

Chapter II: Revelation

1. Revelation in General

The discussion of religion naturally leads on to that of revelation as its origin. If God had not revealed Himself, religion would have been impossible. Man could not possibly have had any knowledge of God, if God had not made Himself known. Left to himself, he would never have discovered God. We distinguish between God's revelation in nature and His revelation in Scripture.

Atheists and Agnostics, of course, do not believe in revelation. Pantheists sometimes speak of it, though there is really no place for it in their system of thought. And Deists admit the revelation of God in nature, but deny the necessity, the reality, and even the possibility of any special revelation such as we have in Scripture. We believe in both general and special revelation.

2. General Revelation

The general revelation of God is prior to His special revelation in point of time. It does not come to man in the form of verbal communications, but in the facts, the forces, and the laws of nature, in the constitution and operation of the human mind, and in the facts of experience and history. The Bible refers to it in such passages as Ps. 19:1, 2; Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15.

a. Insufficiency of general revelation. While Pelagians, Rationalists, and Deists regard this revelation as adequate for our present needs, Roman Catholics and Protestants are agreed that it is not sufficient. It was obscured by the blight of sin resting on God's beautiful creation. The handwriting of the Creator was not entirely erased, but became hazy and indistinct. It does not now convey any fully reliable knowledge of God and spiritual things, and therefore does not furnish us a trustworthy foundation on which we can build for our eternal future. The present religious confusion of those who would base their religion on a purely natural basis clearly proves its insufficiency. It does not even afford an adequate basis for religion in general, much less for true religion. Even gentile nations appeal to some supposed special revelation. And, finally, it utterly fails

to meet the spiritual needs of sinners. While it conveys some knowledge of the goodness, the wisdom, and the power of God, it conveys no knowledge whatever of Christ as the only way of salvation.

b. Value of general revelation. This does not mean, however, that general revelation has no value at all. It accounts for the true elements that are still found in heathen religions. Due to this revelation gentiles feel themselves to be the offspring of God, Acts 17:28, seek after God if haply they might find Him, Acts 17:27, see in nature God's everlasting power and divinity, Rom. 1:19, 20, and do by nature the things of the law, Rom. 2:14. Though they live in the darkness of sin and ignorance, and pervert the truth of God, they still share in the illumination of the Word, John 1:9, and in the general operations of the Holy Spirit, Gen. 6:3. Moreover, the general revelation of God also forms the background for His special revelation. The latter could not be fully understood without the former. Science and history do not fail to illumine the pages of the Bible.

3. Special Revelation

In addition to the revelation of God in nature we have His special revelation which is now embodied in Scripture. The Bible is preeminently the book of God's special revelation, a revelation in which facts and words go hand in hand, the words interpreting the facts and the facts giving substance to the words.

a. Necessity of special revelation. This special revelation became necessary through the entrance of sin into the world. God's handwriting in nature was obscured and corrupted, and man was stricken with spiritual blindness, became subject to error and unbelief, and now in his blindness and perverseness fails to read aright even the remaining traces of the original revelation, and is unable to understand any further revelation of God. Therefore it became necessary that God should re-interpret the truths of nature, should provide a new revelation of redemption, and should illumine the mind of man and redeem it from the power of error.

b. Means of special revelation. In giving His special or supernatural revelation God used different kinds of means, such as (1) Theophanies or visible manifestations of God. He revealed His presence in fire and clouds of smoke, Ex. 13:21-22; 33:9; Ps. 78:14; 99:7; in

stormy winds, Job 38:1; Ps .18:10-16, and in a “still small voice,” 1 Kings 19:12. These were all tokens of His presence, revealing something of His glory. Among the Old Testament appearances those of the Angel of Jehovah, the second Person of the Trinity, occupied a prominent place, Gen. 16:13; 31:11; Ex. 23:20-23; Mal. 3:1. The highest point of the personal appearance of God among men was reached in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Him the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, John 1:14. (2) Direct communications. Sometimes God spoke to men in an audible voice, as He did to Moses and the children of Israel, Deut. 5:4, and sometimes He suggested His messages to the prophets by an internal operation of the Holy Spirit, 1 Pet. 1:11. Moreover, He revealed Himself in dreams and visions, and by means of Urim and Thummim, Num. 12:6; 27:21; Isa. 6. And in the New Testament Christ appears as the great Teacher sent from God to reveal the Father’s will; and through His Spirit the apostles become the organs of further revelations, John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; 1 Thess. 2:13. (3) Miracles. The miracles of the Bible should never be regarded as mere marvels which fill men with amazement, but as essential parts of God’s special revelation. They are manifestations of the special power of God, tokens of His special presence, and often serve to symbolize spiritual truths. They are signs of the coming Kingdom of God and of the redemptive power of God. The greatest miracle of all is the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. In Him the whole creation of God is being restored and brought back to its original beauty, 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 21:5.

c. The character of special revelation. This special revelation of God is a revelation of redemption. It reveals the plan of God for the redemption of sinners and of the world, and the way in which this plan is realized. It is instrumental in renewing man; it illumines his mind and inclines his will to that which is good; it fills him with holy affections, and prepares him for his heavenly home. Not only does it bring us a message of redemption; it also acquaints us with redemptive facts. It not only enriches us with knowledge, but also transforms lives by changing sinners into saints. This revelation is clearly progressive. The great truths of redemption appear but dimly at first, but gradually increase in clearness, and finally stand out in the New Testament in all their fullness and beauty.

To memorize. Scripture passages bearing on:

a. General Revelation:

Ps. 8:1. "O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth."

Ps. 19:1, 2. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows wisdom."

Rom. 1:20. "For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." Rom. 2:14, 15. "For when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them."

b. Special Revelation:

Num. 12:6-8. "And He said, Hear now my words: if there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so; he is faithful in all my house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth."

Heb. 1:1. "God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath in the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son."

2 Pet. 1:21. "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

For Further Study:

a. Mention some of the appearances of the Angel of Jehovah. Can he have been a mere angel? Gen. 16:13; 31:11, 13; 32:28; Ex. 23:20-23.

b. Name some examples of revelation by dreams. Gen. 28:10- 17; 31:24; 41:2-7; Judg. 7:13; 1 Kings 8:5-9; Dan. 2:1-3; Matt. 2:13, 19, 20.

c. Mention some cases in which God revealed Himself in visions. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1-3; Dan. 2:19; 7:1-14; Zech. 2-6.

d. Can you infer from the following passages what the miracles recorded reveal? Ex. 10:1, 2; Deut. 8:3; John 2:1-11; 6:1- 14, 25-35; 9:1-7; 11:17-44.

Questions for Review:

1. How do general and special revelation differ?
2. Where do we meet with the denial of all revelation of God?
3. What is the position of the Deists as to revelation?
4. What is the nature of general revelation?
5. Why is it insufficient for our special needs, and what value does it have?
6. Why was God's special revelation necessary?
7. What means did God employ in His special revelations?
8. What are the characteristics of special revelation?