

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 9, A Theology of General Revelation, Knowing God Through Special Revelation, Old Testament Varieties, Hebrews 1:1-2

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 9, A Theology of General Revelation, Knowing God Through Special Revelation, Old Testament Varieties, Hebrews 1:1-2.

We continue our study of God's revelation with a theology of general revelation as we seek to put things together systematically. We affirm the objective reality of God's general revelation.

God reveals himself to all people, always and everywhere. He discloses himself in creation, Psalm 19: 1 and 2, Romans 1:20 and 21, John 1:4 and 5. He discloses himself in human beings, moral nature, Romans 1:32, Romans 2:14 and 15, and Ecclesiastes 3:11. And he discloses himself thirdly in his providence, Acts 14:15 to 17, Acts 17:26, 27. God thus bombards all men and women with knowledge of himself.

The world around us testifies to its maker. Our moral makeup bears witness to God. The benefits he confers on humanity in providing rain testify to him.

What does general revelation reveal about God? It manifests his existence and glory, Psalm 19:1. It reveals his divine nature, power, and role as creator, Romans 1:20. It reveals his holiness, justice, and work of judgment, Romans 2:14 and 15. It reveals his goodness, Acts 14:17 and Acts 17:26 and 27. Other divine attributes are inferred from these, such as wisdom, beauty, and majesty, which come quickly to mind.

God's general revelation is universal, occurs at all times, and extends to all people. We thus cannot get away from his revelation. We pass judgment every day.

We pass judgments every day that reveal the reality of God's law engraved in our nature, Romans 2:14, 15. When we look at the sky or any creature, we see his handiwork. We cannot eat fruits or vegetables without being exposed to his providential goodness, Acts 14:15 to 17.

He arranges the nation's times and boundaries so that people might seek him, Acts 17:27, 28. God does not hide the knowledge of himself. There are also subjective aspects of general revelation.

What gets through to human beings? How do they respond to it? Paul teaches that God makes his external general revelation clear to all people, Romans 1, 20. They perceive God's qualities when they look at the things he has made. In this sense, all know God.

It is the same with internal general revelation. People show knowledge of God's holiness whenever they pass judgment on their actions or either excuse or accuse themselves, Romans 2, 15. In this sense, they are a revelation to themselves and others of God's holiness and justice.

However, although God objectively reveals himself to all of us, and although he sees to it that this revelation reaches us, we do not fully profit from God's revelation in creation, conscience, or providence as we ought. For historical and contemporary perspectives on general revelation, see Daniel Strange in a chapter called General Revelation in a book called Faith Comes by Hearing, A Response to Inclusivism, edited by Christopher Morgan and I. I should say and me. Until we come to know Christ, we actively suppress, distort, and misuse God's good disclosure of himself.

We oppose his external general revelation and in pride and rebellion, exchange the knowledge of the living God for idols. We misuse his internal general revelation by exercising our sense of morality in hypocrisy, Romans 2:2 and 3, and more. Or by indulging in what we know to be wrong and urging others to do the same.

We enjoy God's providential goodness but fail to give him the glory and instead worship idols, even those we create in our minds. I'm on the third one right now. Acts 14:14 to 17, Acts 17:26 to 28.

God is patient, but he will not fail to respond to such human rebellion and ingratitude. In the preaching of the gospel, he offers salvation in Christ for all who believe. But he also shows his wrath against all who persistently oppose general revelation.

Romans 1:16 to 18. He gives up such people to their sinful desires and allows them to pursue idolatry, practice sin, and suffer darkened thinking. Romans 1:21 to 28.

He will justly condemn those who do who know what is right and yet do what is wrong. Romans 1:32. Those hypocritical in their moral judgments are storing up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment is revealed.

Romans 2:5. In sum, due to these people's sinful responses to general revelation, God holds them without excuse. Romans 1, 20. Other questions emerge.

Is a natural theology, one based on general revelation, not scripture, possible for unsaved people? As we have seen, some truths about God shine through general

revelation. God's existence and glory. Psalm 19:1. Divine nature, power, and role as creator.

Romans 1: 20. Holiness, justice, work of judgment. Romans 2:14 and 15. And his goodness. Acts 14:17 and 17:26, 27. Other truths are surely implied. We are sinners. The wicked will be punished. We need forgiveness. People matter. God is the reason for life. And so forth.

But many key truths and concepts would never be known through general revelation alone. The Trinity. Jesus.

His substitutionary death. His bodily resurrection. Justification by faith.

The Holy Spirit. And others. Even more, apart from Christ and special revelation, we distort the knowledge and truth we are given.

Unfortunately, without Christ, we run not to the light but away from it. We exchange God's truth for idolatry, and we avoid God's path and choose obvious sin instead. Will unsaved people be saved by heeding the light of natural revelation? Sadly, the answer to that question is no.

I want to add a little bit to the there is a natural theology. My take on it is there are plenty of natural theologies, and they're all idolatrous. People have theologies by looking at the creation. Primitive peoples have a theology.

It's guaranteed to be a warped one. And actually, it has some truth. Existence of a God or gods.

Some kind of supernatural realm. But oh my goodness. Uh, so yes, there are as many natural theologies as there are human beings on the planet.

There are billions of them, but they are idolatrous—voices from the global church. The Lausanne Covenant shows real wisdom concerning these matters.

We, members of the Church of Jesus Christ from more than 150 nations, praise God for his great salvation. We believe the gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ's commission, proclaim it to all mankind, and make disciples of every nation. We affirm that there's only one savior and only one gospel.

We recognize that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature, but we deny that this can save us, for people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every

kind of syncretism and dialogue, which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies.

Rather, proclaiming Jesus as the savior of the world means proclaiming God's love for the world of sinners and inviting everyone to respond to him as savior and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. You can find that online at www.lausanne.org and so forth. Type in Lausanne Covenant, Lausanne Covenant.

Syncretism, I can just say somebody, see somebody saying, what is that? It is the combining of religions. It is the, so I saw videos recently of people in Mexico; in Brazil, more slaves were taken to Brazil than in the United States, and most of them assimilated and became Brazilians and lost some of their African culture, probably retaining some parts of it. But in one section of Brazil, I've lost a section, and there is a distinct Afro-Brazilian culture.

Okay. And that includes food, some of which looks rather yummy, but unfortunately, it also consists of Roman Catholic churches, but it also consists of what we would call in African traditional religions, but now they're in Brazil, and they are not Christian, and the people dance and so forth and have priestesses who claim to make contact with the other side and stuff like that. And that's a syncretism between Roman Catholicism and an African traditional religion that has been exported to Brazil.

Pleasant people, friendly people, interesting people, and yet they are engaged in idolatry. The Bible is filled with straightforward teaching that Jesus alone is the Savior and that faith in Christ is the only means of receiving this salvation. We see it in the famous John 3.16 and following.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned.

John 3.18, whoever does not believe in him is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God. And this is the judgment that light has come into the world, a reference to Jesus. People love darkness rather than light because their works are evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. In John 14:6, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. And this is John speak. When Jesus said, I am the way, he meant he was the only savior, the only mediator between God and man.

In the context of John 14, the Father has a house in heaven, and Jesus is the way. It's a Greek word that means way or road. Jesus is the only road to the Father's heavenly house.

That is, he's the only savior. There's another I am saying, I am saying follow this pattern. Jesus speaks, and he says, I am the, and it's followed by a predicate nominative, the resurrection, and the life.

I am the light of the world. In this case, I am the door for the sheep or the gate for the sheep. That is similar to his saying, I am the way.

He's the way to the Father's heavenly house, which is a heavenly picture. Jesus is the only gate into the sheepfold is an earthly one. There's no other gate into the sheepfold of the people of God than Jesus.

He's the way, the only savior. He is the truth. That means, but for John, that means he's the revealer of God.

He makes God known as never before. No one has ever seen God. John 1:17, John 1 18, the only God who's at the Father's he has made him known.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us. 1:14. And we have seen his glory, especially in his signs.

As already mentioned in chapter two, Glory is the only son of the Father, who is full of grace and truth. Jesus is the way, the only savior of the world. He's the truth, the revealer of God.

He is the life, the life-giver, the one who gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him. Truly, I say to you, John 5:24, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, you see, Jesus is so much the revealer of God that if you hear his word and believe, you believe in the Father. He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but he has passed from death to life. Jesus is the bestower of eternal life. Not only so, but now, in regeneration, he gives life.

An hour is coming, he says, and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, and those who hear will live. That's now in regeneration. Do not marvel

at this for an hour. It is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, the voice of the son of man, and they'll come out.

Those who have done good to the resurrection of life, those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Works do not save, and works demonstrate the reality or falsity of faith. Jesus is the way, the only savior.

He's the truth, the revealer of God. He's the life, the life-giver. I'm the resurrection and the life, he says and demonstrates it by raising his friend Lazarus, who's been dead for four days out of the tomb.

One of the sisters says, Lord, Lord, he will stink. And that language is followed by these words. Did I not tell you if you believe you would see the glory of God? There's the gospel in light of the stench of death, which didn't appear because Jesus raised and resuscitated Lazarus.

That's the glory of God is seen in that disgusting context. The stench of death is overcome by the glory of God in Christ. Acts 4:12, there's no other name given on heaven among men by which we must be saved in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Romans 10:13 to 17. It is the same. He's the only savior of the world.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Paul quotes the Old Testament prophet. He quotes Joel 2:32. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The difference is for Joel, it was Yahweh. For Paul, it's Yahweh, whose name is Jesus. How will they call on him whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news? Isaiah said this.

The messenger would come, and as soon as you see him, he's bringing good news. His feet are beautiful indeed. But now it's the gospel carriers whose feet are beautiful.

But they have not all obeyed the gospel, for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? Isaiah 52, which is part of that great 53 passage. So faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. Christ is the only means of receiving salvation.

1 John 5 could not be clearer. It distinguishes between the haves and the have-nots. Oh, those who have beauty and those who don't? No.

Those who have great wealth and those who don't? No. Those who have great strength and those who don't? No. Those are things we prize.

This is what God prizes. 1 John 5:11 and 12. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life. And this life is in his son. 1 John 5:11, verse 12. Whoever has the son has life.

Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life. Whatever else may be true about him or her? But we should note.

So, we've just said general revelation doesn't save. You must believe in Jesus to be saved. Does that mean general revelation is defective? No, it's, it doesn't reveal everything.

It doesn't reveal the Trinity or the gospel, but no, there's nothing. You could say something's lacking in it, but nothing is wrong with it. But we should note that nothing is wrong with general revelation, for it is genuine and clear, effectively communicating many truths about God.

The problem is neither general revelation nor its giver. Rather the problem lies in its recipients, fallen human beings. While Romans 1 shows that people should respond positively to God through general revelation.

Romans 1 and 3 teach that all are guilty because no one responds in that way on their own. God demands all humans be righteous. 1:18. But there is no one righteous, not even one.

Romans 3:10. Through creation, all know God and his truth. Romans 1:19 to 21. But Romans 3:11, there's no one who understands.

God gives a witness so that human beings would seek after him. Acts 17:27. Romans 1:18 to 21. But apart from grace, no one seeks for God.

Romans 3:11. Not even one. Humans should fear, love, thank, and worship the creator. Romans 1:21 to 25. But they trade him for idols resembling the creature and have no fear of God before their eyes. Romans 1:23 to 25. Romans 3:18. There's this terrible exchange.

Exchange God for images. Exchange the truth of God for a lie. This rebellion and its ensuing guilt are universal.

Paul stresses that the problem lies not in God or his general revelation. Paul stresses the problem lies not in God or his general revelation but in the universal rejection of

both God and his general revelation. How does general revelation relate to missions? What prompts this question is Paul's practice in evangelism of appealing to general revelation.

When preaching Jesus to fellow Jews, Paul points to him as fulfilling the law and the prophets, citing the Old Testament. See Acts 13:13 to 52. But when preaching to people from other religions, Paul places the gospel in a larger framework.

In Acts 14:8 to 18, we saw Paul point first to God as creator and to his witness in general revelation. In Acts 17:16 to 31, as we saw, he likewise highlights God as the creator and his true nature and witness through creation and providence. For Paul, then, general revelation is insufficient for salvation but is an important starting point for the gospel.

Before missionaries arrive, God is at work, communicating to unbelievers his existence and glory. Psalm 19:1, his divine nature, power, and role as creator. Romans 1:20, his holiness, justice, and work of judgment through the law written on the heart.

Romans 2:14,15, and his goodness. Acts 14:17, Acts 17:26 and 27. Missionaries repeat, clarify, and expand this previous communication by sharing the gospel.

Missionaries do not start from scratch but build on the point of contact God has made with unbelievers in his general revelation as they urge believers to turn to Christ in faith. Thus, endeth the lectures on general revelation. Knowing God through special revelation.

As noted from Hebrews 1:1 and 2, there are distinctions between revelation in the Old and New Testaments, but we dare not miss the underlying unity of God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments. Long ago at many times and in many ways, ESV, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us through his son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.

Yes, there are differences as we saw before, such as great contrast, but there's a commonality. Long ago, God spoke to the fathers. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

God reveals himself in the Old and New Testaments. He is the author of biblical revelation. He is the revealer, the speaking God.

As a matter of fact, although there is progressive revelation throughout the Bible, especially from the Old and New Testaments, Old and New Testament revelation is

unified because it is all God's divine speech. I might quickly add in human words. It is also clear from Hebrews 1:1 and 2, that God's revelation is progressive.

That is, he gradually reveals himself to his people over time. God spoke by the prophets and has spoken by his son. The progressive nature of revelation is inevitably tied to God's gradual provision of it to humans throughout history.

Both the unity and the progressive nature of God's revelation stand out in Jesus' familiar words, Matthew 5:17 and 18. As part of the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfill them.

For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. We see the unity of revelation in three ways. Jesus teaches that he does not abolish but fulfills the law and the prophets.

That is the Old Testament revelation. His graphic assertion about the permanence of the law and prophets and his emphasis that it will all be accomplished. So, three ways.

He didn't come to destroy but to fulfill. Number one, he says, until the jot and tittle, not one jot and tittle will pass away. That is, it's permanent.

Until all is accomplished, that is, he emphasizes the fact it will be fulfilled or accomplished. God will fulfill the purposes for which he gave his word. Such revelation's progressive nature is also clear.

The law and the prophets are moving forward toward fulfillment in Jesus. Old Testament revelation, varieties. I want to give credit here to my former professor of systematic theology, who is now with the Lord, Robert J. Dunsweiler, who taught at Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, and who left his mark on many of us, on all of us who studied under him.

He certainly left it in me in terms of method and his greatness. I hope I showed some of his gracious manners when dealing with others, especially those who disagree with us and so forth. Wow. Varieties.

God reveals himself in the Old Testament in different ways. Hebrews 1:1. These include theophanies, visions and dreams, the Urim and Thummim, the casting of lots, miracles, audible speech, and prophetic declarations. We'll examine each of these in turn.

Theophanies are manifestations of God to human senses, especially sight. The invisible God makes himself visible by appearing to Moses in a burning bush, Exodus 3:1-6. How Moses was surprised. He never saw a bush like this before.

The Lord said to Moses, Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand, he will send them out, my people out. And with a strong hand, he will drive them out of his land.

God spoke to Moses and said, I'm the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty. But by the name of the Lord, I did not make myself known to them.

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan. And I am reading in the wrong chapter, I beg your pardon. Chapter 3 of Exodus.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. And he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

He looked and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called him out of the bush, Moses, Moses.

And he said, here I am. Then he said, do not come near, take your sandals off your feet. For the place in which you are standing is holy ground.

And he said I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God, even at this visible appearance of God. It was holy ground because God revealed himself there.

One second after God ceases revealing his presence there, it is no longer holy ground. And I like to joke and say, if this happened today, Moses or somebody else would be selling little vials of sand, holy sand, and so forth. And that would be ridiculous.

Theophanies are appearances of the invisible God to human beings. God revealed himself to Israel in a, something like a pillar, a column of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Exodus 13:31.

And Isaiah saw the Lord. Wait a minute. God is invisible.

That's the whole point of a theophany. The invisible God becomes visible in part. Isaiah saw him as a king on his throne.

In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah 6, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up. And his train, the train of his robe, filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim.

Each had six wings. With two, he covered his face. With two, he covered his feet.

With two, he flew. And one called to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, woe is me, for I am lost.

For I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. That's just three examples.

Burning bush. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. God graciously led Israel, appearing to Israel.

Day and night in the pillar of cloud, in the pillar of fire. My goodness, they went to bed with the nightlight on. Big nightlight.

Oh, boy. Visions and dreams are means by which God makes known his will to Old Testament saints, including Daniel. In a vision in Daniel 10, 4 and 5. And to Jacob in a dream in Genesis 28.

Daniel 10:4 through 9. On the 24th day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river that is the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like burl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision.

But a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So, I was left alone, and I saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength.

Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Jacob's vision is recorded in Genesis 28:17, 10 to 17. After this, we'll break until our next lecture.

We're looking at different ways God reveals himself in the Old Testament, different ways of special revelation. These revelations are not to all people at all times, but they are to God's people at special times and special places. On his way to Laban, Jacob has a dream.

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones from the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.

And he dreamed, and he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac, the land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring.

Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth. You shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in you and in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, surely the Lord is in this place.

And I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, how awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God. And this is the gate of heaven.

We will take up our lecture on Old Testament means of special revelation in our next lecture.

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