

# **Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## **1. Abstract of Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This text is a transcription of a lecture by Dr. Robert A. Peterson, serving as the first session in a series on Revelation and Scripture. It presents a historical overview, primarily drawing from the work of Peter Jensen, exploring the challenges posed by the Enlightenment to traditional Christian beliefs about divine revelation, particularly through figures like Voltaire and Hume. The lecture examines the Enlightenment's critique of the Bible's credibility and the subsequent Christian responses, including shifts in theological understanding regarding the nature and locus of revelation, with a focus on neo-orthodox perspectives that emphasize revelation as event, self-giving, and ultimately centered in Jesus Christ. Peterson concludes with an assessment of these modern theological approaches, noting both their achievements and perceived shortcomings in fully capturing the biblical understanding of revelation and its authority.

**2. 32 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Revelation & Scripture).**



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### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction

#### Briefing Document: Revelation and Scripture in the Face of the Enlightenment

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in the first session of Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lectures on "Revelation and Holy Scripture." The session focuses on a historical introduction, drawing heavily on the work of Peter Jensen's "The Revelation of God," to explore the challenges posed by the Enlightenment to traditional Christian understandings of divine revelation, particularly the authority and nature of the Bible. The lecture also examines various Christian responses to these challenges, primarily focusing on shifts in theological perspectives on revelation.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. The Challenge of the Enlightenment:

- The Enlightenment, exemplified by thinkers like Voltaire and Hume, launched a significant intellectual attack on Christianity and the Bible.
- Voltaire criticized the Bible's morality, credibility, and doctrinal tenets, questioning miracles and the very nature of God as presented in Scripture. He famously stated, *"May the great God who hears me, a God who certainly could not be born of a girl, nor die on a gibbet, nor be eaten in a morsel of paste, nor have inspired this book with its contradictions, follies, and horrors. May this God, creator of all worlds, have pity on the sect of the Christians who blaspheme him."*
- Hume attacked both natural and revealed theology, arguing against the persuasiveness of arguments for God from the world and famously asserting the impossibility of miracles due to their violation of natural laws. He concluded his discourse on miracles with the ironic statement, *"the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even to this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one."*
- The Enlightenment emphasized human reason and autonomy, leading to a questioning of supernatural claims and the authority of both church and state, which often relied on biblical justifications.
- This intellectual movement significantly eroded the credibility of Christian teaching, leading to a decline in its intellectual, social, and spiritual authority,

especially in Protestant Europe. Bernard Rahm is quoted as saying, *"the mortal wound indicted, inflicted by the Enlightenment on Protestant orthodoxy was a staggering one, and one from which there has never been a full recovery."*

## 2. Traditional Christian Understanding of Revelation Before the Enlightenment:

- Prior to the Enlightenment, there was a fundamental agreement among Christians that the Bible was a special revelation from the one true God and rightly called the Word of God.
- The existence of general revelation through the created world was also acknowledged, although the extent of its truthfulness was debated.
- Christianity was believed to possess a unique and authoritative capacity to bring sinners into a relationship with God.

## 3. Christian Responses to the Enlightenment's Challenge:

- Many Western intellectuals responded to Enlightenment criticisms by agreeing with them, leading to unbelief and a loss of intellectual status for Christianity.
- However, significant missionary expansion and continued academic study of the Bible also occurred.
- A central issue in Christian response has been the theological estimate of the Bible.
- **Conservative Approach:** Some, like Carl F. H. Henry, continued to argue for the traditional view of the Bible as inspired by God and God's direct self-revelation. They engaged with Enlightenment critiques while maintaining the Bible's authority.
- **Reinterpretations of Revelation:** Many Protestant theologians chose to move the chief locus of revelation away from the Bible. Figures like Emil Brunner criticized *"the fatal equation of Revelation with the inspiration of the Scriptures."* Inspiration was often reinterpreted as either attenuated or as the illumination of the receiving agent.
- The primary goal of these reinterpretations was "to save the revelation of God and to save the witness of the Scriptures" in light of criticisms against the Bible.
- These reinterpretations often emphasized the *experience* of divine-human encounters and a *dynamic* revelation focusing on God's historical deeds rather than a static set of words (propositional revelation).

- There was increased sympathy for general revelation and natural theology.

#### 4. Neo-Orthodox Theology and its Emphasis on Revelation as Event, Self-Giving, and Jesus Christ:

- Modern Protestant theology, particularly influenced by neo-orthodoxy (e.g., Karl Barth), emphasizes three key aspects of revelation:
- **Revelation as Event:** Revelation is seen as an act of God, an episode, rather than being identified with the words of the Bible. This protects God's freedom and aligns with the biblical narrative of God's mighty deeds. Daniel L. Migliore is quoted: *"while God is truly disclosed in these events, the divine freedom or hiddenness is never dissolved. God does not cease to be a mystery in the event of revelation."*
- **Revelation as Self-Giving:** Knowledge of God is understood as relational, an encounter between God and human beings, rather than merely the acceptance of intellectual truths. Emil Brunner wrote, *"we are free; we are here, no longer concerned with a relationship in words but with a personal relationship. We are no longer content to believe it, but our concern is to come to him, to trust him, to be united to him, and to surrender to him. Revelation and faith now mean a personal encounter, personal communication."*
- **Revelation as Jesus Christ:** The person of Jesus Christ is now often considered the primary content of Christian revelation, with the Bible seen as bearing witness to him. Robert Morgan is quoted on Barth's view: *"from Barth's threefold form of the Word of God, only the Word incarnate can properly be called divine revelation."* This focus aims to avoid the "abuse" of the Bible as a textbook for all subjects.

#### 5. Assessment of Modern Theological Approaches to Revelation (Peter Jensen's Critique):

- While acknowledging the intellectual achievement of these modern approaches in re-centering God and Christ in theology, Peter Jensen (and by extension, Peterson) expresses reservations.
- He argues that there is a *"symptomatic vagueness at crucial points"* that does not provide the kind of knowledge of God that the Bible leads believers to expect.

- A key point of contention is the "*unwillingness to make Scripture the Word of God,*" which Jensen sees as a watershed shaping the nature of theological conclusions.
- He critiques the limitations placed on God's speech as a revelatory event and argues that trustworthy language is essential for a relationship with God.
- Jensen suggests that downplaying the Bible's direct revelatory nature leads to an "*overly realized eschatology*" and relies on theological capital from earlier generations who held a different view of Scripture.
- He emphasizes that the Christ in whom Christians trust must be the scriptural Jesus, and access to him through something other than inspired words leaves believers in darkness.
- Jensen concludes that the problems posed by the Enlightenment await full resolution and that the alternative to considering Scripture as the Word of God has not fully succeeded. He notes a positive development with some themes like propositional revelation receiving renewed attention.

#### **Conclusion of Session 1:**

- The session concludes by setting the stage for a biblical introduction to the doctrines of Revelation and Scripture in the subsequent lecture.
- Dr. Peterson indicates his own belief in the Bible as an infallible revelation of God, inspired in its very words, while acknowledging the value of understanding the historical and intellectual challenges presented by the Enlightenment.

This briefing document provides a foundational understanding of the historical context and theological debates surrounding the doctrine of revelation as introduced in the first session of Dr. Peterson's lectures. The challenges of the Enlightenment and the diverse Christian responses, particularly the shift towards understanding revelation primarily through the lens of Christ and away from a direct identification with Scripture, are key themes that will likely be further explored in subsequent sessions.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction

### Study Guide: Revelation and Scripture in Historical Context

#### Quiz:

1. According to Peter Jensen, what was Voltaire's primary criticism of the Bible and Christianity that initially impressed him?
2. Summarize the central questions posed by the Enlightenment regarding Christian revelation and the role of human reason.
3. How did David Hume challenge the arguments for God's existence based on natural and revealed theology?
4. What was the "anti-supernaturalism" that emerged during the Enlightenment and how did it impact the study of history and the Bible?
5. Briefly describe Carl F. H. Henry's contribution to the conservative Christian response to the challenges of the Enlightenment.
6. What is the main reason some modern Protestant theologians have moved the chief locus of revelation away from the Bible, according to the text?
7. Explain the neo-orthodox emphasis on "revelation as event" and why they hold this view in contrast to identifying revelation solely with the words of the Bible.
8. Why do some contemporary theologians emphasize "revelation as self-giving" and view a purely "intellectualist" account of revelation as insufficient?
9. What is the significance of focusing on "revelation as Jesus Christ" in modern theology, and what advantages are seen in this approach?
10. According to Peter Jensen's assessment, what is a fundamental weakness in the modern theological reconstructions of revelation?

#### Answer Key:

1. Voltaire's brilliance in attacking the Bible and Christianity, particularly its contradictions, follies, and horrors, deeply impressed Jensen. Voltaire questioned core Christian doctrines like the virgin birth, the death on a gibbet, and the inspiration of Scripture.

2. The Enlightenment questioned whether Christianity possessed a special revelation, suggesting religion should be confined to human reason. They asked what could be known about God through reason alone, doubted biblical miracles, and questioned the Bible's inspiration given its perceived improbabilities and immoral teachings.
3. Hume assailed the argument for God from the world (natural theology), suggesting polytheism or a limited/imperfect deity were more justifiable conclusions. He also argued that miracles, being breaks in natural law, could never be sufficiently proven by human testimony, undermining revealed theology.
4. Anti-supernaturalism was a new mood in historical study that rejected supernatural explanations. This, combined with critical investigations into the Bible's origins and nature, challenged the traditional Christian understanding and authority of Scripture at its core.
5. Carl F. H. Henry was a significant figure in the conservative response, demonstrating that one could be an intellectually rigorous evangelical Christian scholar. His extensive work on revelation aimed to reassert the Bible's authority and inspiration in a post-Enlightenment context, engaging directly with intellectual challenges.
6. Modern Protestant theologians have largely moved the locus of revelation away from the Bible because of the moral and historical criticisms leveled against it, particularly by Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire. They aim to preserve the concept of God's revelation while acknowledging these perceived defects in Scripture.
7. The neo-orthodox emphasize "revelation as event" to protect God's freedom and transcendence, viewing revelation as a free act of God rather than a static text. They see the Bible as a narrative of God's mighty deeds and encounters with humanity, not primarily a handbook of timeless truths.
8. Theologians emphasize "revelation as self-giving" because they believe Christianity is fundamentally about a personal relationship with God, not merely the intellectual acceptance of revealed truths. They argue that an intellectualist view keeps humanity at a distance from God, whereas self-giving emphasizes personal encounter and communication.
9. Focusing on "revelation as Jesus Christ" aligns with the Bible's central message and Christ's role as the unique mediator between God and humanity. It allows

Christian revelation to be seen as self-authenticating and provides a standard by which to evaluate other claims to revelation, while also valuing the Bible as a witness to Christ.

10. Peter Jensen argues that a fundamental weakness in modern reconstructions of revelation is the "unwillingness to make Scripture the Word of God." He believes this division between Christ and the words that witness to him creates a vagueness and fails to reflect the nature of the relationship with God as portrayed in Scripture.

### **Essay Format Questions:**

1. Analyze the key challenges posed by the Enlightenment to the traditional Christian understanding of revelation and the authority of Scripture. Discuss the lasting impact of these challenges on modern theological thought.
2. Compare and contrast the conservative and liberal/neo-orthodox responses to the intellectual crisis brought about by the Enlightenment. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach in defending the Christian faith?
3. Discuss the theological significance of shifting the primary locus of revelation from the Bible to Jesus Christ. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of this move for Christian doctrine and practice?
4. Evaluate Peter Jensen's critique of modern theological approaches to revelation, particularly his concern about the diminished view of Scripture. To what extent do you find his arguments persuasive, and what are the implications of his perspective?
5. Explore the ongoing tension between faith and reason in Christian thought, particularly in light of the historical challenges discussed in the text. How can contemporary Christians navigate this tension in a way that honors both intellectual integrity and biblical authority?



## Glossary of Key Terms:

- **General Revelation:** God's communication of himself through the created order, accessible to all humanity through nature and reason.
- **Special Revelation:** God's specific communication of himself through particular means, such as the Bible, miracles, and ultimately Jesus Christ.
- **The Enlightenment:** An 18th-century intellectual and cultural movement emphasizing reason, individualism, and skepticism towards traditional authority, including religious institutions and doctrines.
- **Rationalism:** A philosophical movement emphasizing reason as the primary source of knowledge and justification.
- **Natural Theology:** The attempt to gain knowledge of God through reason and observation of the natural world, independent of revealed scripture.
- **Revealed Theology:** Knowledge of God derived from divine revelation, primarily through scripture.
- **Anti-supernaturalism:** A worldview that rejects the possibility of supernatural events or interventions in the natural world.
- **Propositional Revelation:** The view that God reveals himself through specific, truth-bearing statements or propositions, often identified with the words of the Bible.
- **Neo-orthodoxy:** A 20th-century theological movement, largely influenced by Karl Barth, that emphasized the transcendence of God and viewed the Bible as a witness to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, rather than as revelation itself.
- **Bibliolatry:** The excessive veneration or worship of the Bible as a book, potentially to the neglect of its central message and the living God.
- **Eschatology:** The branch of theology concerned with the end times, the final destiny of humanity and the universe.
- **Inspiration (of Scripture):** The doctrine that the Holy Spirit superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they wrote God's own message, without overriding their individual personalities or styles.
- **Infallibility (of Scripture):** The doctrine that Scripture is completely truthful and without error in all that it affirms.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction, [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Revelation, Scripture, and the Enlightenment

1. **What was the central challenge posed by the Enlightenment to traditional Christian beliefs about revelation and Scripture?** The Enlightenment, exemplified by thinkers like Voltaire and Hume, critically questioned the notion of special revelation from God, particularly the Bible. They challenged its credibility by pointing to perceived contradictions, immoral teachings, improbable stories, and a lack of scientific or historical corroboration. They advocated for reason and human autonomy as the primary means of understanding the world, suggesting that religion should be confined to human reason alone and questioning the authenticity of miracles. This intellectual movement significantly eroded the intellectual authority of Christian teachings and the Bible as the inspired Word of God.
2. **How did Voltaire specifically critique the Bible and Christianity?** Voltaire attacked both Christian doctrine and the scriptures with "brilliance" and contempt. He mocked core Christian beliefs like the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the Eucharist. He also criticized the Bible's morality and credibility, questioning events like the creation of the golden calf in Exodus, suggesting they were either miracles or acts of human art. His critique aimed to expose what he considered the stupidity, contradictions, follies, and horrors within Christian teachings and the Bible.
3. **What were David Hume's main arguments against both natural and revealed theology?** Hume assailed the argument for God's existence based on the natural world, finding it unpersuasive and suggesting alternative conclusions like polytheism or a limited deity. He was even more critical of revealed theology, focusing his attack on miracles. Hume argued that miracles, as violations of the consistent laws of nature, were fundamentally impossible. He claimed that no amount of human testimony could provide sufficient evidence to believe in a miracle and ironically suggested that belief in Christianity itself requires a "continued miracle" that subverts reason.

4. **What were some of the main responses of Christian theologians to the challenges of the Enlightenment regarding revelation?** Faced with the erosion of the Bible's intellectual authority, Christian theologians adopted various strategies. Some, like Carl F. H. Henry, staunchly defended the traditional view of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, engaging with intellectual criticisms directly. Others, particularly within neo-orthodoxy (influenced by thinkers like Barth and Brunner), shifted the primary locus of revelation away from the Bible itself. They emphasized revelation as an event (God's act), God's self-giving (a personal encounter), and ultimately as Jesus Christ, with the Bible serving as a witness to this revelation.
5. **Why did some modern theologians move away from identifying the Bible directly as revelation?** This shift was largely a response to the criticisms raised during the Enlightenment regarding the Bible's historical and moral claims. By moving the primary focus of revelation away from the literal words of Scripture, theologians aimed to "save" the revelation of God from these perceived defects and to "save" the witness of the Scriptures by understanding their role differently. They sought to emphasize a more dynamic and personal encounter with God, often prioritizing experience and God's historical deeds over a static set of propositions in the Bible.
6. **What is the neo-orthodox understanding of revelation as "event," "self-giving," and "Jesus Christ"?**
  - **Revelation as event:** This view emphasizes that revelation is an act of God, an episode in history, rather than primarily a set of words. It highlights God's freedom and initiative in making himself known.
  - **Revelation as self-giving:** This perspective stresses the relational nature of knowing God. It emphasizes that revelation is not just the communication of truths but the communication of God's own person, culminating in a personal encounter.
  - **Revelation as Jesus Christ:** This central tenet positions Jesus Christ as the ultimate and primary revelation of God. The Bible and other forms of revelation are understood in relation to and as bearing witness to Christ.

1. **What concerns does the author express about the modern theological approaches that de-emphasize the Bible as the direct Word of God?** The author, quoting Peter Jensen, expresses concerns that while these modern approaches have successfully recentered Christian faith around the Trinity and grappled with Enlightenment criticisms, they suffer from a "symptomatic vagueness" and fail to provide the same kind of authoritative knowledge of God found in Scripture. The author questions whether these approaches truly place God in the same position of authority over believers' lives as seen in the New Testament and suggests that an unwillingness to consider Scripture as the direct Word of God creates a fundamental division and potentially compromises God's faithfulness in speech.
2. **Despite the challenges and differing theological responses, what enduring significance does the Bible still hold, according to the text?** Even with the intense intellectual pressure from secularism, the Bible remains the most frequently printed book in the world and continues to be the subject of intense academic study. Despite shifts in theological understanding, it is still widely recognized as playing an indispensable role in leading people to Jesus Christ. Many modern theologians see it as the primary witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, acknowledging its crucial function in attesting to and conveying the central revelation of God in Christ.