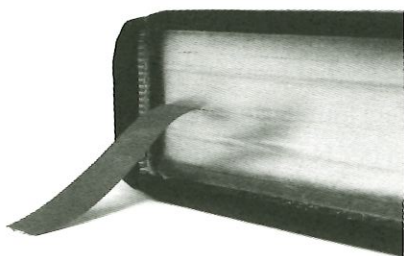


God's Revelation



Topic

Revelation

Theme

God has revealed His truth to humanity.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will appropriately respond to God's revelation of Himself.

Materials

- Resource 1
- Visual 1
- Potato

Scripture Focus

Ps. 19:1–11; Rom. 1:18–20; Heb. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17

Summary

This lesson will cover how God reveals truth to us. Understanding the difference between general and special revelation will show the importance of God's written Word, the Bible—the only way to personally know God and to live for Him.

Outline

I. Revelation Comes from God

- A. Definition
- B. Purpose
- C. Implications

II. General Revelation

- A. Definition
- B. Benefits
- C. Limitations

III. Special Revelation

- A. Definition
- B. Methods
 - 1. Prophets
 - 2. Miracles
 - 3. Visions and dreams
- C. Embodiment
 - 1. The Lord Jesus Christ
 - 2. The Word of God
- D. Benefits

Memory Verses

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.
 . . . The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:
 the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple"
 (Psalm 19:1, 7).*

GETTING STARTED

What Is Bibliology?

Bibliology is the study of the Bible. It is different than Bible study. Bible study involves examining a passage to ascertain its meaning so that it might be properly interpreted and applied to one's life. Bibliology answers foundational questions about the Bible: What is the Bible? How did it come to be? Is it trustworthy? And what is the Bible about? This Bibliology course will answer those foundational questions so that we might develop convictions about the Bible's trustworthiness and grow in our confidence in the Bible. Being confident in the Bible is important to realizing its transformational effects on our lives.

Present a raw potato to your class as an illustration of the difference between Bibliology and Bible study.

ASK: What questions might we ask about this potato? How does it grow? What is it made up of? What is its nutritional value? How might we prepare the potato in a way that makes it tasty?

ASK: Which of those questions would be similar to the types of questions Bibliology answers? Which ones would be similar to the ones Bible study answers? Learning the make-up of the potato and its nutritional value would be an exercise similar to Bibliology. Learning how to prepare the potato for consumption would be similar to Bible study.

Where Do We Begin?

The Bible is essentially God's message to humanity about His character and ways. But it is not the only message He has given to us. He has provided us with other means of revelation. It is important to see how God's revelation in the Scriptures fits into His overall plan to reveal Himself to humanity. It is also important to understand the purpose of His revelation. So this lesson presents God's overall plan to reveal Himself and thereby lays a foundation for building convictions about and confidence in the Bible, God's most informative revelation of Himself.

ASK: Describe your level of confidence in the Bible. (Q1)

ASK: How has your level of confidence in the Bible affected the Bible's influence on your life? (Q2)

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

God has supplied revelation for all of humanity. He offers information we desperately need. There is no higher priority in life than establishing an eternal relationship with God. He Himself has taken the initiative to be sure we have what we need.

I. Revelation Comes from God

A. Definition

Revelation is the work of God by which He makes Himself and His purposes known to mankind. This definition does not specify the means by which God sends revelation, because the means are secondary to His purpose in giving it. His purpose is to allow us to have knowledge of Him.

B. Purpose

Revelation existed before Adam sinned. Of course, the heavens declared the glory of God from the moment of their creation. But even in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve needed God to show them truth. Neither of them knew their purpose as individuals or as a couple until God taught them. On the sixth day of creation, God first showed Adam what he needed to know: Adam was incomplete without a helper suited to him. After that, God created Eve and brought her to Adam (Gen. 2:18–24). Man's exulting poem, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*, shows his response to God. God initiated revelation to man, showed his need to him, and then revealed that He had met the need.

Because sin has permeated our world, we have an even more urgent need of revelation from God. *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one* (Rom. 3:10). Sin alienates people from God and creates a need they try to fill with idol worship.

READ: Psalm 115:1–8. **ASK:** Contrast what the passage says about God with what it says about idols. (Q3) *God—is in the heavens; does what He pleases; helps those who trust in Him; is creator of all. Idols—are made by mankind; are inanimate objects.*

Idol worship reveals that humanity's universal need is to commune with God. But since sin warps their thinking process (Rom. 1:28), they cannot think their way out of the mess of sin. In fact, their understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18), and their minds are hostile and rebellious against God. They cannot please Him (Rom. 8:7, 8). Their sinfulness has created a world of error and confusion, and they cannot find the way to peace and life.

But there is grace in God's revelation! When we were blinded by sin, God caused the light of the gospel to shine so we could have light to see (2 Cor. 4:4). At the root of the term translated as *revelation* is the idea of *unveiling*. God unveils what we could not have known on our own but what we needed to live as His child.

TESTIMONY: Have learners share how their salvation experiences were like walking from darkness to light. (Q4)

The revelation of God gives us the opportunity to know the will of God. We learn of His nature and of His plan. However, we should realize that God has not revealed everything that He might have revealed.

READ: Deuteronomy 29:29. **ASK:** To Whom do the secret things belong? To whom do the revealed things belong? (Q5) *God; believers.*

Though God did not reveal all things to humanity, His revelation gives us all we need to know in order to be rightly related to Him.

C. Implications

All revelation, though revealed in different ways, points toward God. We must acknowledge that God's revelation gives us the only opportunity is to know Him and be reconciled to Him. We must also submit to God's revelation rather than being obsessed with what He has not chosen to tell us.

ASK: What are some truths that God has not revealed to us? (Q6) *The timing of Jesus' return; details about our future on earth, including our time of death; specific reasons for all of His actions.*

II. General Revelation

A. Definition

Some theologians call *general* revelation *natural* revelation. It may be defined as God's work of revealing truth about Himself through the universe He has created. The first chapters of the Bible reveal God's creative activity. When there was no one else, He existed. When there was nothing, He created something. According to Exodus 20:11, *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.* Many places in the Bible pick up on this theme, but Romans 1 and Psalm 19 clearly teach the benefits of general revelation.

B. Benefits

According to the apostle Paul, judgment hangs over the human race because humans are ignoring the obvious: a creation necessarily points to a Creator. The creation is God's teaching device. It has been announcing God's presence from the day God created it.

READ: Romans 1:18–20. **ASK:** According to verse 20, what about God can be clearly seen through creation? (Q7) *The invisible things of God, even His eternal power and Godhead.*

VISUAL: Display visual 1, the pictures of creation. **ASK:** What about God can be specifically seen in these creation pictures?

TESTIMONY: Have the learners share times when they saw magnificent nature and had their thoughts turn toward God. (Q8)

Paul asserted that God's creation gives a clear, unmistakable message. Humanity's problem is not that they cannot see what is clear but that they choose to ignore it.

ASK: According to Romans 1:18, what do people naturally do with the truth they learn about God from nature? (Q9) *They suppress it, or hold it down.*

ASK: How is this reaction played out in society today? (Q10) *The wide acceptance of evolution despite no credible evidence; the fixation on saving the planet as if God doesn't exist and the future of the earth is completely unknown.*

While the creation provides a great benefit for the world—they have evidence of God's existence—they ignore that revelation to their eternal peril.

Paul's thoughts in Romans 1:18–20 might have been sparked by Psalm 19:1–6. Both the heavens and the skies speak volumes about God. They teach day and night (19:2).

READ: Psalm 19:1–6. **ASK:** Why is it significant that general revelation reaches around the globe? (Q11) *Even those who never hear the gospel message are without excuse for rejecting the evidence of a creator.*

The heavens and the skies teach across the cultural barriers of the globe (Ps. 19:3, 4). As an example, God offers the daily journey of the sun. Just as the sun illumines everything on the face of the earth, so the universe illumines the God Who created it.

God's character is glorious (Ps. 19:1). The word *glory* contains the concept of *worthiness*, of *value that is unmistakable*. God has done that which no one else can do. Not only did He create something out of nothing, but He also made it vast and grand and complex. The general revelation of creation shows us a God Who is worthy of worship.

C. Limitations

However, general revelation is limited in its effect. It shows, but it does not speak. We learn of God's existence, power, and glory. But we learn relatively little of His character. General revelation does not reveal the way to a relationship with God, that is, the way of salvation.

READ: Romans 8:18–22. **ASK:** How does the curse on the universe affect the effectiveness of general revelation? (Q12) *Natural disasters, sickness, and killings can cause some to accuse God of not being in control or of being a God Who does not care.*

The majesty of creation should draw us to the Creator. We should become curious, asking how we could know the One Who has the ability to create a system as large as the universe. To find the answer, we need special revelation.

III. Special Revelation

A. Definition

Special revelation is not *special* because it is better in quality than *general* revelation. Its uniqueness lies in its narrower purpose. In special revelation, God revealed truth that will bring mankind into a saving relationship with Him and will meet their needs within that relationship. In a sense, special revelation is built on the foundation of general revelation. Those who respond to the creation's call to learn of the Creator must do so on His terms.

B. Methods

God used an interesting variety of methods to provide special revelation.

1. Prophets

The prophet served as the *mouth* of the Lord. Prophets never gave their own ideas as if they were the originators of God's message. The Spirit carried them along as they provided revelation (2 Pet. 1:21). We know very little about the way God revealed His message to the prophets. When *the word of the Lord* came to the prophet, he relayed the same words to the people. What he received, he gave, so God must have spoken with the prophets in their own languages.

READ: Deuteronomy 13:1–5. **ASK:** What do God's instructions to Israel about false prophets tell you about how seriously God took the role of prophets? (Q13) *God instructed Israel to put false prophets to death, demonstrating that God took the role of prophets with utmost seriousness.*

The prophets were careful to state the divine authority for their messages, so the announcement *thus saith the Lord* rings throughout the Old Testament. Failure to heed the prophet was failure to heed God (1 Sam. 15:1–3, 19–23).

2. Miracles

God also used miracles as a form of special revelation. When God created the universe, He designed its mechanisms. The universe operates by the laws that God placed into effect. Since He is the creator of both the universe and its systems, He may choose to bypass His laws to convey a message.

ASK: What are some Biblical examples of God superseding the laws of nature in order to convey a message? (Q14) *Crossing of the Red Sea, Exodus 14; drought during the reign of Ahab, 1 Kings 17:1; Jesus' walking on water, Mark 6:45–51.*

READ: Exodus 7:5. **ASK:** What message did God send to the Egyptians by bringing the plagues upon them? (Q15) *That He is the Lord.*

As God intensified the plagues on Egypt (Exod. 7–12), He made it clear that Pharaoh could not seek a natural explanation for the miracles. The plague of flies did not affect Goshen, the homeland of Israel, though the flies made life unbearable for the Egyptians (8:20–24). This special revelation was designed *to the end [that] thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth* (8:22).

In addition to this evangelistic purpose, the Lord's miracles affected His people, drawing them to a deeper knowledge of His love and care for them. During Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God brought miraculous food daily in the form of manna. He provided water out of a rock where there was no water. The Israelites' shoes and clothing did not wear out as the people traveled. His miracles tested and humbled Israel so the people would depend on Him and His Word alone. All of this proved that God cared enough for His people to discipline them and draw them back to Himself (Deut. 8:1–5).

3. Visions and dreams

On occasion, God used visions and dreams as special revelation. He supplied the interpretation of these revelations, lest the recipient choose the wrong option from the many possible interpretations. Joseph's rise to prominence was revealed in advance by his dreams (Gen. 37). Later God gave Pharaoh dreams that made sense only when He revealed the interpretation through Joseph (Gen. 41). Much later, Ezekiel had a vision of the temple that God will command Israel to rebuild during the millennial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reality of the vision and the certainty of its fulfillment are seen in the precise design and dimensions revealed (Ezek. 40–43). God no longer uses visions and dreams to convey His messages because the Bible is God's complete revelation for today.

C. Embodiment

Special revelation is forever tangible and observable in the person of Jesus Christ and in the record of God's Word, the Bible. All the means of special revelation pale when compared to the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ

As God in flesh, Jesus is the absolutely perfect revelation of God. John 1:1 and 2 plainly teach the eternality of Christ. As the Word, He has always existed and has always been God.

READ: John 1:1, 2, and 14. **ASK:** Whose glory do we see when we observe the life of Christ? (Q16) *We can know the Father's glory because Christ, the Word, is God.*

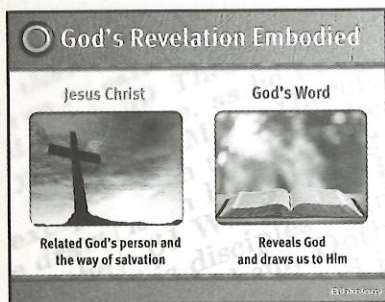
Hebrews 1:1–4 makes clear that Jesus is the absolutely perfect revelation of God. We learn about God's glory and person from the life of Christ.

READ: John 14:7–11. **ASK:** What did Christ convey to His disciples about His relationship with the Father? (Q17) *Christ showed the Father by His life; Christ was in the Father and the Father was in Him; Christ's works were done by the Father through Him.*

Our Lord Jesus not only showed us the person of God the Father but also the way to God the Father. He *purged our sins* by His death on the cross (Heb. 1:3). Special revelation goes far beyond stretching our minds with information that we would never have guessed from general revelation. It draws us to the knowledge of God. It gives us an opportunity to be rightly related to God.

2. The Word of God

We know about special revelation because God recorded some of it in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). But the Bible is far more than a record of God's special revelation. The Bible is special revelation. It is God-breathed; therefore, it is miraculous in essence and accurate in its entirety. As a whole, it is designed to reveal God to us and draw us to a vital relationship with Him. God's Word has extraordinary value because it leads us to Him (Ps. 19:7–11). During the succeeding lessons of this course, we will explore the unique aspects of the Bible's special revelation.



ASK: Why do we sometimes take God's Word for granted and fail to treat it as the very Word of God? (Q18) *We are so familiar with it; we have immediate access to it; we are free to read it without fear of persecution.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 1 as a review of the embodiment of God's revelation.

D. Benefits

Special revelation gives us the opportunity to know God. That knowledge leads to a growing relationship with Him. We need to learn a great deal, but the task is not unpleasant. The Lord saw our need for Him and responded with just the sort of revelation we needed to gain true knowledge. Psalm 19:7–11 teaches that the Word is absolutely trustworthy and that it will bring change to our lives. When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we begin to know the Lord as we desire. His Word will not disappoint us.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

What Your Practice Reveals

You probably would agree intellectually that the Bible is a part of God's special revelation to humanity. Perhaps you would even be willing to go to battle to defend the Bible. But does your day-to-day treatment of the Bible reveal that you believe the Bible is revelation from God?

ASK: What would characterize our lives if we truly believed the Bible is part of God's special revelation to humanity? (Q19) *We would study God's Word regularly; we would talk of God's Word; we would use it to direct our lives.*

ASK: What would a stranger conclude about the Bible's value by watching your life for a week? (Q20)

Hungry for God's Word

Belief that the Scriptures are part of God's revelation to us should lead us to be hungry for the Scriptures and to desire to what to know and understand them.

ASK: How has a fresh look at the Bible as God's special revelation to you affected your desire to know and understand God's Word? (Q21)

Once we get a taste of the power of God's Word, we delight in it and want to know it better. The problem is often that we don't know God's Word and are mostly unacquainted with its life-changing effects. Let this course on Bibliology encourage you to be diligent in Bible study.