

JUST WORDS?

SPECIAL REVELATION AND THE BIBLE

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PREFACE

This short book is an attempt to link up the distinctive properties of the Christian view of special revelation, its classical properties of inspiredness and infallibility, to the place of the Bible in the life of faith in Christ. There are books which set forth this view more systematically: for example, J.I. Packer, *God has Spoken* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), and his earlier *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (IVP, 1958), Timothy Ward, *Words of Life*, (IVP, 2009) and my own effort, *Revelation: The Basic Issues*, (1982, reprinted 2004, Regent College Publishing). Standing behind and above all these is the sterling work of B.B. Warfield, the articles gathered together in *Revelation and Inspiration*, (O.U.P., New York, 1937).

Thanks to Peter Sanlon for suggesting the book and providing the title, and for the help of Graham Hind.

Paul Helm

1. WHAT SORT OF BOOK IS THE BIBLE?

Which way does the arrow point? How do we begin to understand the Bible? Strange questions with which to begin a book on the Bible. But it is vital that from the start we understand the question correctly, and offer the correct answer. The wrong answer, and we lose our way. If when we think of 'religion', or 'the Christian religion' we think of a 'search' or of an 'exploration', then we are pointing the arrow the wrong way. Christianity is not the outcome of humankind's search for God, nor is the Old Testament an account of Israel's search for him. So if from the start we point the arrow from ourselves upward, pointing to the results of a search, trying to find God, then we shall quickly get into a tangle.

No, not upwards, but the search of the arrow points in the opposite direction. Not downwards, to the human race on planet Earth, and to its need. It signals the importance of three words, *God comes down*. It may help to

keep these words in mind in what follows. Think of the arrow as indicating the way that God first of all acts. He comes down to us, coming to us to reveal the way to return to God, the only way. But where does God come down from? Down from beyond our universe existing in time and space, down from what is referred to as 'his own glory'.

God is *above* this universe, his creation. Though it is immeasurably great, he *transcends* it. But he comes down to it. That's quite a leap! We find this hard to grasp because we are used to thinking in exclusively spatial, physical terms. In coming down God does surprising things. He prepares himself for our company. He appears in visions and in dreams. He makes covenants. He acts in mercy and in judgment. He talks through his servants the prophets. In all this, what he says surprises men and women. 'Long ago, in many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...' (Hebrews 1.1) He is a surprising God, who routinely does the unexpected. And at the climax of this business, he comes down in the person of his Son, putting on our human nature, to make known his love, and to deliver us from what holds us captive. As John says, it is not as if we loved God, but that he loved us.

But the odd thing is this. According to the Bible, if we read it discerningly, we'll see that he comes down to us in modest ways. Though he is our Creator and Lord, the

King of Kings, when he comes to us, he adopts a sort of disguise. He does not come as a King, or at least not at all like the kings of the earth, or the Presidents, the Chancellors, the Prime Ministers, or the Chief Executives, who rule us. He comes in 'weakness', in everyday ordinariness, in humility. Only occasionally do those he comes to see shafts of his glory. This is one of the characteristics of God as he has appeared to us. He comes not to blind us, but to engage us. God in Christ woos his Bride.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

In this short book we are to consider one important aspect of the ordinariness with which God visits us. God has done things for us and he says things to us. Some of the things he does are to attract attention. But not like Presidents may command our attention, by their residence or their motorcade or the eloquence of their speech or the might of their army or the size of their entourage. In making himself known, God does not lose anything of his glory, but in what he does his glory shows through in surprising ways. And when all his redemptive work is done, his full glory will be manifest to all. Christ will come in great glory, and all his holy angels with him.

We learn that in God's dealings with the human race, *matter* and *manner* are intertwined, vitally connected. In this study we are considering God's book, what we call