lógia* of God (3:2).² In classical Greek, authoritative communication from the realm of the gods is conveyed by this word (in singular *lógion*), the divine reply to enquiries at an oracular site. Only the gods can speak a *lógion*.³ This word is much more restricted than the more general word *lógos*. The plural *lógia* is used many times in the Septuagint and four times in the New Testament (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12 and 1 Pet 4:11). Not only “words,” but also “stories about events” can be meant.

Douglas J. Moo observes that the word *lógia* gives rise to a plethora of suggestions about its specific reference here: divine utterances of the Old Testament; God’s self-revelation in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; the law, especially the Decalogue; and the promises of the Old Testament, or the Old Testament as a whole.⁴

According to Jakob van Bruggen the apostle Paul does not seem to limit himself to the scriptures or “the Law”. We can also think about the actions of the prophet John the Baptist and of Jesus. For Paul, the word of God through the earlier prophets and God’s words through the prophet John the Baptist and through Jesus of Nazareth are one and the same thing (see Acts 13:17–41), according to Van Bruggen.⁵ However, it seems better to restrict the word to the earlier revelations. The suggestion that Paul intended to include Jesus’ words and ministry is neither supported in the direct context nor by the use of the expression in Second temple Judaism.⁶

In the epistle to the Romans, the words of God are assumed in many different expressions, such as the Gospel that God promised through his holy prophets, in the holy scriptures (1:2). He has revealed (1:19) and said (9:15, 25). In most cases,

² For textcritical issues and for the place of the verse in the context, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*. Anchor Bible 33 (London: Doubleday, 1993), 324-327. For the rhetorical analysis, see Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 238-243.

³ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, rev. ed. 2006), 1056.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 182.

⁵ Jakob van Bruggen, *Romeinen. Christenen tussen stad en synagoge*, CNT (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 58–59.

⁶ The use of the aorist *episteuthēsan* “entrusted” points to earlier revelation. The revealed righteousness in Jesus Christ is in the present (Rom 3:21). B.A. Zuiddam, *Oracles of God: a comparative study of Apostolic Christianity and its Greco-Roman world* (unpublished PhD North-West University, Potchefstroom, 2008), 144.

God's speaking is recorded and known from Scripture.⁷ That is why Paul often uses the expression "as it is written."⁸ He uses the names of Adam and Abraham from the book of Genesis. Moses, David, Isaiah, and Hosea are mentioned as authors of the recorded words of God.⁹ These words of God are authoritative.¹⁰ Given these many examples, it seems best to understand the *lógia* in a broad sense as the Scripture, the Old Testament as a whole.¹¹

Paul sets forth as the greatest point of Jewish distinction the fact that God has spoken to them (to Moses and the prophets) and entered, with these words, into a special relationship with them (Deut 4:8; Ps 147). Of the privileges of the Jewish people, only one is mentioned here; other privileges feature further on in the letter, such as the adoption as sons, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises; "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ" (Rom 9:4–5).

2. God's speaking in the Old Testament

From the wide range of possibilities in the overview above, we focus here on examples of God's speaking in the writings of the Old Testament. The Bible contains also histories and reactions of people to his revelation, but the written texts derive their nature as 'Word of God' from the fact that they contain God's spoken word. From the hundreds of examples, we initially choose the earliest period. These examples are meant as illustrations of the various ways God spoke and also of his faithfulness.

2.1 Speaking in the Book of Genesis

In Genesis 1, there is a striking emphasis on God's speaking at creation. Thus, in his first recorded words, He is not addressing someone else, but 'commanding,' giving an assignment, with the aim that something arises. Then the created man is audibly addressed (1:28–29). Another form of speaking in this chapter is the

⁷ Romans 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2.

⁸ Romans 1:17; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3–4, 9, 21.

⁹ Moses (Rom 10:5, 19); David (11:9); Isaiah (9:27, 29; 10:16, 20; 15:12).

¹⁰ B. Zuiddam, F.J. Van Rensburg and P.J. Jordaan, "Λόγιον in Biblical literature and its implications for Christian scholarship," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19 (2008), 379–394. They argue that the expression is exclusively used for divine speech, and exclusively addressed to the human world. It is applied in an intimate setting of covenant relationship and its content is revelatory in nature.

¹¹ For the relation between the Old Testament and the understanding of righteousness in Romans 3, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ. A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, sec. ed. 2020), 210–217.

‘calling’ that appears in three verses. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night” (v. 5). The firmament was given the designation “heaven” (v. 8). God called the dry “earth” and the confluence of water “seas” (v. 10). His speaking has performative quality, also in blessing his creatures (cf. Ps 33:6, 9).

For us, the question arises how God’s designations became known, for this event preceded the creation of man. The narrator presupposes that God revealed the content to men.¹²

In the dialogues in the first three chapters, it appears that God spoke to man in a direct way, and not through indirect means such as dreams and visions.

In a later period, the LORD spoke to Abram: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” (12:1) Abram obeyed and set out for the land of Canaan. When he was at Shechem, the LORD appeared and spoke again (12:7). God’s communication was audible and visible here. After this, in a vision, the word of the LORD came (*hāyā*) to Abram (15:1). God spoke several times through visions and dreams to the patriarchs and the prophets (46:2; Num 12:6). “The word of the LORD to” (also in Gen 15:4) is a common expression among prophets. In Genesis 20:7 Abram is also called a prophet, as a person who receives messages of God.

In the vision in Genesis 15, a conversation took place, in which God responded to Abram’s questions and concerns and showed him the starry sky. This is followed twice by a covenant in which God communicated audibly and visibly and gave firm promises (Gen 15 and 17). As elsewhere, a covenant is a confirmation of an existing relationship and an additional assurance of commitments made.¹³ Abram had known the LORD for a long time, but here he received a solemn assurance of God’s plans for his life.

Later, Abraham sent a servant to Paddan-Aram to find a wife for Isaac. He was convinced that God would send His angel to achieve this goal (24:7; 25:20). Miraculously, the servant came into contact with Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, and in it all acknowledged that this was God’s guidance (24:27, 48, 50). Laban and Bethuel gave permission for Rebekah to become Isaac’s wife, “as the LORD has spoken” (v. 51). In this case, speaking is done by the particular direction of events, not by an audible voice.

¹² This is also related to the view of the age of the traditions in the book of Genesis. In Ex 20:11 and 31:17, sabbath keeping is motivated by an appeal to the week of creation, so that it must have been known.

¹³ See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Nottingham: Apollos/InterVarsity, 2007), 57, 75–76; Mart-Jan Paul, “The New Covenant in the Context of the Book of Jeremiah,” in Hans Burger et al. (eds.), *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology: Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, SRT 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 124–145, esp. 129–130.

2.2 God's revelation to Moses

In the subsequent books of the Bible, Moses' special position is mentioned. He received it at his calling in Midian (Ex 3) and was confirmed in it by the exodus of the people from Egypt. In the book of Exodus we learn of Moses' mediating role in receiving the legislation and making the covenant (Ex 19–24). Over time, Miriam and Aaron questioned Moses' unique role as leader of the people, because God had also spoken through them (Num 12:2). Then the LORD made it clear that there is an essential difference between the way He reveals Himself to prophets in general (including Aaron and Miriam) and to Moses. Usually, prophets receive God's revelation in visions and dreams, indirectly (v. 6). With Moses, the servant of the LORD, however, it is fundamentally different: God speaks to him "face to face" (v. 8). Only with Moses is His speaking clear and not in riddles;¹⁴ only he may behold "the form" (*temunâ*) of the LORD (cf. Ex 33:18-23). This is how Miriam and Aaron are corrected.

After Moses mostly continuously has spoken himself in the book of Deuteronomy, God speaks to him repeatedly in the last chapters (Deut. 31-34). This is followed in the final chapter by a lookback at the life of Moses, in which his unique position is also expressed. "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut 34:10). In that retrospective, signs and wonders are also mentioned.

God's direct communication with Moses has been described several times, but it is difficult for us to fathom. In any case, this intimacy was exceptional, and later prophets no longer received their messages in the same direct manner.

2.3 Prophets in the Old Testament

Although Abraham is also called a prophet (Gen 20:7), it is not until Samuel that the expression becomes more common. It is noteworthy that in the meantime two prophetesses are mentioned: Miriam (Ex 15:20) and Deborah (Judg 4:4). During the period in the wilderness there were seventy elders prophesying, but that was only temporary (Num 11:25). Many prophets have appeared from Samuel to the time of the rebuilding of the temple (Haggai, Zechariah) and Malachi. Some of them, e.g. Isaiah and Jeremiah, served for decades.

In Samuel's days, the word of the LORD was rare and there were not many visions (1 Sam 3:1). So, there were few prophetic activities. In those circumstances, the young Samuel was called. Eli (as high priest) did not notice this at first and Samuel had no experience with this. "The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him" (v. 7). Over time, Samuel received more words

¹⁴ See the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 13:12–13.

from God (also in “apparitions”). The people of Israel noticed the prophecies emerging, and as a result, all Israel recognized his position (vv. 19–21).

The divine origin of messages is also evident from the words of a servant of Saul. He spoke of “a man of God,” from whom everything he says comes true (1 Sam 9:6). In this regard, the text makes an explanatory remark: “Formerly, in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, “Come, let us go to the seer,” because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.” (v. 9) This comment mentions a shift in terminology, and also seems to indicate a fairly common practice. During king David’s life, the word of the LORD came to “the prophet Gad, the seer of David” (2 Sam 24:11). Both designations are used here. On another occasion, the prophet Nathan responded positively to David’s intention to build a temple. But at night the prophet received a correction and special promises for the future (2 Sam 7). It is an example of a situation where God’s word goes against the desire of a prophet.

2.4 Dreams and visions

A dream is a sequence of images and thoughts that occur during sleep. What exactly dreams are and what they are for, is still largely unknown to current science.¹⁵ In the Bible, dreams occur without any meaning (Eccl 5:2 ET :3), but there are also dreams in which God reveals Himself. In ancient times there was a deep awareness that gods (spirits) could reveal themselves in dreams. While in that case some dreams contain clear messages, others only contain symbols that need to be explained, usually by a professional dream interpreter. There were several books to help the interpreter in the explanation of images or actions in the dream. Sometimes individuals tried to receive a dream (e.g., by sleeping in a temple), but other dreams came uninvited.¹⁶

It is striking that references to dreams are especially present in the books of Genesis and Daniel, when the Israelites lived among nations who believed that dreams were a legitimate way of receiving a divine message.

The word “vision” comes from the Latin *visio*: sight, view. It is a personal experience of something that is sensorily inexplicable, but that is reality for the recipient—the visionary.

God (or any other spiritual source) can give messages through visions. The visions concern a visual experience, but often voices are also audible, and it is

¹⁵ Oneirology is the scientific study of dreams.

¹⁶ A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46, No. 3 (1956), 179–373. Ernst L. Ehrlich distinguishes six themes in *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, BZAW 73 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1953): incubation (in a temple), symbolic dreams, divine commands in dreams, dreams as a means of divine revelation, dreams in comparisons, and the rejection of dreams as a means of revelation.

also possible that the recipient himself participates in the events shown. Visions are akin to revelation dreams, just described, and sometimes both words are used for certain experiences. So, there is no clear distinction between the two.

One difference is that prophets could also receive visions during the day, in a waking state (cf. Balaam in Num 24:4, 16).¹⁷ The book of Habakkuk opens with the sentence “The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw” (NRSV) and chapter 2 states that the prophet looked “to see what He will say to me” (Hab 2:1). Then the prophet is instructed to write down the vision (2:2). The word “vision” appears in the inscriptions of various prophetic books, as in Isaiah: “the vision ... which he saw” (Isa 1:1).

The number of visions described in the Bible is large, and some are very extensive (such as the Book of Revelation). Eliphaz, one of Job’s friends, spoke of a vision he had received (Job 4:13).¹⁸ We can imagine a prophet receiving a vision in seclusion, but Ezekiel 8:1 describes the situation where the LORD’s hand comes upon Ezekiel while sitting in his house with the elders of Judah before him (cf. 20:1–2). In the vision that follows, the prophet is lifted up by the Spirit and brought to Jerusalem.

3. Written record

3.1 In the Old Testament period

God has often spoken to people. The messages were passed on, but also written down. These texts were given special authority and were later also considered as words of God. The first time we read in the Bible about written texts with special authority is when the people of Israel make camp at Mount Sinai. After hearing from God what the provisions are that the people had to abide by, Moses wrote them down (Ex 24:4). During the covenant ceremony, Moses took blood to sprinkle on the altar and on the people. He also read the book of the covenant. The people promised obedience in this ceremony (24:6–8). This book received in this way an official status as a covenant document. Then Moses received instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. He was also given two stone tablets, “inscribed by the finger of God” (31:18). The material and the fact that God himself wrote the text show the special status of these two documents. They contained the text of the Ten Words (so called in 34:28; Deut 10:4).

¹⁷ James E. Miller, “Dreams and Prophetic Visions,” *Biblica* 71 (1990), 401–404.

¹⁸ Here the question arises as to the origin of this vision. Mart-Jan Paul, “The Disturbing Experience of Eliphaz in Job 4: Divine or Demonic Manifestation?”, in: George J. Brooke et al. (eds.), *Goochem in Mokum. Wisdom in Amsterdam*, OTS 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 108–120.

Years later, Moses said farewell to the people and gave speeches recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. At the end of the book it is mentioned that he wrote down his teaching and gave it to the priests (Deut 31:9). They were to place that writing with the ark (vv. 24–26). Moses instructed them to read the text every seven years, on the Feast of Tabernacles (vv. 10–11). The legislation for the king stipulates that he must make a copy for himself of the scroll that is in the care of the priests (17:18). There should be no transmission errors in the tradition and therefore the original must always be used. Twice it is stated that the content must remain unchanged. The Israelites may neither add nor detract from Moses' teaching (4:2; 12:32; cf. Rev 22:18–19). The official repository and this provision show the great authority of the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁹

Centuries later, in the time of King Josiah, the temple in Jerusalem had fallen into disrepair and was restored. During that work, the high priest Hilkiah found a scroll. The prophetess Hulda confirmed the authority of the scroll (2 Kgs 22 and 2 Chr 34). It is likely that the book of Deuteronomy was found, partly because of the repository and the proclaimed punishments.²⁰ In response, there was a covenant renewal in which the text of the book was read aloud and also served as the basis for the new devotion (2 Kgs 23).

During the reign of Josiah and in the period thereafter, Jeremiah prophesied. After the prophet had communicated his message only by word of mouth for many years, he called in the writer Baruch at God's command and had his prophecies recorded (Jer 36:1–4). When King Zedekiah was read the scroll, he cut out parts and threw them into the fire (vv. 23–25). Then Jeremiah and Baruch provided a second scroll, with even more prophecies than the first one (v. 32). In earlier times, the prophet Isaiah was instructed, "Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it in a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness" (Isa 30:8). The written record is for later generations and has a lasting value. The realization of the content may take a while. The written record serves as a bridge across time.

¹⁹ Cf. Arie Versluis, "Covenant in Deuteronomy: The Relationship between the Moab, Horeb and Patriarchal Covenants," in Hans Burger et al. (eds.), *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology: Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, SRT 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 79–100.

²⁰ M.J. Paul, *Het Archimedisches punt van de Pentateuchkritiek. Een historisch en exegetisch onderzoek naar de verhouding van Deuteronomium en de reformatie van koning Josia (2 Kon 22-23)* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1988), 314–316. Cf. James K. Hoffmeier, "The Discovery of the Book of the Law in 2 Kings 22:8-10 in the Light of the Eighth to Seventh Centuries in the Ancient Near East," in Daniel I. Block (ed.), *Write That They May Read. Studies in Literacy and Textualization in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures. Essays in Honour of Professor Alan R. Millard* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2020), 278–293.

In the course of history, it was important for Israel to deal with the earlier revelations. In the books of the time of the Exile and afterwards, there are several indications about the reception and the use of the written word.

After the exile, the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was consecrated and under Nehemiah followed the rebuilding of the city walls. Then the people gathered in the square in front of the Water Gate and asked Ezra, the scribe, to bring the law of Moses. He stood on a wooden platform, with Levites to his left and right. When he opened the scroll, all the people stood up in reverence (Neh 8:1–6). Such is apparently the authority of this writing! Later that month, the people gathered for a day of fasting, confession, and prayer (Neh 9). Even then they read from the law book of the LORD, their God (v. 3). Apparently, the people viewed the code as a direct message from God.

At the end of this short overview from the Old Testament it is good to look at Daniel's attitude. He read "from the books" the message of the prophet Jeremiah over a period of seventy years (Dan 9:1–2). The books (scrolls) will have been a collection of prophetic books or prophecies, although their extent is unknown. In any case, Jeremiah's prophecies belonged to that collection. He spoke in Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10 about a period of seventy years. The way Daniel handled this message shows that he took it as God's word.

From the above it appears that certain writings were given official authority before there was a canon or closed group of writings. The account of Joshua's covenant with the people was given official status (Josh 24:26). The ark with the Ten Commandments was placed in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:6–9; 2 Chr 5:7–10) and it is likely that the scriptures mentioned were preserved there. We are less well informed about the later process of canonization. Nehemiah may have played a role in this (cf. 2 Macc 2:13–14).²¹ In addition to the written messages, the oral tradition remained important.²²

3.2 Reliability according to Flavius Josephus

The descriptions mentioned above leave open the question of how reliable the texts are. Did the writers provide as accurate a historical account as possible, or did they allow themselves liberties in reporting? Flavius Josephus believes that

²¹ Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 150–152. Cf. A. van der Kooij, "Preservation and Promulgation. The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible," in: Nóra Dávid et al. (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, FRLANT 239 (Göttingen: V&R, 2012), 29–40 (32).

²² Mart-Jan Paul, "Oral Tradition in the Old Testament and Judaism," in: Hans Burger et al. (eds.), *Sola Scriptura. Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, SRT 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 123–136.

this representation was accurate. He points out in his writing *Against Apion* the works of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and the Phoenicians to have their own history for many centuries very carefully enshrined in public records written by their wisest individuals (I, 8–9).²³

This attitude is in contrast to the Greeks. On many points even Thucydides is accused by some of lying, although he is reputed to have written the history of his time with the highest standards of accuracy (I, 18). Several causes might possibly be found for the errors in the Greek writings, such as the lack of official documentation and also that those who rushed into writing were concerned not so much to discover the truth, as to display their literary prowess (I, 20–25). It is evidence of true history if everyone both says and writes the same things about the same events (I, 26). Among the nations in touch with the Greeks, it was the Phoenicians in particular who used writing both for managing daily life and for transmitting the memory of public events (I, 28). The Jewish ancestors took the same, not to say still greater, care over the records than the nations mentioned, assigning this task to the chief priests and prophets. These records are preserved “with great precision” (I, 29).

The greatest proof of this precision of the Jewish people is that the records contain the names of the high priests and their succession from father to son for the last two thousand years (I, 36). Josephus writes also that no Jew has ventured either to add, or to take away, or to alter anything of the Scriptures. It is innate in every Judean to regard them as decrees of God (I, 42–43; cf. II, 219). Josephus used the above arguments to demonstrate the antiquity of the Jewish scriptures, and meanwhile he mentions criteria for historicity. He admires the Greeks for their eloquence, but finds their earlier and recent historiography unreliable (I, 44–46).

We cannot prove the details of the apologetic reasoning of Josephus, but Paul’s way of quoting the Scriptures shows similarity in the recognition of trustworthiness and authority (while also distinguishing myths; 1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; Titus 1:14).

Anyone who reads *The Ancient History of the Jews*, however, notices that Josephus allows himself some liberties in his own account of the events that are in the Bible. For example, in direct speech he has Balaam speak about the possibility for the Midianites to seduce the Israelites. In the book of Numbers this is only briefly mentioned (Num 31:16). Josephus also gives speeches by the Midianite girls (*Ancient History* IV, 126–139). He describes the events of Numbers 25 in a fairly free way. However, he does not make any substantive changes.

²³ *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 10: Against Apion*. Author: John M.G. Barclay. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

3.3 Modern scientific explanations

While the words of the Old Testament were authoritative for Paul and his readers, in our time many other approaches are seen.

In Old and New Testament times, people claim to have heard the voice of God in all sorts of ways, and sometimes received visible messages. According to tradition, this also happened in later times. After these testimonies were often accepted uncritically in the past, it has become common in the last few centuries to explain such experiences as natural phenomena as much as possible.

In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, there have been many scholars who believed that God's speech cannot be understood literally and concretely, because this would be a breach of the laws of nature. In the 1970's, Dr. Casper J. Labuschagne drew attention to the subject of 'God's speaking.' He mentioned with astonishment how little has been seriously thought about this subject in modern theology. He himself explicitly chooses the subjective approach. For him, 'God's speaking' is one of the ways in which we speak about and on behalf of God. He sees the speaking of God as an anthropomorphism, as a human-shaped approach. "God spoke, so to speak."²⁴

Phillip H. Wiebe has spent years researching religious experiences and apparitions. He mentions all kinds of natural explanations, such as the theory of the disembodied soul, the persona theory, the archetype theory of Carl Jung, the theory of mental events, Julian Jaynes' theory of stress and other psychoanalytic explanations, such as those of Sigmund Freud. He also mentions the near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences of the soul. There are also all kinds of neurophysiological explanations. Yet he leaves room for authentic experiences of God.²⁵

In recent decades, many prophetic texts have been found in the ancient Near East. A comparison of the prophets of YHWH in Israel with prophets in other countries and religions yields several similarities. In scientific circles, these are often given a lot of emphasis. Robert P. Gordon speaks in this context of the danger of "the disappearance of the Israelite prophet."²⁶ In an important survey work, Martti Nissinen considers prophecy to be in the category of non-inductive forms of divination (i.e., not deducible from observations) found in the ancient Near East.

²⁴ C.J. Labuschagne, *Wat zegt de Bijbel in GODS naam? Nieuwe bijbeluitleg en modern godsgeloof* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1977).

²⁵ Phillip H. Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus. Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Robert P. Gordon, "Where Have All the Prophets Gone? The "Disappearing" Israelite Prophet Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 67-87.

He views prophecy in Israel as a form of intuitive divination.²⁷ Several other scholars object to that characterization and highlight the unique aspects of prophecy in Israel.²⁸

Amidst these discussions it is good to realize the way Paul and his readers understood the *lógia* of God.

4. Conclusion

In the above, some aspects of God’s speaking to people emerged.²⁹ For the apostle Paul, this was a reality, and the words of God were found for him in Scripture, which we call the “Old Testament.”³⁰ These messages have great authority. According to Paul, the Jewish people have the great privilege of having access to those words. In doing so, he also underlines for the readers of the letter to the Romans how important it is to listen to those words and to take their message to heart.

²⁷ Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy. Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), viii and 14–19. He uses the term ‘divination’ as an umbrella term.

²⁸ John N. Oswalt, “Is There Anything Unique in the Israelite Prophets?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (2015), 67–84.

²⁹ For a more elaborate treatment, see Mart-Jan Paul and Jan Hoek, *Een stem uit de hemel. Gods spreken in de Bijbel en in onze tijd* (Apeldoorn: Labarum, 2021).

³⁰ For the background and first use of the term “Old Testament”, see Mart-Jan Paul, “Das Neue Testament als Fortsetzung und Vollendung des Alten Testaments,” in *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Die bleibende Botschaft der hebräischen Bibel*, ed. Hendrik Koorevaar and Mart-Jan Paul (Giessen: Brunnen, 2016), 324–347 (331–334).