

Lesson 1

The Need of the Bible

Man can only know God in as far as God has made Himself known (1 Corinthians 2:11). Without revelation man would never be able to acquire any knowledge of God. The Bible, as written revelation from God, allows man to know about God and His salvation (1 Corinthians 1:21; John 5:39; Romans 10:13-17; 2 Timothy 3:15).

A) Definition of Revelation

The act of God whereby He discloses truth to man that would otherwise be unknown.

B) There are two types of revelation

1) General Revelation

- a. **Definition:** God's disclosure of divine truth **apart from the Bible and through natural evidences.**
- b. **The means of general revelation**
 1. **Creation or nature** (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20)
 - Located outside of man
 - Reveals a mighty God
 2. **Conscience** - a God-given faculty which gives man a relative sense of moral right or wrong (Romans 2:14-15)
 - Located inside of man
 - Reveals a moral God
- c. **The limitation of general revelation**
 1. General revelation gives only a very limited knowledge of God and is unable to bring man to salvation.
 2. Man naturally suppresses (Romans 1:18) and perverts (Romans 1:25) the truth given to him in general revelation.
- d. **The purpose of general revelation**
 1. Negatively - to serve as a basis for God's universal condemnation of man (Romans 1:18-2:8). Man is condemned for rejecting the revelation given to him.
 2. Positively - to cause men to seek for God further and His plan of salvation (1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7, 8; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 8:26-40).

2) Special Revelation

a. **Definition:** God's disclosure of divine truth through **supernatural** evidences

b. The means of special revelation

1. Through Scripture - Scripture is a written record of God's revelatory acts in the past and is itself revelation (John 7:17; Romans 15:4; Jude 3)
2. Through Christ - Christ reveals God's existence, nature, and will
 - John 1:1, 14, 18 - He is the revelation of God to the world
 - John 14:6 - He is personal truth
 - Hebrews 1:1-3 - He is the ultimate and final revelation of God
3. Through prophecy - prophecy reveals the presence and wisdom of God (Heb. 1:1)
 - through dreams (Numbers 12:6; Joel 2:28)
 - through visions (Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; Ezekiel 1:3)
 - through direct verbal communication (1 Samuel 3:4,6,10-14)
4. Through miracles - a miracle is a work that reveals the presence and power of God (Exodus 4:2-5; 1 Kings 18:24; John 2:11; 10:25, 37-38; 14:10-11)
5. Through personal experience
 - people have walked with God (Genesis 5:22,24; 6:9)
 - people have talked to God through prayer
 - people are transformed by God (2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - people who are saved experience the witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16-17; 1 John 5:10)

READING ^[1]

I. THE NATURE OF REVELATION

THE religion of the Bible is supernatural. By this, we don't just mean that all men, as creatures, live and move and exist in God (Acts 17:28). We mean that God has intervened in the course of human history for the salvation of men who would otherwise be lost.

- In the Garden of Eden, God's presence with sinless man formed a distinct element in man's social environment (Genesis 3:8), however, this was broken by the fall of man into sin.
- Nevertheless, in spite of man's sin against God, God remained concerned about man and at once began a series of interventions in human history to rescue man from his sin and bring him to the end destined for him.
- These interventions involved the segregation of the nation of Israel from the other nations (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6; Psalm 145:18).
- God was clear that He had not chosen Israel based on anything it had deserved; rather, His choice rested solely on His gracious will (Deuteronomy 7:7).

- Furthermore, it was clear that Israel had not been singled out to be the sole recipient of the knowledge of God; from the beginning God's dealing with the nation had as its ultimate end the blessing of the whole world (Genesis 12:2,3; 17:4-6,16; 18:18; 22:18), the bringing together again of the divided families of the earth under the glorious reign of God, and the reversal of the curse under which the whole world lay for its sin (Genesis 12:3).
- God gave His word and made known His statutes and judgments to Israel; He dealt with no other nation in this way and therefore the nations remained ignorant of His ways (Psalm 147:19). Accordingly, when Christ, the hope of Israel came, His own lips unhesitatingly declared that the salvation He brought was "from the Jews" (John 4:22). Paul said that the other nations were "far off," "having no hope" and "without God in the world," because they were "aliens to the commonwealth of Israel" and "strangers to the covenants of the promise" (Ephesians 2:12).

The religion of the Bible thus announces itself, *not* as the product of men's search after God, but as a gracious God intervening in a sinful world and forming a people for Himself, that they may show forth His praise (Ephesians 2:7). In other words, 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 against all other religions, which are spoken of as products of the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

The fact that God revealed Himself to Israel does not mean that God has left Himself without witness among the peoples of the world (Acts 14:17). It is asserted indeed, that in the process of His saving work, God endured the nations, allowing them to walk in their own ways; but He has not failed to do good to them, to give rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17). He constantly shows Himself to the nations through His providential care, (Acts 17:27) but He has also been openly revealing Himself to them in creation through which His everlasting power and Divine nature are clearly seen (Romans 1:20). The fact that men at large have not retained knowledge of God, or served Him as they ought, is therefore not due to failure on God's part, but is due to the darkening of their hearts by sin and faulty reasoning (Romans 1:21). Men have replaced the truth of God for a lie and have come to worship and serve the creature rather than the ever-blessed Creator. It is, indeed, precisely because of man's sinfulness and rejection of the revelation he has that the revelation of God in creation and providence no longer meets men's needs. For this reason God has intervened supernaturally in the course of history to form a people for Himself, through whom at length the entire world should be blessed.

It is quite obvious, therefore, that there are two species or stages of revelation, which should be distinguished from one another to avoid confusion. There is the revelation which God continuously makes to all men: by it His power and Divinity are made known. And there is the revelation which He makes exclusively to His chosen people: through it His saving grace is made known. The one is adapted to man as man; the other to man as sinner.

These two species or stages of revelation have been commonly distinguished from one another by the distinctive names of natural and supernatural revelation, or general and special revelation, or natural and saving revelation. The one comes to us through natural phenomena, occurring in the course of Nature or of history; the other implies an intervention in the natural course of things and is supernatural. The one is addressed generally to all intelligent creatures, and is therefore accessible to all men; the other is addressed to a special class of sinners, to whom God would make

known His salvation. The one has the goal of meeting the natural need man has to know of God; the other of rescuing broken and deformed sinners from their sin and its consequences.

Though these two species, or stages, of revelation can be distinguished from one another, it is important that they *not* be set in opposition to one another. They constitute a unitary whole, and each is incomplete without the other. In its most general sense, revelation is rooted in creation and directed toward people who are His creatures. Its object is for men to gain the knowledge of God and have perfect and unbroken communion with Him. When sin entered the world, this communion with God was destroyed and the knowledge of Him seen in Nature was obscured, so another mode of revelation became necessary. Without special revelation, the revelation of God in nature and conscience would be incomplete and ineffective and would only result in leaving people without excuse (Romans 1:20). Furthermore, special revelation would lack this foundation of the basic knowledge of God as the maker and ruler of all things. Apart from it the further revelation of God's interventions in the world for the salvation of sinners could not be intelligible.

In other words "no public historical happening, as such (an exodus, a conquest, a captivity, a crucifixion, an empty tomb), can reveal God apart from an accompanying word from God to explain it, or a prior promise which it is seen to confirm or fulfill. God reveals Himself by telling us about Himself, and what He is doing in His world"

II. THE PROCESS OF REVELATION

According to the Bible, at the same time that God revealed Himself in Nature, He was also revealing Himself on the plane of grace. In contrast with His general, natural revelation, which all men share, this special, supernatural revelation was granted at first only to individuals, then progressively to a family, a tribe, a nation, a race, until, when the fullness of time had come, it was made the possession of the whole world. It may be difficult to obtain from Scripture a clear reason as to why God chose to reveal His grace progressively through the process of a historical development. This is, however, the normal way that God works and the Scriptures are explicit in tracing for us the record of the steady advance of this gracious revelation through definite stages from its first faint beginnings to its glorious completion in Jesus Christ.

In other words, revelation is *progressive*, i.e., cumulative. God has not revealed himself comprehensively at any one stage in history or in any one event. Revelation is a series of divine disclosures, each of which builds upon and unpacks or unfolds that which preceded it. Revelation moves from what is piecemeal and partial and incomplete (but always accurate) to what is comprehensive and final and unified. This contrast between the incomplete and complete, between the partial and the full, is not a contrast between false and true, inaccurate and accurate, but a contrast between shadow and substance, between type and antitype, between promise and fulfillment.

Footnotes:

[1] "The Biblical Idea of Revelation" by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (adapted from)

[Article "Revelation," from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, General Editor, v. 4, pp. 2573-2582. Pub. Chicago, 1915, by the Howard-Severance Co.]