

SPECIAL REVELATION

Characteristics

- ▶ General revelation was marked by certain characteristics...

Continuity

Universality

Clarity

Non-specificity

- ▶ Special Revelation likewise is distinguished by its own characteristics

Personal

Anthropic

Analogical

Personal

- ▶ There is a personal nature to special revelation

“A **personal** God presents himself to **persons**.”

- Millard Erickson

- ▶ Disclosure of his personal name

- ▶ ANE culture

- ▶ God reveals his name to Moses

- ▶ God reveals his character to Moses (Exod 33:19)

“‘**I AM WHO I AM**’; and he said, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’”

- Exodus 3:14

“Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘**Yahweh**, Yahweh God, **compassionate** and **gracious**, slow to anger, and **abounding** in loyal love and faithfulness, who **keeps** loyal love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.’”

- Exodus 34:6-7

Personal

- ▶ There is a personal nature to special revelation

“A **personal** God presents himself to **persons**.”

- Millard Erickson

- ▶ Disclosure of his personal name

- ▶ ANE culture

- ▶ God reveals his name to Moses

- ▶ God reveals his character to Moses (Exod 33:19)

- ▶ The significance of Yahweh's name was bound in the disclosure of his character

“‘**I AM WHO I AM**’; and he said, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’”

- Exodus 3:14

Personal

- ▶ There is a personal nature to special revelation

“A **personal** God presents himself to **persons**.”

- Millard Erickson

- ▶ Disclosure of his personal name
- ▶ Establishment of covenant relationships
 - ▶ Noah (Gen 6:18)
 - ▶ Abraham (Gen 12:1-3)
 - ▶ Isaac (Gen 26:2-5)
 - ▶ Jacob (Gen 28:13-15)
 - ▶ David (2 Sam 7:8-16)
 - ▶ Israel (Exod 19:5-6; Jer 31:31-34)

Personal

- ▶ There is a personal nature to special revelation

“A **personal** God presents himself to **persons**.”

- Millard Erickson

- ▶ Disclosure of his personal name
- ▶ Establishment of covenant relationships
- ▶ Clarification: special revelation is personal in **nature**, not in **mode**
 - ▶ God reveals **himself personally** to us
 - ▶ But it is not through **mystical** or **subjective** means
 - ▶ **Personal knowledge** of God comes through **objective, propositional truth**

Anthropic

- ▶ We've already addressed God's incomprehensibility
 - ▶ Poses a barrier to man's autonomous knowledge of God
 - ▶ Necessitates God's revelation of himself
 - ▶ Man's finiteness cannot comprehend God's infiniteness
- ▶ God transcends the physical realm
 - ▶ We cannot investigate him with scientific inquiry
 - ▶ God **knows** this and has **condescended** to meet our limitations
 - ▶ He has accommodated by using methods of communication that are **meaningful** and **understandable** to us

“God is **spirit**”

- John 4:24

“He is who is revealed is, however, a **transcendent** being, outside our **sensory experience**...; he is not subject to the **confines** of space and time.... Humans cannot reach up to **investigate** God and would not **understand** even if they could.”

- Millard Erickson

Anthropic

- ▶ Human language
 - ▶ Old Testament
 - ▶ Hebrew
 - ▶ Aramaic (later portions during/after exile)
 - ▶ New Testament
 - ▶ Greek (*Koine* rather than classical)
 - ▶ Aramaic and Hebrew statements
- ▶ Human categories of thought and experience
 - ▶ Biblical writers spoke observationally of the world around them
 - ▶ Used figurative language, pictures, and symbols
 - ▶ Used dreams and visions (common human experience)
 - ▶ Jesus' incarnation was as a **normal human being**

“When God appeared to humanity, he used the modality of an **ordinary** human being. Apparently Jesus carried no **visible** sign of **distinctiveness**. Most persons took him for an ordinary, average human being, the son of Joseph the carpenter. He came as a **human**, not an **angel** or a being clearly **recognizable** as a god.”

- Millard Erickson

Anthropic

- ▶ God has, of course, revealed himself supernaturally at times

- ▶ He spoke directly from heaven (John 12:28)
- ▶ He appeared in theophanic glory at Sinai

YET...

- ▶ He used **understandable language** when he spoke from heaven
- ▶ His essential nature was shrouded in clouds and darkness, maintaining the mystery and transcendence of his nature
- ▶ Nevertheless, biblical writers employ recognizable concepts to describe God's theophanic presence, i.e., "storm clouds," "lightning," etc.

Analogical

“God draws on those elements in the **human universe of knowledge** that can serve as a **likeness** of or partially convey the **truth** in the **divine realm**.”

- Millard Erickson

- ▶ In other words, God uses recognizable language to bridge the gap between the heavenly and human realms
- ▶ Two kinds of language
 - ▶ Univocal
 - ▶ Def: Terms that mean the same thing regardless of the subject used
 - ▶ Ex: “Tall” means the same whether used of a person or a building
 - ▶ Equivocal
 - ▶ Def: Terms mean different things depending on subject and context
 - ▶ Ex: “Row” means something different depending on referring to an arrangement of trees or the action of a person in a boat

Analological

- ▶ When God reveals himself, we find that he uses words that are **univocal** in both the human and divine realms
 - ▶ God's actions and character are expressed with words like "love," "life," "power," etc.
 - ▶ Readers and hearers would not have been confused by their meaning, as if introduced to concepts **wholly alien** to human life
 - ▶ Of course, they may have to recalibrate their understanding to the degree these words reflect divine qualities
 - ▶ But the categories themselves mean essentially the same thing in both human and divine realms

"This analological knowledge is possible because **God** selects the components he uses. Unlike humans, God is knowledgeable of **both sides** of the analogy. If humans by their own natural unaided reason seek to understand God by constructing an analogy involving God and humanity, the result is always some sort of **conundrum**, for they are in effect working with an equation containing **two unknowns**.... Not knowing the relationship between God's being (or nature, or essence) and that of humanity, humans cannot construct a **meaningful** analogy. God, on the other hand, knowing all things completely, therefore knows which elements of human knowledge and experience are **sufficiently similar** to the divine truth that they can be used to help construct a **meaningful** analogy."

- Millard Erickson

Analogical

- ▶ This reinforces the fact that God's incomprehensibility requires **God** to initiate communication with people
- ▶ God is the **perfect** communicator
- ▶ He reveals himself in ways that are **meaningful** to us
- ▶ This means we have the responsibility not to go beyond what has been revealed
- ▶ Whenever man has done this, the outcome has always led to obscuration of the truth
- ▶ Inevitably, we create a god of our own understanding

Modes

Direct Acts

- ▶ God has revealed himself **directly** to people throughout history
 - ▶ Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28-30; 2:16-17; 3:9, 11, 16-19)
 - ▶ Moses (Exod 3:4ff; Deut 34:10)
 - ▶ Israel (Deut 5:4)
 - ▶ Witnesses of Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:17)
 - ▶ Witnesses of Jesus' transfiguration (Matt 17:5)
- ▶ Prophets (Heb 1:1)
- ▶ Miraculous signs (Exod 3-14; Acts 2:22)

Modes

Dream and Visions

- ▶ God has communicated with individuals through [waking] visions
 - ▶ Isaiah (Isa 6:1-4)
 - ▶ John (Rev 1:10-16)
- ▶ God has communicated with individuals through [sleeping] dreams
 - ▶ Daniel (Dan 7:1ff)
 - ▶ Joseph (Gen 37)
 - ▶ Pharaoh (Gen 41)
 - ▶ Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2, 4)

Modes

Incarnation of Christ

- ▶ Ultimate mode of special revelation
- ▶ Pinnacle of human history
- ▶ God's most condescending form of revelation (Phil 2:6-7)
 - ▶ Jesus existed eternally with the Father (John 1:1-2)
 - ▶ Jesus became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14)
- ▶ Clearest revelation of God
 - ▶ God spoke "in his Son" (Heb 1:2)
 - ▶ God cannot be seen, yet Jesus has "explained" him (John 1:18)
 - ▶ Jesus is the true "image of God" (Col 1:15) and "exact representation of his nature" (Heb 1:3)
 - ▶ To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9-10)

Modes

“Jesus so **perfectly** reveals God that He is ‘the exact imprint’ of the divine being (Hebrews 1 v 3, ESV). His revelation is **identical** to that which is revealed to such a **perfect** degree that He **is** God. Imagine a poet writing a poem. Inevitably the poet expresses something of **themselves** in the poem. The poem gives us a **window** onto their thoughts and emotions. Now imagine God as an infinite and perfect poet who speaks a word which so fully expresses Himself that it is one with Himself. **Jesus** is that eternal Word, **revealing** the Father and **identical** to the Father in **every way** except that the Son is the **revelation** while the Father is the one who **reveals**.”

- Tim Chester

Modes

Scripture

- ▶ Scripture is an equally authoritative mode to Christ
- ▶ God has spoken to mankind through **written** testimony
- ▶ The uniqueness of Scripture is that it takes the **propositional truths** of God—
 - ▶ his mind
 - ▶ his ways
 - ▶ his righteousness
 - ▶ his works
- ▶ —and **preserves** it as “a lasting and forever-settled witness to the unchanging God.”

Summary

- ▶ Special revelation is God's **particular** disclosure of himself to **specific** individuals and **certain** times and places, enabling them to enter into a **redemptive** relationship with him
- ▶ God uses personal anthropic, and analogical means to reveal himself
- ▶ God has revealed himself by direct address, dreams and visions, the incarnate Jesus, and the written Word

Summary

Distinctions between general and special revelation

- ▶ The agents of general revelation in nature will perish, but the Word of special revelation will not pass away, because it is forever
- ▶ The means of general revelation in nature was cursed and is in bondage to corruption. It is therefore not the perfect world God originally created. However, the Word of special revelation is inspired by God and thus always perfect and holy
- ▶ The scope of general revelation in nature is severely limited compared to the multidimensional expanse of special revelation in Scripture