

God Has Spoken

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

Because Christianity is based on the revealed truth of God's Word, establishing the credibility and believability of the Bible is essential. Eventually Satan will attempt to make us doubt the authenticity of our faith. During those times the more evidence we have, the more confident we will be.

Today many people deny that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Some deny it subtly. Neo-orthodoxy, for example, says the Bible **contains** the Word of God, meaning that only the parts of the Bible that speak to you as you read are the Word of God. That aberrant view of inspiration allows each individual to determine subjectively what parts of the Bible form the Word of God. Other people blatantly deny the inspiration of the Bible, claiming it is just a book of morals and ethics and that Jesus was simply a great teacher who demonstrated an admirable philosophy of life. But the entire Bible is God's revelation. God disclosed Himself to man because otherwise full knowledge of God is unobtainable.

REVIEW

I. THE REVEALER

A. The Essence of His Nature

B. An Examination of His Character

1. God is personal
2. God is moral
3. God is the Creator
4. God is accessible

LESSON

II. THE REVELATION

Revelation speaks of the content of God's communication. It is important to know what God has actually said, because so many people today claim to be speaking or writing for God. A person attending a seminar where I spoke asked if I thought God's revelation was complete. When I replied that I did, she told me that the church she attended was led by an apostle. She assured me that although he wasn't Peter, James, or John, he gave direct revelation from God every Sunday. How do we evaluate claims like that? What has God revealed? Is all the Bible God's revelation? Is it His only revelation? Those are all questions Christians must be able to answer.

That's Hard to Imagine!

Some people think Moses speculated about the creation of the world and then decided to write down his conclusions. But it is hardly likely that human reason would have imagined the extraordinary events of Genesis 1 and 2. God simply told Moses what happened. So Moses wrote, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2). Revelation is God's disclosure of what would otherwise be unknowable.

It's hard also to imagine Isaiah writing on his own, "The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son" (Isa. 7:14). Or can you imagine David writing Psalm 22 with its perfect description of Christ's crucifixion hundreds of years before it occurred? How could he have known Christ would say; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1). God had to reveal it to him. The writers of Scripture didn't write their own thoughts; they wrote the thoughts of God.

Revelation is God's free, voluntary act of love in disclosing Himself to mankind. God has revealed Himself in two ways.

A. Natural Revelation

1. In creation

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." You can't see all that God has made and not conclude someone made it. Design implies a designer. In Romans 1 the apostle Paul expands that concept. Verses 18-20 say, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [a reference to conscience]; for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." So, both the created world and man's conscience tell him that someone made it.

a) Its content

God's creation reveals four specific things about God.

(1) His glory

Psalm 19:1 says that creation declares God's glory, which is the composite of all His attributes. Looking at this world helps us to understand what God is like. A careful observation of nature inspires an awe of the wisdom of its Maker. The beauty in the world attests to the Creator's graciousness. Consider the color in the world. God could have made everything brown--imagine brown sky, brown grass, and brown flowers. But God added color to the world to brighten our lives, so we can conclude that our Creator must be a caring God and a God who appreciates beauty. There is also something about the world that makes us recognize certain things as right, so the Creator must be just. Creation reflects many other attributes of the Creator.

(2) His Eternal Power

An honest look at the created world will certainly produce a profound awareness of the tremendous power of its Maker. Sometime ago I read about our sun and the gaseous projections that extend from its surface for millions of miles. It was staggering to think of the force required to propel them into space. Yet our sun is infinitesimal compared to millions of other suns in the universe, many of which generate energy and power we can't even conceive of. But God's power is much greater than the energy of them all--He created them!

(3) His Deity

The Greek word translated "Godhead" (*theiot es*) refers to God's divine character. Creation enables man to see that the Creator is God--that He is supreme, absolute, and infinite.

(4) His Wrath

When someone examines the creation, he can see that the world is cursed (Rom. 8:22). That curse displays the wrath of God. Our world is under a moral sentence. It is subject to earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters. Also it is violated by man.

So without speaking a word, God has revealed something of Himself. No man denies that God exists unless he has seared his conscience with sin, or allowed pride to destroy his reason. There has to be a first cause--nobody times nothing can't equal everything (which is essentially what the theory of evolution claims)! Psalm 100:3 says, "It is [God] who hath made us, and not we ourselves." Man didn't spontaneously generate. Saying that creation is not the act of God is like saying a painting was done without an artist, a brush, canvas, paint, or even the concept of art. Paul, when telling the Athenian philosophers about the true God, began by assuming the obvious: "God ... made the world and all things in it" (Acts 17:24).

b) Its clarity

Romans 1:20 says, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." In fact, God's natural revelation is so clear that verse 20 ends by saying all men are "without excuse." No one can plead ignorance. There is no excuse for atheism or agnosticism. But if it's so clear, why do some people see no evidence of God in creation? Romans 1:21-25 says, "Because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator." They loved themselves more than God, so "God gave them up unto vile affections" (v. 26). They rejected clear revelation, so "God gave them over to a reprobate mind" (v. 28). God says the difficulty isn't with His revelation but with man.

According to Ephesians 2 mankind is spiritually dead, blind, and ignorant. We became that way because we willfully rejected the truth. God made Himself clearly visible in nature, but man chose to blind himself with his own sin.

2. In man

Romans 1:19 says, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them." There is something in man that affirms there is a Creator who should be obeyed and glorified. That's why ten- year-old atheists are rare--it's natural for children to believe that God exists and that He cares. Not until a man grows up and becomes sophisticated does he decide to be his own god. Romans 1:21 says that man refused to glorify God and "became vain in [his] imaginations." He developed futile thinking patterns. Although he is surrounded by natural revelation from creation and from within, he concludes that God doesn't exist. He has rejected the knowledge God has given him and ends up worshiping himself and his own set of values.

Can Someone Be Saved Through Natural Revelation?

If a man accepts only natural revelation, is that enough? Can a native who sees God in everything and has a rather undefined perception of Him be saved?

In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." In Acts 4:12 Peter, speaking of Jesus Christ, said to the Sanhedrin, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." In John 3:18 Jesus said, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the the only begotten Son of God." Natural revelation isn't enough. If people could be saved by witnessing natural revelation, missionaries would be unnecessary. But Christ said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Since He said to tell "every creature," all must need to hear.

B. Special Revelation

Man is a sinner; he's spiritually dead, willfully blind, and without understanding, so he usually rejects natural revelation. But even if he begins thinking that perhaps there is a God, he can only grope unsuccessfully to know Him. So God, in addition to natural revelation, gave us special revelation, which reveals all we need to know about God.

God wanted to teach us some specific truths; special revelation reveals those truths. It speaks of God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness. It tells us of Christ's sacrifice, the way of salvation, the function of the church, and the second coming. The whole Bible is God's special revelation, going beyond natural revelation and giving specifics. When God has something to say, He doesn't mumble or speak in broad generalities.

How did God reveal Himself through this special revelation?

1. Theophany

A theophany is a visible appearance of God in some form.

a) Genesis 18:1-33--One day Abraham had some visitors: two angels and God Himself. He invited

them to come to his home, and he and Sarah entertained them. God was appearing in a theophany. God who is invisible assumed a human form.

b) Genesis 32:22-30--Jacob wrestled with what appeared to be a man, but was actually God (vv. 28-30). It may have been a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

c) Exodus 3:2--4:17--God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, telling him exactly what He wanted him to do.

So God revealed Himself visibly on several occasions in different forms.

2. Prophecy

God didn't have to appear every time He wanted to communicate. Often He would speak through His prophets. God would guide the prophet's mind and mouth, so he could actually say, "Thus saith the Lord." Sometimes in studying the prophetic books of the Bible, it's difficult to tell whether God or the prophet is talking.

God communicated His message to His prophets in various ways.

a) Casting lots

In the book of Jonah, God wanted His disobedient prophet Jonah to be thrown out of the ship so the fish He had prepared could swallow him. So when the men cast lots to determine who should be thrown out, God made certain that the lot fell on Jonah. Leviticus 16:8-10 and Numbers 26:55- 56 reiterate that God occasionally communicated His will through the casting of lots.

b) Dreams

He also communicated His will through dreams. For example, Genesis 28:10-16; 37:5-9; 40--41:32; Daniel 1:17; 2:1-49 all illustrate the significance of dreams. God communicated to Jacob, Joseph, and Daniel through dreams.

c) Visions

Visions are another common way God communicated His will. Daniel was also skilled in the interpretation of visions (Dan. 1:17) and often interpreted them for others.

d) Speaking

There were other times when God communicated by speaking directly to a person. Genesis 12:1 says, "The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." On a road outside Damascus God confronted Paul by speaking to him directly from heaven (Acts 9:3- 6)!

e) Face to face

Sometimes in the Old Testament God spoke to a man face to face. God is Spirit (John 4:24), so He doesn't have a literal face. But He did communicate as directly as possible with Moses for example (Ex. 33:11-23).

3. Miracles

Miracles proved that God was actively involved. He often used them to validate the preaching of the one who performed the miracle. The prophet Elijah proclaimed what God had said, but the people questioned its credibility. So God granted Elijah the power to perform miracles to confirm His Word (e.g., 1 Kings 17:17-24). In the New Testament, as well as during at least two periods in the Old Testament era, God accompanied His Word with signs to show that it was indeed His Word. Miracles attested to the truthfulness of Jesus and the apostles. The Israelites seemed more responsive to the gospel after they witnessed Peter miraculously healing the sick (cf., Acts 3:4- 9). Second Corinthians 12:12 says, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Those signs confirmed the Word.

4. The written Word

Ultimately God's acts and words were recorded in His written revelation--the Bible. However, everything God ever communicated is not in the Bible. At the end of his gospel the apostle John said, "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (20:30). But God recorded in the Bible all the revelation we need to know. God wanted His revelation written down for several important reasons.

a) Scripture preserves God's revelation

After oral communication has been passed down for several generations, its message becomes blurred. Because God knew that oral communication is very risky, He wanted His truth recorded. In Matthew 5:18 Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law." God's written revelation will never be changed. God expressed His desire when He told Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book" (Ex. 17:14). He wanted His revelation written down.

b) Scripture compiles God's revelation

Imagine having to locate hundreds of people so each could tell you a small portion of God's oral communication. What if our only authoritative message from God was what someone had told someone else? Fortunately we aren't in that situation, because we have a book that compiles God's messages. First Corinthians 10:11 says, "These things happened unto [the Israelites] for examples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." What happened to Israel in Old Testament was written for us today. The Bible assembles all the messages God wanted us to have for our admonition and edification.

c) Scripture liberates God's revelation

God compiled His revelation because He wanted His truth to be independent of orator and writer. Jeremiah 36 illustrates what I mean. The Lord said, "Take thee a scroll of a book, and write in it all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day" (v. 2). Verses 4-6 continue, "Then Jeremiah called Baruch, the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, which he had spoken unto him, upon a scroll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am restrained; I cannot go into the house of the Lord." Jeremiah was a prisoner. And an imprisoned prophet can't benefit the people in person. So God told him to write the prophecy down. Then the Word would be independent of writer and speaker, so although the speaker was in jail, the Word wouldn't be. In verse 6 Jeremiah said to Baruch, "Therefore, go, and read in the scroll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the hearing of the people in the Lord's house upon the fast day; and also thou shalt read them in the hearing of all Judah who come out of their cities."

d) Scripture mobilizes God's revelation

Written revelation is enduring and far-reaching. Even though the prophets have been dead for hundreds of years, their writings still speak.

A revival that occurred in Nehemiah's day illustrates how the Bible can impact people even after the death of the human author. Nehemiah 8 says, "All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra, the priest, brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra, the scribe, stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose.... And Ezra opened the

book in the sight of all the people (for he was above all the people); and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (vv. 1-6). Verse 8 adds, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." There was a revival among the people without Moses or any other prophet to proclaim God's truth--because they had God's written Word. The written word endured long after the prophets were dead.

e) Scripture highlights individual responsibility

Written revelation makes everyone responsible. In Luke 16:29 Jesus quotes Abraham's reply to the rich man's pleading to send someone to warn his brothers of hell: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." His brothers had the written Word, so they were responsible to heed it. Likewise, most people in our society have access to the Bible and are responsible to obey it. We don't need a dramatic miracle or new prophetic visions--God has put in writing all the revelation we need!

You don't need a miracle to validate someone's message today. Simply compare his teaching with the Bible. False prophets can be easily checked by Scripture. The Bible is the culmination of God's revelation--His disclosure of Himself to us. It's our responsibility to read it.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the only source of fully accurate knowledge about God?
2. What does neo-orthodoxy teach about the Bible?
3. Define revelation.
4. Explain what creation reveals about God. Support your answers with Scripture.
5. Why do some people see no evidence of God in creation (Romans 1:21-25)?
6. Can someone be saved through natural revelation? Explain.
7. What is a theophany?
8. What is a Christophany?
9. In what ways did God speak to His prophets?
10. How did God often use miracles?
11. What are five reasons God wanted His revelation written down? Explain each.

Pondering the Principles

1. God has revealed Himself in His creation, but unregenerate men have blinded themselves to that revelation. Unfortunately, Christians are often oblivious to God's work and presence in the world around them. Hectic life-styles and distracted minds can cause that unawareness. However, some believers have accepted the common presupposition that nature is a separate entity, a combination of interrelated laws, and an impersonal force. But the Bible teaches that God is actively involved in His creation. Read Psalm 104 and carefully note God's relationship with His creation. Take time now to thank Him and praise Him for the beauty and wonder of His creation. Ask Him for a heart that is sensitive to His natural revelation.

2.If God had given us only natural revelation, we would be incredibly ignorant of Him and His ways, but in His grace He gave us His written Word. Have you taken the Word of God for granted? Have you neglected it? Read Psalm 19 slowly, reflecting on David's words. Ask the Lord to give you the same attitude toward His Word. But don't wait for a feeling; start reading and studying the Bible today. Make it a priority to spend time in God's written revelation daily.

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