

## Chapter 4

# Is Nature the 67th Book of the Bible?

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*Dr. John Clement Whitcomb Jr. first crossed my path in January 1971 when I, as a freshly saved naval officer, attended lectures jointly given with Dr. Henry Morris on creationism at Scott Memorial Baptist Church in San Diego, California. By August 1971, having resigned my commission in the United States Navy, I sat in Dr. Whitcomb's class on Job at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana. Subsequently, he participated as a member of my Th.M. thesis committee and my Th.D. dissertation committee, all at Grace. This stalwart of the faith not only taught me throughout my student days, but he also then became a senior colleague in my junior teaching days (Greek and New Testament) at Grace where he always sought to be a personal encouragement. Some of my most treasured memories come from the times when he was a faculty prayer partner. Over the ensuing years, I have been immeasurably enriched by knowing "Jack" Whitcomb as a theological mentor and friend.*

*Throughout his Christian life, Dr. Whitcomb has taken 2 Timothy 4:7–8 and Jude 3 seriously in his teaching and writing ministries. While indefatigably contending for the once-for-all-delivered faith, passionately fighting the good fight, and relentlessly holding high the Holy Scriptures, he has been running the race non-stop as a brilliant and articulate spokesman for the cause of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, especially in the matters of creation,<sup>1</sup> the Genesis Flood,<sup>2</sup> and the historicity of the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>*

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*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture in this chapter is from the NAS95 version of the Bible.*

1. John C. Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986).
2. Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb Jr., *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967); John C. Whitcomb, *The World that Perished* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988).
3. John C. Whitcomb Jr., *Darius the Mede* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed,

*As a tribute to this special man who has contributed so much to my life over the past four decades, I gladly take pen in hand to write affirmingly on a theme for which he has expended much of his energies — the validation and defense of a young earth. With this chapter, I salute you, Dr. Whitcomb, because you have selflessly devoted your ministry to the glory of God as recited in His absolutely inerrant and wholly sufficient Word — the Bible — which provides the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).*

### The Question

Is nature the 67th book of the Bible? Providing the answer to this provocative query demands much more time and effort than might be realized at first hearing. It involves matters of: (1) canonicity; (2) the correct interpretation of Psalm 19, Acts 14, Acts 17, Romans 1, and Romans 10; (3) the unique authority of Scripture; (4) the character similarities and differences between general and special revelation; (5) man's fallen mind and the empirical approach to science; (6) proper hermeneutical principles of biblical interpretation; and (7) a biblical worldview.

This significant question should not be taken lightly nor answered quickly. Yet, this appears to be the manner in which Dr. Hugh Ross<sup>4</sup> has treated this matter. In a discussion whose length falls short of three full pages, this popular author, uncritically and without reservation, writes what appears to be intended as a self-evident axiom, "The facts of nature may be likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible."<sup>5</sup> What is the reader to make of Ross's assertion? Is he right? Or, is he wrong?

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1963); John C. Whitcomb, *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1979); John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985); John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980).

4. Hugh Ross earned a Ph.D. in astronomy at the University of Toronto (1973) and is president of Reasons to Believe ([www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)), an organization devoted to promoting a progressive view of origins (over exceedingly long spans of time) in support of an old-earth theory based primarily on allegedly unassailable scientific research. His writings include: *The Fingerprint of God: Recent Scientific Discoveries Reveal the Unmistakable Identity of the Creator* (Orange, CA: Promise Press, 1991); *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994); *Beyond the Cosmos: What Recent Discoveries in Astronomy and Physics Reveal about the Nature of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999); *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001); *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001); *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004).
5. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56. His volume, especially the section in which the quoted sentence appears (p. 53–72), has received mixed reviews. Positive reviews include, for

### Ross's Affirmation — Reliable or Suspect?

In six brief paragraphs and a small chart,<sup>6</sup> Ross swiftly breezes through this profound question without any apparent caveats or hesitations regarding his “Absolutely!” answer. He cites no authority other than himself in support of his rather dogmatic answer. While on the surface his own affirmation might appear sufficient to certify the point, to someone reasonably familiar with Scripture and/or to one trained in critical theological thinking, Ross's answer proves unsatisfactory for at least five major reasons.

First, Ross's chart<sup>7</sup> comprised of 23 biblical texts which supposedly authenticate his answer, upon further reflection, disappointingly turns out to be a result of proof-texting (i.e., citing a scriptural text in support of one's conclusion when upon closer inspection the text is either not directly related or actually contradicts the point being made). The following observations warrant this conclusion.

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Romans 2:14–15 deal with general revelation in the human conscience, but not general revelation in nature, as Ross asserts.
2. Romans 10:16–17 and Colossians 1:23 refer to the preaching of the gospel by humans, not the general revelation of nature, as Ross says.
3. Psalms 50:6 (heavens refers to angels); 85:11 (attributes of King Jesus); 97:6 (heavens refers to angels); 98:2–3 (God's dealings with Israel) have alternative interpretations that are as likely or more likely than that of general revelation in nature, as Ross suggests.
4. Proverbs 8:22–31 is a speech delivered by “lady wisdom” personified, not about general revelation in nature, as indicated by Ross.
5. Job 10:8–14; 12:7; 34:14–15; 35:10–12; 37:5–7; 38–41; Psalms 8; 104; 139; and Habakkuk 3:3 deal with what one can learn about nature from the special revelation of Scripture, not what one can learn from general revelation in nature alone, as Ross teaches.

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example, Paul Copan, *JETS* 39 (1996): p. 307–08; Guillermo Gonzalez, *PSCF* 46 (1994): p. 270. Others have been somewhat neutral, such as John A. Witmer, *BibSac* 153 (1996): p. 493. Many who have been critical, especially of Ross's handling of Scripture, are represented by Mark van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time: A Report on the Progressive Creationist Hugh Ross*, 2nd ed. (Gilbert, AZ: Eden, 1996); John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (Nashville, TN: W Group, 2001), p. 60–62; Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of “Progressive Creationism” (Billions of Years), as Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004). Additional articles can be located at the websites of Answers in Genesis ([www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)) and Institute for Creation Research ([www.icr.org](http://www.icr.org)).

6. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 55–58.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

6. Only Psalm 19:1–6; Acts 14:17; 17:23–31; and Romans 1:18–25; 10:18 do, in fact, refer to general revelation in nature, which is the singular subject Ross addresses.

So, in Ross's answer to the question, "Is nature the 67th book of the Bible?" only five (22 percent) of the 23 passages he cites actually appear to support his basic point and then not to the depth or breadth that Ross intimates. Seventy-eight percent of the Scripture citations were misunderstood by him and thus mistakenly utilized. One's confidence in Ross's ability to objectively and skillfully handle the Bible quickly erodes in this torrent of error.

Second, Ross claims that Romans 10:16–17<sup>8</sup> and Colossians 1:23<sup>9</sup> refer to preaching the gospel to all the world through the general revelation of nature. However, even a cursory reading of Romans 10:16–17 makes it plainly evident that Paul is talking about the gospel in Scripture (i.e., "the word of Christ," being proclaimed by human preachers). While the interpretation of Colossians 1:23 is not so immediately obvious, the consensus of conservative, evangelical commentators confirms that Paul is referring to the human preaching of the gospel, either using hyperbole in referring to the then known world or proleptically in anticipation of the gospel being preached throughout the world.<sup>10</sup>

Third, Ross is mistaken in his understanding and application of general revelation. As demonstrated above in points one and two, this astronomer-by-training has badly interpreted Scripture in arriving at his proposed broad, philosophical approach to general revelation. He goes so far as to imply that all which is discoverable in the realm of "science" is general revelation and, as such, is equal in value and quality to the special revelation of Scripture. Ross asserts, without any reasonable or factual proof, that "the Bible teaches a dual, reliably consistent revelation."<sup>11</sup> By this, he intends to imply that general revelation is not only equal in its quality of revelation, but also its authority. Thus, general revelation, considered by him as any discoverable fact of science, would actually have the apparent authority to interpret Scripture, not the reverse.

The subject of general revelation will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. However, a few preliminary observations sufficiently prove Ross's view deficient.

1. Psalm 19 does compare general revelation (19:1–6) with scriptural revelation (19:7–11). But in fact, it actually contrasts them; thus, they are not

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 56–57.

10. This writer surveyed over 25 evangelical commentaries and not even one suggested that this text might refer to the preaching of the gospel through general revelation in nature. See Van Bebber's expanded discussion in *Creation and Time: A Report*, p. 37–39. Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1997), p. 230–31, in notes 49 and 50, comments on Ross's tortured efforts in handling Scripture elsewhere.

11. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56.

compared as absolute equals, like Ross teaches, but rather Psalm 19 exalts Scripture as the greater and most valued of God's revelation.

2. Ross places science on the same level as Scripture. He fails to distinguish between science as the alleged facts of nature explained by man and Scripture as the certain facts of God given and explained by God. Since science does not carry the inerrant quality of Scripture, one can conclude that Ross greatly overestimates nature/science and woefully undervalues Scripture.
3. He expands the concept of general revelation to include all discoverable/knowable information outside of Scripture. However, a careful analysis of the very few biblical passages that speak to this subject (i.e., Psalm 19:1–6; Acts 14:17; 17:23–31; Romans 1:18–25 and 10:18) severely limit the scope and purpose of this legitimate source of divine revelation.

Let the writer simply ask two questions about general revelation in nature to demonstrate that God intended it to serve more narrow purposes in contrast to the broad informative and authoritative scope of Scripture. First, if only general revelation was available, would we know about God like a person knows God from the Bible?<sup>12</sup> Second, could a person be redeemed based on general revelation alone?<sup>13</sup> The answer to both questions is a resounding “no!” Since this is so, why would anyone exalt the lesser to the same, if not greater, status as the actual greater?

Morris and Whitcomb anticipated Ross' claim<sup>14</sup> three decades earlier when observing:

It has often been maintained that God has given us two revelations, one in nature and one in the Bible and that they cannot contradict each other. This is certainly correct; but when one subconsciously identifies with natural revelation his own interpretations of nature and then denounces theologians who are unwilling to mold biblical revelation into conformity with his interpretation of nature, he is guilty of serious error. After all, special revelation supersedes natural revelation, for it is only by means of special revelation that we can interpret aright the world about us.<sup>15</sup>

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12. From nature, we would not know that God is portrayed as a person, as a male, as a Trinity, as the only true God, and as possessing incommunicable attributes (e.g., his glory and omniscience) and communicable attributes (e.g., his love and grace) to name just a few essential features of God as revealed in Scripture, but not by general revelation in nature. Our knowledge of God would be impoverished by comparison, if limited to what general revelation in nature provides.

13. A brief glance at Romans 10:9–13 alone settles the issue.

14. See Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56, 58 where he uses the word “dual” to express the equality of general and special revelation.

15. Morris and Whitcomb, *Genesis Flood*, p. 458, n. 1.

Fourth, Hugh Ross asserts that general revelation in nature has the “inspired” quality of Scripture<sup>16</sup> and he applies 2 Timothy 3:16 to it. While all of God’s revelation is true and unassailable because the source is God himself,<sup>17</sup> only Scripture is “inspired” in the biblical sense that the Holy Spirit guided men to inerrantly record in written form this God-breathed Word (2 Pet. 1:21). Further, Scripture affirms about itself alone that, because it is “inspired,” it is therefore “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Verse 17 continues as a “purpose” explanation of verse 16. Certainly, not even Ross believes that general revelation in nature was given “that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).

Fifth, adding any additional revelation to Scripture makes the so-called “facts of nature” canonical.<sup>18</sup> So, when Ross considers nature the 67th book of the Bible, he is in effect calling the Scriptures incomplete and thus reopening the canon for additional revelation.

Do we know for certain that God will or will not amend our current Bible with a 67th book? Or in other words, “Is the canon forever closed?” Several significant observations, when taken together, have convinced the Church over the centuries that the canon of Scripture is actually closed, never to be reopened.

1. The Book of Revelation is unique to the Scripture in that it describes with unparalleled detail the end-time events which precede eternity future. As Genesis began Scripture by bridging the gap from eternity past into a time/space existence with the only detailed creation account (Gen. 1–2), so Revelation transitions out of time/space back into eternity future (Rev. 20–22). Genesis and Revelation, by virtue of their contents, are the perfectly matched bookends of Scripture (i.e., the “alpha and omega” of the canon, the beginning and the end).
2. Just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi completed the Old Testament canon, so there was a parallel silence (even to this very day) after John delivered Revelation. This leads to the conclusion that the New Testament canon was then closed also.
3. Since there have not been nor now are any authorized prophets or apostles in the Old Testament or New Testament sense, then there are no potential providers of future inspired, canonical revelation.

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16. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56.

17. Richard L. Mayhue, “The Authority of Scripture,” *TMSJ* 15 (Fall 2004): p. 227–236.

18. F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, rev.ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969), p. 129–294; Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1987).

4. Of the four exhortations not to tamper with Scripture (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6), only the one in Revelation 22:18–19 contains warnings of severe divine judgment for disobedience. Further, Revelation is the only book of the New Testament to end with this kind of admonition. Therefore, these facts strongly suggest that Revelation was the last book of the canon and now that the book is complete, to either add or delete would bring God's severe displeasure.
5. Finally, the early church (i.e., those closest in time to the Apostles) believed that Revelation concluded God's inspired writings, the Scriptures. Therefore, the 21st century Church should also believe that the canon is and will remain closed because, according to Scripture, there will be no future 67th book of the Bible, not even nature itself.

In concluding this section, the reader should consider that if Ross handles science as imprecisely as he does theology, then his science is also highly suspect. For example, he writes, "Some readers might fear that I am implying God's revelation through nature is somehow on an equal footing with His revelation through the words of the Bible."<sup>19</sup> Some might defend him at this point by responding that the reason one does not need to fear is because Ross is not equating the two and has been misunderstood. However, in the context that follows, this scientist is actually saying in effect, "Don't fear that I am putting both on an equal footing because human reasoning leads one to fearlessly do just that." He is actually attempting to reassure those whom he would persuade to his thinking that to equate general revelation in nature with special revelation is perfectly permissible and harmless, and even the correct thing to do. His conclusions are based on faulty human reason without the proper assistance and authority of divine revelation and, thus, in error and in opposition to what the Bible actually teaches, as will be demonstrated in the discussion that follows.

### **Exploring the Issue**

Demonstrating that Hugh Ross's positive answer to the question is wrong does not automatically make one correct when responding, "No, nature is not the 67th book of the Bible!" One must also establish that the "no!" reply proceeds factually, fairly, and logically from a serious investigation of at least six important factors. These issues need to be carefully considered when formulating and stating a confident reply. The following discussion will follow these lines of thought: 1) biblical texts, 2) the authority of Scripture, 3) the character of revelation, 4) man's fallen mind and empiricism, 5) proper hermeneutics, and 6) a biblical worldview.

### **Biblical Texts**

Many theologians' understanding of general revelation is that there are just seven explicit biblical passages which deal with this subject (Ps. 19:1–6;

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19. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 57.

Eccles. 3:11; Acts 14:17; 17:23–31; Rom. 1:18–25; 2:14–15; 10:18).<sup>20</sup> These are texts that, with few exceptions, have no hotly disputed textual variants or really attractive alternative interpretations. Thus, these selections provide desirably unarguable evidence for developing an exegetical basis on which to build a theology of general revelation.

These few passages develop all that the special revelation of Scripture teaches about general revelation.<sup>21</sup> Thus, whatever comprises our theology of general revelation as taught in Scripture must come from these sources. This demands that God's special revelation define God's natural revelation without contaminating the subject with man's philosophical reasoning. A brief discussion of each biblical passage follows.

### Psalm 19:1–6<sup>22</sup>

This grand psalm provides six major insights into general revelation. First, as to its *source*, the heavens comprise a significant element of general revelation (19:1). Second, in regard to its *message*, God's glory as the Creator of the heavens is unmistakable (19:1). Third, the never-ceasing cycle of day and night testify to its *permanency* so long as the created order exists (19:2). Fourth, as to *character*, it is a silent witness comprised of phenomenological evidence (19:3). Fifth, its *extent* has no geographical limitations since the evidence can be observed everywhere (19:4a, b). Sixth, as to its *order* or *regulation*, the predictability of sunrise and sunset points to the precise order of the creation and thus the orderliness of the Creator (19:4c–6).

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20. None of these seven biblical texts teach that history is one of the sources of general revelation. In contrast, these theology texts do include history as part of general revelation: Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), p. 154–55; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2002), p. 70–71; and Renald Showers, "General Revelation," part 1, *Israel My Glory* (August/September 1995): p. 22. To say that history is not part of general revelation is not to deny that Scripture speaks of God's providential hand in human history (cf. Job 12:23; Dan 2:21, 4:17). However, what we know for certain about God's activities in history comes from the special revelation of Scripture, not from any human account of history itself treated as a distinct source of general revelation.
  21. Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003) develops this thesis in chapter 5, "General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics," p. 113–40. "Any efforts to widen the scope of general revelation to include information or theories about aspects of creation, man, or anything else besides God do not have support from the Bible, which limits the scope of general revelation to information about God" (p. 117).
  22. See James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999), p. 113–115, who compares the teaching of Psalm 19 with those who want to extend the psalm's meaning into the realm of scientific inquiry. John Street, "Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?" in John MacArthur, gen. ed., *Think Biblically!* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), p. 214–219 looks at Psalm 19 in light of recent writings concerning psychology.



Then in verses 7–11 the expansive nature of special revelation in Scripture is contrasted with the severe limitations (in scope of and intent of the message) of general revelation in the heavens. First, the *source* is the Word of God (19:7–8). Second, the *message* is of salvation (19:9–14). Third, in regard to *permanency*, it will outlast the created order (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31). Fourth, the *nature* of Scripture is propositional (i.e., words, sentences, paragraphs, etc.) (Ps. 19:7–8; 2 Tim. 3:16). Fifth, the *extent* of special revelation reaches to both earth and heaven (Ps. 19:7–8; 119:89). Sixth, regarding the Bible's *regulation*, it is conducted flawlessly by God the Spirit (Ps. 19:7–14; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:20–21).

It is no exaggeration to say that Psalm 19 is the classic text when establishing the superiority of special revelation in Scripture over general revelation in nature. So it is no surprise then, that in the progress of God's special revelation in Scripture explaining general revelation, that this text appears first. Psalm 19 concludes that throughout all time, all languages, and all cultures the message of general revelation has been delivered non-verbally in such a manner that every human could comprehend that the God of power and order exists and thus all glory should be rendered unto Him.

#### Ecclesiastes 3:11

Solomon pens a short, pregnant truth that eternity is set in the heart of every person. It undoubtedly resulted from man being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) which subsequently was severely distorted in the fall (Gen. 3:1–21), thus needing to be restored by God's gracious salvation (Rom. 3:21–26). This hints at what Paul later makes clearer regarding general revelation through man's conscience (cf. Rom. 2:14–15). There is a limited intuitive sense of God's existence in every person that points to the fact that humans are immortal, not temporal. It must be further noted that this text does not directly answer the question at hand since it does not deal with nature but rather human conscience.

#### Acts 14:17<sup>23</sup>

Here, Paul is rejecting man's worship of him which should have been rightly rendered to God alone, who created the heavens and earth (14:15). He goes on to make a statement about God's general revelation in reference to "rains from heaven" (cf. Job 5:10; Matt. 5:45) and "fruitful seasons" (cf. Gen. 1:14, 29). These two features served as an ongoing witness, in effect a continuous revelation of God's goodness (in spite of their evil) by satisfying their hearts with food and gladness (14:17).

Several characteristics of general revelation can be observed in this text. First, it is available throughout history, from beginning to end. Second, it is provided for all humans. Third, it can be observed by the most scientifically unsophisticated. Fourth, it reveals something about God's nature.

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23. See Stephen R. Spencer, "Is Natural Theology Biblical?" *GTJ* 9 (1988): p. 59–72.

### Acts 17:23–31<sup>24</sup>

Paul is in Athens, one of the great centers of intellectualism in that day. In spite of their great learning, the Apostle indicts the Athenians as the spiritually ignorant (17:23, 30). He then confronts them with the truth of God as Creator (17:24), sustainer (17:25), sovereign (17:26), Savior (17:27), and source of life (17:28–29).

The major and explicit emphasis of this passage is God's special revelation through Paul's preaching (cf. 17:23, "I proclaim to you" and 17:30, God is now "declaring to men") and Christ's resurrection (17:31). The minor and implicit emphasis is upon the most general of general revelation, which points to God as the source of the people's origin to which Paul alludes in his preaching. Of the seven hallmark texts on general revelation, this one makes the least contribution, since its main point concerns that which can be known through special revelation, i.e., the miraculous resurrection of Christ and the apostolic witness of Paul, here included as Scripture.

### Romans 1:18–25

Paul here contrasts this revelation (*apokaluptō*) of God's righteousness to be embraced by faith (1:15–17) with the revelation of God's wrath which falls upon people for rejecting what can be known by sight (i.e., God's eternal power and deity, 1:18–3:20). That which is known (*gnōstos*) about God among them vividly pointed to God himself as the source of their knowledge (1:19), which came about by viewing God's creation (1:20). The invisible omnipotence and deity of the Creator can unmistakably be seen in His observable creation, thus leaving all people without excuse (1:20) for not honoring God (1:21), for exchanging the truth for a lie (1:25), and for serving the creation rather than the Creator (1:23, 25). Because of this rejection and reversal, God's wrath comes upon man.

It should be noted that the three conclusions drawn from Acts 14:17 are also found here. God has revealed himself from the time of creation to the present in His created order. This revelation has been available to all of mankind. No special scientific knowledge or equipment was necessary to understand God's message about himself.

### Romans 2:14–15

In a rather vague way, Paul seems to allude here to an inner sense (cf. "conscience" in 2:15) which contrasts with the external general revelation of the created order. He argues that even though unbelieving Gentiles do not have the Law (i.e., Old Testament Law), they nonetheless have a moral standard of sorts by which they strive to live. This would seem to parallel the thought of Ecclesiastes 3:11 that with the fall of Adam, the image of God was severely damaged but not eliminated. God still has an inner witness in all men that generally points them

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24. Ibid.

to the God of righteousness. However, it must be noted that this text does not address the subject of general revelation in nature, but rather general revelation in human conscience — that revelation in man's soul is about God and His moral standards.

### Romans 10:18

Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 in affirming that, even without a preacher, humans are not ignorant of God. They have known about God through general revelation (cf. Ps. 19:1–6). The general revelation of 10:18 is contrasted with the preaching of special revelation in 10:14–17.

This last biblical text on general revelation returns to the first text in Psalm 19. In context, the order is reversed (Ps. 19:1–6 on general revelation and Ps. 19:7–11 on special revelation; Rom. 10:14–17 on special revelation and Rom. 10:18 on general revelation).

### Summary

The following observations can be made from the Bible about general revelation:

1. The breadth of content is limited to the knowledge of God, not all knowledge.
2. The time span is all of time, not just more recent times.
3. The witness is to all people, not just to some with scientific training.
4. The acquisition is made by human sight and sense, not with scientific equipment or technique.
5. The whole corpus of general revelation was available immediately after creation. It did not accumulate with the passing of time and the progressive collection of knowledge.

Therefore, the concept of general revelation in nature as defined by Scripture should not be broadened or expanded any further than the special revelation of Scripture allows in its only five texts (Ps. 19:1–6; Acts 14:17; 17:23–31; Rom. 1:18–25; 10:18). To do so, would be to do the unthinkable — add to the Scripture without divine authorization.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Scripture itself rejects the notion that nature is the 67th book of the Bible, as Ross wrongly asserts.<sup>26</sup>

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25. John D. Hannah, “*Bibliotheca Sacra* and Darwinism: An Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century Conflict Between Science and Theology,” *GTJ* 4 (1983): p. 37–58. “It behooves us to remember to be cautious not to neglect the exegesis of Scripture and the qualitative gulf between special and general revelation” (p. 58).

26. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 55–58.

### The Authority of Scripture<sup>27</sup>

The concept of *authority* is thoroughly woven into the fabric of Scripture. It is unmistakably obvious from Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created . . .”) to Revelation 22:20 (“Yes, I am coming quickly”) and everywhere between. This idea of “ultimate right” is inextricably linked with God’s sovereignty (Rom. 11:36).

What is truly known about authority did not originate outside of Scripture, but rather within. Thus, it is not a secular concept that has been co-opted by religion. On the contrary, it is a sacred element of the very person of God. What Scripture properly teaches about authority has actually been shamefully distorted by this world’s system and wrongfully employed by all world religions.

The rightful idea of authority has fallen on hard times at the start of the 21st century. Illegitimate forms and expressions of authority range from the illegal and abusive exercise of political totalitarianism to individual authority emerging from a postmodern mindset of selfishness.

The appropriate approach to this discussion commences with a working definition of authority in general, especially legitimate authority exercised in a proper fashion. A representative dictionary definition records that authority is the “power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; right to command or give a final decision.”<sup>28</sup>

Bernard Ramm suggests:

*Authority itself means that right or power to command action or compliance, or to determine belief or custom, expecting obedience from those under authority, and in turn giving responsible account for the claim to right or power.*<sup>29</sup>

The New Testament noun (appearing 102 times) most commonly translated “authority” is ἐξουσία (*exousia*). A representative lexical definition reads, “The power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office.”<sup>30</sup>

However, with a biblical worldview, original authority and ultimate authority reside with God and God alone. God did not inherit His authority — there was no one to bequeath it to Him. God did not receive His authority — there was no one to bestow it on Him. God’s authority did not come by way of an election — there was no one to vote for Him. God did not seize His authority — there was no one to steal it from. God did not earn His authority — it was already His. God inherently embodies authority because He is the great “I AM” (Exod. 3:14; John 8:58).

27. This section has been adapted from Richard L. Mayhue, “The Authority of Scripture,” *TMSJ* 15 (Fall 2004): p. 227–236.

28. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., “authority.”

29. Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 10, emphasis in the original.

30. *BDAG*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. rev., s.v., “ἐξουσία.” Cf. *TDNT*, s.v., “ἐξουσία.”

God's authority becomes obvious and unquestionable when one considers three facts. First, God created the heavens and earth and that which is therein (Gen. 1–2). Second, God owns the earth, all that it contains, and those who dwell in it (Ps. 24:1). Third, in the end God consumes it all in that He declared, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

To understand and accept the fact of God's authority is as simple as accepting the fact of God Himself. Romans says this best: "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom. 13:1). This classic text lays out clearly the source of all authority and articulates the principle of "Divine delegation" (cf. Job 34:13; John 19:11).

There are numerous statements in the OT which explicitly testify to God's authority. For example, "That power belongs to God" (Ps. 62:11) and "Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You" (2 Chron. 20:6).

Jesus declared, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Jude wrote, "[T]o the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 25).

This truth fleshes out in syllogistic fashion thusly:

1. Scripture is the Word of God.
2. The words of God are authoritative.

Conclusion: Scripture is authoritative.

Both the ontological basis (God is) and the epistemological basis (God speaks only truth) are established in Scripture (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 119:142, 151, 160). John Frame succinctly asserts, "There is no higher authority, no greater ground of certainty. . . . The truth of Scripture is a presupposition for God's people."<sup>31</sup> Thus, the very nature of God and God's Word is not determined inductively by human reason but deductively from the testimony of Scripture (cf. Ps. 119:89; Isa. 40:8).

The outworking of God's authority in Scripture can be summarized in a series of negative (what it is not) and positive (what it is) statements.

1. The authority of Scripture is *not* a derived authority bestowed by humans; rather it is the *original* authority of God.
2. It *does not* change with the times, the culture, the nation, or the ethnic background; rather it is the *unalterable* authority of God.
3. It is *not* one authority among many possible spiritual authorities; rather it is the *exclusive* spiritual authority of God.

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31. John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), p. 127. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, "Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism," *JETS* 20 (December 1977): p. 289–305; John M. Frame, "Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic," *WTJ* 47 (1985): p. 279–299; Tim McConnel, "The Old Princeton Apologetics: Common Sense or Reformed?" *JETS* 46 (December 2003): p. 647–672.

4. It is *not* an authority that can be successfully challenged or rightfully overthrown; rather it is the *permanent* authority of God.
5. It is *not* a relativistic or subordinate authority; rather it is the *ultimate* authority of God.
6. It is *not* merely a suggestive authority; rather it is the *obligatory* authority of God.
7. It is *not* a benign authority in its outcomes; rather it is the *consequential* authority of God.

While general revelation in nature is as authoritative as Scripture since both come from the same authority-source (i.e., God, general revelation is not self-authenticating). Only what special revelation authenticates about the scope of general revelation's authority should be accepted. What one allows as authoritative from general revelation in nature should not exceed or go beyond what the Bible has specified.

If Ross would subscribe to this biblical truth, he would therefore have to withdraw his assertion that "nature is . . . on an equal footing with His revelation through the words of the Bible."<sup>32</sup> He would also have to admit that his thesis, ". . . the Bible teaches a dual, reliably consistent revelation," is in error.<sup>33</sup>

### The Character of Revelation

To fully grasp the qualitative and functional differences between general revelation<sup>34</sup> and special revelation, one need only consider the following three contrasts between the two. First, the world of general revelation in nature will perish (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 1 Pet. 1:24; 2 Pet. 3:10), but the Word of special revelation will not pass away because it is forever (Ps. 119:89; Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 1 Pet. 1:25). Second, the world of general revelation in nature was cursed and in bondage to corruption (Gen. 3:1–24; Rom. 8:19–23) and is therefore not the perfect world God

32. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 57.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

34. While much has been written on general revelation, the following materials are the more helpful. G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955); G.C. Berkouwer, "General and Special Divine Revelation," *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. by Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), p. 13–24; Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), p. 61–82; James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 43–91; N.H. Gootjes, "General Revelation in Its Relation to Special Revelation," *WTJ* 51 (1989): p. 359–368; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 121–124; Spencer, "Natural Theology," p. 59–72; Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 113–140.

originally created (Gen. 1:31), while the word of special revelation is inspired of God and thus always perfect and holy (Ps. 19:7–9; 119:140; 2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 7:12). Third, the scope of general revelation in nature is severely limited compared to the multi-dimensional expanse of special revelation in Scripture.

To enlarge this line of thinking, consider these additional differences.

	<i>General Revelation in Scripture</i>	<i>Special Revelation in Scripture</i>
1.	Condemns only.	Condemns and redeems.
2.	Harmonizes with special revelation, but does not provide new material.	Enhances and explains in detail the content of general revelation, but goes significantly beyond.
3.	Its perceived message needs to be confirmed by Scripture.	Scripture is self-authenticating and self-confirming in its claim to be God's Word.
4.	Needs to be interpreted in light of special revelation.	Needs no other revelation to interpret — it interprets itself.
5.	Never equated with Scripture by Scripture.	Has no peer.

With this in mind, consider Hugh Ross's demand that nature be considered as "His Word written on the heavens and earth."<sup>35</sup> First, the world of natural revelation is not revealed in "words," as is Scripture alone. Second, the general revelation of nature is never spoken of in Scripture as the Word of God, but frequently Scripture is referred to by this term (Acts 7:38; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Therefore to reason (as does Ross) that both nature and Scripture are revelations of God and thus equal in all respects is like arguing in the physical realm that both an infant and a 21-year-old athlete are humans created by God and thus fully capable of competing in the Olympics. This would be absurd, for while both are human, they each possess drastically differing athletic capabilities.

### Man's Fallen Mind and Empiricism

Revelation does not include what man discovers on his own (i.e., knowledge) but rather what God discloses that otherwise man could not find on his own. General revelation in nature, as defined by special revelation, discloses the existence of God, the glory of God, the power and intelligence of God, the benevolence of God, and the fallenness (evil) of humanity.

When the human race fell in Genesis 3, one of the terrible consequences included the spiritual debilitation of the mind. The New Testament uses 12

35. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 55.

different negative Greek words to describe the ruin of man's intellectual capacity.

1. Debased — Romans 1:28	7. Deluded — Colossians 2:4
2. Hardened — 2 Corinthians 3:14	8. Deceived — Colossians 2:8
3. Blinded — 2 Corinthians 4:4	9. Sensuous — Colossians 2:18
4. Futile — Ephesians 4:17	10. Depraved — 1 Timothy 6:5
5. Darkened — Ephesians 4:18	11. Corrupted — 2 Timothy 3:8
6. Hostile — Colossians 1:21	12. Defiled — Titus 1:15

As a result of this mental mayhem, people are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7), and some even “have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). The cause of this universal trauma on the mind was Eve's efforts to question and edit God's special revelation in Genesis 2:17. She did this by employing an erroneous view of general revelation, manifest by human empiricism (the foundation of scientific inquiry), in order to validate or invalidate God's special revelation which did not then nor ever will need human authentication.

At the completion of creation, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Adam and Eve were in righteous fellowship with God and had been given dominion over all of God's creation (Gen. 1:26–30). A life of earthly bliss described their potential future and that of their offspring before sin entered the picture. Genesis 3:1–7 describes the far-reaching and devastating blow to the human mind which would affect every human being who ever lived thereafter. Without question, Satan waged war against God and the human race in this monumental passage where the battlefield turns out to be Eve's mind. In the end, Eve exchanged the truth of God (Gen. 2:17) for the lie of Satan (Gen. 3:4–5) and the human mind has never been the same since.

The empirical method in primitive form actually originated in Genesis 3 when Eve concluded that the only way by which she could decide whether God was right or wrong (after Satan had planted seeds of doubt about God's truthfulness in her mind — Gen. 3:4) involved testing Him with her own mind and senses. Paul explained it this way in Romans 1:25, speaking of those who would follow on the spiritually perilous path of Eve and then Adam: “. . . they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”

In short order, Eve had basically bought into the lie of Satan and faced a momentous choice. Either she could disobediently choose to eat or she could obediently choose to refrain. Eve believed that she alone could determine the best option with her own mind; God's command was apparently no longer



authoritative. God's verbal revelation was perceived to no longer dictate what was right and what was wrong in her life. God's authoritative instruction appeared now to be optional because, all of a sudden due to Satan's influence, there were other alternatives.

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). Here, one finds the first historical practice of empirical research and inductive reasoning in its infancy. In the initial act of human rebellion, Eve decided to conduct three tests on the tree in order to see whether God or Satan was right.

So, she subjected the tree to these tests, the first being that of physical value. She observed the tree, and in examining it she saw that its fruit was "good for food." It had nutritional value. These might have been Eve's thoughts. *Maybe Satan is right. Maybe God was over-restrictive in preventing me from having all the joy of life and all the fruit in the garden.*

Based on this seemingly positive response, she ran a second test. Eve realized that the fruit was "a delight to the eyes." Not only would it benefit her body nutritionally, but she also discovered that it had emotional or aesthetic value. Putting this into postmodern language, she felt good about looking at the tree.

Eve wasn't satisfied yet. She wanted to be thorough. Perhaps she thought, *I'll take it one step further.* Then came a final test. She looked and saw that the tree was desirable "to make one wise." It had intellectual value that would make her wise like God.

In the midst of Eve's deliberation, she saw and thought that the tree really was good. It met her needs physically, aesthetically, and intellectually. Her mind drew the inference that either God was wrong or God had lied; Satan's deceit had successfully lured her away from God's absolute and unfailing truth. The human mind was about to be wasted forever. Being deceived, Eve was then led to disobey; she rejected God's instructions and took from the tree's fruit and ate. Adam quickly did the same (Gen. 3:6).

Paul summarizes Eve's disastrous act this way. "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). The seduction of Eve's mind by Satan's deceit and Adam's blatant disobedience resulted in the corruption of their souls and, as a result, the souls of all humans who would follow (Rom. 5:12). Thus, the human mind was wasted by sin. Man's mind was so debilitated that fellowship with God was no longer humanly possible and the ability to see and understand life from God's perspective vanished. The human race was now estranged from its God and Creator.

As a result, God's original two created human beings and every one of their offspring experienced a brutal reversal in their relationship with Him and His world.

1. They no longer would concern themselves with thoughts of God, but only with the thinking of men (Ps. 53:1; Rom. 1:25).
2. They no longer would have spiritual sight, but were blinded by Satan to the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4).
3. They would no longer be wise, but foolish (Ps. 14:1; Titus 3:3).
4. They would no longer be alive to God, but rather dead in their sins (Rom. 8:5–11).
5. They no longer would set their affections on the things above, but on the things of earth (Col. 3:2).
6. They would no longer walk in light, but rather in darkness (John 12:35–36, 46).
7. They no longer would possess eternal life, but rather faced eternal death — i.e., eternal separation from God (2 Thess. 1:9).
8. They would no longer live in the realm of the Spirit, but rather the flesh (Rom. 8:1–5).

The subsequent consequences of this catastrophe seem to be lost on Ross who insists that knowledge (not revelation) gained by human observation in nature should be equal to or even superior to God's special revelation in Scripture. He attempts to make the humanly discoverable or understandable equal to revelation which by definition can only be known accurately by divine disclosure.<sup>36</sup>

The truth is that general revelation as defined by Scripture does not uncover anything that one could not find in the special revelation of Scripture. Both Eve and Dr. Ross engaged in the confused substitution of knowledge acquired by human acquisition for revelation received by God's gracious provision in both general and special revelation.

### Proper Hermeneutics

The consensus of the evangelical community in the late 20th century on proper hermeneutics was expressed by the writings which resulted from the multiple meetings of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI).<sup>37</sup> The following excerpts express their conclusions regarding special and general revelation.<sup>38</sup>

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 55–58.

37. Over a ten-year period (1977–1987), the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) held three summits for scholars (1978, 1983, 1986) and two congresses for the Christian community at large (1982, 1987) to formulate and disseminate the biblical truth about inerrancy.

38. Norman L. Geisler and J.I. Packer, *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: ICBI, 1983), p. 15–16.

***Article XX.** WE AFFIRM that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and cohere, and that the Bible speaks truths when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.*

***WE DENY** that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.*

What is in view here is not so much the nature of truth (which is treated in Article VI), but the consistency and coherence of truth. This is directed at those views which consider truth paradoxical or contradictory. This article declares that a proper hermeneutic avoids contradictions, since God never affirms as true two propositions, one of which is logically the opposite of the other.

However, whatever prompting and clarifying of Scripture that extrabiblical studies may provide, the final authority for what the Bible teaches rests in the text of Scripture itself and not in anything outside it (except in God himself). The denial makes clear this priority of the teaching of God's scriptural revelation over anything outside it.

***Article XXI.** WE AFFIRM the harmony of special with general revelation and therefore of biblical teaching with the facts of nature.*

***WE DENY** that any genuine scientific facts are inconsistent with the true meaning of any passage of Scripture.*

This article continues the discussion of the previous article by noting the harmony of God's general revelation (outside Scripture) and His special revelation in Scripture. It is acknowledged by all that certain **interpretations** of Scripture and some **opinions** of scientists will contradict each other. However, it is insisted here that the **truth** of Scripture and the **facts** of science never contradict each other.

"Genuine" science will always be in accord with Scripture. Science, however, based on naturalistic presuppositions will inevitably come in conflict with the supernatural truths of Scripture....

While these brief but weighty statements do not explore the subjects in great detail, nor necessarily agree with every conclusion of this chapter, they do establish several very crucial principles.

1. God's special revelation in Scripture takes priority over God's general revelation in nature.
2. God's special revelation in Scripture interprets God's general revelation in nature, not the opposite.

The basis for the ICBI conclusions is the traditional, time-tested, grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Bible.<sup>39</sup> However, when one is committed to harmonizing fallible, sinful men's interpretations of their limited observations of the cursed and corrupted creation with the inerrant propositional truth statements of Scripture by deviating from the historical-grammatical method, then in effect a new hermeneutic has been substituted as a means that allegedly justifies the end of bringing Scripture into harmony with the perceptions of fallen, darkened minds.

Another aspect of proper hermeneutics that is almost always absent in the discussion of general and special revelation is divine illumination, whereby Scripture promises divine aid from the Holy Spirit to true believers in Christ to help them correctly interpret the Bible.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:12–13).

People commonly use the expressions, “It just dawned on me,” or “The light just came on” to describe dim thoughts which later take on new understanding. God's Spirit does that for believers with Scripture.

A great prayer to offer as we study Scripture is, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Ps. 119:18). It acknowledges a colossal need for God's light in understanding Scripture. So do verses like, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart” (Ps. 119:33–34; see also v. 102).

God not only wants Christians to know but to understand and obey. So He gives them the help that they need through His Holy Spirit. Believers, like the two to whom Jesus spoke on the road to Emmaus, require God's assistance: “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). God's ministry of illumination by which He gives light on the meaning of Scripture is affirmed by the Psalmist (Ps. 119:130).

Paul and John also comment on this in the New Testament.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might (Eph. 1:18–19).

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39. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. 1890 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, rpt. 1950), p. 173, 203–210.

... the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for any one to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (1 John 2:27).

While the truth of divine illumination does not eliminate the need for gifted men to teach (Eph. 4:11–12; 2 Tim. 4:2) or the hard labor of serious Bible study (2 Tim. 2:15), it does promise that there is no need to be enslaved to Church dogma or to be led astray by false teachers. Our primary dependence for learning Scripture should be upon the author of Scripture — God himself.

It needs to be noted that:

1. There is no promise of divine illumination for scientific observation or interpretation of those observations.
2. There is no promise of divine illumination for general revelation.
3. However, there is a promise of divine illumination only for the special revelation of Scripture.

Hugh Ross gives lip service to “sound biblical exegesis,” but contradicts what he says by what he does in adopting a new hermeneutic at the neglect of the historical-grammatical approach.<sup>40</sup> By equating the value and priority of general revelation with that of special revelation, he either denies the unique promise of divine illumination for special revelation or erroneously assumes that divine illumination applies also to general revelation.

### A Biblical Worldview

What is a worldview? A worldview comprises a person’s collection of presuppositions, convictions, and values from which he tries to understand and make sense out of the world and life. “A worldview is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.”<sup>41</sup> “A worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world and second, an application of this view to life.*”<sup>42</sup>

How does one form a worldview? Where does one begin? Every worldview starts with presuppositions (i.e., beliefs that one presumes to be true without supporting independent evidence from other sources or systems). Interpreting reality, in part or in whole, requires that one adopt an interpretive stance since there is no “neutral” thought in the universe. This becomes the foundation upon which one builds.

What are the presuppositions of a Christian worldview that is solidly rooted and grounded in Scripture? Carl F.H. Henry, an important Christian thinker in

40. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 58.

41. Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 24.

42. W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), p. 29.

the last half of the 20th century, answers the question very simply: “. . . evangelical theology dares harbor one and only one presupposition: the living and personal God intelligibly known in his revelation.”<sup>43</sup> Without equivocation, Dr. Henry forthrightly and clearly believes that “Our theological systems are not infallible, but God’s propositional revelation is.”<sup>44</sup> Henry earlier had elaborated on this theme: “In its ontological and epistemological predictions Christianity begins with the biblically attested self-disclosing God, and not with creative speculation free to modify theism as an interpreter wishes.”<sup>45</sup> Ronald Nash approaches the question in a similar manner: “Human beings and the universe in which they reside are the creation of God who has revealed himself in Scripture.”<sup>46</sup>

For the sake of this chapter, let it be stated that two major presuppositions underlie the thoughts included. The first is the eternal existence of the personal, transcendent, triune, Creator God. Second, the God of Scripture has revealed His character, purposes, and will in the infallible and inerrant pages of His special revelation, the Bible, which is superior to any other source of revelation or human reason alone.

It would be worth mentioning here that one’s approach to Christian apologetics will influence one’s approach to a worldview.<sup>47</sup> The appropriate question to be asked is “should one develop the content of an apologetic system evidentially by human reasoning and then move *to* special revelation or presuppositionally starting *from* special revelation?”<sup>48</sup> Evidentialists, like Ross, start with data outside of Scripture in order to supposedly prove or better understand Scripture,<sup>49</sup> while presuppositionalists begin with Scripture in order to understand the world.<sup>50</sup>

43. Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), p. 212.

44. Carl F.H. Henry, “Fortunes of the Christian World View,” *Trinity Journal* 19 (1998): p. 168.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

46. Nash, *Faith and Reason*, p. 47. He gives the same answer in *Worldviews in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p. 52.

47. Portions of this section have been excerpted from the Introduction (written by this author) to MacArthur, gen. ed., *Think Biblically!*, p. 13–16.

48. Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), p. 7–8. Also see Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

49. A recent volume espousing this approach has been provided by R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and A Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*. For a thorough critique see George J. Zemek, “Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense: A Review Article,” *GTJ* 7 (Spring 1986): p. 111–123.

50. See Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed, William Edgar, ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003) and Stephen R. Spencer, “Fideism and Presuppositionalism,” *GTJ* 8 (Spring 1987): p. 89–99. Also consider John C. Whitcomb Jr., “Contemporary Apologetics and the Christian Faith,” part 1, *BibSac* 134 (April–June 1977): p. 99–106 and *The World that Perished*, p. 95–139.

Generally speaking, one's view of general revelation will greatly influence one's apologetic system. The conclusions drawn earlier in this chapter concerning the limitations of general revelation in nature as defined by special revelation in Scripture will direct one toward a presuppositional apologetic.<sup>51</sup>

What is the Christian worldview?<sup>52</sup> This author offers the following as a working definition:

The Christian worldview sees and understands God the Creator and His creation (i.e., man and the world) primarily through the lens of God's special revelation, the Holy Scriptures, and secondarily through God's natural revelation in creation as interpreted by human reason and reconciled by and with Scripture, for the purpose of believing and behaving in accord with God's will and, thereby, glorifying God with one's mind and life, both now and in eternity.

What essentially distinguishes the Christian worldview from other worldviews? At the heart of the matter, a Christian worldview contrasts with competing worldviews in that it 1) recognizes that God is the unique source of all truth, and 2) relates all truth back to an understanding of God and His purposes for this life and the next. Arthur Holmes superbly summarizes the unique implications of a Christian worldview when relating absolute truth to God.

1. To say that truth is absolute rather than relative means that it is unchanging and universally the same.
2. Truth is absolute not in or of itself but because it derives ultimately from the one, eternal God. It is grounded in His "metaphysical objectivity," and that of His creation.
3. Absolute propositional truth, therefore, depends on the absolute personal truth (or fidelity) of God, who can be trusted in all He does and says.<sup>53</sup>

Are there any common misperceptions about the Christian worldview, especially by Christians? There are at least two mistaken notions. The first error is that a Christian view of the world and life will differ on all points from other worldviews. While this is not true (e.g., all worldviews accept the law

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51. The classic historical illustration of the importance of one's apologetic methodology revolves around the "Galileo affair." See Terry Mortenson, "Philosophical Naturalism and the Age of the Earth: Are They Related?", *TMSJ* 15 (Spring 2004): p. 73–74.

52. For a brief history of the Christian worldview in general and the recent spiritual climate in America, see Henry, "Fortunes," p. 163–176 and Carl F.H. Henry, "The Vagrancy of the American Spirit" *Faculty Dialogue* 22 (Fall 1994): p. 5–18. Historically speaking, James Orr is generally credited as the first modern theologian to organize Christian thought around the core idea of "worldview," in *The Christian View of God and the World* (Edinburgh: A. Elliot, 1893; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948).

53. Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 37.

of gravity), the Christian worldview will differ and be unique on the most important points, especially as they relate to the character of God, the nature and value of Scripture, and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The second error is that the Bible contains all that we need to know. Common sense should put this misdirected thought out of business. However, it is true that the Bible alone contains all that Christians need to know about their spiritual life and godliness through a knowledge of the one true God, which is the highest and most important level of knowledge (2 Pet. 1:2–4). Also, while it does not exhaustively address every field, when Scripture speaks in any subject area, it speaks authoritatively. One’s approach to Christian apologetics and to worldview will ultimately influence one’s approach to integration, i.e., the combining and understanding of special revelation, general revelation, and knowledge obtained by human learning.<sup>54</sup> Three important principles should guide us as we consider the integration of sources of knowledge.

1. While all truth is God’s truth, not all truth is revealed truth and not all statements that claim to be truth are actually true.
2. Revealed truth is certain, while non-revealed truth claims can often be wrong and are subject to change. For example, the content of Genesis 1–2 is absolutely certain by virtue of it being divinely revealed truth, while scientific theories of origins are tentative at best.
3. Revealed truth should help to interpret non-revealed truth/knowledge. For example, the certain content of Genesis 1–2 should be used to validate or invalidate the tentative scientific theories on origins.

This is not intended to make theologians into scientists, but rather to use revealed truth as a benchmark by which to judge non-revealed truth claims.

However, this should prevent scientists from unwarrantedly usurping the role of the theologian, as Ross has. By elevating non-revelatory truth claims based on study of the creation to the level of general revelation, he has tried to establish a “dual, reliably consistent revelation,”<sup>55</sup> which puts human interpretations of the cursed and corrupted creation on an equal footing with God’s blessed and inerrant revelation through Holy Scripture.<sup>56</sup> In so doing, he has then made it appear that non-revelatory knowledge, falsely classified as general revelation in nature, is equal to and at times superior to special revelation in Scripture. Thus, he has used supposed science to interpret Scripture, and wrongly claimed that he had biblical authority to do so.

Unfortunately, Ross’s worldview is not consistently biblical in its construction. His apologetic approach is evidential not presuppositional, and he integrates

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54. See Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 121–131 for an excellent discussion and summation of the issues. Also consult Spencer, “Natural Theology.”

55. Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 57.



non-revelatory, tentative knowledge with the certainty of revealed truth as though they were equals. In so doing, his thinking and conclusions are severely called into question and his progressive creationist views should be rejected.

J. Robertson McQuilken warned about this mistake over three decades ago. While he made the following statement with regard to the behavioral sciences, it is equally true and applicable to the natural sciences.

My thesis is that in the next two decades the greatest threat to biblical authority is the behavioral scientist who would in all good conscience man the barricades to defend the front door against any theologian who would attack the inspiration and authority of Scripture while all the while himself smuggling the content of Scripture out the back door through cultural or psychological interpretation.<sup>57</sup>

### The Answer

No — nature is not the 67th book of the Bible! To equate acquisition of general knowledge with divine revelation (general or special) is a faulty exaggeration that results in untruth. To expand general revelation beyond the limits set by special revelation is unbiblical and leads to theological error.

Nature is not the 67th book of the Bible for the following seven reasons.

1. It violates Scripture's warning not to add to the scriptural canon.
2. It dramatically overstates what Scripture says about general revelation.
3. It falsely elevates general revelation to the same authority level as special revelation.
4. It wrongly equates the character of general and special revelation.
5. It fails to take into account the Fall and man's diminished intellectual capacity to think in the realm of general knowledge.
6. It deviates from the norm of historical-grammatical hermeneutics.
7. It is derived from a flawed worldview, apologetics, and approach to integration.

Thus, Dr. Hugh Ross needs to rethink and abandon his answer to the question of nature being the 67th book of the Bible and bring his response into conformity with Scripture. In so doing, he would ultimately correct his tragic error in promoting a progressive view of origins in support of an old-earth theory which is contrary to the Genesis record. Christian scholars, leaders, laypeople, and students who have accepted Dr. Ross's progressive creationist views should also abandon this position as unbiblical, and instead believe Genesis.

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57. J. Robertson McQuilken, "The Behavioral Sciences Under the Authority of Scripture," *JETS* 20 (March 1977): p. 37.