



What We Believe

Article 2 of 13: Revelation

As we consider the Doctrine of Revelation, we hope to demonstrate the condescending loving kindness of God our Savior in revealing Himself and His truths to humanity. This is another area of doctrine that is deep and challenging, yet edifying and encouraging to us as God's people. This subject is so deep that we will only be able to scratch the surface.

We could define divine revelation as the disclosure of truth by God, previously unknown, which humans could not know unless God had made it known to them.

Let's begin by reading through this, the second article of our CrossLife Statement of Faith.

Revelation: God has graciously disclosed His existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed Himself to fallen human beings in the person of His Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by His Spirit has graciously disclosed Himself in human words. We believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of His saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative, and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of His will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

Revelation can be seen in terms of three main factors

1. The Revealer – The Tri-une God.
2. The modes of revelation - Creation, human conscience, prophecy, the Incarnation and Scripture.
3. The reception of revelation - Humans responding in faith by the Holy Spirit's work called "illumination."
Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia vol. 4 88, 89

In order to develop this great subject further, let's approach it using the following outline:

1. The Source and Fact of Divine Revelation – The Who and What
2. The Divisions and Forms of Divine Revelation – The How
3. Purpose of Divine Revelation – The Why

The Fact and Source of Divine Revelation

God is a God who is there and He has not been silent. The noteworthy Christian philosopher from the 20th Century, Francis Schaeffer, believed that Christianity is the truth about the universe in which we live.

"God is there and He is not silent!" God truly exists, and he has spoken to us in the Bible to tell us about himself, about ourselves, and about our world. He made known to us what we could never discover by ourselves in our questioning and searching."

Francis Schaeffer, He is there and He is not Silent, 1972, Introduction xv

"The religion of the Bible presents itself as distinctively a revealed religion. Or rather, to speak more exactly, it announces itself as the revealed religion, as the only revealed religion; and sets itself as such over against all other religions . . ." B.B. Warfield Article "Revelation," from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, v. 4, pp. 2573-2582.

The God Who is there is the God Who has revealed Himself !

God's revelation of Himself was an act of condescending grace. He did not need to do it because He is eternally self-sufficient in His Triune perfection. He was not obligated to do it as He is owing to no one.

He did it because it pleased Him to do so as an act of sheer sovereign, loving mercy.

Revelation has been categorized in the following two divisions, General and Special Revelation

General Revelation

The Bible teaches us that God is revealed through at least the following natural or general ways: Creation, the conscience of man (see 1st Trinity article), and the history of providence. General or Natural Revelation has been extended to and is discernible by all mankind throughout the ages, yet lost humanity's perception of this revelation is marred and impacted by the effects of the fall and by sinful depravity. Romans chapter 1 tells us that the lost suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ... For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened ...” Rom. 1:18 - 25

“The lost are held captive by the wicked one to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:26

General revelation is sufficient to show forth the existence of God but is not alone sufficient to enlighten fallen mankind unto salvation. The solemn truth is that God will use the facts of general revelation on judgment day to rightly and justly judge the lost for their denial of Him or their failure to worship and serve Him as the one true creator God.

God's Revelation in Creation

God purposefully created things in such a way that they would reveal Him as the Creator.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.” Ps 19:1

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Romans 1:19-20 See also, Job 36:24-33; 37:1-13; Psalm 8:1-4.



God's Revelation in the Conscience of Mankind

Genesis tells us, “Then God said, ‘Let us create man in our image, in our likeness...’” Genesis 1:26

Man, as an image bearer of God, even though fallen still reflects to a certain extent the personal, moral and intellectual nature of God. The image of God within humanity is also the basis for a basic sense of moral right and wrong that humans have had, however suppressed from one degree to another. This is why so many cultures arrive at the same conclusions that it is wrong to murder, steal and take one's neighbor's wife.

“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 2:14-16

God's Revelation through Providence

In Scripture we see testimony that God has revealed His existence and knowledge through His acts of providence. The Easton Bible Dictionary defines providence, “literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of second causes.”

“In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14:16, 17 Also Ps.33:10; Prov. 20:24; Is. 40:23; Dan. 2:21; Prov. 16:33; Acts 17:24-28

Special Revelation

Special revelation deals with specific types of revelation having the ultimate goal of leading humanity to redemption. In order for sinful humanity to come to know God and His truth savingly, special revelation is necessary, particularly, the Gospel, the revelation of God's salvation by grace through faith in the Person and work of His one unique Son Jesus Christ who is the express revelation of God in human form.

Means of God's Revelation

Special revelation consists of: Direct communication, theophany, angelic communication, prophecy, dreams, visions, urim and thumim, the Incarnation of God in Christ, and The Word of God in Scripture.

Direct and Audible Communication

In history, God has communicated with some individuals audibly through their hearing or by placing a thought in their mind. He spoke to the prophets directly, who in turn spoke that word to others when God so commanded.

The Bible tells us that God spoke to Moses “mouth” to “mouth” and “face to face”. Exodus 4:10, 33:11; Numbers 12: 6-8

God put His words in the mouth of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah 51:16; Jeremiah 1:9

Scripture also describes this process of direct communication as, “the Word of the LORD came to” This phrase occurs from Genesis to Malachi when God would reveal a truth through His prophets.

Visions and Dreams

At times God would communicate through visions or dreams. See Numbers 12:6 In a vision an individual would perceive a message from God visually and possibly audibly while awake or possibly while in a trance. A dream of course would be when someone would perceive a message from God mentally but while asleep. Some examples are Joseph in Gen. 37:5, Daniel in Dan. 7:1, Peter in Acts 10, Paul in Acts 16, John in Rev.

Theophanies

Theophanies or Christophanies were appearances of God in a human likeness, particularly God the Son in a pre-incarnate physical manifestation normally in the form of a man. Examples of this were, when the LORD appeared to Abraham in Gen. 18:1-33, to Hagar, Gen. 16:7-14 and to Moses, Exodus 3:2-6

Prophecy

Prophecy is the mode in which an individual, a prophet would communicate a message from God to His people or other groups. There are two main facets to prophecy “forth-telling” and “fore-telling”. Forth-telling was when God revealed a message such as some statement of fact or an exhortation or promise, admonition or warning. Fore-telling has to do with future events, like the prophecies concerning Christ’s birth, or the various destructions of Jerusalem, Christ’s Second Coming, etc. It seems that this aspect of the predicting of future events is what captivates the curiosity of people especially today. O.T. and N.T. prophets acted as a mouthpiece for God, receiving a message from Him and proclaiming it in accordance with His will. A prophet would not become as a robot while God revealed something to him, but would be in control of his thoughts and actions. Examples of ways God might communicate with a prophet are:

1. An increased understanding.
2. An external audible voice – 1 Samuel 3:3-9
3. Internal voice – 1 Kings 12:18-22; Is. 7: 3, 4
4. Opening the prophet’s eyes – Num. 22:31; 2Kings 6:15-17
5. Visions - Ezekiel 37; Book of Revelation.
6. Dreams and Interpretation– see previous notes above.

It is important to note that the words were God’s words not the prophet’s and many times the prophet may not have understood or grasped the message himself, but that others may have come to understand through the illumination of the Spirit.

Angelic Communication

At times God would reveal truths through angelic messengers, in fact the word for angel in Greek, “angelos” actually means “messenger.” Angels would appear in the form of a man and communicate some truth or promise or warning to an individual. Like Gabriel appearing to Daniel in ch. 9 or to Mary in Luke ch. 1 or the two angels at the tomb in Luke 24.



Urim and Thumim

This was a tool given to the O.T. priests to reveal God’s will in a “yes” or “no” answer. See Numbers 27:21 and Ezra 2:63



Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Revelation of God

The Incarnation is the supreme act by which God reveals Himself. Christ is at the center of the Gospel. Biblical revelation is about Him. Rom 1:3, 16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Gal 4:4,5; Heb 1:1,2. The O.T. is revelation in anticipation of Christ; and the N.T. is revelation in reflection of Him. (Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary, Vol. 5 p.87)



In the Incarnation, the fullness of God was displayed, shown forth and revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Christ in His Person, His words and His works are the pinnacle of God's revelatory activities.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, ... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." Hebrews Chapter 1:1-3

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" John 1:1, 14

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. ..." Colossians 1:15-20

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily". Colossians 2:9

All the events of divine revelation, past, present and future, are for the ultimate revelation of the Incarnation, cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." John 1:18 also John 14:9, 10



The Word of God in Scripture

The Word of God in Scripture is God's normative or standardized record by which He has revealed and communicated His truth. God's will and message is communicated by the reading and or hearing of the Scripture. It is in God's Word in Scripture where we are given all that is required for us to know about Him, His will, and His way of Redemption, the Gospel. In the Bible we have a collection of 66 books written over a period of 1,500 years by over 40 human transcribers from various walks of life from kings to peasants. It can be said legitimately that the Bible is a library of redemptive volumes.

Inspiration and Authority

Inspiration is the term for the concept Scripture describes for the means with which God has delivered His Word to man. Scripture is "God-breathed".

"All Scripture is breathed out by God" 2 Timothy 3:16

The Greek word for "God-breathed" is, "Theopneustos", literally, breathed out by God Himself.



"The doctrine of verbal, plenary (i.e., complete, total) inspiration means that the words of the Bible are the words of God. This doesn't mean that God spoke every word himself, but that the words spoken by the authors of Scripture are the words that God desired them to speak in the revelation of himself. Thus there is no significant difference between the ultimate authority of God and the immediate authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture is the divine authority of God Himself speaking" Sam Storms [Article - Special Revelation](#)

"The doctrine of plenary inspiration holds that the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to give to man." Warfield, Inspiration and Auth. p. 173

What we are saying in our statement of faith is that the original hand written manuscripts of the Bible called the "autographs" were communicated from God through human writers in such a way that all the words are in effect God's Words, carrying His authority, are without error in what they communicate and are therefore infallible. We claim this only for the originals autographs. We will talk about the reliability of copies below.

How was this done? Humans make mistakes, "to ere is human." The Apostle Peter sheds light on the process in which God supervised the giving of His Word:

"... knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20, 21

Peter says that God carried or moved men along, supervising the process recording Scripture. In this process, the writers were not robots, it was not by some sort of mechanical dictation, and they were not in some sort of trance. They were fully alert and using whatever personal writing skills they possessed. The primitive church accepted the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament without question.

The Apostles taught this, but most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ believed and taught this without question. As God in human flesh our Lord speaks with an ultimate authority. “The Scripture cannot be broken” John 10:35. He referred to Scripture as the “commandment of God” and the “Word of God” Matt. 15:3, 6. As He interacted with people, Jesus, referring to the O.T. would repeatedly say things like, “have you not read what was said to you by God.” Matt. 22:31 Jesus referred to the most ancient of O.T. historical accounts as true history. Adam and Eve, Noah, Sodom, Moses and Israel in the wilderness, Jonah.

The Authority of Scripture

The authority of Scripture is tied to the Inspiration of Scripture. To say that God is our authority in everything and to say that God’s Word is our authority in everything is virtually saying the same thing. Since the Scriptures are God-breathed, they are authoritative, because they carry His authority.

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Since all Scripture is God-breathed, it proceeded from Him and bears His authority. 2 Timothy 3:16

Jesus said dogmatically that “the Scripture cannot be broken” John 10:35

“God’s Word is a two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

God is so serious about His Word that Ps. 138:2 says His Word is magnified above all His Name.

Sola Scriptura and Tota Scriptura

Our statement of faith states that the 66 books of the Bible alone are God’s inspired word and are sufficient as a revelation of the Gospel. As we consider the question, what are we held responsible by God to believe and do, the concept of “Sola Scriptura” or “Scripture Alone” comes into play. This concept was revived in the Protestant Reformation, but was non-the-less the belief of Jesus and the Apostles.

“ The concept of Scripture *alone* most characterized the reformers of the 16th century. It was Luther who most clearly stated the principle of the “infallible Word of God” ... over against the “fallible word” of the Church and its extra-biblical traditions. ... Contrary to Rome which insisted that the Church should determine what the Bible teaches, Luther argued that the Bible determines what the Church ought to teach. The authority of the Bible entails its sufficiency.” Sam Storms – [Article on Special Revelation](#)

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for elevating their man made traditions over Scripture. Matt. 15:4-9

Sola Scriptura helps us to ensure that our doctrines and practices are from Scripture alone and not the mere writings and traditions of man. Our statement of faith says, “the Bible is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.” Following closely from Sola Scriptura is the concept of “Tota Scriptura” or “All of Scripture.” This helps us ensure that the content of our doctrine comes from the consensus of all that the Scripture has to say on a particular subject. 2 Timothy 3:16 confirms that “ALL” Scripture is profitable for teaching.

Canon of Scripture

The word “canon” comes from the root “reed” and carries the idea of a measuring rod. In regards to Scripture, it refers to its extent, measure or content. Another term, “Rule of Faith” was also used early on. How do we know that the 66 books actually belong in the Bible? This is the category of “canonization.”

The canon of the O.T. was well decided upon by the time of Jesus. God had ended His communication through the prophets with Malachi. There was a good 400 years before the next prophet, John the Baptist. Josephus, the Jewish historian, had a listing of the O.T. which included our current books. In the late first century, Jewish leaders gathered in at the Council of Jamnia, where they listed the O.T. books they accepted. Yet, for the O.T., the ultimate validation of the canon or measure of Scripture comes from the Lord Jesus Himself. In one concise statement, He identified the extent of the books that He recognized as belonging to the canon of Scripture. He said,

“... from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” Matthew 23:34-36.

Abel is from the first book of the O.T., Genesis, and Zechariah is found in the last book of the O.T.,

2 Chronicles, according to the Hebrew Masoretic ordering of the Biblical books. The books of our modern Bibles are arranged according to the order of the Greek translation of the O.T. called the Septuagint.

The canon of the N.T. came together by the end of the first century. Mark, the first Gospel to be written down approx. 60AD and the last book of the New Testament, Revelation was recorded by the 90's AD, possibly sooner. The Gospels were recognized as inspired early on by the church. The writings of the Apostle Paul were equated with the other Scriptures by the Apostle Peter, 2 Peter 3:15-16. By the end of the first century all the current books were accepted as Scripture. By the 2nd and 3rd centuries a few differed on the canon. The current N.T. was officially recognized at the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD and again 4 years later at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. One of the main criteria for a book or letter to be counted among the canon was that it was written by an Apostle or one of their close associates. It is important to understand that the ancient church did not establish the canon of Scripture as much as they recognized in an official list, those N.T. books long held to be part of God's Word.

Reliability and Trustworthiness of the Bible

The reliability of Scripture comes under attack on a regular basis. Those who are called the "new athiests" use old arguments in a new era in attempts to undermine the trustworthiness and authority of Scripture. As modern believers we have two very important, foundational questions that we must answer. First, Do we have what the ancients had? The second foundational question is, is what we have reliable?

The picture of the textual reliability of the O.T and N.T. is very much brighter than that of any other ancient writings and much brighter than at any time since the first century. The reliability of the O. T. is based on the careful methodology of the ancient Hebrew scribes to yield a trustworthy copy. For the N.T., the reliability is based on the sheer numbers of manuscripts that remain to our day, which compared with one another yield a reliable text.

Old Testament Textual Reliability

The O.T. scribes took very meticulous steps to safeguard the copying of one manuscript to another. The counting of lines, words, the marking of the middle word of the Torah, etc. all helped to validate that a new copy was the same as the one being copied. Two great examples of the reliability of the O.T. text in our modern times are the discovery of the Ebla tablets and a complete manuscript of the book of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The archaeological find of thousands of clay tablets from the ancient kingdom of Ebla in the 20th Century worked to validate various names, regions and cities from the O.T. accounts that had been doubted by many modern scholars. The Hittite civilization, the region of Canaan, the five plains cities including, Sodom, Gomorrah and Haran, were all validated as historical. Archaeology has worked to validate places, names, people and events found in the Bible, not disprove them.

Clay Tablet from Ebla – 2,250 BC



Isaiah Scroll from Qumran – 200 BC



The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s, yielded a complete copy of the book of Isaiah. Prior to this find, the oldest copy of Isaiah was from approx. 980 AD in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. The text of Isaiah found in the late 1940's near the Dead Sea has been accurately dated as approximately 200 BC. The difference in the age of the two manuscripts is about 1,000 years. The two texts have been found by scholars to be virtually exact except for a few spelling and word order differences.

What an amazing validation of God's providential preservation of the text of the O.T.!

New Testament Textual Reliability

The sheer numbers of partial and complete copies of the manuscripts of the N.T. is mind boggling. Currently nearly 5,800 hand copied Greek N.T. manuscripts exist. Nearly 25,000 hand copied manuscripts exist in various ancient languages, like Latin, Coptic and Syriac. To put this in perspective, compared to the numbers of manuscripts available today from other ancient writings, there is no competition. Some better non-biblical examples are approx. 650 manuscript copies of Homer's Iliad and only about 350 copies of the writings of Buddha. Scholars have concluded that even if all the copies of the N.T. had been lost, it could be virtually duplicated using the N.T. quotations made by the early church fathers in their writings. Another important factor to compare is the time between the writing, the original autograph and the earliest available copy. The Gospel of John was written approx. 85AD. The earliest available fragment of the N.T.



Codex Sinaiticus
Circa 325 AD



called P52, which is a portion of John ch. 18, verses 31-33 on one side and John 18:37-38 on the other side, is dated to no later than 125 AD. That is a gap of only 40 to 50 years. For most of the N.T. there is a date gap of only about 125 years. The gap between the N.T. originals and two of the oldest most complete copies, the Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are only about 225 years. For the Iliad the time between the writing and the oldest available copy is a gap of 400 years. For other ancient writings it is much worse. Details adapted from Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p.38

So do we have what the ancients did?

According to solid conservative Christian scholars like Daniel Wallace and Craig Blomberg, the text of the N.T. is firmly settled on to less than 1% of the total textual variants. This is very, very significant! The vast majority of these variants, about 75%, are merely differences in spelling or word order. Less than 1% of all variants are of any substantial nature and none of these substantial variants affect any central doctrine of Christianity. No other ancient documents can boast this accuracy!

“The text of the N.T. is 99.5% textually pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.”

Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 1968, p. 475

The answers to our two questions are a resounding yes, and yes. Amazingly, we still possess what the ancients had and what we have is trustworthy!

The Purpose of Revelation – Redemption

Special revelation from God was necessary to His redemptive plan. God’s ultimate purpose in revelation was to make known truths about Himself, truths about salvation through Christ in the Gospel in order to redeem worshippers for Himself. It is not just for creeds or doctrinal standards, but personal redemptive encounter with the Living God that marks the ultimate goal of His revelation. Jer. 31:31-34; John 17:3.

“In Scripture revelation’s primary function is rather one of invitation to the delights of ever greater communion with the Lord, Is. 55 and Rev 22:17” New Dictionary of Biblical Theology Article, IVP p737

“the Gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ...” Romans 1:2

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” Romans 10:17

“you have been born again, ... through the living and enduring word of God” 1 Peter 1:23

“... the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation ... 2 Timothy 3:15

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth ...” James 1:18

We speak so commonly of salvation by grace, as we should, but how often do we stop to think of His revelation to us as an act of grace, as an undeserved gift? What a gracious gift in deed! May we no longer take divine revelation for granted. We have only been able to scratch the surface on this huge subject.

We have seen God as Revealer, His modes of revelation and His ultimate purpose in revelation – redemption, that we may know Him according to the truth. Glory to God Alone!

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Recommended Free Resources

J. Warner Wallace – PleaseConvinceme.com – Affirming the Bible’s Reliability Free Course:

[http://www.pleaseconvinceme.com/index/COURSE_5 - Affirming the Bibles Reliability](http://www.pleaseconvinceme.com/index/COURSE_5_-_Affirming_the_Bibles_Reliability)

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Sermons on Biblical Authority at The Gospel Coalition:

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/category/sermons/a/topic/Biblical+Authority>

Resources on Bible and Sola Scriptura at Monergism.com: [Bible Link](#) [Sola Scriptura Link](#)

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