

Divine revelation: communication of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency

## Divine revelation

Revelation is supernatural communication from God to man, either oral or written, though usually restricted to its written aspect, that is, to the whole contents of Holy Scripture. It is the discovery by God to man of himself; God showing or unveiling himself: that is, his Being, his moral will and his redemption in Christ. This is over and above of what he has made known by the light of nature (creation: his book with pictures) and reason (the speaking voice within me, or conscience).

Revelation is not only possible, for God can and does always reach his ends, but it also necessary if we are to attain the true knowledge of God and salvation. Man is left inexcusable by the light of nature (Romans 1), but as Calvin said, he is like a short-sighted and bleary-eyed man who cannot see clearly. He needs spectacles. The dense ignorance, low morality and abject helplessness of man in his natural state demands the revelation embedded and contained in the whole of Scripture.

All Scripture is revelation. Only divine revelation can remedy man's natural alienation from God (Job 31:35). Man needs a final authority for creed and conduct, for faith and practice: he has it in Scripture.

Divine revelation is made certain for us by the attestation of miracles and prophecy. Miracles are the natural accompaniments and attestations of new communications from God. They generally certify to the truth of doctrine and the commissioning of the prophet (Deuteronomy 13.; Matthew 11:21,22; Luke 7:22; John 5:36; the starting point, according to the Lord Jesus, is to believe in his works, John 10:25,26,37,38; 15:24).

Prophecy also attests to revelation (Isaiah 41:21-23), for no human being can foretell future events with precision, as the Bible is confirmed to have done for many hundreds of times.

So revelation is the fact of God speaking. But how did he speak. He spoke by the prophets, ultimately in his Son (Hebrews 1:1-3); and when it came for his message to be inscripturated, he inspired the message (1 Timothy 3:15-16). Inspiration may be defined as that operation of the divine Spirit which renders a speaker or writer infallible in the communication of truth whether or not previously known.

Diverse means of revelation have been employed by God: through nature (Romans 1:18-21; Psalms 19); through providential dealings (Romans 8:28); through miracles (John 2:11); through direct communication (Acts 22:17-21); through Christ (John 1:14; and in the ultimate sense, through the Bible (1 John 5:9-12), for no knowledge of Christ (who is the image of God) can be acquired except through the Scripture, which testifies of Him (John 5).

Ways of self-revelation Throughout the history of man, God has revealed Himself in various ways and through different means.

## Nature

Natural revelation can never lead a soul to a knowledge of salvation and the true God; yet it is not valueless. All true elements in pagan religions are extracted from this natural revelation. Because of this natural revelation, the heathen feel that they are the offspring of God (cf. Acts 17:28), u still have an instinct after God, though warped and corrupted by sin (Acts 17:27). Man sees in nature, the created order, a natural exhibition, continues and powerful, of the Deity (Romans 1:19,20; Psalm 19:1ff).

Man is thus rendered inexcusable by this communication from God, for though it is wordless, it testifies eloquently of God: something made must have a Maker - this is the unmistakable and inevitable conclusion one must come to when he considers "the work of his fingers."

## Self-consciousness

Man knows in himself, intuitively that he is obliged to do moral good and avoid moral evil. The work of the law is embedded in their conscience. Even though man may be ignorant of the Ten Commandments, he still feels and knows the difference between good and evil; and knows that good is commendable and evil will be punished (Romans 2:14). Though man live in the darkness of sin and ignorance, and twist the truth of God, he still has a certain illumination (John 1:9); and is subject to the general operations of the Spirit who restrains sin (Genesis 6:3). Such a constitution of man, even in his fallen state, is the link that God uses to bring him in contact with his special revelation. Man still has a reasonable soul, plus an intellect, and if and when given the ability to respond by faith, he will.

All the same, the fact that man has an inherent yearning to worship a superior, that man is by nature an homo religiosus. In itself this is a conscious and individual revelation that God is there.

## History

History should be properly viewed as the divine execution of God's eternal decree. Throughout the centuries God's secret will is unfolding: that is exactly what makes the study of history worthwhile - we can learn much from history. God has a wise programme, and Scripture abundantly testifies to it (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Daniel 2:31-35; 7:1-28; 9:24-27; Hosea 3:4,5; Matthew 23:37-25:46; Acts 15:13-18; Romans 11:13-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). God's purposes are progressively unfolding before our very eyes, and since God's ultimate purpose is that He may be glorified in His Son, the firstborn among many brethren, he is working all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). God is dealing with man: initially in his innocence, then in his sin and in his redemption from sin. He made the nations as nations, portioning them lands for their habitation (Acts 17), and they all exist because of Him and his providential mercy.

Revelation is derived from the Greek 'apokalupsis,' meaning unveiling, disclosing. It is the making known of something previously unknown, and that by God. Revelation not only tells of God, but clearly fixes the fact of monotheism, and that the Triune Creator is the only one to whom worship and adoration is to be addressed, and there is none other like him. God did not

restrict himself to one method of speaking. By his multi-variegated wisdom he employed a range of revelational ways and means, among which we may mention the following:

### Theophanies

Literally meaning "God-appearances." Such occurrences happened before the Incarnation of Christ, and it was actually the Son of God who appeared as the Messenger of Jehovah, speaking and bringing a message from Jehovah, and yet claiming for himself divine prerogatives, titles, and works. Thus God appeared to Hagar, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and many Old Testament saints.

### Visions

God granted visions to Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah and others. Perhaps the most renowned and impressive is the vision that Isaiah saw of the pre-incarnate Christ in the Temple (Isaiah 6). John recounts that the prophet saw Christ's glory (John 12).

### Dreams

Both Joseph (the patriarch) and Joseph (husband of Mary, Jesus' mother) experienced several dreams in which God conveyed to them his will for their future. He communicated to them at least a part of his plan. Obviously everybody dreams, but not all dreams are revelations from God!

### Miracles

C.S. Lewis described miracles as the sound of a bell that attracts attention before a speech is made. Miracles attest to God's revelation and are themselves revelation, though they have to be explained and interpreted. The resurrection of Christ is a unique miracle, but it needs to be interpreted, and that's what the Bible provides. Christ himself explained his own miracles most of the time (cf. John 6). Miracles are authenticating signs from God, confirming his prophet as really a prophet sent from him.

### Urim and Thummim

The Hebrew behind these words signify "lights and perfections." They were distinct from the gems on the breastplate (Leviticus 8:8). God answered questions by means of the Urim and Thummim (Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6). As King over his theocratic nation God could be consulted directly and He would direct his people in peace.

**Conclusion** The former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people (through visions, dreams, theophanies, and so on) have now ceased. Those means were piecemeal, fragmentary, and irresistibly leading forward to something better, that is, the appearing of his Son, the Word (Hebrews 1:1-3). We are therefore to resist strenuously the temptation, so prevalent in Pentecostal and charismatic circles, of seeking to know God's will apart from the Scripture.

