



REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | April 06, 2008

REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

The word *revelation* is the doctrine that God speaks. Again, our God is Trinitarian and he communicates and we call that revelation. Now let me distinguish revelation from speculation. Speculation is philosophy, sociology, various forms of scientific experimentation. Speculation is our attempt to wonder and to guess: what's God like? Revelation is God telling us, revealing to us who he is. So we believe in revelation (God speaks to us), not speculation (we get to guess who God is).

Now, this is important because early on in Genesis, the first chapter of your Bible, at least ten times in Genesis 1, it says, "and God said," "God said," "God said," "God said"—why? Ours is a God who speaks, he reveals, he communicates, he lets us know who he is and what he wants, and we call this revelation.

There two general categories of revelation. We'll call the first general revelation, the second we'll call special revelation. General revelation is spoken of in Romans 1 and 2, and therein it speaks of creation and conscience, those are the locators of general revelation. Creation, we look at the world and we learn some things about God. He's big, he's powerful, he's beautiful, he's orderly, things like that. That's our external witness. Our internal witness is conscience. We have some semblance of right and wrong and good and evil, so God must be moral, God must be just, God must be good.

Now, general revelation is available to all people, and it communicates truths about God, but not in a very specified way. For that we need special revelation. Special revelation can include miracles, an angel, or dreams. When we speak of special revelation, we're speaking about Jesus Christ coming into human history. Hebrews 1:1–2 says it this way, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," that God teaches us about himself by coming as the man Jesus. And for our purposes when we speak of special revelation, we particularly mean the Bible, the Scriptures, that God's Word is his form of special revelation. That's how God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

Unlike general revelation, it gives specific information. In general revelation, you could learn something about God, but you wouldn't know that his name is Jesus and he was born in Bethlehem and he died on the cross in our place for our sins. For that you need special revelation, you need the Scriptures.

And so, when it comes to the Scriptures, here's what we mean: the Bible is sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New, written over the course of more than one thousand years by roughly forty authors in three languages. There are different genres of literature that are contained in your Bible; in that way, the Bible is more like a library than a singular book. It is arranged by genre of literature, and not compiled, as you have it, in chronological order. So if you want to read it in chronological order, you need to buy a chronological Bible that lays it out in historical succession.

Additionally, regarding the Scriptures, as you read, you may note that there are chapters. Those chapters were not inserted until the 1200s. There are also verses. Those verses were added by a lecturer in Paris in the 1500s. Those were later insertions. They were not part of the original text, but they are there like addresses on homes to help us find things. And in that way, they're exceedingly helpful. Additionally, regarding Scripture, it's the best-selling book of all time. It's been translated into a few thousand languages, and it is how God has chosen to speak to us.

Now, when it comes to the issue of who wrote the Bible, the answer is that God, through human authors, wrote the Bible; that God inspired—the Bible uses this language, 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed [or inspired or breathed out by God]," depending upon your translation—that the Scriptures are God revealing himself through human authors by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

So when it comes to authorship, we believe in dual authorship, that God through human authors, reveals himself to us. And that's why we read in the Old Testament hundreds of times, "Thus saith the Lord." When the prophets speak for God in the Old Testament, they say, "Thus saith the Lord." They're speaking on God's behalf. If you take the sum total of Scripture, Genesis to Revelation, there are about 3,800 occurrences in various forms and ways that the Bible says that it comes from God.

It's very emphatic on this point, and what we call this is—here's the big theological nomenclature: *verbal plenary inerrancy*. Verbal plenary inerrancy. If you want to study more of this, there's something called the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." We believe this. This is actually a doctrine that is very precious to us.

You say, "What do these big words matter?" Let me explain each one, 'cause they're important. By *verbal* what we mean is that all the words of Scripture, not just the ideas of Scripture, are from God. Jesus says it this way in Matthew 5:16–17, he says that all Scripture will be fulfilled, there won't be the dotting of an *i* or the crossing of a *t* that won't be fulfilled, that the very words of Scripture matter, not just the idea. So *verbal*.

Plenary means in the whole Bible. We don't believe you can believe this part of the Bible and not believe that part of the Bible. We believe that all of the Bible is equally God's Word.

Verbal plenary *inspiration*, that it's inspired of God, that it comes from God. This is the doctrine of inerrancy, that the Bible is without error, that the Bible alone is perfect. We believe that. We believe that at Mars Hill, and it works itself out practically in the fact that we often just go right through books of the Bible. Why? Because we believe the whole Bible is God's Word and it's all important and helpful.

This is what 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, so that you might be thoroughly equipped for every good work." We believe all of the Bible is perfectly God's Word.

That being said, the Bible was originally written in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. It has been translated and we believe that translations are on a compendium from thought for thought to word for word. I preach from a word-for-word translation, the English Standard Version. I do so because I believe that the words matter, not just the ideas. I think it's good to have thought-for-thought translations, that can include The Message, Phillips, Living, New Living. There are some that are in the middle like the New International Version, which is also a good thought-for-thought translation, but we believe that teaching from the word-for-word translations is best. You can enjoy the others, but for teaching, the word-for-word translation is best because we want to know—inasmuch as we can—what exactly the words were, trying to translate them as closely as we can into the English, and so we use the English Standard Version of the Bible, but we don't dislike the others, we enjoy those as well but that is the translation we use for teaching.

And when it comes to the inspiration of Scripture, let me give you two verses, 2 Peter 1:20–21, "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation." People didn't make the Bible up. "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." That's how we get the Bible. The Holy Spirit, like a wind filling a sail, compelling a ship forward, the Holy Spirit fills the prophets and apostles, carries them forward to tell us the revelation of God. It's a miracle, it's something that God does uniquely for those he has chosen to write Scripture.

Second Peter 3:15–16 says it this way, Peter—the leader and head of the disciples and apostles appointed by Jesus—says, "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul—" the guy who wrote by preponderance about half of the New Testament books, "also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

Peter says, "You know, Paul's writing a lot of letters. Now some of you have wondered about those. The wisdom he writes with is wisdom that God gave him." When you read Paul, you'll find some things there are hard to understand, head coverings, tongues, predestination, things like that. Peter says even though some of it is hard to understand, don't twist it like Satan did God's word in Genesis 3. People who do that, they do it to their own destruction, and they do it to the other Scriptures as well.

What Peter is saying is this: Paul's writing books of the Bible, so be careful in how you interpret them. Peter knew that Paul was writing books of the Bible. The point here is that even early on they knew who was writing the Bible. It was not a hundred years later that people decided what should be in and out of the canon. The church agreed and it was confirmed later at councils, but they were simply confirming what they already held true.

That being said, let me give you a few closing thoughts. Here's what we believe, first of all, we believe in the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. This is a Latin phraseology that means that the Bible is our highest authority. Now we believe in lower courts of reason and tradition and experience, but we believe that the Bible is the metaphorical Supreme Court of highest authority.

So if you come into Mars Hill and say, "Well, I don't agree." We would say, "Well, let's open the Bible and see what God's Word says." That's our highest authority. I'm not the highest authority. I teach from the highest authority. I'm not the highest authority. If I'm not true to the Scriptures, then I need to be rebuked and corrected as well because God's Word is the authority, not me or anyone else. That's what we believe.

In addition, we believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, that Scripture is without error. It's perfect. We believe that. It's not a popular doctrine anymore. We believe it.

In addition, Scripture is sufficient. We don't need other religions and other books outside of Scripture to know who God is. Now, good Christian books that help teach the Bible can help us learn things about God, but ultimately the Scripture is sufficient to know God.

We subsequently believe that not only is Scripture in highest authority but—and I think this is exceedingly important—Scripture's about Jesus, it's about Jesus. It's always about Jesus. It's only about Jesus. The Bible's about Jesus. So our position is people aren't really teaching the Bible unless they're teaching about Jesus, 'cause it's all about him.

Jesus says this in John 5. Bible scholars come to argue with him and he says, "You diligently study the Scriptures." This is John 5:38–39. "You diligently study the Scriptures thinking that in them you'll find eternal life, yet you fail to recognize these are the Scriptures that testify about me and you refuse to come to me to have eternal life." Jesus says, "You guys don't know the Bible. You may have memorized the Pentateuch," meaning book in five parts, the first five books of Moses in the Old Testament—and that's what these people had done. "You've memorized Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Here's your problem, you don't know your Bible." They would have been shocked. He says, "'Cause the Bible's about me." The Bible's about Jesus.

He shows this following his resurrection on two occasions. At the end of Luke's gospel, in Luke 24 it says that he opens the Psalms, so the poetic literature, the Prophets, and the Law, the three categorizations of the Hebrew Old Testament, and he explains how all of the Old Testament was about him.

So here's my promise to you: at Mars Hill we talk about Jesus. We always talk about Jesus. We believe that you open the Bible and you get to Jesus. You see a king, get to king Jesus. You see a shepherd, Jesus is the great shepherd. You see a temple, God came as Jesus to temple, tabernacle among us. You see a prophet, Jesus is our capital-P Prophet. It's all about Jesus. We try to bring everything back to Jesus. And ultimately we believe that that's what the Bible's all about, it's all about Jesus. We love Jesus, we serve Jesus, we pray to Jesus, we sing to Jesus. We want to be like Jesus. We want to die and we want to be with Jesus, and the only way to do that is to follow the teaching of the Bible. And so that's what we believe.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.

