

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 9, Theology of General Revelation, Heb. 1 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 9, Theology of General Revelation, Heb. 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text presents **Dr. Robert A. Peterson's session on revelation and scripture**, specifically exploring **general revelation**, which God makes known through creation, humanity, and providence to all people. Peterson argues that while **general revelation reveals aspects of God's nature and existence**, humanity universally rejects and distorts this knowledge due to sin. Consequently, he emphasizes that **salvation is not achieved through general revelation**, but only through **special revelation in Jesus Christ**, further explored through Old Testament examples like theophanies and visions. The lecture also touches upon the **unity and progressive nature of God's revelation** in both the Old and New Testaments.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 9 – 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 9, Theology of General Revelation, Heb. 1

Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Revelation and Scripture, Session 9

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 9 of his teaching on "Revelation and Holy Scripture." This session covers two primary areas: a theology of general revelation and an introduction to knowing God through special revelation in the Old Testament. Peterson emphasizes the objective reality and universal scope of general revelation, while also highlighting its limitations due to human sin. He then transitions to special revelation, emphasizing its unity and progressive nature, and begins to explore its various forms in the Old Testament, drawing from Hebrews 1:1-2.

I. Theology of General Revelation:

Main Themes:

- **Objective Reality of General Revelation:** Peterson strongly affirms that God genuinely and objectively reveals himself to all people, at all times, and in all places. He states, "We affirm the objective reality of God's general revelation."
- **Three Primary Means of General Revelation:** God discloses himself through:
 - **Creation:** "He discloses himself in creation, Psalm 19: 1 and 2, Romans 1:20 and 21, John 1:4 and 5." The world around us "testifies to its maker."
 - **Human Beings (Moral Nature/Conscience):** "He discloses himself in human beings, moral nature, Romans 1:32, Romans 2:14 and 15, and Ecclesiastes 3:11." Our moral makeup "bears witness to God."
 - **Providence:** "And he discloses himself thirdly in his providence, Acts 14:15 to 17, Acts 17:26, 27." The benefits God confers, like rain, "testify to him."
- **What General Revelation Reveals About God:** While limited, general revelation manifests:
 - 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 (Romans 2:14-15).

- His goodness (Acts 14:17, Acts 17:26-27).
- Implied attributes like wisdom, beauty, and majesty.
- **Universality and Inescapability:** "God's general revelation is universal, occurs at all times, and extends to all people. We thus cannot get away from his revelation."
- **Human Response and Suppression of Truth:** Despite God's clear and universal revelation, humans do not fully profit from it due to sin. "Until we come to know Christ, we actively suppress, distort, and misuse God's good disclosure of himself." This suppression manifests as:
 - Exchanging the knowledge of God for idols (Romans 1).
 - Hypocrisy and indulging in known wrong (Romans 2).
 - Failing to give God glory for his providential goodness and instead worshipping idols (Acts 14, 17).
- **Consequences of Rejecting General Revelation:** God responds to rebellion and ingratitude with wrath, giving people over to their sinful desires and darkened thinking (Romans 1:16-18, 21-28). He will justly condemn those who know what is right but do wrong (Romans 1:32, Romans 2:5). "In sum, due to these people's sinful responses to general revelation, God holds them without excuse. Romans 1, 20."
- **Limitations of Natural Theology:** While general revelation reveals certain truths about God, it is insufficient for salvation and knowledge of key doctrines. "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." Peterson argues that natural theologies developed without Christ are inherently "idolatrous."
- **General Revelation and Missions:** General revelation serves as an important starting point for the gospel. "For Paul, then, general revelation is insufficient for salvation but is an important starting point for the gospel." Missionaries build upon the existing knowledge of God communicated through general revelation, clarifying and expanding it with the gospel message. "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."

- **The Lausanne Covenant:** Peterson highlights the wisdom of the Lausanne Covenant, which affirms the universal knowledge of God through general revelation but denies its saving power and rejects syncretism. "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."
- **Jesus Christ as the Only Way of Salvation:** Peterson emphasizes numerous biblical passages (John 3:16-18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:13-17; 1 John 5:11-12) to assert that salvation is exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. "Jesus alone is the Savior and that faith in Christ is the only means of receiving this salvation." He highlights Jesus' "I am" statements in John (the way, the truth, the life; the resurrection and the life; the light of the world; the door/gate) as emphasizing his unique role.
- **General Revelation is Not Defective:** While insufficient for salvation, general revelation is "genuine and clear, effectively communicating many truths about God." The problem lies in the fallen recipients, not the revelation itself or its giver.

II. Knowing God Through Special Revelation, Old Testament Varieties:

Main Themes:

- **Unity and Progressive Nature of Special Revelation:** Drawing from Hebrews 1:1-2, Peterson emphasizes that God has spoken throughout history, culminating in his Son. "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..." While there are distinctions between Old and New Testament revelation, there is an underlying unity as it is all "God's divine speech." Revelation is also progressive, unfolding gradually over time.
- **Fulfillment in Jesus:** Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-18 ("Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill them") highlight the unity of revelation and the fact that the Old Testament points towards and finds its completion in Christ.
- **Varieties of Old Testament Special Revelation:** God revealed himself in the Old Testament in various ways, including:

- **Theophanies:** Manifestations of God to human senses, especially sight. Examples include the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6) and Isaiah's vision of the Lord on his throne (Isaiah 6). Peterson notes that these are temporary appearances of the invisible God. "Theophanies are appearances of the invisible God to human beings."
- **Visions and Dreams:** Means by which God made known his will to individuals like Daniel (Daniel 10) and Jacob (Genesis 28). These were specific revelations to God's people at particular times. "Visions and dreams are means by which God makes known his will to Old Testament saints..."

Important Ideas and Facts:

- The objective reality of God's self-disclosure through creation, humanity, and providence.
- The specific attributes of God that can be discerned through general revelation.
- The impact of human sin on the reception and interpretation of general revelation.
- The necessity of special revelation, specifically the gospel of Jesus Christ, for salvation.
- The limitations of natural theology and the danger of idolatrous interpretations.
- The role of general revelation as a foundational point of contact in missionary work.
- The affirmation of the Lausanne Covenant regarding general revelation and the uniqueness of Christ.
- The scriptural basis for Jesus Christ being the exclusive way to salvation.
- The unity and progressive nature of God's revelation throughout the Old and New Testaments, culminating in Jesus.
- The various forms of special revelation in the Old Testament, with initial examples of theophanies and visions/dreams.

Quotes:

- "God reveals himself to all people, always and everywhere."
- "Until we come to know Christ, we actively suppress, distort, and misuse God's good disclosure of himself."
- "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."
- "We recognize that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature, but we deny that this can save us..." (Lausanne Covenant)
- "Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)
- "There's no other name given on heaven among men by which we must be saved in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." (Acts 4:12)
- "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..." (Hebrews 1:1-2)
- "Theophanies are appearances of the invisible God to human beings."

Conclusion:

Session 9 of Dr. Peterson's lectures provides a comprehensive overview of general revelation, emphasizing its reality, scope, and limitations due to human sin. It clearly articulates the necessity of special revelation in Jesus Christ for salvation. The session then transitions to explore the nature of special revelation, highlighting its unity and progressive unfolding in the Old Testament through various means like theophanies and visions, setting the stage for further exploration in subsequent sessions.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 9, Theology of General Revelation, Heb. 1

Study Guide: General and Special Revelation in the Old Testament

I. General Revelation

- **Definition:** God's self-disclosure to all people, at all times, and in all places through creation, human moral nature, and divine providence.
- **Sources:** Psalm 19:1-2, Romans 1:20-21, John 1:4-5 (creation); Romans 1:32, Romans 2:14-15, Ecclesiastes 3:11 (human beings); Acts 14:15-17, Acts 17:26-27 (providence).
- **What it reveals about God:** Existence, glory, divine nature, power, role as creator, holiness, justice, work of judgment, goodness. Other attributes like wisdom, beauty, and majesty can be inferred.
- **Universality and Clarity:** General revelation is universal and objectively clear, making knowledge of God accessible to everyone.
- **Human Response:** Despite God's clear revelation, humanity actively suppresses, distorts, and misuses this knowledge due to sin and rebellion, leading to idolatry and darkened thinking (Romans 1:18-28).
- **Limitations:** General revelation alone cannot provide knowledge of key truths such as the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the Holy Spirit. It does not lead to salvation.
- **Natural Theology:** While countless natural theologies exist based on general revelation, they are inherently flawed and idolatrous without the corrective lens of special revelation.
- **Relevance to Missions:** General revelation serves as an important point of contact in missions, as it provides a foundational understanding of God's existence and attributes that missionaries can build upon when proclaiming the gospel.

II. Special Revelation (Old Testament Varieties)

- **Definition:** God's specific self-disclosure to particular people at particular times and places.

- **Hebrews 1:1-2:** Contrasts God's speaking through prophets in the past with his speaking through his Son in the "last days," highlighting both the continuity and progressive nature of God's revelation.
- **Unity and Progression:** Old and New Testament revelation share an underlying unity as God's divine speech, progressively revealed throughout history, culminating in Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17-18).
- **Varieties of Old Testament Special Revelation:**
 - Theophanies:** Visible manifestations of the invisible God to human senses (e.g., the burning bush - Exodus 3:1-6; pillar of cloud and fire - Exodus 13:21; Isaiah's vision - Isaiah 6:1-4).
 - Visions and Dreams:** Means by which God made his will known to individuals (e.g., Daniel's vision - Daniel 10:4-9; Jacob's dream - Genesis 28:10-17).
 - Urim and Thummim:** (Mentioned but not detailed in the excerpts).
 - Casting of Lots:** (Mentioned but not detailed in the excerpts).
 - Miracles:** (Mentioned but not detailed in the excerpts).
 - Audible Speech:** Direct verbal communication from God (e.g., God speaking to Moses from the burning bush - Exodus 3:4).
 - Prophetic Declarations:** Messages from God delivered through prophets.

III. Relationship Between General and Special Revelation

- General revelation provides a universal, though incomplete and often suppressed, knowledge of God.
- Special revelation, particularly through Jesus Christ and Scripture, offers a fuller, clearer, and saving knowledge of God, correcting the distortions of general revelation.
- General revelation acts as a foundation or starting point that special revelation builds upon in the work of missions.

Quiz: General and Special Revelation

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to the text, in what three primary ways does God disclose himself through general revelation? Provide a biblical reference for each.

2. What are some of the key attributes of God that can be understood through general revelation? Give at least three examples from the provided text.
3. Why does the text argue that human beings do not fully profit from general revelation? What is the primary reason for this failure?
4. Explain the author's perspective on "natural theology." Why does he consider these theologies to be flawed?
5. According to the Lausanne Covenant, what is acknowledged about general revelation, and what is denied regarding its efficacy for salvation?
6. In the context of John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life"), what does Jesus mean by claiming to be "the way"?
7. According to the text, how does the Apostle Paul utilize the concept of general revelation when preaching the gospel to those unfamiliar with Judaism? Provide an example from Acts.
8. Explain the significance of Hebrews 1:1-2 in understanding the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament revelation. What two aspects are highlighted?
9. Define "theophany" as it is used in the text and provide one specific example of a theophany from the Old Testament mentioned in the excerpt.
10. How does the account of Jesus raising Lazarus illustrate the concept of God's glory in the face of death, as discussed in the text?

Answer Key: General and Special Revelation Quiz

1. God discloses himself through general revelation in creation (Psalm 19:1-2, Romans 1:20-21), in human beings through their moral nature (Romans 2:14-15), and in his providence (Acts 14:15-17, Acts 17:26-27). These avenues constantly bombard humanity with knowledge of God.
2. General revelation reveals God's existence and glory (Psalm 19:1), his divine nature, power, and role as creator (Romans 1:20), and his holiness, justice, and work of judgment (Romans 2:14-15). Additionally, his goodness is revealed through his providential acts (Acts 14:17).
3. Human beings do not fully profit from general revelation because, until they come to know Christ, they actively suppress, distort, and misuse God's disclosure

of himself. They exchange the knowledge of God for idols and engage in hypocrisy and sin despite their moral awareness.

4. The author believes that while numerous natural theologies exist based on observing creation, they are all inherently idolatrous and warped. Although they might grasp the existence of a supernatural realm, they fundamentally distort the true nature of God without the guidance of special revelation.
5. The Lausanne Covenant recognizes that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. However, it firmly denies that this general revelation can save us because people suppress the truth through their unrighteousness.
6. By claiming to be "the way," Jesus means that he is the only savior and the sole mediator through whom anyone can come to the Father's heavenly house. He is the exclusive road or path to God.
7. When preaching to those from other religions, Paul often begins by appealing to God as the creator and highlighting his witness in general revelation, as seen in Acts 14:8-18 and Acts 17:16-31. This establishes a common ground regarding God's existence and power before introducing the gospel message.
8. Hebrews 1:1-2 highlights both the progressive nature of God's revelation, moving from speaking through prophets to speaking through his Son, and the underlying unity of God as the author of both Old and New Testament revelation. It shows God's consistent self-disclosure throughout history, culminating in Christ.
9. A theophany is a visible manifestation of the invisible God to human senses. An example from the Old Testament is God's appearance to Moses in the form of a burning bush that was not consumed (Exodus 3:1-6).
10. The raising of Lazarus demonstrates God's glory overcoming the stench of death, illustrating the gospel in a tangible way. Despite the physical decay, Jesus' power as the life-giver (a truth revealed in special revelation) manifests God's glory and the defeat of death itself.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the relationship between God's general and special revelation as presented in the text. How do they complement each other, and why is special revelation considered essential for salvation?
2. Analyze the reasons why, according to the text, humanity fails to respond appropriately to God's general revelation. What are the consequences of this failure, both individually and in terms of natural theology?
3. Evaluate the significance of the progressive nature of God's revelation, as highlighted in Hebrews 1:1-2 and Matthew 5:17-18. How does the Old Testament revelation prepare the way for the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ?
4. Examine the various forms of special revelation in the Old Testament discussed in the lecture excerpts. What do these diverse methods of communication reveal about God's desire to make himself known to his people?
5. Explore the implications of the text's understanding of general revelation for the practice of Christian missions. How should missionaries approach those who have never heard the gospel in light of God's universal self-disclosure?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **General Revelation:** God's self-disclosure to all people at all times and in all places through creation, human moral nature, and divine providence.
- **Special Revelation:** God's specific self-disclosure to particular people at particular times and places, such as through theophanies, visions, dreams, miracles, audible speech, prophetic declarations, and ultimately through Jesus Christ and Scripture.
- **Natural Theology:** The attempt to gain knowledge of God based solely on reason and observation of the natural world, apart from special revelation.
- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God to human senses.
- **Progressive Revelation:** The idea that God gradually reveals himself and his will to humanity over time, culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Syncretism:** The combining or blending of different religious beliefs and practices.
- **Idolatry:** The worship of anything other than the one true God, often involving the creation and veneration of idols.
- **Justification by Faith:** The theological doctrine that believers are declared righteous in God's sight solely through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the law.
- **Providence:** God's active involvement in and governance of the world and its affairs.
- **Inclusivism:** The theological view that salvation is possible for those who have not explicitly heard of Christ but respond to the general revelation of God. The text explicitly rejects this view.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Revelation & Holy Scripture, Session 9, Theology of General Revelation, Heb. 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on General and Special Revelation

1. What is general revelation, according to the source, and where can it be observed?

General revelation is how God reveals himself to all people, at all times, and in all places. The source identifies three primary avenues for general revelation: creation (as seen in Psalm 19:1-2, Romans 1:20-21, and John 1:4-5), human beings (through their moral nature, as indicated in Romans 1:32, Romans 2:14-15, and Ecclesiastes 3:11), and God's providence (illustrated in Acts 14:15-17 and Acts 17:26-27).

2. What aspects of God's nature and character are revealed through general revelation? General revelation manifests God's existence and glory (Psalm 19:1). It reveals his divine nature, power, and role as creator (Romans 1:20), as well as his holiness, justice, and work of judgment (Romans 2:14-15). Furthermore, it demonstrates his goodness (Acts 14:17, Acts 17:26-27). From these, other attributes like wisdom, beauty, and majesty can be inferred.

3. How do human beings typically respond to God's general revelation, and what are the consequences of this response? Despite God's clear and universal general revelation, human beings do not fully profit from it. Instead, they actively suppress, distort, and misuse God's disclosure of himself. This rebellion includes exchanging the knowledge of the living God for idols, exercising morality hypocritically, indulging in known wrong, and failing to give God glory for his providential goodness. Consequently, God holds them without excuse and shows his wrath against those who persistently oppose general revelation, sometimes giving them over to their sinful desires and darkened thinking.

4. Can a "natural theology" based solely on general revelation lead to salvation? While general revelation does reveal certain truths about God—such as his existence, glory, divine nature, power, creativity, holiness, justice, judgment, and goodness—it is insufficient for salvation. Key truths like the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ (including his substitutionary death and resurrection), justification by faith, and the Holy Spirit are not known through general revelation alone. Furthermore, apart from Christ, the knowledge gained through general revelation is often distorted and exchanged for

idolatry. Therefore, unsaved people will not be saved by heeding the light of natural revelation alone.

5. How does the Lausanne Covenant view general revelation in relation to salvation and other religions? The Lausanne Covenant acknowledges that everyone has some knowledge of God through general revelation in nature. However, it explicitly denies that this knowledge can save, as people suppress the truth through their unrighteousness. The Covenant also rejects any form of syncretism or dialogue that implies Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies, affirming that Jesus is the only savior and that the gospel is the sole means of salvation.

6. According to the source, what are some of the ways God revealed himself in the Old Testament (special revelation)? The source outlines several varieties of God's special revelation in the Old Testament, as indicated in Hebrews 1:1. These include theophanies (manifestations of God to human senses, such as the burning bush and Isaiah's vision of the Lord), visions and dreams (through which God made known his will to individuals like Daniel and Jacob), the Urim and Thummim, the casting of lots, miracles, audible speech, and prophetic declarations.

7. How does general revelation relate to the work of Christian missions? General revelation, while insufficient for salvation, serves as an important starting point for Christian missions. Before missionaries arrive, God is already at work communicating his existence, glory, divine nature, power, creative role, holiness, justice, and goodness through general revelation. Missionaries build upon this existing knowledge, clarifying and expanding it by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and urging unbelievers to turn to him in faith. They do not start from a blank slate but leverage the points of contact God has already established.

8. What is the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament revelation, as discussed in the source? The source emphasizes both the unity and the progressive nature of God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments, drawing from Hebrews 1:1-2 and Matthew 5:17-18. While God spoke through prophets in the past, in these last days he has spoken through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus' teaching that he came to fulfill, not abolish, the law and the prophets highlights the underlying unity. The progressive aspect is seen in God's gradual revelation over time, culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both Old and New Testament revelation are considered God's divine speech, though expressed in human words.