

What is Revelation? (cont.)

Revelation through history. Here we start moving from general revelation to special revelation. The distinction between general and special revelation is that general revelation is given to all people, irrespective of time or location. God's creational revelation comes to all and it comes no matter what the date, but special revelation is not universal, and that is why I actually prefer the term particular revelation. The term special revelation does not say a whole lot; I prefer the term particular revelation. Particular revelation is bound by time and space. We might think of God walking in the garden with Adam. What did God say to Adam in the garden? In order to know what is being communicated in particular revelation, what is necessary? You must be a party to the revelation—right? Or it must be recorded in such a way that it can be handed on, can be communicated, can be shared with those who are remote in time or space.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." Hebrews 1:1-2 suggests a number of things to us. First, it suggests that God has revealed Himself to us through His biblical history in a variety of ways. I am not going to read the entire list from the outline to you, but you can read through it yourself. We see theophanies, visions, the urim and thummim, lots, miracles, angelic messengers, audible speech from God, prophetic oracles, and events listed there. Now each of those in that entire list can be categorized as a particular revelation, as the historical revelation of God. Sometimes they are called the 'mighty deeds' of God. You will note that this list includes speech—the words of God, whether communicated directly or by angelic oracle. In fact, if you recall, we might best speak of God's historical particular revelation as a word-and-deed revelation. The debate—a longstanding debate now—over whether revelation can be stated in words, propositions, or must be found only in events is a wrong-headed debate. A spoken word is an event. Sometimes theologians think about a spoken word as a speech act. We may also say that a deed is an enacted word. The biblical pattern is that its verbalized words are referential to God's acts, to God's mighty deeds. And if you recall when we talked about Geerhardus Vos on this issue, the pattern is: the promissory word, an event which fills up that word or completes it, and then an interpreted word which explains, or proclaims that event. But Hebrews 1 and 2 also suggest that, while there is a rich diversity in God's revelation, it is finally a universal revelation because it is God's disclosure of His character and His will. Third, Hebrews 1 and 2 suggest that God's particular revelation is historical and it is progressive. It is historical in that it is addressed to concrete particular situations. It is progressive in that it is not an all at once revelation. Rather it addresses particular historical situations within the context, within the terms of the situation's place in a linear view of history.

Revelation through inspired speech. It has been common, and still is common, to think of inspiration as a thoroughly human phenomenon. It is the welling up within us of our subconscious human impressions. Thus, we speak of the artist as being inspired. We think of the poet as being inspired. But that is not the biblical conception of inspiration. When Scripture talks about inspiration, it is not talking about an intra-human reality; what Scripture refers to as the inspired word is a word which is perhaps not by our device, not by our ingenuity, but rather a word which originates from and is commissioned by God.

We see this clearly in the archetypical character of Balaam in Numbers 23 and 24. If you know anything about Balaam's story, he was commissioned by Balak the king of Moab to prophesy against Israel. But when it came down to the event, he was unable to do that. He said, "Must I not take care to say what Yahweh puts in my mouth? What Yahweh says, that is what I will say." It is fairly common in the Old

Testament to attribute prophetic speech to the hand of God, to the mouth of God. There is always this sense of divine compulsion to prophesy, to speak what was instructed from God.

Another example is Amos 3:8: “The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken—who can but prophesy?” I particularly like Jeremiah 20:9: “Whenever I said, ‘I’ll call Him to mind no more nor speak His name again,’ then His word was imprisoned in my body like a fire blazing in my heart, and I was weary with holding it under and could endure no more.” Biblical religion is prophetic through and through. That is to say, it is understood as a religion that has been given by God. It is not something that has arisen from out of us. Revelation is inspired utterance and that idea, that inception, stands at the very heart of biblical revelation. We are going to come back to Scripture; I just wanted to introduce the concept of written inspiration.

The revelation of Christ. The revelation of God comes to its climax, is summed up, in Christ. He sums up, He is the completion of all other forms; He is the key to making sense of all other revelation. First, we see that Jesus is the prophet. He is the authoritative speaker of God’s will, the fulfillment of God’s promise. He comes as prophet, but not just any prophet, not just another in a long stream of prophets, but as *the* prophet par excellence. For instance He says, and He says more than once, “You have heard it said...but I say to you.” It is interesting what Jesus is doing in those kinds of statements. What does he do right after that? He quotes the Old Testament—right? He is relativizing an Old Testament statement a bit, but He is doing so for the sake of pushing forward His authority. “I am the authority,” He says. It is interesting that a Jew, a first century Jew, would say, “You have heard it said...but I say to you.” The person who says that is either God or a nut. The first century Christians were also convinced that Jesus was the fulfillment, not only of God’s Word, not only was He a prophet, He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s expectation for a Messiah. We talked about a common statement for Jesus; a common statement for Matthew, the Gospel writer Matthew, was, “In order that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise. What Isaiah had to say, he had to say about Jesus. What Hosea had to say, he had to say about Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment; He is the climax of the story. I could go on and on about that issue, but Jesus is more than merely the authoritative speaker of the Word. He is more than merely another prophet, even the last and the greatest of the prophets. He is more than the providential fulfillment of expectation. He is also the authoritative revealer of God’s very nature. He is the authoritative revealer of just who God is. What do we find in John 1? In verse 14, “The word become flesh and dwelt among us.” By the time you get to verse 18, John says, “No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten God has,” (or the only begotten son, depending on your text), “he has made him known.” He has exegeted Him. If you have got questions about who God is, what He does, what He likes, what He does not like—go to Jesus. Jesus is the key to God’s character. Jesus is also the key to revelation. To see and know Jesus is to see and know God. That is the way John gets at this. The Word has become incarnate in such a way that to see Jesus is to see God. The other New Testament writers hit at the same reality to the affirmation that Christ reveals God. The verb *thanaroostae*, ‘to be manifest, to appear,’ regularly has the connotation of manifesting what was previously hidden. When it is used of Christ—1 Peter 1, Hebrews 9, 1 Timothy 3—the implication is that Christ is the incarnate disclosure of God’s nature. You cannot get more intimate or complete in your notion of revelation.

Now let us take up the issue of Scripture as the Word of God written. I just made the point that Jesus is the key to the revelational organism. God’s particular revelation is instrumental, and that is an important word, ‘instrumental.’ God’s particular revelation is instrumental in the effect that, it is an instrument to leading us to Christ. It has an instrumental function to bring us face to face with Jesus Christ. In other words, and Calvin will take this up and we will get at it more too, the very purpose of Scripture is to

bring us face with Jesus Christ. The Bible is instrumental in that sense. The Bible mediates this knowledge of Christ.

Yet this instrumental, mediatory function of the Bible is carried out across the entire spectrum of revelation. And to make sense of that we need to say something about human need. As we have already indicated, human beings were created with an inborn need to worship. And originally we had the capacity to seek God, but in our sin that capacity to seek God has been defaced and our need to worship is misapplied. We now worship things in the creation. We worship the created, rather than the Creator. And we do this, according to Calvin, partly by ignorance, partly by malice. The product is that we no longer see the knowledge of God, which shines forth in the fashioning and the upholding of the universe, the governance of the universe. This means that the Bible is needed as a guide, a teacher. It is going to restore us to the knowledge of God the Creator. But all true knowledge of God derives from one very important fact, and we should not miss it here—it is only in His great mercy that God reveals Himself. God does not have to reveal Himself. He did not have to reveal Himself in creation; He does not have to reveal Himself now in redemption; He does not have to reveal Himself in Scripture; He does not have to reveal Himself in Jesus any more than He had to create in the first place. It is only by His mercy, only by His grace, that He bridges the great distance between us and His heavenly glory. And to do this God accommodates—we are going to come back to that word—God accommodates His Word to fallen human capacities.

There are really two movements in Calvin's articulation of the doctrine of revelation. God must republish His creational word; He must return us to a knowledge of God the Creator. And second, He must address our lack; He must fix the broken part within us and thus bring us to a knowledge of God the Redeemer. And Scripture is related to both of these movements. Let us address the first one: the accommodation of creational revelation to fallen man. Calvin actually used the word 'accommodation' in a couple of ways. First, he said the Bible is an accommodation to our creaturely finitude, just like creational revelation. "For who of slight intelligence does not understand that as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wondrously, in a measure, to lisp in speaking to us. Thus some forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our slight capacity." Here God is likened to a nurse who lisps baby talk with an infant. It is interesting what Calvin is saying: the Bible is not an exercise in inter-trinitarian dialogue, the Father talking to the Son in big, God-long words. We sometimes treat the Bible that way—it is God's thoughts, and we just happen to be eavesdropping. Actually, Calvin's idea is that the Bible is closer to baby chatter. It is written right where we are at. And when we read the Bible, what do we find? It is crude; it is earthy. Remember the movie, *Contact*? Remember the language that the aliens used? It was the language that any respectable god would use—mathematics. Well, the Bible is not written in that stuff. It is written in human language. It is written in exactly the kind of stuff that you can use, that you need. Thus Calvin said, "When we find God prattling to us in the Bible, in uncultivated and vulgar style, we shouldn't be offended, we should be grateful, since it's only by such condescension that we can know Him at all." If the Father were speaking to the Son, and speaking in Father-and-Son talk, we would not have a clue. Again, revelation is never a given—God crosses the gulf; He spans the distance; He comes to us; He condescends; He accommodates; He draws us in.

The second way that Calvin used the word accommodation: Scripture is also an accommodation to our sinful corruption. Not only is it an accommodation to our creatureliness, it is also an accommodation to our sinfulness. Calvin compared the Bible to a pair of reading glasses. In what is certainly the most quoted paragraph in the entire *Institutes*, he said, "Just as older, bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognized it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles, will begin to read distinctly,

so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our blindness, clearly shows us the true God.” What is the Bible? It is eyeglasses for the spiritually near-sighted. What do we see through these glasses? Calvin’s conclusion is that we see God as Creator again. We might chart what we have said so far regarding Calvin’s view of revelation: [drawing on the chalkboard] that’s just an eyeball from the side, and a Bible, we will make it open so it is actually being used. And we will make some spectacles since he has just described this Word as a pair of spectacles. What do the eyes see through these spectacles? We see the creation. But through this creation we see God; remember where we started, this theater for His glory, this mirror in which we contemplate God. And the motive for Calvin is Psalm 119: “Your word is a light to my path and a lamp to my feet.” Scripture is a restatement of divine norms for creaturely existence in the world, and through all of that we see our heavenly Father. To cram two of Calvin’s metaphors together, the lipping spectacles of Scripture bring us face to face with our Creator once again. We see the creation that is the theater of His glory.

It is not enough, however, that Scripture republishes it, says again this creational revelation; it tells us that God is our Creator. It is not enough that it republishes God’s moral norms for man. In fact, one cannot get to that republication without the other function of Scripture, a function which actually precedes its republication of creational revelation. In other words, we are not there yet. Our chart is a long way from complete; there is a lot of stuff missing. Scripture is also a redemptive work. In-lettered into Scripture is a promise of redemption, God’s cure for our weak eyesight. Scripture does not merely give us a normative view on the world, as important as that is; it also tells us, it also promises, that God is going to address the problem of sin. He is going to address the problem of alienation from Him. And that drama, that promise, starts in Genesis 3:15, and through a series of promises and fulfillments, it finds its climax in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, or if I can use this terminology, the Eye Doctor.

But it is not that reason that the Bible saves. Now please bear with me; the Bible does not save. Reading the Bible never saved anyone. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that it is the appropriate object of worship. The greatest single catechetical question ever asked, and it did not come from Westminster, asked: “What is your only comfort?” That is the Heidelberg Catechism question one. Whether we live or die, Jesus is our Savior. That is our only comfort. See, we believe the Bible; we do not believe in it. We believe in Jesus. The Bible is an instrument to bring Christ home to God’s people. We believe in Jesus. In other words, the Bible does not fulfill its primary function unless we are brought to a redeeming faith in Christ by the internal working of the Spirit using Scripture. There is a lot more our chart needs.

One of the abiding characteristics of a particular revelation, as I have already indicated, is that it is bound to space and time. If God acts or speaks at a particular moment or locale, only those who are in attendance will be privy. The only way to offset that inherent parochial nature of particularity is to record the revelation so that it can be shared with persons and communities that are remote temporally and geographically. Furthermore, it is that very reality that makes Christianity a missionary religion. God acts in space and time. Biblical religion is not about universal mathematical principles; it is about Jesus Christ, the second person of the trinity, walking Palestine in the first century and being crucified for us. And the only way that can be communicated is by you and me sharing it. But this reality of particular revelation means that Scripture is going to play a crucial role in mediating God’s actions, God’s acts. But apart from that, we find the Bible becomes something of a locus, a focusing point for all of revelation. This revelation in creation is still there. It is still there, but even as a Christian I do not pick it up very well all the time. So Scripture declares God as Creator; it affirms His providential rule over creation; it gives us a clear affirmation of His creational norms, but beyond that we find a promise of

redemption, a record of God's redemptive, historical actions, and a record and proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Now this revelation of God does move toward more concrete form and explicit interpretation in Scripture but it reaches its zenith of concrete activity and explicitness in Christ. Both Hebrews 1:1-3 and John 1:1-18 link Jesus to the unfolding drama of redemption found in the Old Testament and the revelation found in creation. Jesus is not only a Savior, He's the one through whom all creation is made in the first place. So He becomes the center not only of the redemptive act, but the creative act as well. He is both the Redeemer who is sent to fix the problem, and He is the model we are supposed to follow in being obedient to God. If we want to know what God's original intention is, if we want to know what service He expects of His creatures, we follow Jesus. But Calvin insisted that our discussion of revelation, the Word of God, all the things we are talking about, begins with Jesus. The rest of what we have said about revelation makes no sense outside of Jesus. Even though God has revealed His Fatherhood right within the stuff of creation, we cannot know that outside of our experience of Jesus as our Redeemer. Calvin makes that point in the second chapter of book one of the *Institutes*. While creation precedes redemption as an historical reality, in our human experience, the knowledge of God as Redeemer will come before our knowledge of God as our Creator. There are a couple ways to make sense of this. I remember my friend Al Wolters saying this once at a conference: "Outside of Jesus, it's just dirt." He is right. If I do not know Christ as my Redeemer, as my *Savoir*, I can look at the world all day long and it will just be dirt. I will not know it as His creation outside of His Son. Another way to get at this, as John gets at the issue in chapter 16 of his Gospel, is that the only ingress to the Father is through the Son. You do not get to the Creator except through the Redeemer. As the fulfillment of the Old Testament, as the subject of New Testament revelation, Jesus is the center of Scripture, but He is also the very center of revelation. In a sense, we must start right there.

So, what is the Bible about? Calvin at one point said the Bible is a proclamation of God's Word in our world on our behalf. It is a declaration of God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ faithfully inspired by the Spirit of God and illuminated in the people of God by the Spirit. Now with that, you see that Calvin's understanding of revelation is thoroughly trinitarian. Herman Bavinck said, "The essence of the Christian religion consists in this, that the creation of the Father, devastated by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and recreated by the Holy Spirit into the Kingdom of God." Notice the thoroughly trinitarian understanding of revelation, and it is redemptive historical—creation, fall, and redemption. Well, what is missing from our graph, if Calvin and Bavinck are right? The Holy Spirit, first of all. Where should I put Him? Let us put Him where He will illuminate this Word. We are going to talk about the Holy Spirit and the Word. These things are going to stay close together. Now, what else is missing? It is, after all, a trinitarian Word. So where is Jesus here? Where do we put Jesus in our chart? Where do you find Jesus? You find Him in the Bible, in Scripture. I do not know where it comes from, it has kind of turned into a cliché, but Jesus always comes to us dressed in the robes of Scripture. Do you know another way to get to Jesus? Is there another medium of Jesus that is faithful, that is truthful, and that is reliable? No. So I think with the Bible is probably a good place to put Him.

The authority of Scripture in the ministry of the Spirit. Now Calvin developed his doctrine of Scripture in terms of the Holy Spirit. Spirit and Word always go together; you cannot separate the two of them. The Bible is the inspired Word of God revealed in human language and confirmed to the people of God by the inner witness of the Spirit. When we talk about the authority of Scripture, we are coming very close to speaking of the inspiration of Scripture. And we will talk much more about that next week. But for his part, Calvin spent no time at all—he refused to take up the question of how the Bible is inspired. He simply asserted the divine origin of Scripture. For instance, in his commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16, he said, "All those who wish to profit from the Scriptures must first accept this as a settled principle, that

the law and the prophets are not teachings handed on by the pleasure of men, or produced by men's minds as their source, but are dictated by the Holy Spirit. We owe to the Scriptures the same reverence as we owe to the God, since it had its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed within it."

Note the very high view of Scripture that we see in Calvin. But how does one know that the Bible is the Word of God? How are we to know that it is this kind of holy oracle, that it shows forth Christ and the way of life? For Calvin, there is never anything like an independent platform that we can stand on from which to look down and by our reason pass judgment upon the Word of God. We cannot, in other words, simply objectively decide for or against the Bible. I will ask the question again: how can we know the Bible is the Word of God? Calvin's answer is that such assurance comes only by the witness of the Spirit, the same Spirit who inspired the prophets and the apostles, the same Spirit who brings Christ home to us in regeneration, not some other spirit, the same Spirit as that. Calvin wrote, "While some people demand a rational proof that the Bible is truthful or inspired, I reply the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than reason, for as God alone is witness to Himself and His word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed in the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets, must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded." In other words, God does not simply throw His Bible out there and say, "You figure it out." That is the point here. In this revelation He is going to see it through to completion. Divine revelation is not a skill acquired through academic study, rather it is a gift of God's grace. Just as the content of this revelation is about God's grace, through His Spirit, so the understanding of this revelation is going to be by God's grace, through His Spirit.

Now Calvin gave very short shrift here to the different proofs that people have put forward for the Bible's authenticity. He stated frankly that those who wish to prove to unbelievers that the Bible is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith is He known. Yes, Calvin was very well-acquainted with the evidence for the Bible's credibility: its antiquity, its miracles, its prophecy, the witness of the Church, and the history of the martyrs. He did not deny any of that. As a matter of fact, he approved it all, but he said those things are secondary aids to our feebleness. They are secondary compared to the chief and highest testimony. Quite simply, we believe not because we recognize the Bible as authoritative, rather we recognize the Bible as authoritative because by the Spirit of God we believe. Again, evidence, rationalism has its place. Calvin was not an irrationalist, not at all. But he said when you make an evidentiary base the base, you have fallen into a rationalism, which makes man, not God, the final court of appeals. Now that could make Calvin sound a little subjectivistic. And neo-Orthodox theologians have attempted to enlist him in their cause, with the idea that it is our experience of the Bible, it is our experience with Scripture that makes it the Word of God, that revelation cannot be locked up into a book because in its essence it is a really dynamic force. But to read Calvin that way is to misread him and to misunderstand his point. Calvin does say at one point, "The Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven." But he is not suggesting that the Bible becomes the authoritative truthful Word of God only when we recognize it as such, because in the very next chapter he claims that the people of God do not render the Bible to be the Word; it already is. But for it to function with full authority, we must recognize it as such. As a matter of fact, Calvin is instructive here; he divides the issue of truth and authority. Authority is really a relationship; it is not an objective reality out there.

What is Calvin doing here? He is seeking to place the authority of Scripture (the entirety of Scripture) where it belongs, under the Holy Spirit, under the authority of the Spirit rather than under the authority of a church. He is writing in the context of a polemical relationship with the Roman Catholic church. As

the Spirit gives the Word, as the Spirit creates the church, He is the Lord over both. No ecclesiastical power, no ecclesiastical court, no human reason has authority over the Word. Rather, the Spirit of God is sovereign over all.

Let me address some questions. How does this emphasis on the Holy Spirit relate to the question of canonicity? What books should be in Scripture? I want to suggest, and I think it is thoroughly consistent with Calvin, that this relationship between the Spirit and the Word is consistent throughout biblical history, and the church has undertaken the process of the recognition of the canon through the guidance of the Spirit. We all, I hope, are aware that there were far more things written in the first century and into the second century than what we have in our canonical New Testament. One of the realities of the early church, beginning in the sixties, was persecution. It was sporadic; sometimes a whole generation would go by without any persecution, but it would sooner or later pop up again. And we oftentimes depict the Romans as a bunch of dunderheads. They really were not. Certainly Christianity was declared illegal, but the Romans were not out there just killing everybody—"Oh, he looks a Christian! Get him!" They had a system of jurisprudence. They had to prove that you were a Christian. And of course what they would do is come into your house and look for proof that you were a Christian. So people had to decide early on, what am I willing to die for—*The Didache*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, or *The Gospel of Thomas*? The answer for all those cases was no, I am not willing to die for those. Very early, by the leading of God's Spirit, in providence, the church came to an agreement over most of the books of the New Testament. These four Gospels that we have, there was never any doubt. These were not the only four Gospels; there were many written, but there was never a contest—these were worth dying for. It was worth having the Gospel of John on your person. It was worth having Matthew. Most of Paul's epistles, maybe twelve of the thirteen—the book of James was of some question for a while—2 and 3 John—but the vast majority of the New Testament canon is pretty well set very early. Interestingly, it was not officially set until much later—the year is usually dated 365, the Muratorian Canon. But it is mostly there right from the very beginning, and it is amazing how consistently that happened. How does that happen? Well, one could say by the accident of history. My own answer and the answer the church historically has given is: it has been by the providence of God's Spirit in history. The same Spirit who generates the Word is also going to work to bring it home to the people of God, illuminating it, interpreting it, protecting it, defending it. That is the consistent argument.

How do we put together the statement about the knowledge of God as Redeemer preceding the knowledge of God as Creator with all of that I have said before? My answer is that I am actually following Calvin's order here. He started with Jesus and then went on to other things. I followed him pretty closely. His point, when he says you must start with Jesus, is to punctuate the reality that the knowledge of God as our Father precedes our knowledge of Him as our Creator. Remember that all Romans 1 can really do is say someone is there and you are accountable. That is all it needs to do. What Calvin has in mind, when he says the knowledge of God the Redeemer returns us to the knowledge of God the Creator, is that the fullness of redemption gives us the fullness of creation. It says this one, *Yahweh*, the old God of Scripture, is the Creator. We have had a tendency, almost a tradition, to put way too much on Romans 1. All Paul means there is that, you are without excuse. Someone is there yet you still go on looking. Remember our discussion of Barth? In some sense, Barth does have a point: if we give too much space to a kind of creational revelation we do make biblical revelation unnecessary. And that is not the direction Calvin wanted at all.

Scripture itself is a mediator; we used the word instrument, and mediator would be a synonym. I would say that the Holy Spirit applies Scripture, completes Scripture. I would not say Scripture is mediated through the Holy Spirit. Scripture itself is an objective reality, an objective historical artifact. It does not need the Spirit to serve as a form of mediation. Come alongside? Yes. And that is certainly part of

Calvin's understanding, that the Word and Spirit can never be divided; we are going to have a lot more to say about this. Calvin is writing in the context of not only the Catholic church, but a kind of rationalism in his day, which says, "Well, all I really need is the Bible. I do not need the Spirit." And in the context of spiritualists, some of the Anabaptist school would say, "All I need is the Spirit and not the Bible." So Calvin has a very firm interest in wanting to keep those two together. We are a long way from being done in discussing Calvin and the Spirit. As a matter of fact, that is exactly where we are going to end up when we talk about authority; we will be looking at this whole issue of Calvin and the Spirit again.

How would you respond to a Mormon who would say, "Well, using the same argument you have used, I can use it on behalf of the Book of Mormon"? Or how would you respond to a Muslim who, in that same process, would make a claim for the Koran? Remember what Calvin is saying. He does say these other proofs, though secondary and feeble, are there. It is true that a revelation must do justice to the phenomenon that it is trying to describe—the nature of human needs, the answer to that need, the historical precedents that are involved here—and it seems to me that the Bible does a much better job than others have. The bishop Lesslie Newbigin, in several of his books, makes the point that Christianity is the only major world religion that has the guts to stand upon historical precedent. I went to Harvard University to get my first master's degree. Harvard is not exactly Covenant Seminary. I went there on purpose. I figured, as a new Christian, if this Christianity stuff is not true, then I should disprove it as quickly as possible so I can get on with my hedonistic lifestyle. It was going pretty good; I said, "Hey guys, you know, if it is not true, prove it to me as quickly as possible." And at Harvard everyone is right but the evangelical Christian, every revelation is true but the Bible.

Back in the 1920s, the folks at Harvard University said the Bible is full of historical errors and one of them was about the Hittites. The Hittites are talked about in Numbers and other places, but believe it or not, back in about in 1918 Harvard sent an archaeological exploration to Asia Minor. In that time, there was no extra-biblical evidence for the Hittites. They said, "Here is proof the Bible is not true; it made up the Hittites." Have you ever seen one of those statues which have the body of a lion, eagle's wings, a man's head, a beard, and a kind of a pope's hat? If you could lift them, on the bottom it would say, "Made by Hittites." There are two of them now at the Harvard Museum of Ancient and Near Eastern Antiquities, which is shoved off in the furthest corner possible of campus. So they went over and what they found was the Hittites. They said, "Well okay, you guys got lucky; the Bible got lucky. Look here; look here, in Isaiah it talks about this king Sargon II. Now, all of the really truthful, the really reliable, ancient and near eastern king lists do not say anything about Sargon II. All the Egyptian king lists say nothing about Sargon II. And the Assyrian king lists say nothing about Sargon II. Here is proof that the Bible is wrong; it has its historical details false." So they go to Ashurbanipal, which would have been the Assyrian capital during that time. And they start digging around. What did they find when they got down to that next layer? Bricks, and some guy printed his name on every brick on that layer—Sargon II.

Sargon II got eradicated from the other king lists because no one liked him, because he was a bad guy. Now, there is a lot of that stuff. It happens over and over and over again, even in the Bible. Does that prove that the Bible is true in everything? No, but it helps us to understand that the people who wrote here, the people who are generating this thing, cared about historical veracity. Now, that should concern us, because we live in history. We are historical. We are not existential minds that float in space. I have dates; I have mortgages; I have all the rest of that. And it seems that this revelation takes those kinds of things seriously. And with those details, you have to jump from there to metaphysics. But if it is wrong there, there is no reason I should be caring about that leap.

In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* Newbigin talks about when he first went to India as a missionary and spent some forty years in India. He was talking to a very learned Hindu who said, “I don’t get you Christians. Here you have this revelation that is about history. It is about God entering space and time, then you come over here and you talk like philosophers. I can get that from a Hindu. You do not even understand the nature of your own religion.” So this is a revelation that does justice to the phenomena, historically and personally, as well as existentially. We have had two thousand years of folks just kicking it around. And most of these other ‘revelations,’ do not even pretend to operate on that level.