

THEISM

How God Reveals Himself

People sometimes wonder whether God exists because they cannot see him. Scripture affirms that God is invisible (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 11:27). Moreover, God is a spirit (John 4:24). Since God is not physically discernable, some wonder how God reveals himself. The answer is that God makes himself known by the manner and the content of his revelation.

God reveals himself in two ways. One is general, which is also called natural revelation. The other is special, which is also called divine or biblical revelation. Generally speaking, God reveals himself naturally through his creation. “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalms 19:1). The heavens are the work of God’s fingers, he has ordained the moon and the stars (Psalm 8:3). Yet, while nature reveals that God exists and declares “his eternal power and Godhead,” nature is limited in what it reveals about God, his attributes, and his will for humanity. Therefore, God also reveals himself in special ways.

In the Old Testament, God sometimes revealed himself directly. He spoke to Adam (Genesis 3:9-19), to Cain (Genesis 4:6-15), to Noah (Genesis 6:13 – 9:17), to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 7), to Moses (Exodus 33:11), to Samuel (1 Samuel 3:2-14), and others. When God revealed himself in physical form, he revealed himself as a man, as he did to Abraham (Genesis 18). God also appeared on occasion as an angelic messenger, as he did to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-12), to Abraham (Genesis 22:11-18), to Lot (Genesis 19:1-22), to Manoah (Judges 13:2-23), and others.

Sometimes God revealed himself through unusual ways. To Job, God revealed himself in a whirlwind (Job 38:1). To Moses, the Angel of God revealed himself in an unconsumed flame of fire in a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2). To Balaam, the Angel of God revealed himself through a talking donkey (Numbers 22:28-35). To Gideon, God certified his will through fleece (Judges 6:36-40). To Elijah, God revealed himself through a still small voice (1 Kings 19:13). Sometimes God revealed himself through dreams. This he did to Abimelech (Genesis 20:3), to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:25), to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:28), and others. Through visions, God revealed himself to Jacob (Genesis 46:2), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1) and others. Sometimes God revealed himself through his mighty acts, as he did when he sent the plagues against the Egyptians (Exodus 10:1-2). He dried up the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15-30), he fed manna to the Israelites in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3) and he enabled the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan (Joshua; Psalm 105). Sometimes God revealed his will through priests and prophets. On occasion, God revealed himself through Urim and Thummin which were used by the priests (Numbers 27:21; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65). Moreover, God revealed his message through his servants the prophets (2 Kings 17:23; 21:10; 24:2; Jeremiah 25:4; Daniel 9:10; Amos 3:7; Hosea 12:10). Sometimes God instructed that his word be written (Exodus 17:14; 34:27; Deuteronomy 17:18; 27:3, 8; Jeremiah 36:2). And sometimes God revealed himself, his commandments and his promises, through having his word read (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 17:19; 31:9-13; Joshua 8:33-35; Nehemiah 8:1-5).

In New Testament times as well as the Old, God revealed himself and his will in miraculous ways. Through angels, God revealed events related to the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:20-23; 2:13; Luke 1:11-20; 26-38; 2:9-14). God’s will for apostolic activity was sometimes directed through angels (Acts 5:19-20; 12:6-11; 27:23-24). God also revealed his will through visions (Luke 1:22; 24:24-26; Acts 9:10-16; 10:3-6; 9-17; 18:9-10; 23:11). Most notable among these is that of Paul’s

visionary experience on the road to Damascus, which led to his conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26). Miracles of Jesus and the apostles confirmed the spoken word (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:4). Nicodemus realized that Jesus was a teacher come from God because “no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). The blind man who had been healed declared that “if this Man were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:33).

However, the primary way God revealed himself in New Testament times was through his son. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1). Jesus was the word of God personified. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:1, 14). Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Christ “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). “In Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

Through his Holy Spirit, God endowed certain persons, such as Zacharias and John the Baptist (Luke 1:67-80; 3:2), with the ability to know and proclaim his word. Jesus promised that his disciples would be guided into all truth by the Spirit of truth and that he would tell them of things to come (John 16:13). He promised that they should not be concerned about what to say when brought before authorities because “the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:12). The apostles’ speech and preaching “were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul declared that “the word preached was not the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Peter wrote that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Just as God revealed himself through the written word in Old Testament times, so he also does now. Proclaiming the word of God causes many to become obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7; Romans 10:17). That’s because “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The Holy Scriptures makes the man of God complete, “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

The Old Testament or covenant became non-binding and the New Covenant now reveals how God would have us live (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13). Jesus declared a blessing on those who hear the word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28). Moreover, the apostles wrote as they were instructed (1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Timothy 3:15; Revelation 1:11, 19; 2:1, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5).

Although the miracles that accompanied Jesus and the apostles no longer occur, God still reveals himself through his written word. He also reveals himself by providing for those who trust and obey him. Faithful people, like Abraham, know that God will provide (Genesis 22:8, 14). When we pray to God for guidance, we expect first that God will require us to abide by principles revealed in scripture, and second that God will either open doors for us to enter or close doors where we should not go. God reveals his caring nature when he says that if we trust and acknowledge him, he will “direct our paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6; see also Matthew 6:25-24). People who have faithfully committed themselves to God know from experience that God has revealed to them his loving character. They are also ready to affirm from their experiences in faith that God does indeed exist.