

1. **INTRODUCTION** – In Part 1 of this series on Ultimate Truth, we looked at how the supernatural and religion has been a vital part of cultural development. In Part 2 of this series, we looked at what constitutes “Truth” and at the four major religions in what they hold to be True and how they differ. In Part 3 of this series, we will look at how God’s Truth has been woven into human culture as first “General Revelation” or God’s Self-Disclosure preserved in Creation which preceded the development of organized religions; followed by “Special Revelation” or God’s Self-Disclosure relationally preserved in Scripture. God’s plan to redeem humanity and all of creation from the Fall plays out progressively within human history. God’s Self Revelation is expressed both in General Revelation and Special Revelation.
2. **GENERAL REVELATION** – Is the category of revelation through which God makes His existence known indirectly with His Creation. It is that which captures humanity’s attention and inclines our mind and heart toward God’s Presence. General Revelation is not in itself what theologians would call “Salvific” meaning capable of redeeming humanity from their Fallen nature, but it is intended to predispose humanity toward the Gospel which alone is Salvific. Including my own study prior to becoming a Christian, there seems to be a progression of truth from General Revelation to Special Revelation revealed in Scripture. This makes sense because God always had a plan to redeem humanity. Where General Revelation lacks the power of redemptive Grace of the Gospel that would be revealed in Special Revelation, General Revelation harkens back to a time on earth where all of humanity was aware of “El Elyon” – meaning “God Most High” or “God of Heaven and earth.” In the first ten chapters of Genesis all of humanity knew God existed and some like Melchizedek served Him as Priest and King. Special Revelation is the category of revelation through which God makes His existence known directly and includes God’s Personal disclosure through Abraham, Moses and the Prophets, and most especially in Jesus. The relevant records of these disclosures are preserved in Scripture where Yahweh made Himself Personally known to humanity and was recorded by Holy Spirit inspired men in the Bible. There are a few stepping stones between General Revelation and Special Revelation worth noting here:
  - a. “Perennial Philosophy” – was a concept I developed as an undergraduate Cultural Anthropology student in 1971. From a young age I was searching for “the Truth” of the Ultimate Reality. I observed creation and saw order, purpose, and symbiotic interdependence both at the micro-level of organic chemistry of plant and animal life on earth and also to the macro-level of the cosmos. My study spoke to me of the necessity of a God behind the scenes but could not reveal who this God was. As a non-Christian I started studying world religions with the intention of discovering common truths that ran cross-culturally. I referred to these common truths as the “Perennial Philosophy” because these foundational values continually emerged from different

cultures throughout different ages. This study ultimately led me to a belief that God is hard-wired in Creation and that Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Truth of redemption for humanity.

- b. **“Redemptive Analogies”** – Don Richardson (born 1935) was a Canadian Christian missionary, teacher, author and international speaker who worked among the Sawi tribal people of Western New Guinea, Indonesia. He argued in his writings that, “hidden among tribal cultures, there are usually some practices or understandings, which he calls ‘redemptive analogies’, which can be used to illustrate the meaning of the Christian Gospel, along the lines of how Paul used the story of the “Unknown God on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-32 in contextualizing the biblical representation of the incarnation of Jesus” to the Greeks. In the case of the Sawi people, Richardson discovered a tribal tradition of the exchange of sons between warring tribes to broker peace... called the Peace Child. This discovery allowed a context to explain how God chose Jesus to make peace between God and humanity. In his book Eternity in their Hearts, Richardson asked the question that if this Christ foreshadowing metaphor existed in the Greek Culture and with the Sawi people, could they not be found in other cultures? “In other words, has the God who prepared the Gospel for the world also prepared the world for the Gospel?” Cultural context remains the most available and relevant means to explain the abstract nature of the Christian Gospel to non-Christians.
- c. **“Order of Melchizedek”** – The Bible makes clear that there is an older order of understanding who God is from General Revelation. The following article is from the Zondervan Software version of the Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible – that explains Melchizedek as meaning *king of righteousness*. This priest-king is mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; and Hebrews 5:6-11; 6:20-7:28. Noted theologian and Bible commentator helps explain in this Zondervan article about who Melchizedek was and why he was important to the development of the Gospel.
  - i. **Genesis 14:18-20** – He is the king of Salem and priest of El Elyon, who brought Abram bread and wine, blessed him and received a tithe from him after Abram had defeated Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. Salem is best identified with Jerusalem on the basis of (1) Psalm 76:2; (2) the early mention of the city in the Tell el-Amarna letters (14th century B.C.) and archaeological Assyrian inscriptions, long before Salem became an Israelite city where it was known as *Uru-salem*, *Uru-salimmu*; (3) the Targumim; and (4) the Genesis Apocryphon.
    - 1. It is noteworthy that the author of Hebrews does not mention any typology in connection with the bread and wine. By offering these refreshments, Melchizedek expressed his friendship and perhaps his religious kinship with Abram.
    - 2. Most critics regard Melchizedek as a Canaanite priest because both elements of the name he serves, El Elyon, occur as names of specific deities, the first in Ugaritic (M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*) and the second in Phoenician; the Aramaean inscription from Syria combines the two into a compound.

3. Scripture clearly equates El Elyon with Yahweh. Melchizedek regarded El Elyon as the creator of matter, the cosmos (Gen 14:19), a concept foreign to the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near E which did not distinguish spirit from matter and therefore worshiped the elements of the cosmos. Moreover, it is clear that Abram regarded Melchizedek as worshiping the same God as he. By unhesitatingly giving Melchizedek a tithe of everything (v. 20) the Yahwist, Abram, not only showed his support of this priest-king and his sanctuary but also publicly demonstrated that he recognized him as a person of higher spiritual rank than he, a patriarchal priest. By contrast Abram declines a gift from the king of Sodom to indicate publicly that he has no theological or spiritual affiliation with him. Also, by calling Yahweh “El Elyon” Abram emphasized to the king of Sodom that his God and Melchizedek’s are one and the same. Finally, the Old Testament elsewhere uses this name as an epithet for Yahweh (Psalms 7:17; 47:2; 57:2; 78:56).
4. **AD notes that Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4 may well be a view of the pre-Davidic kingship and this early Canaanite worship of El Elyon were linked with Yahwism and the founding of the Davidic dynasty during the days of Abraham. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 where God reveals through Moses 600 years after Abraham, that He is using the Jews to destroy the Canaanites because of the evil nature their worship had descended into post-Melchizedek, which included human sacrifice and sexual cult worship along the lines of Sodom and Gomorrah which God detested and ordered to be destroyed.**
- ii. **Psalm 110:4** – Here a Davidic king is acclaimed by divine oath “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” F. F. Bruce stated that the background for this acclamation is provided by David’s conquest of Jerusalem c. 1000 B.C., by virtue of which David and his house became heirs to Melchizedek’s dynasty of priest-kings (NBD, 806). Be that as it may, it is sure that David had in view the One greater than himself when he called Him lord in v. 1 (cf. Mark 12:35 ff.). This acclaim must refer to the Lord Jesus who was Son of God as well as son of David.
- iii. **Hebrews 5:6-11; 6:20-7:28** – In order to demonstrate that Christ superseded the Aaronic priesthood the writer of Hebrews first demonstrated that Melchizedek is a type of Christ by noting that both are a “king of righteousness” as well as a “king of peace,” both are unique (“without descent”), and both abide as priest continually (Heb 7:1-3). He then proceeded to demonstrate that the order of Melchizedek is superior to the order of Aaron: (1) because Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, the father of Levi, for he blessed Abraham and received tithes from him (vv. 4-10); (2) because David predicted that the order of Melchizedek would replace the Levitical priesthood, showing that the latter was imperfect (vv. 11-19); (3) because of the divine oath behind it (vv. 20-22); (4) and because of its permanence (vv. 23-25).
1. Attempts to identify Melchizedek with the patriarch Shem, an angel, a power or virtue or influence of God, the Holy Ghost, the Son of God, the Messiah, etc. are unauthorized additions and irreconcilable with the argument of the Book of

Hebrews. It is an essential part of this argument that Melchizedek is given no pedigree and that he was a man made like unto the Son of God (cf. W. Smith, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, II [1863], 315).

2. Melchizedek is used by Philo and in a pesher found in Qumran Cave 11 in a way different from the typological exegesis of Hebrews.

- iv. **Bibliography** Commentaries on Genesis, Psalms and Hebrews; for ancient works see W. Smith, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, II (1863), 315; for extensive bibliography on Hebrews see M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament from Qumran Cave 11," NTS, XII (1966), 318, n. 3; for bibliography on 11Q Melchizedek see H. H. Rowley, "Melchizedek and Zadok," *Festschrift A. Bertholet*, ed. W. Baumgartner *et alii* (1950), 161ff.; A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (1955), 31-46, 120-122; O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (1959), 38ff.; Merrill P. Miller, "The Function of Isa 61:1-2 in 11Q Melchizedek, JBL, LXXXVIII (1969), 467.

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- d. **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Second Edition** – Defines General Revelation as "The divine disclosure to all persons at all times and in all places by which humans come to know that God is and what He is like. While not imparting truths necessary for salvation – such as the Trinity, the incarnation, or the atonement – general revelation conveys the conviction that God exists and that He is transcendent, immanent, self-sufficient, eternal, powerful, good, and a hater of evil." Psalm 19 goes on to proclaim that God reveals Himself in two ways: through nature – vs 1-6, and through Scripture – vs 7-13. In Romans 1, Paul argues that through the universal revelation of nature God is clearly seen and understood – vs 20, and clearly known – vs 19 and 21. Paul concludes that general revelation establishes guilt without providing a salvific benefit available only through Jesus' atonement and special revelation.

3. **SPECIAL REVELATION** – The **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Second Edition** goes on to explain that humanity could only discover the existence and infer some aspects of Who God is from General Revelation. Thus, Special Revelation is God's Self-disclosure through His Personal interaction with Godly men and women to provide an authoritative understanding of divine Truth and the manifestation of God's Will through the Bible. Revelation means the "disclosure of what was previously unknown." The essentials of the Biblical view of this Truth is that "the Logos [Jesus] is the Divine Agent in all Revelation," and that Special Revelation as revealed in the Bible is the only authoritative standard of Truth which informs and validates "revelation in nature, history, reason, and conscience" providing "redemptive revelation conveyed by wondrous acts and words." This "Special Revelation in Sacred History [redemptive history] and is crowned by the incarnation of the Living Word [Jesus] and His inscripturation of His spoken Words."

- a. "The Gospel of redemption is therefore not merely a series of abstract theses unrelated to specific historical events context, it is dramatic news that God has acted in redemptive history climaxed by the incarnate Person and salvific work of Christ (Hebrews 1:2) for the salvation of lost humankind." This "series of Sacred acts therefore includes the divine provision of an

authoritative canon of writings – the Sacred Scriptures – providing a trustworthy source of knowledge of God and His [Redemptive] plan.”

- b. General Revelation points us in the general direction of God and captures our attention, while Special Revelation draws us into a knowable and reliable Truth. General Revelation and Special Revelation should be understood as a fundamental unity. “The Scripture adduces God’s unitary Revelation – General and Special – to display humanity’s true predicament as a finite creature with an eternal destiny, made for fellowship with God, but now separated from God by Sin.”
  - c. Special Revelation is Redemptive Revelation. “God promises salvation as a divine gift to humanity which cannot save itself as explained in the Old Testament and that God has now fulfilled that promise of redemption in the gift of Jesus in whom all people are called to believe as explained in the New Testament.
  - d. “The Gospel News is that the Incarnate Logos [Jesus] has borne the sins of the doomed, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification. This is the fixed center of Special Redemptive Revelation.” God’s “redemptive history is the carrier of this absolute revelation... a historical sequence of Special Revelation... events climaxed by the incarnation [Advent], atonement [substitutionary Death on the Cross], and resurrection of Christ [life from death] as the unique center of Redemptive Revelation.”
  - e. “Contemporary Theology is marked by its reaffirmation of the priority of revelation to reason. Revelation is the source of Truth, and reason as illuminated by the Spirit is the instrument for comprehending it.”
4. THE BIBLE – The Bible has many writers but only One Author, meaning the Logos [Jesus], through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God chose the Jews out of all the peoples of the world to communicate His Truth to all of humanity. The Jews developed an amazing process whereby the original texts were created, copied, and preserved for posterity. In the nuanced world of Biblical scholarship, scholars have combed through the earliest copies of the texts and have found only minor variations.
- a. The Authority of the Bible – Authority is defined in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Second Edition as:
    - i. The right and power to command, enforce laws, exact obedience, determine outcomes or judge others.
    - ii. The authority to instruct and command obedience in individuals to perform by virtue of their position or office.
    - iii. Authority may be bestowed upon another or be inherent within itself; while Jesus had both aspects of authority... both bestowed and inherent.
    - iv. Because the Bible points beyond itself to God, it has conferred authority. The Bible has real authority in itself as the authentic embodiment of God’s Self-disclosure.
    - v. The locus [source] of all authority is God Himself.
    - vi. Revelation is the key to God’s authority, and both Revelation and authority may be regarded as two sides of the same reality... in Revelation, God declares His authority to humanity.

- b. The Canon of the Bible – referring to the group of books acknowledged by the early church as the rule of faith and practice. The Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, while the Christian canon consists of sixty-six books for Protestants, while the Catholics add seven more books from the Apocrypha [Deutero-canonical].**
  - i. All canonical Scripture is considered authoritative, but not all are considered equally beneficial or helpful.**
  - ii. Inspired literature formed the basis of and standard for faith and practice, though other writings by learned and devote believers were considered revered but not authoritative.**
  - iii. The oldest book of the canon is Job, believed to have been written several hundred years before Moses wrote the Pentateuch during the Exodus [1550-1406 BC]. The final prophecies by Malachi – 465 BC and Joel – 450 BC.**
  - iv. The first book of the Christian canon was written by James in 45-48 AD and the last books written by the Apostle John 92-96 AD.**
  - v. The oldest list of the canons comes from about 150-170 AD.**
  - vi. Books were carefully protected and copied within the Jewish Scribal system that preserved the integrity of the original documents. Scholars such as the Apostle Paul had their own copies of the texts. These copies of private libraries would be bequeathed to other scholars for protection and use in teaching others. Such copies were of great value.**
- c. The Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Bible:**
  - i. Biblical Inerrancy is defined as – “The Bible in its original written form is inerrant, free of all errors and a perfect transposed message from God by the Inspired writers.”**
  - ii. Biblical Infallibility is defined as – “The Bible in its present form will never fail to accomplish God’s purposes both in the properly trained reader and the properly trained teacher.”**
  - iii. The original source copies of the ancient texts no longer exist; however, we have many early second generation and third generation documents. We are also continually finding additional copies such as the Dead Sea Scrolls that prove the sources we have are accurate and reliable.**
  - iv. The Bible has been sourced and studied by thousands of scholars for millennia, while there are few extremely minor errors typical in copying, they essentially amount to “punctuation and spelling choices” in the thousands of ancient documents studied, with none of these errors affecting the meaning or theology presented in the text.**
  - v. The Old Testament prophets, as well as Jesus and the early disciples all accepted the authority of the texts that existed during their life and times, and also throughout the early church. Modern scholarship has consistently reaffirmed the reliability of the texts, therefore we believe that the correct validation of the text is by the text itself. In other words, the Word of God is consistent and true and the only authoritative standard for learning and reproof. As Paul taught in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”**



**5. The Work of Discipleship:**

- a. I have been teaching Bible studies for many years, and a new trend has emerged... people want the results of serious discipleship, but they don't want to do the work. **SPOILER ALERT** – there is no short cut to doing anything that's worthwhile... including discipleship, you have to do the work. If you want to be good at something, you have to be disciplined and put the time and energy into it necessary to master it. There is a good reason that the root word of disciple is discipline. Jesus said, "A student is not above their master, it is enough that they become like their master" – Matthew 10:24-25a.
- b. There is Good News – the same Spirit that inspired the Holy Scriptures, resides within every born-again believer. We as students have a part to play in preparing and studying, the Spirit has a part to play in guiding the process of Spiritual Formation in each believer.
  - i. There is a common misunderstanding about our usefulness to God. God does not judge us by the work we accomplish, remarkably He seeks out those who will submit to Him.
  - ii. We don't need to be superstars... we just need to be open to whatever He is doing and willing to follow Him.
  - iii. Whatever we submit to Him, He will multiply. Whatever we give to Him, He will bless and use. Matthew 14:14-21 records the story of 5 loaves of bread and two fish being submitted to Jesus, and with these He fed thousands of people.
- c. Authentic Discipleship has been established to provide the necessary resources for serious discipleship. A master's degree takes years of study and effort, and tens of thousands of dollars to accomplish. The resources are available online at [www.authenticdiscipleship.org](http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org) and they are free. Here's how to get started:
  - i. Start at the Biblical Literacy tab – Hermeneutics teaches the skill set to comprehend how the Scriptures should be read and understood. Scripture is very different than picking up a current book or magazine, and Hermeneutics will teach you how to study the text.
  - ii. Next on the Biblical Literacy tab – Bible Survey goes through the Bible book by book, so you can learn the historical cultural context into which the inspired writer was addressing. Read the text along side the survey and you'll see how the Scripture takes shape and communicates.
  - iii. Prayerfully ask God to open your mind and your heart so you can catch up with what He is up to in your life and in the world around you. The cool part... He wants to teach you and He wants you to understand. He is asking for your cooperation.
  - iv. The Table of Contents shows all of the articles that are available on the AD website... make a copy of it and keep track of your progress through it. You probably will need a journal to make notes in as you progress through the materials.
  - v. God is WAY more radical than we are commonly taught in church services... it is my prayer you'll discover a God who loves you and is absolutely passionate about you. **DO THE WORK!**

**We pray you'll experience God in such a way that it transforms your life!**