



Bibliology

The Study of the Bible

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Bibliology

Chapter One: REVELATION OF CHRIST

REVELATION

1. Audrey Millard J. Erickson writes: "Because man is finite and God is infinite, if man is to know God it must come about by God's revelation of Himself to man. By this we mean God's manifestation of Himself to man in such a way that man can know and fellowship with Him." (Erickson 1983:153).
2. There are two reasons why revelation is necessary for us to know God:

(a) We are creatures.

Bruce Milne writes:

"In the beginning God created ... man". (Gen 1:1,27). These first words of the Bible express the distinction between God and mankind. God as the Creator exists freely apart from ourselves; the creature depends utterly on God for existence (cf man and woman as "dust" in Gen 2:7; 3:19; Ps 103:14). God and mankind therefore belong to different orders of being.

This distinction is not absolute. We are made "in the image of God"; God communicates with us (Gen 1:28 etc.); God became man in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1,14); God the Spirit indwells Christians and brings them into a personal relationship to God (Rom 8:9-17). All these factors confirm a degree of correspondence between God and humanity. Yet a profound, irreducible distinction remains.

This distinction in being involves a distinction in knowing; "who among men knows the thought of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God". (1 Cor 2:11). Only God truly knows God. Since God is Creator and Lord of man, His knowledge includes our self-knowledge (Ps 139:2f); but our knowledge does not include God's self-knowledge. Our creaturehood, therefore, requires God to reveal Himself if we are to have adequate knowledge of Him. Even unfallen Adam needed to be personally addressed by God before he could know God's will. (Gen 1:28ff; 2:16f). (Milne 1982:20).

Bibliology

(b) We are sinners.

Milne writes:

“Our need of revelation is immeasurably increased by our sinfulness. The fall has affected every aspect of our being, not least our perception of moral and spiritual reality. Sin renders us spiritually blind and ignorant of God. (Rom 1:18; 1 Cor 1:21; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:1f; 4:18).

There is therefore no road from man’s intellectual and moral perception to a genuine knowledge of God. The only way to the knowledge of God is for God freely to place Himself within range of our perception, and renew our fallen understanding. Hence, if we are to know God and have any adequate basis for our Christian understanding and experience, revelation is indispensable.” (Milne 1982:20).

TWO KINDS OF REVELATION

There are two kinds of revelation:

1. General Revelation
2. Special Revelation

1. **General Revelation**

General revelation is God’s communication of Himself to all persons at all times and in all places. Mankind receives two kinds of general revelation:

(a) **The Revelation of God in Nature**

Milne writes:

“In Romans 1:18-32 Paul explains God’s judgment on the Gentile (non-Jewish) world of his day. God has “given them over” (1:24,26,28) to the self-destructive tendencies of their fallen natures because “although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him” (1:21). But they “exchanged the glory of the immortal God ... exchanged the truth of God for a lie ... did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God”. (1:23,25,28). This lost knowledge of God consisted of their recognising “God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature (which) have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”. (1:20). Accordingly they are “without any excuse” (1:20); it seems, therefore, that Paul sees the created order as God’s revelation to all people of His eternal power and deity, which

obliges them to acknowledge God and give glory and thanks to Him. (1:20f). In Acts 14:17 Paul informs the pagans in Lystra that God “has not left Himself without testimony”; this is confirmed by His kindness in “giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy”. Acts 17:26f refers to the Creator’s ordering of the affairs of individuals and of nations “so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him.” (Milne 1982:21).

(b) The Voice of God in Conscience

Milne writes:

“Romans 2:14f states that “when Gentiles, who do not have the (Old Testament) law, do by nature things required by the law ... they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” Thus the conflicts of the human conscience are relevant to the issues of God’s final judgment. (Rom 2:16, cf 1:32). The Old Testament prophets frequently speak of God’s just judgments on the Gentile nations, although these nations had not been taught the Old Testament law (e.g. Je 46-51; Am 1:6-2:3). The New Testament recognises that the non-Christian conscience is qualified to judge Christians’ general behaviour (e.g. 1 Tim 3:7; 1 Pet 2:12). Indeed the moral appeal of the gospel, its assertion that all have sinned (Rom 3:9-23), its call to repentance (Acts 17:30), its interpretation of the work of Christ in moral terms (Rom 3:21-26; 1 Cor 15:3) all imply a genuine continuity between universal moral experience and that of the believer; this in turn implies some awareness of God’s will on the part of non-Christians.

These biblical references confirm the fact that God has revealed Himself to all men in the conflicts of their moral experience. This is not invalidated by discrepancies between human moral codes. While God reveals Himself in the conscience of the non-Christian, owing to the fall the non-Christian’s knowledge of God’s will is by no means perfect. Sin causes a moral obtuseness, which distorts all our consciousness of God and His will. The dictates of the non-Christian conscience are not therefore “God’s voice within” in the unambiguous sense. Our point is the limited but crucial one, that “God has not left Himself without testimony”; under all the conflicts of human moral experience, we all have some awareness that the sense of obligation to do good and to spurn evil reflects the will of an ultimate Lord to whom we are finally responsible.

This does not “prove” God’s existence, any more than general revelation from creation does. Rather, Scripture claims that in fact

God gives some witness to Himself to all people in these dimensions of their experience, whether or not this can be verified by rational deduction. (Milne 1982:21,22).

Limitations of General Revelation

General revelation is one of God's ways of providing man with true knowledge of Himself. While it is a trustworthy gift, it does have limitation. It requires that man interpret the revelations he receives from nature. These revelations give him only a veiled or partial picture of God. This is because man's nature is sinful. His spiritual faculties are corrupted, and often he refuses to accept the truth when he sees it. Often he does not come to the right conclusions about God. He does not understand all the God's general revelation. That is why we see people worshipping nature, God's creation, instead of the Creator. (Rom 1:21-32).

God has given general revelation for three reasons:

- (a) It stabilises human society by giving a special sanction to the moral law. Milne writes: "Our sense of moral obligation, whereby good and evil are distinguished held evil in check, and human life in general enabled to function tolerably without being submerged in uninhibited outburst of wickedness, is due finally to this revelation of God, however little it may be acknowledged."
- (b) He gave general revelation to men so that they would desire to search for a fuller knowledge of Himself and His plan of salvation. It is one of God's ways of calling people to turn to Him. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him. (Acts 17:24-27).
- (c) He did it to lay a foundation upon which the Last Judgment can be based. Every man will appear before Him and no one will have the excuse of not knowing Him and therefore not worshipping Him as God. (Rom 1:18-21).

Through general revelation God has given each man some knowledge about Himself. Each one will be responsible for what he has done with God's revelation.

2. Special Revelation

Special revelation involves God's particular communications and manifestations of Himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations which are available now only in the Scriptures. Special revelation denotes the ways God makes Himself known with a clarity and fullness, which far surpasses general revelation. It is centred in the miracle of the incarnation and mediated through the

God inspired words of the Bible. Special revelation therefore assumes two forms:

(a) Holy Scripture

The Bible claims to record God's words to His creatures. (Jn 10:35; Rom 3:2; 2 Tim 3:16).

God communicated with particular persons at particular times. But He also wanted to reveal Himself in the form of permanent writing, so that there would be a clear and fixed record of this revelation on various subjects. In the words of Gleason Archer, "If there be a God, and if He is concerned for our salvation, this is the only way (apart from direct revelation from God to each individual of each successive generation) He could reliably impart this knowledge to us. It must be through a reliable written record such as the Bible purports to be". (Jensen 1978:19).

These words were originally written and spoken to particular generations, but by His providence they address every generation. (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11).

(b) Jesus Christ

God spoke through His son. Heb 1:1-2 contrasts this with the earlier forms of revelation, and indicates that the incarnation is a superior form of revelation. Jesus both spoke the Father's word and demonstrated the Father's attributes. He was the most complete revelation of God, because He was God. John could make the amazing statement, "That which was from the beginning ... we have heard ... we have seen with our eyes ... we have looked upon and touched with our hands". (1 Jn 1:1). And Jesus could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father". (Jn 14:9).

Milne writes about the relationship between these two forms of revelation:

"These forms cannot be separated. Christ, the incarnate Word, is known through the written Word of God, the Bible. Knowing Christ is, of course, a richer reality than mere acquaintance with Bible teaching about Him. But the Christ we know in personal experience is the Christ of the scriptural witness; there is no other Christ. Saving response to Christ means commitment to Him in terms of Scripture's testimony to Him.

Conversely the written Word cannot be separated from the incarnate Word. The Bible can be properly interpreted only from the perspective of a living faith in Christ who is its central theme, the climax and centre of the entire biblical revelation of God's person and purposes. (Milne 1982:25).

SPECIAL REVELATION IS PROGRESSIVE

1. While the later parts of the Bible do not contradict the earlier parts, God revealed Himself to man by slowly unfolding stages. This is seen in the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah as each prophecy gave a little more information than had been revealed previously.
2. **An example of progressive revelation: the doctrine of the resurrection of the body**

A good illustration of progressive revelation can be seen in Israel's beliefs concerning life beyond the grave and the resurrection of the dead. In Job 19:23-27, Job confessed that, in his resurrected body, he shall see God. In Psalm 16:10, David taught that the soul of the Messiah would go to "Sheol" but that it would not remain there, for the body of the Messiah would not remain in a state of death long enough to "see corruption", but would be raised from the dead. The psalmist believed that one day he would rise from the dead and see God's face. (Isa 17:14-15).

This "awakening" cannot refer simply to his rousing up from a night's sleep; for it is presented in opposition to the status of the wicked, "whose portion is in this life" (v14). Such a symbol for eternal life thus corresponds to that which is found in Psalm 49:14, that is in the morning of immortality – after death, therefore, the separation of the righteous from the lost is complete.

Perhaps the most explicit statement of the doctrine of the resurrection to be found in the Old Testament is given in the words of Daniel 12:2. Daniel indicates two resurrections, first a resurrection of "those" who sleep in the dust of the earth; then the resurrection of "those", that is, the rest of the dead, "to shame and everlasting contempt".

Although the Old Testament gave believers a certain amount of hope in the future the New Testament gives us much more information about the resurrection of the body.

- (a) For Christians, it will take place at the "rapture". This word comes from the Latin word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which is translated in English as "caught up". The rapture of the church is the catching up or translation of the church. It is the catching up to the dwelling place promised in John 14:1-3. In 1 Corinthians 15:51 Paul says this is a "mystery". The so-called mystery religions of Paul's day used the Greek word "mysterion" in the sense of something that was to be revealed only to the initiated. Paul himself, however, used it to refer to something formerly hidden or obscure but now revealed by God for all to know and understand. (See also Eph 3:2-6). The Old Testament taught clearly that men would be raised from the dead, but it did not reveal that a number of people would go into God's presence without

experiencing death. That is why the statement “we shall not all sleep” is a mystery. (1 Cor 15:51).

- (b) The New Testament gives more detail on the resurrection body. (1 Cor 15:35-44).

v37. Death is the precondition of life.

Leon Morris comments on this verse:

“What dies is nothing like what appears. A dead-looking, bare dry seed is put into the ground, but what comes up is a green plant, vigorous and beautiful. It is not that body that shall be that is sown. Paul will presently develop the thought that the body that is raised is incomparably more glorious than the body that is buried. Here he leaves it to be implied. Far from the decomposition of the body presenting an obstacle to the resurrection, it merely prepares us for the thought that the body that is to be raised is much more wonderful than the body that was buried”. (Morris 1958:224).

v38-44. For a new kind of life we need a different kind of body.

The next principle is that for a new kind of life we will need a different kind of body. By taking examples from different aspects of the created order, Paul shows that the Creator God is accustomed to producing many varied kinds of “bodies”. He thus ensures that each is specially suited to its own particular environment: a star will not function in the water, nor will a whale cope with the sky. Each is perfectly suited to its own location. In the same way our physical bodies, ideal for this earthly existence in spite of their immortality, will be useless in the perfection of God’s kingdom. They need, therefore, to be buried when their work is done, so that from such raw material God can produce a “spiritual” body (v44), perfectly suited for inheriting the kingdom of God. The resurrection body in Paul’s view is a glorious body, just as far surpassing the present body as does the beautiful plant the seed from which it springs.

Fee explains that “the natural body” and “the spiritual body” in verse 44 describe “the one body in terms of its essential characteristics as earthly, on the one hand, and therefore belonging to the life of the present age, and as heavenly, on the other, and therefore belonging to the life of the Spirit in the age to come. It is “spiritual” not in the sense of “immaterial” but of “supernatural”, as he (Paul) will explain in verse 45 because it will have been created by Christ, who Himself through His resurrection came to be “a life-giving Spirit”.

There is continuity (v37) but there is also change (v38-44).

Bibliology

3. The ultimate and final revelation of God was given to us in Christ. (Heb 1:1-2). After Him there was nothing more to be said, except to record and explain the meaning of His life, death and resurrection. These verses draw a clear contrast between the partial revelation conveyed by the prophets and the perfect revelation embodied in Christ. The use of the phrase “these last days” (v2) strengthens the idea that the era of Christ is the final era. No new revelation is to be expected. Christ is the greatest and the last of the prophets.
4. Once we know this, it becomes obvious that earlier parts of Scripture must be read in the light of the fuller understanding contained in the later parts. For example, it is foolish for us to draw our concepts about life after death mainly from such books as Psalms and Ecclesiastes, but ignore the clearer revelation of the later prophets and the apostles.
5. The doctrine of progressive biblical revelation does not mean that earlier and partial revelations were erroneous. At the end of His three years of instruction of the disciples, Christ said to them, “I have yet many things to say to you”. (Jn 16:12). But that did not imply that what He had taught them at the first was untrue.

Chapter Two: COMPOSITION OF THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

At the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, before the beginning of the Communion Service, she was given a book. This the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received from the Dean of Westminster. As he presented it to the Queen seated in her Chair, the Archbishop of Canterbury used these words, "Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the rule for the whole life and government of Christian principles, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords". This book was, of course, a Bible.

THE MEANING OF THE NAME, BIBLE

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word "biblia" ("books"). It is the Book, as being superior to all other books. The word, "Scriptures", is derived from Latin, and means simply, "the writings". It occurs in John 7:42; Acts 17:11; Romans 4:3 etc. By the second century AD Greek Christians called their sacred Scriptures "ta Biblia", "the Books". When this title was subsequently transferred to the Latin, it was rendered in the singular and through Old French came into English as "Bible".

Another common designation of the Bible is the "Word of God". (2 Tim 2:9; Heb 4:12).

THE WRITING OF THE BIBLE

There is no record of any inspired writings prior to the days of Moses. Evidently prior to Moses' time, God was pleased to make known His will verbally, in a direct and personal manner, to individuals, as to Adam (Gen 2:16), Cain (Gen 4:6), Noah (Gen 6:13), Abram (Gen 12:1), Abimilech (Gen 20:3), Isaac (Gen 26:2), Jacob (Gen 28:13), and to Job and his friends. (The book of Job, written probably about the time of Moses, apparently related to an earlier time, the time of the patriarchs).

The first actual reference to writing found in the Bible is in Exodus 17:14, where the Lord commanded Moses to "write the story of the fight with Amalek in a book". The Old Testament Scriptures were penned over a period extending more than a millennium, from C 1500 to C 400 BC. According to conservative scholars, Moses was the first inspired writer, producing the Pentateuch around 1500 BC. After him about 40 persons were engaged in writing the Scriptures. These authors came from many walks in life. Types of people included herdsmen (Amos), sages (Solomon), Kings (David), peasants (Micah), fishermen (Peter), tax collectors (Matthew) and priests (Isaiah). Their work was spread over a