



## Subjective Revelation

### **The Father's Careful Direction of the Places His Son Lived upon Earth**

God the Father guided the people of Israel both by his works of providence and by providing objective revelation to each place where his only-begotten Son was to live on this earth. For example, seven hundred years before his incarnation, Micah the prophet wrote under divine inspiration that the Messiah King would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). God also providentially used the decree of a heathen emperor (Caesar Augustus) to take Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem when it was time for Jesus' birth (Luke 2:1-7). When foreigners inquired where the King of the Jews was to be born, the chief priests and scribes remembered the Scripture written by the prophet Micah (Matt 2:1-6).

Herod then determined *'to seek for the child, to destroy him'*. This was revealed objectively to Joseph in a dream, along with instructions to take Jesus and his mother to Egypt until the death of the king (Matt 2:13-15). Thus yet another prophecy from 700 years earlier was fulfilled, one given by the prophet Hosea (Hos 11:1). When Herod died God spoke to Joseph in another dream to announce that death and to direct him to take Jesus and Mary back to Israel (Matt 2:19-21). However, there was still danger to the child Jesus, because a son of Herod now ruled Judea (the region of Bethlehem and Jerusalem). Therefore another dream directed Joseph to settle his family in Galilee (Matt 2:22).

### **God's Special Mercy to Galilee**

It was not that God was reacting to current human events. Yet another 700-year-old prophecy, this one by Isaiah, had foretold that Messiah Jesus would conduct most of his public ministry in *'Galilee of the nations'* (Isa 9:1-7). This objective revelation had been given at a time when God was beginning to send brutal world empires to invade and then to oppress the land of Israel for the following 700 years. In succession God sent the armies of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome to crush and to control the Jewish people.

These armies always came against Israel from the North which meant that Galilee would bear the full shock and violence from maximum forces at the height of motivation. Galilee endured the deepest darkness under many warriors' boots and rods of oppression, and it was Galilee's to see garments rolled in blood. Invaders would garrison their conquering troops in Galilee as a rear guard. Thus their land had dwelt for centuries under the gloom of aggression and settled domination.

In compassion for those who had suffered most acutely, Jehovah decreed that Jesus the Messiah would live, teach and bring healing miracles especially to the region of Galilee. Most of Jesus' objective revelation was given there, which meant that *'a great light shone'* in that beautiful place. Jesus *'is the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of his nature'* (Heb 1:3). That glory and image shone longest and most brilliantly in Galilee. Jesus was the final and greatest prophet; the culmination of all that had happened throughout history was found in him. Most of his teachings were uttered in Galilee, and most often his saving power was on miraculous display in that region. Galileans were the most privileged recipients of objective revelation.

### **Galilee's Rejection of God's Grace**

Nevertheless, the hour came (Matt 11:20-24 ) when Jesus found it necessary to pronounce *'woes'* or coming ordeals of desolation, upon *'the cities where most of his mighty works had been done,*

*because they did not repent!* Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were in greater danger than had been Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom! Theirs would be unbearable judgments, since they would not repent under the full glory of Messiah's objective revelation. Having the highest privileges of objective revelation underscored the deepest guilt of stubborn unbelief.

In that hour when the Saviour, who sought to bring blessings to the Galileans, found it necessary to pronounce their doom, Jesus consoled himself in prayer: At that time Jesus declared, *'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight'* (Matt 11:25-27).

Just as the Father's will had been fulfilled by placing Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, his young childhood in Egypt, and his public ministry in Galilee, so also God was bringing to pass his sovereign purposes in *'hiding'* from many the spiritual realities and heavenly glories of the Person and works of Christ. In mercy the Father was also actively *revealing* to some among them the very things hidden from many.

### **Complex Doctrine of Revelation by the Apostles**

Our Lord Jesus could thank the Father for both the *'hiding'* and the *'revealing'* work in men's hearts. Jesus understood that many human hearts are corroded with pride, and the result is that they are wise in their own eyes. They rely on their own understanding, whereas true wisdom teaches, *'Trust in the LORD with **all** your heart, and **do not** lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path'* (Prov 3:5-6). *'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned'* (1 Cor 2:14).

However, to those who are as little children, realizing their need for instruction and trusting the Lord for truth, to them God reveals truth in the inward man. God chose what is foolish in the world ... what is weak in the world ... what is low and despised in the world. To them God reveals the things men need to know about Christ and his teachings in order to be saved.

What Matthew is telling us in his Gospel (chapter 11:10-30) is that there are two kinds of revelation from God. There is truth revealed objectively, as was that shining most brightly in Galilee. But only those who are given subjective revelation will receive the objective truth. The objective revelation is often referred to as light; the subjective as sight.

The New Testament takes up this theme in many places. Again Matthew emphasizes the same teaching in chapter 16:13-20 of his Gospel. Near the end of Jesus' public ministry he asked his disciples who men said that he was. There follows a rehearsing of the more flattering opinions of men: That he was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. Then Jesus asked what their conclusions about his identity were. Peter ventured with, *'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'* Jesus immediately commented, *'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in heaven.'* The truth of Jesus' identity was objectively revealed in the sight of all who met him, both in his glory and his words. Yet it required a subjective revelation from the Father to disclose this truth to Peter's heart.

John, in his gospel, says equally amazing things about objective revelation and subjective revelation. At the very outset of chapter 1, John described Jesus' entrance into the world as a light shining in darkness (John 1:5). But just one verse later we are told that a man named John was sent from God to bear witness to the light! When light shines in darkness the only one who needs a witness of it is a *blind man!* To behold the glory of the light objectively displayed, the blind man must receive sight subjectively.

This is the explanation for many who live in the midst of Christian families, churches and schools but who cannot comprehend the gospel. They are always favoured with receiving large quantities of the truth by which men are saved. Objective revelation is their constant companion. But until God reveals his Son within them they will not believe and cannot repent.

## **Pauline Emphasis on This Apostolic Teaching**

Paul spoke of his own conversion in the same way. In Galatians 1:15-16 he wrote about *'when it pleased God ... to reveal his Son **in** me'*. For long years God's Son was revealed to Paul objectively. He diligently studied the prophets who clearly declared to him the coming Messiah. Paul encountered Christians telling to him the great biblical truths of divine revelation about Jesus, the Son of God. He was present when Stephen gave a Spirit-filled declaration of Jesus from the Old Testament to him and others. All that objective revelation before him was being processed by his mind. However, only when it pleased God to reveal his Son in Paul did he trust Jesus and become his servant.

How eloquently Paul developed this doctrine of objective revelation and subjective revelation in 2 Corinthians 4:3-7! If our gospel is hidden from someone as if a veil hung over his eyes, even though he is constantly being presented with the truth, that person is perishing! The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ has been presented to his eyes and ears. But Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing *'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ'*.

God reveals his glory in Christ and the gospel objectively, that is, *to sinners*. Satan, however, is active in blinding the minds of sinners lest they understand and comprehend the glory. In such a circumstance God is not 'checkmated' or overcome by Satan. Our God is the Creator who commanded light to shine out of darkness (as recorded in Genesis 1:2-3).

In the case of each sinner who is ever converted God shines *'**in** our heart to give the light of the **knowledge** of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'* The divine work of 'new creation' (subjective revelation) within a person's heart precedes and causes his mind to have the knowledge of objective revelation. Through God's prior internal working a sinner apprehends *'the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'*.

We who live in the West (Europe and the Americas) are confronted by an increasingly hardened pride of intellect. Our universities are succeeding in nurturing this pride which serves the exalting of educators while undermining all faith in God. Confronted with such competition for the minds of the people of our age, there comes a temptation to seek to win the young and educated with greater skills of mind than are found in the universities. We then think we must win by intellectual arguments, perhaps even with tactics such as hiding the themes of the Bible which have become so unpopular on our university campuses and to our age. But it is a mistaken confidence to lean on human philosophy and argumentation to win sinners to a knowledge of the glory of Christ.

## **Application of This Doctrine to Our Western World**

We need something far more profound than wisdom from man to dispute with the self-declared wise men of this age. God must arise and re-create the heart of a sinner to persuade him of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Subjective revelation from God himself must attend the faithful declaration of divinely given objective revelation in order for a sinner to be enlightened. This realization should humble any preacher or any witness of the glory in Christ. It will compel us to employ spiritual weapons such as reliance on the Word of God and on prayer. To do so we will be forced to resist reshaping ourselves or our messages so as to fit into the spirit of our age. Academic, entertainment, political, and organizational models must not become formative of the messengers or their pulpits in preaching the gospel.

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