

**Special Revelation & Enlightenment**

**Ultimate Reality.**

Every religion accepts there is an ultimate reality that is eternal and unchanging. For Christians that ultimate reality is God, for Buddhists ultimate reality is an eternal truth that governs the universe.

**How may God be known?**

Some say God cannot be known because He is beyond human understanding and cannot be described using the limits if human language. However, some theists think it is possible to know something of God’s nature and purposes through revelations. There are two kinds of revelation – special revelation and general revelation.

**General Revelation.**

Refers to knowledge of God or the divine that is discovered through natural means, for example through seeing the beauty of the natural world or through philosophy and reasoning. Christians use the term to describe knowledge of God that is available to everyone. This may include seeing a beautiful sunset and believing it to be a creation of God, or feeling a connection to God through prayer or worship.

**Special Revelation.**

Special revelation is when people experience God directly in a particular event. It might be a dream, a vision, a prophecy, a miracle or hearing ‘God’s call’. These experiences usually have a huge impact on people and can change their lives. Some religions have been founded on revelations received by the founders of these faiths. Special revelations are rare and the majority of Christians believe in God without experiencing such events.

**Visions.**

A vision is a form of special revelation that comes in visual form. People see holy figures, angels or hear messages from God. A vision holds deep meaning for the person receiving it and enables them to become aware of a new reality or some new information.

There are many examples of visions in the Bible. Saul is one example of someone who had a vision of the resurrected Jesus and completely changed his life.

Complete the following …

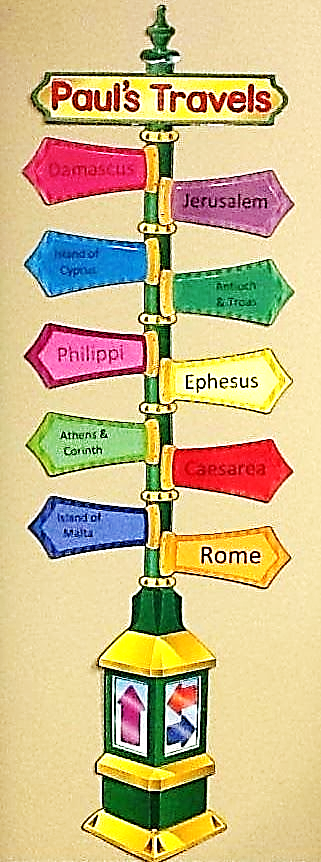
1. Note down definitions for the keywords.
2. Explain each of the following terms with examples; Special Revelation; General Revelation; Visions

**Buddhism and Revelation.**

Revelation is not a term generally used in Buddhism but Buddha’s enlightenment can be thought of as a type of revelation. According to Buddhism everyone can reach the same insight into the nature of reality that Buddha achieved. This is not a revelation of God, Buddhists do not believe in a god, instead Buddha revealed the true nature of reality. He discovered;

* Suffering is an unavoidable part of life.
* Everything is subject to change (impermanence).
* Suffering can end if we accept the realities of life and live a compassionate, moral life.

Buddhists use meditation, as Buddha did, to try to achieve enlightenment, to be happy and escape the cycle of suffering.

**Arguments against special revelation.**

One argument against special revelation is that it usually relies on the word of one person. How do we know they are telling the truth? Perhaps they are claiming they had a revelation to gain attention, they may be mentally ill. How can that person know what they are experiencing is a revelation from God, rather than their own imagination, or even a hallucination? For example Saul was walking in a hot desert area when he had his experience, the heat, thirst and the sun could have caused him to ‘see’ something that wasn’t there.

A theist might respond to the criticisms of Saul/Paul’s story by pointing out the results of the experience. Paul went on to make four journeys going as far as Rome, proclaiming Jesus as the son of God. He set up churches in the places he visited. Without Jesus’ revelation to Saul, Paul would not have been responsible for the spread of the Christian Church.

Questions …

1. What ‘ultimate truths’ did Buddha discover when he attained enlightenment?
2. Using the example of Saul/Paul explain an argument against special revelation.



Key Terms

**Ultimate reality** – the supreme, final, eternal and unchanging reality.

**The divine** – God, gods or ultimate reality.

**Revelation** – God showing himself to believers, a way in which people can know about God.

**Special Revelation** – God making himself known through direct personal experience or an unusual, specific event.

**Vision** – seeing something, for example in a dream or a trance that shows something about the nature of God or the afterlife.

**Enlightenment** – the gaining of true knowledge about God, self or the true nature of reality, usually through meditation and self-discipline, in Buddhism gaining freedom from the cycle of rebirth.