How We Got the Bible

Part 1 Revelation

The word "revelation" comes from the Greek word *apokalupsi*s which means "disclosure" or "unveiling." Revelation, therefore, has to do with revealing, uncovering, or unveiling what previously was hidden. When used in a theological sense, "revelation" refers to God's intentional manifestation of Himself and His plans.

(American Heritage Dictionary) Revelation: A manifestation of divine will or truth.

For the purposes of this part of our study we are going to define *revelation* as "God making Himself known."

There are two important beliefs upon which our entire study is based: (1) the existence of God and (2) God has made Himself known. The Bible makes no attempt to prove God's existence but simply declares in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God". I am not going to try to prove the existence of God. I am going to take it for granted that you believe God exists. We are going to consider several aspects of *revelation*.

The words *reveal*, *revealed* or *revelation* are words we find in our Bible. So while these words are not unbiblical the definition itself is not a scriptural one. But we will see that the definition asserts biblical truths.

God making Himself known: this definition asserts four facts.

1. God exists
2. God can be known. Not exhaustively but intimately. The reason we cannot know God exhaustively is first, because of His nature and secondly, because of my nature. God is infinite while you and I are finite. God is not limited in any way. You and I are limited by things such as time and space and we are limited in our knowledge.
3. God Himself is the Revealer. Revelation is not a human activity. Human beings do not even share in revelation. It is God that does the revealing. 1Tim. 6:16; Job 11:7.
4. God is the subject being revealed. God is the one being revealed. The Bible speaks to many subjects but we must understand that every subject on which the Bible speaks has it relationship to God. Every subject is from God, is through God and goes back to God. You cannot properly understand any subject apart from its relationship to God.

The Necessity of Revelation. If you and I are to know anything about God, that knowledge must come from God Himself. Man has an inherent desire to know God. The truth of God motivates man to search for religious knowledge. But man's thoughts about God are unreliable unless they are founded upon the proper methods of revelation. (2Cor. 4:4)

If there is a God and He is knowable and He has revealed Himself, how has He done that?

The Method of Revelation. Theologians have divided the ways God reveals Himself into two categories. The first one is General Revelation. General revelation is the way in which God has revealed Himself to all people all the time. The classical definition of 'general revelation' is given by Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis:

'[T]he disclosure of God in nature, in providential history, and in the moral law within the heart, whereby all persons at all times and places gain a rudimentary understanding of the Creator and his moral demands.[1]

We will refer to three methods of general revelation as follows:

Creation: Rom. 1:19,20. This is probably the most general way in which God reveals Himself. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them:" (the pagan). "for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen,…" How are the invisible things of God clearly seen? "…being understood by the things that are made,…" What is understood about God by the creation of the world? "…his eternal power and" (secondly) his "Godhead;" The Scripture teaches that all men everywhere can see there is someone who is greater than mankind. Men everywhere arrives at the conclusion that there is someone greater than he is. Ps. 19:1-3 addresses this same issue. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Therefore they are "without excuse" as it tells us in Romans 1:20.

Conscience: Rom. 2:14-15. Acts 2:37,

If God is powerful, what kind of being is He in regards to morality? And this leads us to the second way God reveals Himself to mankind in Romans 2:14-15. How can people who have never received the law of God still be accountable for their actions? Paul says, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)" This is the second way God has revealed Himself to everyone, everywhere and that is through their conscience. If God made all creation, and he made me, and there is a sense of right and wrong within me, then the person who made me must have put that within me. My own conscience given to me by my Creator reveals the moral character of that Creator. My conscience registers right and wrong and tells me this being has a morality.

What kind of being is he morally? What is the predominate means by which this being acts in the affairs of men? This brings us to the third way in which God reveals Himself to all men everywhere and that is through His providence. Acts 14:17, "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." When we look about us and see the works that are wrought on the earth and we see earthquakes and tornados and

tsunamis we might get an unbalanced view of how God works in the lives of men. But when we take notice we realize the predominate work of God in the lives of mankind is that He does good. He gives us rain and sun as Matthew 5:45 tells us. He gives us reward for our labor and fills our hearts with gladness. In general what happens on the earth is good. Men can look at their affairs and see that, despite their wickedness, there is still a good that is given to them.

Providence: Acts 14:17

All over the earth men everywhere have an inherent knowledge that there is a powerful being who is moral and provides good for them.

General revelation is available to anyone willing to accept it. General revelation reveals that there is a God but it does not reveal who it is. At this point man is not capable of identifying this deity yet. And that is where Special revelation comes in.

In the first six verses of Psalm 19 we have what some people refer to as the Revelation in the Skies. When we get to v. 7 the God is identified. This verse gives us the first reference to a revelation other than general. It gives for us an example of special revelation; a revealing of God to certain people at a certain time. Creation, conscience and providence reveals to man there is a God but it does not reveal who He is.

On the television series *I Shouldn't Be Alive*, the episode, "Killer Crevasse" tells the story of two young men climbing to the top of Mt. Rainier. Regarding the experience on reaching the summit one of the men said, "You're connected to the earth and something even bigger." You and I might think, maybe those two men realized something about God. And even though these types of stories are repeated around the world and people try to express the feeling or sense of a 'greater power' or 'unseen hand' they, more often than not, miss the point. They attribute these experiences to mother nature or luck or their own ability or to some non-descript spiritual force.

Despite everything people see and experience they miss the whole point. Sin has brought about the suppression of this revelation from God as Romans 1:17 tells us when it says, they "hold the truth in unrighteousness". General revelation is obscured by sin. Something more is needed otherwise man, in his sinful condition, will most often completely miss the point. Yet man is not unable to see God through the processes of general revelation. In Gen. 17 we see where God began speaking to Abraham. God promises Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation, God's chosen people. Later when the Israelites go into the promised land they send spies into Jericho where they meet with Rahab the harlot. See Jos. 2:9-10. How did Rahab know that the LORD, Jehovah, was with the Israelites? She didn't read it in a book. God didn't speak to her. Rahab says in verse 10 that they had heard, do doubt through the testimony of witnesses, what the LORD had done at the Red Sea, etc. Only in the Garden of Eden was general revelation sufficient. But since the fall, mankind most often misses the point. As valuable as general revelation is it is not enough. General revelation, for example, does not reveal God's plan of salvation. And this brings us to Special or Particular revelation. When God, in His grace, steps in and interrupts the normal process in an unusual way that is Special or particular revelation; God revealing Himself to certain people at certain times. General revelation and special revelation are intertwined and function together.

Miracles: Throughout the history of the world, perhaps some 6,000 to 10,000 years, the majority of miracles fall into certain time periods. There are three time periods in which most of the miracles were performed. The first of these would be during the 3 1/2 years of Jesus' ministry. Countless miracles were performed by Jesus. (Mt. 12:15; 19:2). The second period was the 50-60 years during which the Apostles ministered. The third period was the sixty year span covering the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. Prior to Elijah and Elisha a cluster of miracles took place during the life of Moses.

Exodus 9. This chapter illustrates for us several things.

God revealing Himself – v. 14

The Doer of the action – v. 1

Creation – v. 6, 10, 23

Conscience – v. 27

The purpose of miracles. 9:14; 10:1-2. The primary purpose of a miracle is not to benefit man. It is to make Himself known. Rm. 9:17.

The 'Who' of the miracles. Unless God does something more to reveal who is manipulating creation then man does not know who is committing the action. But we know this because we can read it in a book (Bible) with words. And that leads us to the next means of special revelation which is God revealing Himself verbally.

Verbally:

Audibly: 1Sa. 3:4; Gen. 13:14; 1Ki. 19:11-13; Ac. 9:7
Dreams and visions: **Ge. 20:3**; 1 Ki. 3:5; Mt. 2:19.
The written Word:

Exodus 9. The writers are clear about who is doing the speaking. 9:1, 5, 12, 13, 20, 22, 35. The proof that God has revealed Himself personally is woven throughout Scripture. The writers of Scripture assert over and over that the words are from God.

It is the verbal revelation that explains the other forms. The words tell us who is doing the action. Exodus 9 speaks to the other forms of revelation. Creation is being manipulated by someone. The words tell us who the actor is.

Exodus 9:27 gives us an example of God being revealed through conscience. Pharaoh knows that he is the guilty party. Pharaoh knows that he is being judged by someone who is righteous and the way he knows who it is, is because Moses has told him verbally. The Egyptians recognized a multitude of gods and yet Pharaoh understands that it is the Lord who is righteous.

The verbal revelation explains man's purpose. Verse 16 says, "for this cause have I raised thee up," Verbal revelation gives the proper perspective for God's providential work in this man's life. (See also v. 14; Rom. 9:17)

There is one means of revelation left out and that leads us to the final form of revelation and that is in the person of God's Son. This revelation is the final revelation because it is the fullest revelation possible. Every other form of revelation is validated by this means of revelation. The Lord Jesus Christ identifies the Creator. He explains right and wrong. He explains providence, worked miracles, referred to Old Testament writings confirming them as the Word of God.

Jesus Christ is God revealed. (John 1:18; John 14:9; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22;

God's Son: (He. 1:1-2) Jesus Christ, the final and fullest possible revelation.

The Purpose of Revelation It is through the written Word of God we understand where we came from, how we became sinners, the consequences of our sin, and how we can be delivered from sin. It reveals the person and work of Jesus Christ, the way of salvation, and God's purpose for our lives. Special revelation answers the questions; Who am I? How did I get here? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Imagine your boss handing to you, one of his employees, a policy memorandum written by some of his personal staff and assuring you as he does so that it exactly expresses his mind. This situation is parallel to that in which a Christian comes by God's providence to possess a Bible. The employee no doubt has some general idea of the boss's goals and strategy before he reads the memo, inasmuch as he belongs to the firm, but by studying the memo he comes to know the boss's mind with a precision not otherwise attainable. So it is with members of the Christian church as they study their Bibles.[2]

In what is referred to as the Patriarchal Age, from Genesis 12-50 God revealed Himself through Outward Manifestations, Symbols and Theophanies. These came in the form of the burning bush, a cloud, thunder & lightning, as a man or angels; speaking through Balaams donkey. In the Prophetic Age God spoke to men by the movements of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. This is referred to as *inspiration*. To be sure, these periods overlap. But the revelation of God through inspiration culminated with the writing of the New Testament. God has made His revelation available to us today by providing and preserving His truth in written form – the Bible. He guaranteed the truthfulness of these writings by using the special method of delivering His truth by the process of inspiration.

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2. Geisler, Norman L., *Inerrancy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 221, 1980

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