

# Effective Bible Study

Discerning and Applying God's Truth

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## The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, editor

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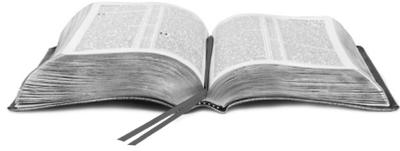
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# Preface

There are a great deal more dusty, unused Bibles in Christian homes than there are dusty, unused computers, televisions, or phones. Given what the Word of God is, and given how easy it is to study it, the dust should be on the other appliances, if it is going to accumulate anywhere!

This course is designed to show students the character of God's Word and provide them with a laboratory to develop the skills necessary to dig into God's Book personally.

Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 provides motivation and direction for us: All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Paul expected Timothy to accomplish enormous tasks, and the Word of God was the tool that would make it possible.

The first verse opens our eyes to the nature and use of God's Word. When we open it, we must remember that it comes directly from God. Although we know that God breathed his Word, He did not tell us many of the details of the process. He used prophets to communicate His Word. He spoke with them and guarded them from error in teaching His truth. He protected His Word so that it would come to us without error. That gives us full confidence in it. We can actually hold the message from God in our hands!

The God who authored the Word also determines its proper use. That certainly is an author's prerogative. In this case, He wants us to use His revelation for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. As we do, God's Word will furnish us for all good works.



# The Bible Is God's Revealed Word

## ▶ Scripture Focus

Psalm 19:1–11; Romans 1:18–20; Hebrews 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

## Theme

God reveals His truth and His nature through general and special revelation.

### Memory Verses

*“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. . . . The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:1, 7).*

## GETTING STARTED

Asking for directions, especially in the age of GPS, takes humility. The proud will wander aimlessly claiming not to be lost.

1. How likely are you to seek directions when you don't know what to do or where to go?
2. Where do people often turn for directions on how to live life to its fullest?
3. In what areas of life do you need direction from God?

This study will emphasize the specialness of God's special revelation in the Bible. It will encourage you to desire to be in God's Word to find direction for your life.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

We desperately need God's truth. Life is meaningless without it. Praise God that He wisely revealed to us all the truth we need to know to be rightly related to Him.

Revelation is the work of God by which He makes Himself and His purposes known to humanity. This definition does not specify how God sends revelation. Why God gives revelation is more important than how He gives it.

### **Purposes and Implications of God's Revelation**

Revelation existed before Adam sinned. Of course, the heavens declared the glory of God from the moment God created them. But even in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve needed God to show them truth. Neither of them knew their purpose as individuals or as a couple until God taught them.

On the sixth day of creation, God took the initiative to show Adam's incompleteness. Adam needed a helper suited to him (Gen. 2:18–20). To meet Adam's need, God created Eve and brought her to Adam (2:21–24). Adam was overjoyed. So God initiated His revelation to Adam, revealed Adam's need, and then revealed that He met Adam's need.

God still reveals His truth to humanity today, but humanity's need for God's truth has changed. The need is now desperate because sin entered the world and affected every person's relationship with God (Rom. 3:10). Every person would be separated forever from God if God did not tell them how to be reconciled to Him.

Human attempts to seek answers to life have usually ended up with the creation of idols as physical representations of gods. Making idols allows people to be in control of their gods. They set up the rules for worshiping their god and even place demands on it. Their gods are obligated to respond to their actions. Of course, their gods are completely worthless because they are lifeless.

4. Read Psalm 115:1–8. Contrast what the passage says about God with what it says about idols
  
5. What does the making and worship of idols, both in Old Testament times and now, reveal about the universal needs of humanity?

Since sin warps the thinking process (Rom. 1:28), we cannot think our way out of the mess of sin. In fact, our understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18), and our minds are hostile and rebellious against God. We cannot please Him (Rom. 8:7, 8). Our sinfulness has created a world of error and confusion, and we cannot find the way to peace and life.

God's revelation reveals His grace. When we were blinded by sin, God caused the light of the gospel to shine so we could see the way to Him (2 Cor. 4:4). At the root of the term translated as *revelation* is the idea of *unveiling*. God unveils what we would not have known and could not have known, including what we needed to live as His child.

The revelation of God gives us the opportunity to know the will of God. We can learn of His nature and of His plan. However, God has not revealed everything to us. According to Deuteronomy 29:29, God has reserved some secrets for Himself. But despite its limitations, God's revelation is not deficient in anyway. It gives us all we need to know to obey Him and be rightly related to Him.

There are several important implications of God's revelation to humanity. We must submit to God's revelation without trying to guess what God has chosen not to tell us. We must also be satisfied with the information He has determined that we should know. We must acknowledge that our greatest need is to be reconciled to God, and then we must recognize that His revelation gives us the only opportunity for reconciliation.

God has revealed truth to us in different ways. Without God's revelation we would be clueless and absolutely hopeless.

## Benefits of General Revelation

General revelation is God's work of revealing truth about Himself through the universe He has created. The first chapters of the Bible reveal God's creative activity. When there was no one else, He existed. When there was nothing, He created something. Exodus 20:11 says, *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.* Romans 1 and Psalm 19 clearly teach the benefits of general revelation.

According to the apostle Paul, judgment hangs over humanity because humans are ignoring the obvious fact that all of Creation necessarily points to a creator. It is God's teaching device, and ever since the time of the creation of the world, Creation has been announcing His presence.

6. Read Romans 1:18–20. According to verse 20, what about God can be clearly seen through creation?

Paul asserted that Creation gives every person a clear, unmistakable message about God. Humanity's problem is not that people cannot see what is clear, but that they choose to ignore it.

7. According to Romans 1:18, what do people naturally do with the truth they learn about God from nature?

8. How is this reaction to the truth seen in society today?

Some people suppress the truth that surrounds them every minute of every day. While Creation provides a great benefit for them—they can know of God's existence—they ignore that revelation to their eternal peril.

Paul's thoughts in Romans 1:18–20 might have been sparked by Psalm 19:1–6. Both the heavens and the skies speak volumes about God. They teach day and night (19:2).

9. Read Psalm 19:1–6. Why is it significant that general revelation reaches around the globe?

As an example of Creation’s witness, God offered the daily journey of the sun. Just as the sun illumines everything on the face of the earth, so the universe illumines the God Who created it.

God’s character is glorious (19:1). The word *glory* contains the concept of *worthiness*, of *value that is unmistakable*. God has done that which no one else can do. Not only did He create something out of nothing, but He also made it vast and grand and complex. The general revelation of Creation shows us a God Who is worthy of worship.

### **Limitations of General Revelation**

General revelation, however, is limited in its effect. It *shows*, but it does not *speak*. We learn of God’s existence, power, and glory, but we learn relatively little of His character. General revelation does not reveal the way to a relationship with God, that is, the way of salvation.

10. Read Romans 8:18–22. What effect does God’s curse on the universe have on the effectiveness of general revelation to reveal God?

The majesty of Creation, even in its sin-cursed state, should draw people to the Creator. They should become curious, asking how they could know the One Who had the ability to create a system as large as the universe. To find the answer, humanity needs special revelation.

### **Methods of Special Revelation**

Special revelation is not special because it is better in quality than general revelation; its uniqueness lies in its narrower purpose. In special revelation, God revealed truth that will bring humanity into a saving relationship with Him and will meet their needs within that relationship. In a sense, special revelation is built on the foundation of general revelation.

Those who respond to Creation's call to learn of the creator must do so on His terms.

God used an interesting variety of methods to provide special revelation. The *prophet* served as the *mouth* of the Lord. Prophets never gave their own ideas as if they were the originators of God's message. They were carried along by the Spirit as they provided revelation (2 Pet. 1:21). We know very little about the way God revealed His message to the prophets. When *the word of the LORD* came to the prophet, he relayed the same words to the people. What he received, he gave, so God must have spoken with the prophets in their own languages.

11. Read Deuteronomy 13:1–5. What do God's instructions to Israel about false prophets tell you about how seriously God took the prophet's role?

The prophets were careful to state the divine authority for their message, so the announcement *thus says the LORD* rings throughout the Old Testament. Failure to heed the prophet was failure to heed God (1 Sam. 15:1–3, 19–23).

God also used miracles as a form of special revelation. When God created the universe, He designed its mechanisms. The universe operates by the laws that God placed into effect. Since He is the Creator of both the universe and its systems, He may choose to bypass His laws to convey a message.

12. What are some examples from the Bible of God's superseding the laws of nature to convey a message?

13. Read Exodus 7:5. What message did God send to the Egyptians by bringing the plagues upon them?

As the plagues God brought on Egypt intensified (Exod. 7–12), the Lord made it clear to Pharaoh that he could not seek a natural explanation for God’s miracles. The plague of flies did not affect Goshen, the homeland of Israel, though the flies made life unbearable for the Egyptians (8:20–24). This special revelation was designed *to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth* (8:22).

In addition to this evangelistic purpose, the Lord’s miracles influenced His people, drawing them to a deeper knowledge of His love and care for them. During Israel’s forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God brought miraculous food daily in the form of manna. He provided water out of a rock where there was no water. The Israelite’s shoes and clothing did not wear out as the people traveled. His miracles tested and humbled Israel so the people would depend on Him and His Word alone (Deut. 8:1–4). All of this proved that God cared enough for His people to discipline them and draw them back to Himself (8:5).

On occasion, God also used visions and dreams and their accompanying interpretations as special revelation. Joseph’s rise to prominence was revealed in advance by his dreams (Gen. 37). Later God gave Pharaoh dreams that made sense only when God allowed Joseph to interpret them (41). Much later, Ezekiel had a vision of the temple that God would allow Israel to rebuild in the millennial rule of Christ. The reality of the vision and the certainty of its fulfillment are seen in the exacting design and dimensions revealed (Ezek. 40–43).

14. Why doesn’t God use visions and dreams to convey His messages today?

## **Embodiment of Special Revelation**

Special revelation is forever tangible and observable in the person of Jesus Christ and in the record of God’s Word, the Bible. All the means of special revelation detailed above pale when compared to the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

As God in flesh, Jesus is the perfect revelation of God. John 1:1 and 2 plainly teach the eternity of Christ. As the Word, He has always existed

and has always been God. When He came to earth, He revealed His glory to humanity.

15. Read John 1:1, 2, 14. What is included in the glory that people behold when they look at Jesus, the Word?

16. Read Hebrews 1:1–4. According to these verses, what can you learn about God from the life of Christ?

17. Read John 14:7–11. What did Christ convey to His disciples about His relationship with the Father?

By His sacrifice, Jesus also revealed that He is the way to God the Father. He *purged our sins* by His death on the cross (Heb. 1:3). Special revelation goes far beyond stretching our minds with information that we would never have guessed from general revelation. It draws us to the knowledge of God. It gives us an opportunity to be rightly related to God.

The Bible is also special revelation. It is God-breathed; therefore, it is miraculous and accurate in its entirety (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). God designed it to reveal Himself to us and draw us to a vital relationship with Him; therefore, it has extraordinary value (Ps. 19:7–11). During the succeeding lessons of this course, we will explore the unique aspects of the Bible's special revelation.

18. Why might we take God's Word for granted and fail to treat it as the very Word of God?

Special revelation gives us the opportunity to know God. That knowledge leads to a growing relationship with Him. We need to learn a great

deal, but the task is not unpleasant. The Lord saw our need for Him and responded with just the sort of revelation that we needed to gain true knowledge. Psalm 19:7 and 8 teach that the Word is absolutely trustworthy and that it will bring change to our lives.

When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we begin to know the Lord as we desire. His Word will not disappoint us.

## **MAKING IT PERSONAL**

19. How will you respond when you observe God's general revelation in Creation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
20. How might you use Creation as a door to introducing others to God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
21. How should you respond when you are exposed to God's special revelation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
22. What do you need to do to immerse yourself more regularly in God's Word?