

HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO MAN?

If God exists, we would know of His existence even if He chose not to directly reveal Himself to us.

The house that I live in was built long ago. I have never met the builder, and suspect he may be dead by now. I have no written communication from him. I have only this house that he once built.

Yet I know that the builder existed, because of the visible evidence of what he once did. I know he was skilled in certain ways to be able to build a home like this ... with complicated roof-lines, a brick coal fireplace, and some mouldings and trim that are a step above the bare basics. The existence of this home is a fact. And the fact that it exists reveals to me information about its builder.

So also the world and the observable universe are facts, and evidence of its Creator. And not only can we see that a Creator has existed, but by studying and contemplating the visible creation we can draw a few conclusions about the Creator. The Creator is wise, having built into creation much intricate detail. Everything seems to fit and work together in harmony. The Creator is mighty, having the ability to bring this massive vision into existence. Where would we begin if we chose to undertake so great a task? And the Creator was creative, as is evidenced by the beauty of the mountains, the rivers, the trees, and the many varieties of plants and flowers and birds.

So without having any further communication with man, God's fingerprint is all around us, and it reveals to us information about God, the Creator.

Now the question becomes this ... Beyond this observable creation has God chosen to communicate with us? This would be His choice. If God chose not to communicate with man, we could not force Him to do so. We could merely examine the observable evidence and come to certain conclusions about God. Many today believe this to be the case, and they believe that we can only know of God thru a study of the universe.

But the question is ... has God chosen to communicate with man on a more detailed level? Has He chosen to tell us things about Himself, or about the reason for our existence, or His plan for the universe, or what lies ahead?

To answer this question we must consider the evidence. God does not stand before us visibly, and He does not speak to us with an audible voice. But is there other evidence to consider, beyond the creation itself, that might be a means thru which God has communicated with man?

But again, we cannot assume God has chosen to communicate with us at all. He may have chosen not to do so. And so we pull together the evidence that is available to us, and we consider it.

DREAMS & VISIONS ... OR AN AUDIBLE VOICE?

God could choose to speak to man thru dreams and visions, or even thru an audible voice. Some claim that He has done so in the past, and others claim that God continues to do so in the present. And so a part of the evidence to consider is the testimony of those who claim to have heard from God thru dreams, or visions, or by hearing His voice.

But are those that tell us such things being honest, or are they fabricating stories? Or do some honestly believe they have heard from God, not knowing it was their imagination, or a mental illness, or perhaps some supernatural entity other than God?

Furthermore we have the problem that the many different accounts we hear often conflict, as to the information we are given concerning God. So how can we know which of these accounts is legitimate, if any, and which are not?

And if God has chosen to reveal certain things to man, would He do so in a way that could be so confusing and so easily misunderstood, to the point that we can never really be sure what He is saying to us?

OUR CONSCIENCE

If God created us, could it be that our conscience is the means thru which God speaks to us? This could be the means God uses to teach us what is right and what is wrong ... what is moral and what is immoral ... what is ethical and what is unethical.

But here again we have the problem of subjectivity. Each person, speaking from his own conscience, differs greatly from other persons. We can find no consensus as to absolute right and wrong.

And once again we ask ... if God has chosen to reveal things to us, would He use such a means that would be so confusing and unclear?

PROPHETS

Some say God has spoken to the mass of humanity thru certain select men and women ... prophets ... those chosen to take a message directly from God and communicate it to all others. Some say prophets existed in the past, and others say God still uses prophets today. But here, too, there is much disagreement, and many conflicting accounts from those claiming to be prophets. And if prophets are, or were, used by God ... we must have a means to discern the true prophets from the false. We must carefully consider the testimonies of those claiming to be prophets.

THE BIBLE

In my 51 years I have lived in Michigan, Florida, and now Kentucky. Most of my friends and family members are Christians. I have always been taught that the Bible is God's Word revealed to mankind. I never had reason to question this, and everyone around me was so definite about the fact that the Bible is clearly God's Word. Every pastor and Bible teacher I ever encountered told me the Bible is the Word of God. Preachers pounded their pulpits and raised high their Bibles while shouting in a loud voice, "This is the Word of the Lord."

And so I can take this torch that has been passed to me and shout in an equally loud voice, “This is the Word of the Lord.” I can do so because those that preceded me were so sure about the fact, as were those that preceded them, and so on. We know this is the Word of God because everyone knows that this is so.

But what is the evidence in support of this conclusion?

Let’s assume that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us thru the written word. This seems like a very good way to preserve the consistency of the message. Once recorded and preserved, it cannot shift or change as could our conscience, or the testimony of prophets, or dreams or visions.

But there is a problem! There are other writings besides the Bible that certain men claim are from God. What about the Koran? What about the Hindu scriptures? What about the Book of Mormon? And there are many others also claiming such authority?

Does it have to do with our culture? Most of those around me teach that the Bible is the Word of God. But what about those raised in Iran, who are taught that the Koran is the Word of God? What about those born into the Jewish culture, where everyone around them is teaching the Torah, but not the writings of the apostles? Has God blessed us with His revelation ... the Bible ... while others born into other situations or cultures are being misled?

Furthermore, let us consider the Bible. Our Bible consists of 66 books that have been determined to be the Word of God. But other books were evaluated in the first few centuries of the church, and they were deemed to be uninspired, and not the Word of God. But were the individuals who made these decisions correct? Did they include the correct writings? Did they leave out any? Consider that the Roman Catholic Church accepts some additional books that other Christians do not. Who is right? And consider some well known figures from the past, like Martin Luther ... who would have us remove the book of James from our Bibles if he had his way.

And so we are faced with many different writings that we must consider, and ask the question ... is this a part of God’s revelation to mankind?

But unfortunately most people today are not willing to think about the evidence. And some people today want to prevent others from looking at the evidence. We are commanded to accept the fact that the Bible ... or the Koran ... or some other writings are from God, based on the strength of the teachers and scholars. We do not think for ourselves. And if the set of teachers and scholars around us are wrong, there is no hope of finding the truth!

And consider the pressure on individuals within the various cultures of our day. If you are a Jew, but become a Christian ... your family and friends will disown you. If you are a Muslim and become a Christian, you might be executed. If you are a Christian, but do not subscribe to what is considered to be “orthodox” beliefs, you may might be asked to leave the church.

If God has chosen to reveal Himself to us thru the preserved written word, we have many different writings to consider as possible candidates ... and we must consider the possibility that none of them are really God's Word.

“THE BIBLE SAYS IT ... I BELIEVE IT”

Now let us consider the situation among Christian believers today. I have often heard the battle cry, “The Bible says is ... I believe it ... That settles it.” This is the proof that is offered to any who might disagree.

Even 100 years ago preachers could proclaim truth from the Bible, and not many would disagree ... since most in our culture accepted that the Bible was the Word of God. But our culture today is different. The tide has turned, and no longer does the Bible command the respect it once had. Believers express their opinions on various issues, even quoting from the Bible, but this does not have the impact it once did.

People today are more independent, and less apt to accept a belief simply because others have passed the belief to them. It is not that they are saying, “I will not believe you, no matter what.” Instead they are saying, “I will not believe you unless you can prove your point from the evidence.” But Christians today are not ready for this challenge. The average Believer today does not know why he believes the things he believes. And if the average person were to really think about why they believe, they would be forced to admit they are basing their beliefs on things that have been taught to them by others.

There is the story of the newly married bride preparing a pot roast for her husband, and she begins by cutting both ends off the roast. When her watchful husband asked why she has done this, she replies that this is just how you prepare a roast, and when pressed further she does not really know why. When the young woman calls her mother to ask why it was that both ends had to be cut off from the roast, her mother replies, “Because the pan that I always used was small, and I had to cut off the ends to make the roast fit.”

We often believe what we believe, without really knowing why we believe it.

COULD WE BE FALSE WITNESSES?

If we make claims about God to the world based on the Bible, we had better know for certain that the Bible is God's Word and that we are properly understanding it ... or we could be false witnesses. We could actually be opposing God, all the while thinking we are speaking for Him.

Those of us who believe the Bible is God's Word are familiar with Saul, who later became Paul. Before Paul's Damascus Road experience, he was passionately doing what he believed was God's work. No one could have convinced him that he was on the wrong side, as he physically pulled Christians from their homes to persecute them or to kill them for proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. Paul was devoted, and zealous, and sincere, and passionate about his beliefs ... and he thought we was speaking for God ... but he was wrong.

I wonder how many there are in the world today just like Paul was prior to his experience on the road to Damascus ... false witnesses ... proclaiming things about God that are not true!

CONSIDERING THE EVIDENCE

And so to thoroughly consider the issue of God's revealed Word to man ... which writings are a part of His Word and which are not ... we would need to lay out all of the possible manuscripts before us and study them, looking for evidence. This would be an arduous task, since many of the candidates would be hard to find, and possibly corrupted since the time they were first written, and since we would need to have knowledge of a number of different languages to properly study them.

But if we do not undertake this task, how can we really weigh all of the evidence to know what is, and what is not, God's Word?

PERFECTION IN THE BASIC MESSAGE BEING CONVEYED

Without studying in detail each of the various writings that have been raised as a possible candidate, we consider the basic message being conveyed by each. And when we do so we will find in the Bible a wisdom higher than any human wisdom ... and much different than any other writing claiming scriptural authority. Consider the explanation found in the Bible concerning that state of man, and man's destiny.

God creates all things, including mankind. Man has a close fellowship with God, until man sins and death is the result. Humanity inherits this death condition ... this mortality. God speaks not to the mass of humanity with an audible voice, but to select individuals that He chooses to be His instruments. Signs and wonders validate their message, to enable mankind to differentiate between the true prophets and those that are false. God communicates His just requirements to mankind, but time and again mankind fails to be righteous. Experience proves that none have the ability to be righteous according to God's standards. All appears to be lost.

God does not choose a select group exclusively, as some erroneously teach ... or as some other belief systems teach. God's purpose is always to bless **ALL** of mankind. But His means for doing so is to work thru certain select individuals who are called to be God's instruments. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were God's instruments, and God communicated directly with them. But always, the Bible tells us, God's intent is to bless all mankind.

Jacob is renamed Israel, and his descendents become known as the Israelites. Thru Moses the Law is given to the Israelites. Always God desires to bless all mankind, but His chosen instrument ... the nation of Israel ... fails to be faithful. Israel is removed from her land, and the line of kings ends as the nation is in exile. But even then God speaks thru His prophets of a time when Israel would be restored to her land, and when the Anointed One would come and reign upon the throne.

John the Baptist comes bearing the message that the kingdom is near, and it is time to repent and get ready. Jesus follows with the same message ... the kingdom is near. Here was the Anointed One, ready to fulfill the words of the prophets by sitting upon the throne to reign, and thru Israel all peoples upon the earth would be blessed.

But Israel does not recognize the time of the king's visitation. The kingdom is rejected, and the king is crucified.

The apostles continue proclaiming the “coming kingdom” message **to the nation of Israel**. Peter calls upon Israel to repent, so that the times of restoration that were spoken of by the prophets could come, and so that the Anointed One would return.

But again and again Israel rejects the message, and persecutes those who proclaim it.

Since the day God told Abraham, “All peoples of the earth will be blessed thru you,” God has been working thru His chosen instruments to accomplish this very purpose. But His instruments have not cooperated. It appears that God’s plan is at an impasse. How can the kingdom come upon the earth, and how can God bless all peoples thru Israel, when Israel herself continues to reject the message from God?

But this too is a part of God’s plan. This rejection may not have been prophesied before, but it fits right into God’s plan for the ages. Israel rejects the kingdom, so God now turns directly to the Gentiles. Paul is not one of the select 12 apostles ... but he is an apostle chosen by God nonetheless. He is an apostle of a different kind, and he did not simply continue the same message that had been borne by the others who preceded him. When Paul became a believer, he did not study under the other believers. This might have seemed like a good idea in the ways of man, but God had different plans ... and He revealed new things directly to Paul ... things that had not been revealed to mankind ever before.

God is no longer working thru Israel as His instrument ... He now goes directly to Gentiles, who are joint heirs (equals) with Israel. The focus is no longer on Israel being born again, but on an entirely new creation. No longer is the focus on the nearness of the kingdom to come upon the earth ... but upon God’s broader kingdom overarching the entire universe. No longer do we wait for the Lord to come to reign upon the earth ... we wait for Him to call us to meet Him in the air.

But God has not rejected Israel forever. Israel will still serve a purpose when Christ prepares to return to establish the kingdom upon the earth. But for now Israel has been temporarily set aside as God works thru a new instrument ... an instrument that had not been mentioned by the prophets of old ... the Body of Christ. This new instrument is the example of God’s grace to the entire world.

The day will come when Christ descends, when the trumpet sounds, and when the Body of Christ is called to be with Him, to play a part in the heavens. And the day will come when Christ returns to reign upon the earth, when again Israel will play a part. And the day will come when all of God’s creation will be subjected to Him, under the reign of Christ, when all are reconciled to God ... when not one sheep remains lost ... when even death and evil are defeated ... when all are saved ... and when God becomes All in all.

It all began with God alone, in perfection. Man is on a journey, guided by the sovereign God, toward a perfect conclusion.

When we step back and consider this revelation, can any dispute the wisdom and love and power that prevails? Just as God’s fingerprint is upon His visible creation, letting us know that God does exist and did create all that we see around us ... so also God’s fingerprint is upon the Word of God when we consider the wisdom ... the genius ... the perfection of the message.

When we consider the other writings that some claim are from God, we know enough of the message being conveyed to see that there is not the same wisdom and perfection that permeates the Bible. In no other case do we see the perfection of God, the flaws of mankind, and the perfect plan where not just some ... but all of creation is reconciled to God, ending in perfection.

And so the wisdom and perfection of what is revealed in the Bible is evidence that this is God's revelation to man.

UNITY

As we consider the Bible's account, ending with a total reconciliation and perfection, we note the unity found throughout. Despite the fact that many different human agents were at work in relaying God's message to us, and despite the fact that the various accounts were penned at different times ... there is a wonderful unity that exists when we consider the account as a whole. Each chapter and verse exists with purpose, and helps to form the total unified whole.

Furthermore, there is a progressive unfolding throughout time as God's revelation unfolds. The judges reveal more of God's truth than the patriarchs possessed ... and the prophets reveal more than the judges.

PROPHECY

Consider the many prophecies found in Scripture that have been fulfilled to the last detail! In "God's Eonian Purpose," Mr. Adlai Loudy observes:

“... twenty five specific predictions were made by the Hebrew prophets, bearing on the betrayal, trial, death, and burial of Christ. These were uttered by different prophets during a period of five hundred years ... yet they were all fulfilled in twenty four hours in one person – the Christ of Whom they spoke.” (pg 27)

WOULD MAN HAVE RECORDED HISTORY IN THIS WAY?

As we consider the story of mankind as found in the Bible, we must ask the question ... would man have told the story in this way if left to himself? Even the greatest of men is shown to be fallible and sinful. Even those who preceded Christ in His genealogy are filled with flaws.

The blatantly honest manner in which mankind is described reveals that the hand of God was at work in this revelation.

DO WE HAVE THE CORRECT 66 BOOKS?

We still have the problem that fallible men made the selection as to what to include and what not to include in the Bible, and we are placing faith in them as to these decisions to include or exclude the various writings.

What has impressed me the most in this regard has been the work of two men who have done a very intricate analysis of the Bible. In the extensive writings of both E. W. Bullinger and A. E. Knoch, who worked independently of one another, we are provided with very detailed outlines of the Bible that show

great symmetry and perfection. While the overall message being conveyed by the Bible shows great wisdom and perfection, so also does a literary analysis of the writings themselves.

And as observed previously, the Bible presents us with an honest, unified, complete picture of mankind; from creation to a perfect reconciliation, despite the sinfulness and helplessness of man.

Were there additional writings that were left out and not included? If there were, I don't believe it would be possible for us today to find them. And again pointing to the perfection of what we have with us today in the form of the 66 books we call the Bible, it would seem that the complete account has been preserved for us.

DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS & INTERPRETATIONS

Everything I have stated thus far is dependent on our having an accurate translation from the original languages, and an accurate interpretation of what the Bible is teaching.

Unfortunately the issue becomes clouded by the many different Bible translations today, which are focused more on being easy to read than being faithful to the original manuscripts. These translations differ from one another, and they also make certain passages appear to contradict other passages.

Coupled with this is the problem of interpretation. Today we have many different denominations, and many different preachers, scholars, teachers and writers ... and while they all start with the same Bible, they teach many drastically different things, contradicting one another. This confusion makes it appear that the Bible is not the Word of God, because supposedly learned men cannot agree what it says.

And the perfection of the message is lost when we rely upon the imperfect teachings of men as to what the Bible says. Far from the perfection that is revealed in God's Word, we hear instead of a God Who loves the world (all mankind), but Who is also willing to torment some forever and ever. We hear of a God Who says on the one hand that He will seek the single lost sheep until it is found, while also saying that some of the lost will remain lost forever and ever. We hear of a God who will deal with a man who commits a finite amount of sin in this short lifetime ... by tormenting him with an infinite punishment, forever and ever.

And so many Believers today proclaim an imperfect and illogical message, and as a result many men do not believe the Bible can possibly be God's Word. But it is not God's Word that is the problem ... it is the traditions and teachings of men that have crept into the English translation of the Bible, and the many divergent and contradictory teachings being proclaimed today.

Many today teach, supposedly from God's Word,

That God created all things,
That God is in control of all things,
That God is love,
That God created man and placed him upon this earth which is filled with temptation and evil,
That God sent His Son to die for the sins of man ...

But that in the end some will accept Him and some will reject Him,
And the story will end with a lake of fire tormenting some forever and ever,
While those that believed in their lifetime spend eternity in heaven enjoying their reward

A perfect God ... with an imperfect plan that cannot or will not reconcile ALL, but only some. Even if we try to pin the blame on man for failing to believe ... the fact is that God could not develop a plan that would ultimately reconcile all to Himself, even though that is His desire.

It is easy to see why this prevailing message of Christianity today is leading individuals to the conclusion that the Bible is NOT the Word of God.

But when carefully and consistently translated, and when carefully and thoughtfully and prayerfully studied and contemplated ... apart from the biased teachings of man ... we cannot fail to appreciate the wisdom of God as revealed in His revelation to man.

CAN THE MAJORITY BE WRONG?

Some will counter by asking how such a minority viewpoint can be correct, when the entire “church” in all of its denominations teaches of an eternal hell.

My response would be to point to the Bible itself, and to ask when the truth was ever in the majority. When the Old Testament prophets spoke, were they in the majority? When John the Baptist spoke, was he in the majority? When Jesus went up against the Pharisees, was he in the majority? And even at the end of Paul’s ministry, when he arrived in Jerusalem and was arrested to be taken to Rome ... he was in the minority. Paul was opposed not just by the unbelieving Jews, but also by those who believed but who were zealous for the law, and who objected to his teachings concerning grace (Acts 21:20).

In all of Scripture, when was the majority correct? Today we hear Believers marvel that this huge church has grown from such a small number of persecuted Believers in that early church we read about in the Bible. But as the church has grown, and as “orthodoxy” was defined by the church fathers in the 5th century ... what makes us believe that the majority opinion was correct?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO STUDY GOD’S WORD OBJECTIVELY TODAY?

Some that I have encountered will fatalistically declare that even if the ultimate salvation of all is true, it is impossible for the average person today to come to this conclusion.

But if one is willing to accept the fact that the majority opinion of The Church ... commonly referred to as “orthodoxy” ... could perhaps be incorrect, and if he is willing to study the Word of God for himself, then God’s plan to ultimately save all of mankind is clear and obvious. What prevents this from happening is the fact that most have been “indoctrinated” into a system of beliefs that is prevalent in their church, denomination, or circle of friends ... and the Bible is studied in light of that context, instead of objectively. In other words, opinions are already determined before Bible study begins ... and the Bible is simply used to prove that the pre-determined opinions are correct. Most begin from the perspective that there is an eternal hell ... a place of endless torment ... and this viewpoint is then proven from the Bible, while setting aside or limiting passages that seem to contradict the viewpoint.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the work of Mr. A E. Knoch and the others that were associated with him. I am not a follower of Mr. Knoch as others might follow Luther or Calvin or Wesley. If I led others to follow Mr. Knoch, I would be no different than others who are dependent upon the teachings of a certain man.

But I will point to the **method** used by Mr. Knoch, and say that this method is the best approach for translating Scripture, casting off the biases of mankind as much as is humanly possible, to study from the pure Word of God ... without knowing the original languages.

IF GOD REVEALED HIMSELF, HOW WOULD HE HAVE DONE SO?

Think about something. If God did choose to reveal things to man, would he do so by ensuring that His Word was recorded in a consistent and clear manner, or would He allow the individual men who recorded His message to do so in an inconsistent manner?

Again quoting from “God’s Eonian Purpose” by Mr. Loudy:

“... thought can only be expressed in words, and those words must express the exact thought of the speaker, otherwise, his exact thought is not expressed.” (pg 24)

“‘Have a pattern of sound words which you hear from me’ (2 Tim 1:13). Thus we see that inerrancy demands that the sacred scribe be simply an amanuensis, and give the exact words. And this is confirmed by the Scriptures themselves, as in 2 Peter 1:21, ‘For prophecy was not at any time carried on by the will of man, but holy men of God speak, being carried on by holy spirit.’”

If God was not clear and consistent in His message, how would we know today what He was trying to tell us? This would be no different than hearing from God in dreams, or visions, or thru our conscience.

And if we will carefully look at God’s Word, we will marvel at its consistency.

I do not use the Concordant Version of the Bible simply because I think it is a better translation than any other. This would be basing my choice on personal preference, much like someone would choose the Living Bible versus the NIV versus the New King James, and so on.

I use the Concordant Version because of the METHOD that was used.

Look at almost any other translation and you see great inconsistency. A single word, like aion, is sometimes translated eternal, sometimes age, sometimes world. Would God have the writers He had chosen to pass His Word to us be so inconsistent? The problem is the bias of man that has crept in. If the translator, based on his understanding of the Bible as taught to him, thinks the word “world” fits better in one particular context, because the word “eternal” won’t fit ... he makes this decision. And all who study from this Bible translation are now affected by this decision.

Or consider the example of hell. Here we have a Hebrew word (sheol) and three totally different Greek words (hades, gehenna, tartarus) and all are simply mixed together indiscriminately into a single English

word “hell”. But even more inconsistent are those cases when one of these words, like “hades” or “sheol”, is found and which cannot possibly mean “hell” as we understand “hell” to be ... so the translator must resort to another word in this case ... something like “grave.”

A wise God seeks to reveal Himself to mankind by using sounds words so we can understand what He is telling us ... but His word is handled carelessly and inconsistently, and distorted to fit the teachings of mankind.

I use the Concordant Version because it is consistent, and it enables me to look at any English word that was used ... tracing it to the original Greek word ... examining how that same Greek word was used in all other instances ... and knowing when the original writers were using the same words or different words to express their thoughts.

It is only when we use a translation in our study that has taken such steps to be consistent, that we can fully observe and appreciate the perfection of God’s revelation to mankind.

THINK FOR YOURSELF!

I have told you the evidences I have considered, and why I have come to the conclusion that the Bible is the Word of God ... and the message I see God relaying to mankind in His Word. And now I ask you to do the same. Do not believe these things I have said simply because I believe them, or even because I might sound convincing.

I have perhaps given you some things to think about. And as we consider the question, “How has God revealed Himself to us?” ... I ask that you consider the evidence, study, discuss, contemplate, pray, and think for yourself.

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