THE BIBLE AND DIVINE REVELATION



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God , after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
Hebrews 1:1-2

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INTRODUCTION

It should be pointed out at the outset that studying the Bible and Divine Revelation does not mean the Book of Revelation, rather, it means God's act of revelation as He reveals Himself through the Holy Scriptures.

By way of definition, the word "revelation" comes from a Greek word that means, "the unveiling." It refers to a divine act of communicating to man what otherwise could not and would not be known. Divine Revelation, especially biblical revelation, is an unveiling; it is a divine act by which God communicates to man those things–those truths–which otherwise man could never know, nor could he discover on his own in any way.

God can be known only because He reveals Himself. The nature of God is such that man, on his own, cannot discover God. When a Soviet astronaut came back from one of the first trips into space, he stated that he saw no evidence of God out there and, therefore, concluded that Communist Atheism was absolutely correct. But just because he could not see God in space does not mean that God does not exist; God has other ways of revealing Himself. In fact, someone else made a statement that, if the astronaut had stepped out of his spaceship, he would have seen God rather quickly.

God is the Incomprehensible One. According to Job 11:7, it is impossible for anybody to have a perfect knowledge of God. God is an infinite being, and man is a finite being with finite knowledge. Man can know many things about God by virtue of what He has revealed to man about Himself, but all of man's knowledge will never be a perfect knowledge. It is impossible for a finite being like man to have a perfect knowledge of the infinite God.

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Basically, theology is a systematizing of what God has revealed. It is by virtue of Divine Revelation that there are answers to some of man's basic questions; such as, "Is there a God? If there is, does He communicate? If He communicates, what does He say?" Divine Revelation answers all three of these questions. "Is there a God?" Yes, there is. "Does He communicate?" Yes, He does. "What does He say?" What He says is what Divine Revelation is all about.

There are two main modes or types of Divine Revelation: General Revelation and Special Revelation.

I. GENERAL REVELATION

A. The Nature of General Revelation

General Revelation refers to the way God reveals Himself generally to all men. These are things by which it is possible for anyone anywhere in the world to know about God, because God has revealed Himself in a general way to all. The nature of General Revelation is that this revelation is embodied in things. General Revelation has been defined as "the embodiment of divine thought in the phenomenon of nature, in the fact or experience of history, and the general constitution of the human mind." This means that God has revealed Himself in certain ways to all men, and that is why it is called General Revelation. It appears to all men; it is a revelation available to all men. The main object of General Revelation is to supply man's need for spiritual answers and to persuade the souls of men to seek after God.

Again, General Revelation is the revelation by which God reveals Himself to all men. Its emphasis is to get man to begin searching for God in a real and personal way.

B. The Means of General Revelation

In what ways and through what means does God reveal Himself generally to all men? According to Scripture, there are four different means of General Revelation.

1. Through Nature

The first and primary way is through nature. God has revealed Himself generally to all men by means of nature. If a man studies nature and learns its lessons, he can learn certain things about God. For example, the psalmist states that nature reveals to man the concept of creation in Psalm 19:1-6. If a man truly studies the work of nature as embodied in natural law in the heavens and space–as he observes the rotation and the perfect uniqueness of the harmony of the universe, as he observes the fact that the universe has a design, that it operates in such a way that he can set his watch by, that he can set his calendar by it–this, the psalmist says, reveals the glory of God. Isaiah 40:12, 14, and 26, teach that, by means of nature, God has also

revealed His individuality. Acts 14:14-17 declares that, by means of nature, man can learn about the goodness of God. Romans 1:19-20 declares that, in nature, man can discover the power and divinity of God.

So one way that God has revealed Himself by means of General Revelation is through nature in order that man can learn about His glory, individuality, goodness, power, and divinity.

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2. Through Providence

The second means of General Revelation is through providence. This is God's revelation through history. History is merely the execution of God's divine program of the ages in all of its details. By studying history, man can learn about the providence of God.

According to Job 38:22-23, the coming of snow in the day of battle shows the providence of God. For example, it was no mere accident of nature that the Germans were stopped by the snows of Russia. It was no mere accident that Napoleon was stopped the same way. A person observing history should be able to see that the coming of the snow was no mere fluke, but was God's providence being worked out in history.

Psalm 75:6-7 teaches that, through providence, one can see that God is in control as to who ascends thrones. Why do certain men get elected and others do not? Why have different key personalities come at the same time in history to be in power at the same time; such as, Hitler on one side, and Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt on the other? It was the providence of God that worked out these things. Acts 17:26 teaches that, by means of the providence of God, one can see how boundaries and borders of nations are set. The providence of God is also revealed through the history of Israel according to Deuteronomy 32:8-9.

Providence can also be seen in the life of the believer according to Romans 8:28. So, providence is the second means by which God reveals Himself to man through General Revelation.

3. Through Preservation

The third means of General Revelation is through preservation. The way God has preserved nations, individuals and things can also teach humanity certain lessons.

Acts 17:28 deals with human preservation, while Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3 deal with universal preservation. Indeed, the preservation of the universe is a mystery to science, because the nature of the atom is such that it should simply explode. Yet it holds itself together by what scientists call the "atomic glue." What is this atomic glue? It is God's work of preservation.

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This, too, is part of General Revelation, another way that God has revealed Himself to all men.

4. Through Conscience

The fourth means of General Revelation is through conscience. This is the way God has revealed Himself in the exercise of absolute law.

Romans 2:14-15 points out that the keeping of law is something that is characteristic throughout the entire human world. Everywhere you look in humanity, every society, no matter how primitive–or how civilized–has a set of certain basic laws, which is a product of their conscience. This, too, shows a means of General Revelation.

C. The Limitation of General Revelation

There is, however, a certain limitation to General Revelation. General Revelation is limited as to just how much it can reveal regarding two aspects: salvation and condemnation.

1. Regarding Salvation

The first aspect of the limitation of General Revelation is its insufficiency to lead man to salvation; it is insufficient to save. In other words, while General Revelation can reveal many things about God, one cannot discover the content of the gospel by means of General Revelation. No person can know the content of the gospel through nature, providence, preservation, or conscience. Because General Revelation does not actually spell out the content of the gospel, it is insufficient to save.

Acts 17:23 emphasizes the fact that General Revelation offers a limited knowledge. In Ephesians 3:8-9, Paul says that the gospel was hidden to the minds of men.

2. Regarding Condemnation

While General Revelation is insufficient to save because the gospel is not revealed through it, the second aspect of its limitation is that it is sufficient to condemn according to Romans 1:20.

People sometimes ask, "Will a person who has never heard about Yeshua (Jesus) go to Hell?" Some people want to answer, "No, people who never hear about the Messiah are going to get to Heaven anyway." The logical conclusion to this statement is that no missionaries should be sent to these people. The most dangerous thing to do in this case would be to give someone a knowledge of the gospel so that he could reject it and, therefore, end up in Hell! If their ignorance will get them into Heaven, then no one should witness to them. Why give them an opportunity to hear the gospel, then reject it, and end up in Hell?

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The truth is that even those who never hear about Jesus will end up going to Hell. The reason is because General Revelation is sufficient to condemn. The principle of Romans 1 is this: If a person lives up to the light that he has, then God will make sure he gets more light, until he hears the gospel in some way, shape, or form. As has been stated, man can learn a number of great truths about God from General Revelation. If he lives up to the light that he has from General Revelation, then God will make sure he gets more light.

This is one explanation of how a person born and raised in the Midwest, perhaps in Kansas or Missouri, suddenly has a tremendous burden to go to a remote tribe in Africa or South America that very few people have heard about. He has this burden because there are people among these tribes who are living up to the light they have, and if they are given more light, they will believe. So, God sends someone to share the gospel with them. If a person dies without ever hearing about Yeshua the Messiah, what that means is he would not have believed even if he had heard the gospel. The proof of it is that he had not lived up to the light he did have.

In Romans 1:18-25, Paul explains that the nature and tendency of humanity in general is to corrupt that which he can learn from General Revelation. For example, man can learn about the greatness of God from General Revelation; that God is a creator (v. 20). But what did man do in the course of human history? Did he worship the Creator as the Creator? No, the tendency of man was not to live up to the light that he had through General Revelation. Instead, he began to worship the creature, the created, in place of the Creator. He began to make statues and images of animals or men or angels, and began to worship these things (vv. 21-23). As a result, Paul says, their minds became darkened (vv. 24-25). They became darkened because they failed to live up to the light that was available to them by means of General Revelation.

Whereas on the one hand, General Revelation is insufficient to save, on the other hand, it is sufficient to condemn. At the Great White Throne Judgment when the question is raised, "Why have you not believed on Yeshua the Messiah?" the sinner may say that it is because no one ever presented the gospel to him, assuming perhaps that he will not be condemned. However, God will then show to that individual–by means of the records kept in the books that are mentioned in Revelation 20–that he did indeed have knowledge available to him by means of General Revelation. It is obvious that he rejected the knowledge available to him by not living up to the light he had, therefore, no further light was given to him. Consequently, the gospel never came to him. He will be condemned because he did not live up to the light he had.

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D. Summary

To summarize this section, one of the modes of Divine Revelation is General Revelation. This is the revelation by which God reveals Himself generally to all men. We can learn a lot of things about God through General Revelation, but it has the limitation that no one will receive the content of the gospel through it. Therefore, it is sufficient to condemn, but it is insufficient to save.

II. SPECIAL REVELATION

A. The Nature of Special Revelation

The second major mode of revelation is Special Revelation. The nature of Special Revelation is that it is embodied in words. Whereas General Revelation is revelation embodied in things, Special Revelation is revelation embodied in words. In Special Revelation, God makes Himself known at specific times, through specific people, and in specific ways.

B. The Necessity of Special Revelation

There are three main reasons why Special Revelation is needed. First of all, Special Revelation is needed to correctly interpret the truths from General Revelation. Through General Revelation, it is possible to learn only so much, and it is even possible to misinterpret those truths available from General Revelation. Therefore, Special Revelation is needed to correctly interpret the truths of General Revelation.

The second reason for Special Revelation is to furnish man with a revelation of salvation. Again, General Revelation can never provide the content of the gospel. While man can learn many things about God from General Revelation, he cannot learn of salvation, because the gospel itself is not available through General Revelation. General Revelation is incomplete revelation, but with Special Revelation, it is possible to have complete revelation in that salvation is clearly explained to us.

The third reason for Special Revelation is to harmonize what appears to be contradictory elements in General Revelation. General Revelation shows both the goodness of God and the severity of God. For instance, the goodness of God is seen through the periodic rains that cause the seed to grow. The severity of God is seen by destructive rains that destroy the growing plants and wheat. This seems to contradict the nature of God. It is impossible to harmonize these truths from General Revelation, but this is possible through Special Revelation.

C. The Means of Special Revelation

In Hebrews 1:1-2, the writer points out that God has revealed Himself in a number of different means or ways throughout biblical history in

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Special Revelation. What are these various ways that the writer of Hebrews refers to when he writes about different ways of Special Revelation? All together, there are six different means of Special Revelation.

1. By Theophanies

First, a very common means of Special Revelation in the Old Testament is by theophanies. A theophany is the appearance of God in a visible form. In the Old Testament, this came primarily in two forms. The first form was by means of the Shechinah Glory, which was a visible manifestation of God's presence that came in the form of a light, a fire, or a cloud, or some combination of these things.

The second major form of a theophany was the Angel of Jehovah. What is very evident is that throughout the pages of the Old Testament, whenever the Angel of the Lord–the Angel of Jehovah–appeared, it was never a common, ordinary angel, but rather, it was always the Second Person of the Trinity appearing in angelic form.

Thus, one means of Special Revelation was by way of theophanies, the appearance of God in a visible form, either by means of the Shechinah Glory or by means of the Angel of the Lord.

2. By Miracles

The second means of Special Revelation is by miracles. Miracles in Scripture are special revelations about God.

a. The Definition of Miracles

A simple definition of a miracle is that it is an unusual event that accomplishes a useful work in revealing the presence and the power of God. A more detailed definition of a miracle reads like this: "An event in nature so extraordinary in itself, and so coinciding with a prophecy or a command of a spiritual leader or teacher, as to fully warrant a conviction that God has wrought it with the design of certifying this teacher or leader that he has been commissioned by God."

Basically, a miracle is an extraordinary event that is inexplicable in terms of ordinary, natural facts.

b. The Nature of Miracles

The nature of miracles is seen in four ways. First, miracles are distinct from providence. In providence, people do not necessarily acknowledge God, but in a miracle, even an unbeliever can acknowledge the supernatural character of it. For instance, in Acts 3:1 -4:22, when the miracle of the healing of the lame beggar occurred, even unbelievers acknowledged it to be the work of God (Acts 4:14-16, 21-22). In Acts 14:8-18, when a cripple was healed, even unbelievers acknowledged this to be a work of God (vv. 8-12). A

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miracle, then, is distinct from providence in that even unbelievers will acknowledge its supernatural character.

Secondly, the nature of a miracle is that it is distinct from answered prayer, which does not constitute a sign. While on one hand, a miracle could result from an answered prayer, it is nevertheless distinct from the answered prayer itself in that miracles can come separately from prayer.

The third way in which the nature of miracles is seen is that they do not break natural laws, they are the result of supernatural power that supersedes these laws.

The fourth way in which the nature of miracles is seen is that they are supernatural in character, disclosing divine power as seen in John 3:2.

c. The Categories of Miracles

Basically, there are two categories or types of miracles. One category is when natural law intensified; such as, the universal Flood of Noah's day. It is not unnatural to have floods on this planet. But in the case of the world wide Flood, it was a flood intensified to a miraculous status.

A second category or type of a miracle is when the participation of nature is totally excluded. Whereas in the first type, natural law was intensified by God and nature working together; in the second type, nature is totally excluded. These are miracles such as getting water from a rock or resurrection from the dead. In no way can it be said that nature cooperates with God in these things.

d. The Facets of Miracles

There are three facets of miracles. The first facet is that they are extraordinary works of God in that they show the exercise of His supernatural, divine power, and which produce amazement as seen in Exodus 14:31 and Luke 9:43.

A second facet of miracles is that they are worked through chosen men, but Acts 2:22 and 19:11 reveal that the power is recognized to be of God.

And the third facet of miracles is that they are revelatory events; they are the unveiling of truth.

e The Purposes for Miracles

There are three main purposes for miracles. The first purpose is to affirm a new revelation from God as shown in Matthew 12:28.

The second purpose is to affirm doctrine. However, these two–miracles and doctrine–must be in unity with each other. A doctrine can stand alone, but miracles cannot stand alone because Satan can also produce miracles. This is where people get caught up

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into movements where they never mature or never get saved because they assume that the existence of the supernatural automatically means it is of God. Nothing can be farther from the truth, for Satan himself can perform miracles.

For example, Matthew 7:22-23 states that many will come to Jesus in that day and say: *Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by your name, and by your name cast out demons, and by your name do many mighty works? And then He will say to them: I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*
Miracles do not prove doctrine. Instead, doctrine proves the miracle. That is why every miracle must be tested by doctrine, by the Word of God, to make sure it is of God, not of Satan.

And the third purpose of miracles is to manifest the power of God.

f. The Vocabulary of Miracles
There are four different words used for the concept of miracles, each emphasizing a distinctive nature. The first word is "wonder." When a miracle is called a wonder, it emphasizes what a miracle will do: it causes or awakens wonder in the observer.

The second keyword for miracle is "power." When the word "power" is used, it emphasizes that a miracle is done by divine power.

The third word for a miracle is "work." When the word "work" is used for a miracle, it emphasizes what a miracle accomplishes: a practical and beneficial work.

The fourth term for a miracle is "sign." When this word is used for a miracle, it means that the miracle is authenticating the message and the messenger as being from God.

g. The Frequency of Miracles
We are often told in many circles that there were always miracles throughout the Bible and, therefore, there should always be miracles today; but that, too, is a fallacy.

Actually, throughout the entire period of biblical history of nearly two thousand years, there were only four major periods of miracles. The first period was that of the Exodus and the Wilderness Wandering, which was only a forty-year period. The second is the period of Elijah and Elisha. The third period of miracles is the time of Daniel and his three friends. And the fourth major period of miracles is that of the Messiah and the apostles. So, there were only four major periods of miracles. Generally speaking, miracles were not happening all the time. If miracles were a common element, they would no longer be miraculous.

The nature of miracles is the concept of the extraordinary, the concept

of the unusual, something that does not occur on a regular basis.

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3. By Direct Communication

The third major means of Special Revelation is by direct communication. This was the primary way that God spoke to prophets according to Numbers 12:5-8 and I Samuel 28:6. In fact, the very nature of a prophet is one who receives direct revelation from God.

Direct communication came in seven different ways. The first way was *mouth to mouth* and *face to face*. This was especially true with Moses. It was mouth to mouth communication with Moses in Numbers 12:7- 8; and it was *face to face* in Deuteronomy 34:10.

A second way of direct communication was by means of an audible voice in that one could hear the voice of God from Heaven. Some examples of this include: Adam, in Genesis 2:16; Cain, in Genesis 4:6-15; Noah, in Genesis 9; the multitudes at Mount Sinai, in Exodus 19:9 and 16; Samuel, in I Samuel 3:4-14; Paul, in Acts 9:4; and Peter, in Acts 10:19.

A third major way of direct communication was by means of the casting of lots in which God revealed Himself as well as His will. Some examples of this include: the case of Joshua in the division of the Land, in Joshua 14:1-2; how Jonah was found out, in Jonah 1:7; and the way the twelfth apostle was chosen, in Acts 1:26.

A fourth way of direct communication was by means of the *urim* and *thummim*. The *urim* and *thummim* refer to the Breastplate of the High Priest, upon which were the twelve stones signifying the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This Breastplate was able to answer yes-and-no questions by the stones lighting up when the answer was "Yes," or by not lighting up when the answer was "No."

A fifth way was by means of dreams, both to unbelievers such as Abimelech, in Genesis 20:3-7 and to believers such as Joseph, in Genesis 37:5-9.

A sixth way by which God communicated directly was by means of visions. He did this with Abraham, in Genesis 15:1; Daniel, in Daniel 2:19; and Amos, in Amos 7:8-9.

The seventh way that God directly communicated was through inner illumination as mentioned in II Peter 1:21.

4. By Angels

The fourth means of Special Revelation is by angels in that sometimes God reveals Himself in a special way by means of these angels. For example, God gave the Law of Moses by means of angels according

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to Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19. God gave Special Revelation to Daniel through an angel in Daniel 9:20-21 and 10:10-21. It was by means of angels that the shepherds were told about the birth of the Messiah in Luke 2:10-13. Indeed, virtually the entire Book of Revelation was revealed to John by means of an angel according to Revelation 1:1-3.

5. By the Incarnation

The fifth means of Special Revelation was by the Incarnation. When God became a man by means of the God Man, He revealed Himself even further in the person of Yeshua. Everything that is true about the divine nature of the Father is also true of the Son.

Many Scriptures teach that the Incarnation became a very special means, a very special form of Special Revelation. In Matthew 11:27, the Son revealed the Father. In John 1:14 and 18, Jesus came to reveal the glory of the Father. In John 14:1- 9, one of His disciples asked Him to show them the Father, and Yeshua answered, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Colossians 2:9 states that *all the fullness of the Godhead* indwelt bodily in the Son. According to I John 1:1-4, to see Yeshua meant to see God; to see Jesus' work was to see the work of God; to hear Jesus' teaching was to hear the very words of God. In Hebrews 1:1-2, the writer states that God has revealed Himself in various ways and in various forms throughout history, but has, in these last days, revealed Himself to us by means of His Son.

6. By the Scriptures

The sixth and last means of Special Revelation is by the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the Word of God, the written revelation of God by which one can rightfully interpret all the other forms of revelation. By means of Scripture, it is possible to rightly interpret everything from General Revelation. By means of Scripture, it is possible to correctly interpret the other five forms of Special Revelation. It is by means of Scripture that one can interpret theophanies. It is by means of Scripture that one can interpret miracles and be able to know how far a miracle can go. In this way, the Scriptures are more important than any miracle, for in Luke 16:31, Abraham said to the rich man: *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead*. Resurrection from the dead is a stupendous miracle, but by itself, it is insufficient. Miracles will fail to convince if the Scriptures are not believed. By means of Scripture, it is possible to determine which miracles are true and which are false. By means of Scripture, it is known that Satan can duplicate many of God's miracles. By means of Scripture, we know that miracles are not a common event, but an unusual event. Also, by means of Scripture, one can rightfully interpret the various forms of direct communication. By means of Scripture, it is possible to interpret the revelations given by angels. By means of Scripture, one can fully understand what the Incarnation was about and how to rightfully interpret the revelation received from

the Incarnation. By far, the Scriptures are the most important of the six different modes of Special Revelation for man today.

While the Scriptures contain partial knowledge of God, it is all that God has chosen to let us know for now according to Deuteronomy 29:29. The primary goal of the Scriptures is unto redemption according to II Timothy 3:15. On this score, it provides what General Revelation fails to provide: the content of the gospel.

The Scriptures are the sufficient revelation of God, though they are not the exhaustive revelation. Romans 8:18 states that, in the future glory, further revelation will be given. I Corinthians 13:12 teaches that there will be future knowledge to be gained, and Jude 3 tells us that final revelation will come only in the glorified state. In the present state, Scripture is the final revelation for now. Therefore, Paul admonishes *believers not to go beyond the things which are written* in I Corinthians 4:6. It is by the written Word of God that truth and error of everything else with which we are confronted in the spiritual war can be determined. It is revelation by means of words according to I Thessalonians 2:13. It is the Scriptures that contain the *Thus says the Lord*.

III. PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

In the context of the Scriptures, there is another form of revelation sometimes spoken of that is called Progressive Revelation. Progressive Revelation is not a third mode or type of revelation; rather, it explains the revelation that came through the Scriptures.

Progressive Revelation means that God did not choose to give the entire Word at one time; rather, the writing of the Scriptures came over a period of one thousand six hundred years. Step by step, the plan and purpose of God was unfolded. Each step was absolutely flawless and completely whole until the final revelation came. Man now has a complete revelation in the written Word of God, and there is no need to know that which is beyond the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, God has given all that He intends man to know for now. He does want man to know more, but only in the next life, not in this one.

There is General Revelation and there is Special Revelation, with the primary form of Special Revelation being the written Word of God: the Scriptures. To close with the admonition of Paul that the Bible is the final authority, so one must be careful *not to go beyond the things which are written.*✡

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