

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 2, Revelation of God, Psalm 119 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 2, Revelation of God, Psalm 119, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture, the second session in a series on Revelation and Scripture, begins by assessing Peter Jensen's work on divine revelation in light of historical challenges like the Enlightenment and postmodernism, noting the contemporary debates surrounding the Bible's authority and interpretation. Peterson then shifts to a biblical perspective, emphasizing the "knowledge of God" and the gospel as primary categories for understanding revelation. He uses Psalm 139 to illustrate God's intimate yet infinite knowledge of humanity, leading to humility and hope. The lecture concludes with an extensive exploration of Psalm 119, presenting it as a guide for studying God and His Word with reverence, diligence, and a whole-person integration of mind and heart, referencing insights from Augustine and Martin Luther along the way.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



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3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 2, Revelation of God, Psalm 119

Briefing Document: Revelation, Scripture, and Knowing God

Overview:

This session, led by Dr. Robert A. Peterson, delves into the concept of God's revelation, the authority and nature of Scripture, and the proper posture for knowing God through His Word. The session begins by assessing Peter Jensen's perspective on revelation in light of historical and contemporary challenges to Christian faith. It then transitions to a more biblical approach, emphasizing the "knowledge of God" and the "gospel" as crucial categories. The latter half of the session focuses on Psalm 119 as a foundational guide for understanding and engaging with Scripture in order to know God.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Assessing Contemporary Challenges to Revelation:

- The session begins by acknowledging the historical assault on traditional Christian faith, particularly from the Enlightenment figures like Voltaire and Hume.
- It highlights the neo-orthodox emphasis on revelation as history, God's self-giving, and Jesus Christ, noting that this view often separated these aspects from the explicit words of the Bible.
- Peterson notes Jensen's assessment, which recognizes some strengths in this view but critiques the separation of God and His Word.
- The contemporary landscape presents further challenges, including a highly relativistic environment influenced by the New Age, energetic cults, new physics, post-Vatican II Catholicism, and increased inter-religious encounters.
- "Without a doubt, claims for Christian revelation must cope with an exceptionally relativistic environment, coming to terms with the New Age, energetic cults, the new physics, the insights of post-Vatican to Roman Catholicism, and the strongest face-to-face encounters between living and powerful religions in centuries."
- The concept of exclusive truth claims for Christian revelation is increasingly challenged in the West, where Christian faith has lost its privileged status.
- "And if, on the one hand, the prevailing Western culture is more accepting of faith claims, on the other, it is less accepting of such claims posed in an exclusive way."

- The authority and interpretation of the Bible are now debated through the lens of literary criticism and hermeneutics, leading to a demand for pluralism in its use.
- While acknowledging advances in understanding Scripture, Peterson warns of potential dangers to systematic theology and foundational Christian doctrines like the Trinity if new approaches undermine traditional readings.
- The erosion of the National/Confessing Church in the Protestant world diminishes the traditional mechanisms for transmitting dogmatic understandings of the faith.

2. Re-centering on Knowing God and the Gospel:

- Peterson suggests shifting the focus from "revelation" as an initial category to the more prominent biblical concepts of the "knowledge of God" and the "gospel."
- "I am not suggesting, therefore, that we simply turn back again to Scripture as such and reinstate it as revelation forthwith. It is better to follow the more prominent biblical category of the knowledge of God and the more crucial biblical category of the gospel by which this knowledge arises."
- This shift allows for a reassessment of the nature and role of Scripture in a way that is both true to the Bible and the Christian faith, while acknowledging the challenges raised since the Enlightenment.

3. The Infinity and Intimacy of God (Psalm 139):

- Drawing from Psalm 139, Peterson illustrates the paradoxical nature of God's infinity and His intimate closeness to humanity.
- David's contemplation of God's immensity leads not to despair but to humility and hope, recognizing that while we cannot fully comprehend God, He knows us completely, and we can know Him truly.
- "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, and I cannot attain it." (Psalm 139:6)
- "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" (Psalm 139:17)
- This foundational understanding of God's character (infinite Creator, holy) and humanity's (finite creatures, sinners) sets the stage for understanding revelation as God's gracious communication.

4. General and Special Revelation:

- Peterson defines general revelation as God making Himself known to all people everywhere, all the time.
- Special revelation is defined as God making Himself known to some people in some places, some of the time.
- He quotes Augustine to highlight humanity's innate longing for God: "You give us delight in praising You because You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

5. Psalm 119 as a Guide for Knowing God Through Scripture:

- Psalm 119 is presented as the "best guide" for how believers in Christ should approach the study of God and His Word.
- It is described as "Scripture's most focused meditation on itself," an acrostic psalm with units of eight verses, each emphasizing God's Word.
- The psalm uses eight major terms to refer to Scripture: instruction/law, word, decrees, precepts, statutes, promises, commands, and judgments. These terms teach about the nature, authority, and effects of God's Word.
- Psalm 119 ascribes numerous attributes to God's Word: righteous, good, just, true, pure, enduring, reliable, wondrous, and trustworthy.
- "You are righteous, Lord. The decrees you issue are righteous." (Implied from the discussion of Psalm 119)
- God's Word has powerful effects: producing reverence, purifying, strengthening, comforting, giving life, hope, discernment, wisdom, understanding, and guidance.
- The Word also stimulates healthy responses in believers: longing, delight, love, fear, meditation, obedience, joy, rejoicing, hope, and gratitude.
- Psalm 119 provides guidance for studying theology:
- **Humble Listeners:** "Lord, teach me your statutes." (Psalm 119:12)
- **Diligent Seekers:** Seeking the Lord with the whole heart. (Psalm 119:2, 10)
- **Faithful Servants:** Accepting God's authority and following His will. (Psalm 119:17, 22, 23)
- **Tested Travelers:** Needing wisdom in a hostile world. (Psalm 119:19-24)

- **Joyful Worshipers:** Praising God through His Word. (Psalm 119:171-172)
- **Whole Persons:** Integrating mind, heart, ways, lips, and feet.
- **Lovers of the Lord and His Word:** (Psalm 119:41-48, 97)
- **Pursuers of Holiness:** Walking according to God's Word. (Psalm 119:1-8)
- **People of Prayer:** Recognizing the need for God's help to understand. (Psalm 119:18, 169)
- **Meditators:** Giving careful thought to God and His ways. (Psalm 119:15)
- **Those Amid Trials:** Experiencing the truth and comfort of God's Word (quoting Luther).
- Luther: "...teach us not only to know and understand...but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is."
- Luther: "In fact, the main thing to make you a theologian is grievous trials."
- **People of Conviction:** Believing in the truth of God's Word despite opposition. (Psalm 119:22-24, 41-46, 99-100)
- **Diligent Students:** Reading, searching, and thinking hard. (Psalm 119:94-95)
- **Those Filled with Delight:** Finding joy in God's statutes. (Psalm 119:54, 77)
- **Those Filled with Reverence:** Standing in awe of God. (Psalm 119:120)
- **Those Who Weep:** Grieved by the disregard for God's Word. (Psalm 119:136)
- **Humble Individuals:** Acknowledging their need for God's help. (Psalm 119:33-35)
- **People of Hope:** Trusting in God's enduring Word. (Psalm 119:89)
- **Those in Community:** Learning from God's Word and one another (quoting Luther).
- Luther: "The longer you write and teach, the less you'll be pleased with yourself. When you have reached this point, then do not be afraid to hope that you have begun to become a real theologian."

Conclusion:

Session 2 emphasizes the enduring relevance of understanding God's revelation in a challenging intellectual and cultural landscape. It advocates for a shift in focus towards the biblical concepts of the knowledge of God and the gospel as central to understanding Scripture. Furthermore, it presents Psalm 119 as a comprehensive and practical guide for engaging with God's Word with humility, diligence, love, and a desire to truly know God. The session underscores the transformative power of Scripture in shaping our understanding, attitudes, and lives as believers.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 2, Revelation of God, Psalm 119

Knowing God and Our Posture: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Peter Jensen (as discussed by Peterson), what were the three major emphases of the neo-orthodox view of scripture following the Enlightenment?
2. What is the primary challenge faced by claims for Christian revelation in the postmodern era, and how does this impact the missionary concern?
3. Peterson suggests that choosing "revelation as a response to the Enlightenment" is the wrong initial category. What does he propose as a better starting point for understanding revelation?
4. In Psalm 139, what is the paradoxical relationship that David recognizes between God's infinity and His relationship with humanity?
5. According to Peterson, what is the crucial difference between general and special revelation? Provide a brief definition for each.
6. Why does Peterson consider Psalm 119 to be a particularly helpful guide for how believers in Christ should approach the study of God and His word?
7. Name three attributes that Psalm 119 ascribes to God's word, highlighting what these attributes teach us about its nature.
8. Describe two ways in which God's word powerfully affects those who read it in faith, according to the study of Psalm 119.
9. What does it mean to study theology as "humble listeners" and "diligent seekers" as described in the context of Psalm 119?
10. According to the Luther quotes presented, what role do trials play in becoming a "real theologian"?

Answer Key

1. According to Jensen, the three major emphases of the neo-orthodox view of scripture were emphasizing revelation as history, as God's self-giving, and above all, as Jesus Christ. Peterson notes that these emphases tended to separate from the words of God in the Bible to some degree.

2. The primary challenge is the exceptionally relativistic environment of postmodernism, where exclusive truth claims are less accepted, and the choice between faiths can seem more about style than truth. This makes the question of Christian revelation increasingly important for missionary efforts.
3. Peterson proposes that the more prominent biblical category of the knowledge of God and the more crucial biblical category of the gospel by which this knowledge arises are better starting points. This approach allows for a reassessment of Scripture's nature and role.
4. David recognizes that despite God's infinite nature, He is not distant but intimately close to humanity. God knows us completely, yet His thoughts and ways are beyond our full comprehension, leading to humility and hope.
5. General revelation is God making Himself known to all people everywhere at all times through creation. Special revelation is God making Himself known to some people in some places at specific times, often through more direct means like Scripture.
6. Peterson considers Psalm 119 a helpful guide because it is Scripture's most focused meditation on itself, using various terms to describe God's word and highlighting its attributes and effects on those who engage with it.
7. Three attributes are: righteous (verse 7), enduring (verse 89), and wondrous (verse 129). "Righteous" indicates its moral perfection, "enduring" signifies its eternal and unchanging nature, and "wondrous" points to its capacity to inspire awe and understanding.
8. Two effects are purification (verses 9-11) and the giving of life (verse 93). God uses His word to cleanse us from sin and to provide spiritual vitality and sustenance.
9. Studying theology as "humble listeners" means approaching God's word with a receptive attitude, ready to learn and be instructed by Him. Studying as "diligent seekers" involves actively and earnestly seeking to understand the Lord and His commands with our whole hearts.
10. Luther believed that grievous trials are a key factor in becoming a real theologian because they humble individuals and drive them to God. He suggested that satisfaction with one's own teaching might indicate a lack of deeper theological understanding gained through struggle.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the impact of the Enlightenment and postmodernism on the understanding and reception of Christian revelation, according to the provided text. How does Peterson suggest evangelicals should respond to these challenges?
2. Analyze the significance of Psalm 119 as a guide for theological study. What specific postures and attitudes towards God and His word does this psalm encourage, and why are they important for understanding Christian truth?
3. Explain the concepts of general and special revelation as presented in the text. What are the limitations of general revelation in leading to saving knowledge, according to the evangelical perspective described?
4. Drawing from Psalm 139 and Psalm 119, discuss the relationship between knowing God and the role of Scripture in that knowledge. How does recognizing God's infinity and our finiteness shape our approach to studying His word?
5. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of relying solely on Scripture as the source of revelation in light of the challenges raised by neo-orthodoxy and contemporary thought discussed in the text. How does Peterson propose navigating these complexities?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Enlightenment:** An intellectual and cultural movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that emphasized reason, individualism, and skepticism towards traditional authority, including religious dogma.
- **Postmodernism:** A late 20th-century movement characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives, universal truths, and objective reality, often emphasizing relativism and the social construction of knowledge.
- **Neo-orthodoxy:** A theological movement of the early to mid-20th century that reacted against liberal theology by reasserting the transcendence of God and the revelatory nature of Scripture, often emphasizing its encounter with humanity rather than its literal inerrancy.
- **General Revelation:** God's communication of Himself to all people at all times through the created order.

- **Special Revelation:** God's specific and direct communication of Himself to particular people at particular times, primarily through the Bible and ultimately through Jesus Christ.
- **Hermeneutics:** The branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of biblical texts, focusing on the principles and methods of understanding their meaning.
- **Dogma:** A core belief or set of beliefs held by a religious group or church, considered to be authoritative and essential to the faith.
- **Evangelicalism:** A Protestant movement that emphasizes the experience of conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of sharing the Christian message.
- **Acrostic:** A poem, word puzzle, or other composition in which the first letter, syllable, or word of each line, paragraph, or other recurring feature in the text spells out a word, message, or the alphabet (as seen in Psalm 119).
- **Precept:** A general rule intended to regulate behavior or thought; in the context of Psalm 119, often refers to God's commands or instructions.
- **Statute:** A written law passed by a legislative body; in Psalm 119, often refers to God's established rules and decrees.
- **Testimony:** A formal statement of fact or evidence; in Psalm 119, often refers to God's revealed truths and experiences of His faithfulness.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 2, Revelation of God, Psalm 119, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Revelation and Scripture

1. **How has the Enlightenment and subsequent postmodern thought impacted the understanding of Christian revelation?** The Enlightenment, with figures like Voltaire and Hume, launched a significant assault on traditional Christian faith, particularly the authority and uniqueness of Christian revelation. Neo-orthodoxy emerged, emphasizing revelation as history, God's self-giving, and Jesus Christ, sometimes at the expense of the Bible's direct words. Postmodernism has further complicated the landscape by creating an exceptionally relativistic environment where all truth claims, including Christian ones, face intense scrutiny and are often seen as merely one perspective among many. Christian revelation now competes with various religious and philosophical viewpoints, having lost its once-favored status in the West.
2. **What is the current state of debate regarding the nature and authority of the Bible?** While older debates about the historical sources of the Bible have somewhat receded, new discussions have emerged, focusing on the literary nature of the text and employing theories of literary criticism and hermeneutics in unprecedented ways. The prevailing pluralism of thought often leads to a demand for a corresponding pluralism in the interpretation and use of the Bible. While these new approaches offer potential for deeper understanding, they also pose challenges to traditional systematic theology and core Christian doctrines like the Trinity, which are based on specific readings of Scripture.
3. **How does the lecture suggest we should approach the study of revelation and Scripture in light of these challenges?** Instead of simply reverting to pre-Enlightenment views or focusing solely on Scripture as revelation, the lecture proposes prioritizing the biblical categories of the "knowledge of God" and the "gospel" as the foundation for understanding revelation. This approach aims to reassess the nature and role of Scripture in a way that remains true to both the Bible and the Christian faith while engaging with contemporary intellectual contexts.
4. **What is the significance of Psalm 139 in understanding our relationship with God and His knowledge?** Psalm 139 highlights the infinite nature of God, yet emphasizes His intimate closeness to humanity. God knows us completely – our

thoughts, actions, and very being – from before birth to our final days. David's contemplation of God's infinity leads not to despair but to humility and hope. While we can never fully comprehend God, we can genuinely know Him, and this foundational knowledge allows us to trust and find hope in Him, even amidst opposition.

5. **What is the distinction between general and special revelation, according to the lecture?** General revelation refers to God making Himself known to all people, everywhere, all the time, through the created order. Special revelation, in contrast, is God making Himself known to specific people, in particular places, and at certain times. While evangelicals acknowledge general revelation, they, following Calvin, believe it is insufficient for salvation due to humanity's sinful incapacity to respond appropriately.
6. **According to the lecture, what posture should believers adopt when studying God and His Word, as exemplified by Psalm 119?** Psalm 119 serves as a comprehensive guide for approaching the study of God and Scripture. It advocates for a posture of humble listening, diligent seeking, faithful service, tested traveling (acknowledging opposition), joyful worship, and engagement as whole persons (integrating mind, heart, and actions). This study should be characterized by love for God and His Word, a pursuit of holiness, prayerful dependence on God for understanding, meditative reflection, perseverance through trials, conviction in God's truth, diligence in study, delight in God's instruction, reverence for His majesty, tears over disobedience, humility acknowledging our limitations, and hope in God's promises, all within the context of Christian community.
7. **What are some of the key attributes and effects ascribed to God's Word in Psalm 119?** Psalm 119 ascribes numerous attributes to God's Word, including being righteous, good, just, true, pure, enduring, reliable, wondrous, and trustworthy. It also highlights the powerful effects of God's Word on believers, such as producing reverence, purification, strength, comfort, life, hope, discernment, wisdom, understanding, and guidance.
8. **What are some of the healthy responses that God's Word should stimulate in believers, according to Psalm 119?** As believers engage with God's Word, it should engender attitudes of longing, delight, love, and fear towards it. It should also elicit actions such as meditation, obedience, joy, rejoicing, hope, and gratitude to God. Ultimately, Psalm 119 demonstrates that the study of God and His Word is intrinsically linked to living a life of faith and obedience.