Revelation as a Source of Knowledge: An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 1:17–18.

Fai Ebenezer, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study investigates revelation (ἀποκάλυψις, apokalupsis) as a distinct source of knowledge within Ephesians 1:17–18, examining Paul's prayer for wisdom and illumination. Employing a descriptive and analytical exegetical method alongside a qualitative hermeneutical framework, the research analyzes the Greek text within its historical and theological context. An epistemological lens is applied to evaluate revelation's relationship to cognitive and empirical knowledge systems. Revelation knowledge surpasses cognitively acquired knowledge, operating through divine illumination (φωτίζω, photizo) that transforms the believer's inner perception, producing conscious awareness (οἶδα, oida) and spiritual transformation. While not negating other epistemological modes, revelation constitutes a superior knowledge source because it originates directly from God, the ultimate ground of truth. This study advances interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, epistemology, and cognitive science by demonstrating how revelatory knowledge offers an epistemic framework complementary to—yet distinct from—rationalist and empiricist paradigms.

Keywords: Revelation, Knowledge, Ephesians 1:17–18,
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INTRODUCTION

The human desire to know raises foundational questions that transcend disciplinary boundaries: Can humans genuinely know? How does one certify authentic knowledge? What types of knowledge exist, and how are they acquired? These inquiries intersect theology, philosophy, and cognitive science, rendering the study of knowledge inherently interdisciplinary. Contemporary epistemology privileges scientific inquiry emphasizing empirical verification and philosophical inquiry emphasizing rational coherence. Religious traditions, however, affirm divine disclosure as a legitimate epistemic avenue. This study situates itself within this interdisciplinary engagement by examining revelation as a distinct epistemological source that interacts with yet transcends empirical and rational systems.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GAP

The New Testament employs multiple terms for knowledge, including γνῶσις (*gnōsis*, inquiry-based knowledge), ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*, exact knowledge), and σύνεσις (*sunesis*, understanding). However, ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*)—revelation knowledge—operates differently: it is granted solely by divine initiative rather than attained through human cognitive effort. The central problem this study addresses is the epistemological status of revelation knowledge and its relationship to other knowledge forms. A significant gap exists in current scholarship: while theological treatments of revelation abound, few studies systematically integrate exegetical analysis of Ephesians 1:17–18 with interdisciplinary epistemological frameworks drawn from philosophy and cognitive science.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

i. conduct an exegetical analysis of Ephesians 1:17–18 focusing on the semantics of ἀποκάλυψις, φωτίζω, and οἶδα;

ii. articulate the epistemological implications of revelation as a knowledge source; and

iii. demonstrate interdisciplinary relevance for contemporary debates regarding the limits of empirical and rational epistemologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theological Debates: Revelation versus Reason

The Enlightenment tradition asserted that knowledge of God and religious truth is ultimately attainable through human reason alone. Thomas Aquinas contested this position, arguing that revelation transcends reason without contradicting it; divinely revealed truths exceed rational comprehension.[1] Rationalism's core contention—that reason alone constitutes the source and justification of beliefs—remains contestable. Calvario observes that while certain aspects of God may be demonstrated rationally, other dimensions exceed intellectual limits.[2] The virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and life after death exemplify truth claims inaccessible to pure reason.

[1]F. Luduşan, "Theological and Philosophical Aspects of Revelation," https://rais.education/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/0541.pdf accessed March 26, 2026.

[2] Patricia Calvario, “Bounds of Reason in the Knowledge of God: Gregory Palamas' Criticism of Greek Philosophy, " *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia 73*, no. 2 (2017): 783–92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26197001.

Hodgson and King respond to rationalism by affirming revelation as a distinct knowledge type.[3] Amini underscores revelation's pivotal role in the Semitic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam).[4] Clavier defines revelation's essential criterion as derivation from a supernatural or divine source, not subject to natural means of acquisition.[5] Ryrie emphasizes that humans must place themselves under God as the object of knowledge before revelation can occur.[6] Harvey describes revelation as a gift requiring reception rather than achievement through research or study.[7] Grudem grounds revelation in divine incomprehensibility: humanity cannot fully know God unless God self-discloses.[8] That is, God cannot be known through self-effort but it is God that chooses to help man know Him.

General versus Special Revelation

Erickson distinguishes general revelation (God's self-manifestation through nature) from special revelation (God's manifestation to particular persons at definite times and places enabling redemptive relationship).[9] Packer notes that knowing other persons depends on their willingness to be known; analogously, knowing God depends on divine self-disclosure

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[3] Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, *Reading Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 104.

[4] Majid Amini, “Revelation in the Reflections of Reason," *New Blackfriars* 87, no. 1010 (2006): 406–17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43251055 accessed March 20222.

[5] Paul Clavier, "No Creation, No Revelation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2013): 255–68. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24709292 accessed March 2022.

[6] Charles C Ryrie, Basic *Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Publishers), 29.

[7] Nicholas Peter Harvey, “Revelation and Contemplation," *New Blackfriars 72,* no. 847 (1991): 152–160.

[8] Wayne Grudem, Systematic *Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 149-151.

[9] Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine,* Edited by Arnold L. Hustad (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 33 and 43.

rather than human epistemological effort.[10] This presupposes that knowing God is purely by revelation because that knowledge transcends human cognitive ability.

Epistemological Frameworks for Revelation

Geisler and Feinberg articulate a Christian epistemological perspective affirming revelation as a legitimate source of justified belief.[11] Sonheim argues that knowledge of God encompasses cognitive, experiential, and relational dimensions irreducible to propositional content alone.[12] More recently, Truncellito notes that standard epistemological criteria (justified true belief) require expansion to accommodate revelatory claims.[13] Lewis and Demarest propose an integrative theological epistemology where revelation, reason, and experience function complementarily.[14] That is, all the afore mentioned sources of knowledge are not antithetical to one another because each has its place.

RESEARCH GAP IDENTIFIED

While existing literature establishes revelation's theological necessity, a gap remains regarding systematic integration of exegetical analysis of Ephesians 1:17–18 with contemporary epistemological discourse. Furthermore, limited interdisciplinary engagement with cognitive science

[10] J. I. Packer, Knowing *God, 20th Anniversary Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 35 and 37.

[11] Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, Introduction *to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1980), 110.

[12] Paul R. Sondheim, "The Knowledge of God," in *Christian Dogmatics,* edited by Carl E. Braaten, Gerhard O. Forde, Hans Schwarz et al (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 202.

[13] David A., Truncellito, "Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/epistemo accessed March 26, 2026.

[14] Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Historical, Biblical, Systematic, Apologetic and Practical in Three Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 96.

perspectives on perception and awareness transformation exists. This study addresses this gap by providing exegetical foundations for revelation epistemology and suggesting interdisciplinary trajectories.

METHODOLOGY

Exegetical Approach

This study employs a descriptive and analytical exegetical method focusing on Ephesians 1:17–18 within its immediate literary context (1:15–22) and broader canonical setting. The Greek text (Byzantine text-type) serves as the primary source, with comparative reference to NA28 critical apparatus where variant readings affect interpretation.

Hermeneutical Framework

The hermeneutical approach integrates historical-grammatical interpretation with theological and epistemological analysis. Historical reconstruction of Ephesus as the political capital of Asia Minor, center of Artemis worship, and hub of occult practices. Cartwright illuminates the epistle's polemical context.[15] The authorship question—while acknowledging scholarly debates regarding Pauline authorship. Guthrie follows early church witness (Clement of Rome, A.D. 95) affirming Pauline origin.[16] The letter's likely circulation to multiple congregations (absence of "in Ephesus" in significant manuscripts) does not undermine its exegetical value.[17]

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[15]Mark Cartwright, "Temple of Artemis at Ephesus," *World History Encyclopaedia*, https://www.worldhistory.org/Temple_of_Artemis_at_Ephesus/ accessed March, 2022.

[16]Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 483-484.

[17] Francis Foulkes, The *Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 69.

Analytical Method

Lexical-semantic analysis[18] utilizes standard Greek lexicons and exegetical tools.[19] Syntactic analysis follows for verbal aspect and mood semantics.[20] Intertextual connections to Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish traditions are examined where relevant.

Epistemological Lens

An epistemological lens is applied to evaluate revelation knowledge claims against standard epistemic criteria (justification, truth, belief). This framework enables systematic comparison between revelatory epistemology and rationalist/empiricist alternatives while avoiding inappropriate imposition of external criteria on theological claims. This multi-dimensional method is appropriate because the research question spans exegetical, theological, and philosophical domains. Isolating any single dimension would produce incomplete understanding of revelation's epistemological status.

GREEK TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Ephesians 1:17–18 (BYZ)

ἵνα ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης, δῴη ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως, ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ· πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν, εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι

[18] Cleon L., Jr. Rogers and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 435.

[19] Also see W. E. Vine, Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Unabridged Edition* (McLean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Company, n.d), n.p.

[20] Daniel B. Wallace, Greek *Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 481.

ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις.

Translation (NASB adapted)

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart 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.

EXEGESIS

The God of Our Lord Jesus Christ (1:17a)

Paul identifies the recipient of prayer as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." This designation contrasts sharply with Artemis, the primary deity of Ephesus. The term δόξα (*doxa*) functions adjectivally to denote splendor, magnificence, excellence, or preeminence.[21] Hoehner further notes that "glory" reflects the essence of one's being—the summation of all attributes.[22] The God addressed is therefore preeminent over all competing claims to divinity, not crafted by human hands but creator of the cosmos

The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation (1:17b)

The verb δῴη (*dōē*, from δίδωμι, *didōmi* which means 'give') appears in the aorist active subjunctive, third person singular. That is, the Father 'may give…' which points out that this knowledge is not automatic. It is the sole prerogative of God. Major and Laughy note that the subjunctive mood expresses hypothetical possibility.[23] This grammatical observation carries

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[21] Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians*: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 254.

[22]Ibid, 254.

[23] Wilfred E. Major and Michael Laughy, "The Subjunctive Mood," *Ancient Greek for Everyone,* https://ancientgreek.pressbooks.com/chapter/46/ Accessed March 2022.

significant epistemological weight: prayer for revelation does not guarantee its reception. Revelation remains subject to divine volition rather than human demand.

Hoehner argues convincingly that πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) refers to the Holy Spirit rather than the human spirit.[24] The qualities of wisdom and revelation cannot be generated by human capacity, and the context clarifies that revelation occurs through God's Spirit, not human spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revelation. Paul's prayer is for the Father to be gracious enough to give that Spirit of wisdom and then revelation. The Greek rendering is Ἀποκάλυψις and denotes an uncovering of things not previously known—hidden mysteries of God unveiled by divine initiative, inaccessible to human investigation.[25] This is knowledge that can only be given, not learned through cognitive effort.

Enlightened Eyes of the Heart (1:18a)

Πεφωτισμένους (*pephōtismenous*) is used in the passive voice; a perfect passive participle from φωτίζω (*photizō*), meaning "to shine, give light, illumine, enlighten." The passive voice is grammatically crucial: Traffis explains that in passive constructions, the subject receives the action rather than performing it.[26] The possessive pronoun (ὑμῶν, *humōn*, "your")—referring to the Ephesians—receives enlightenment passively. They do not achieve illumination through cognitive effort; it is done for them by the One to whom Paul prays.

[24] Hoehner, 256.

[25] F. F. Bruce, The *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 245.

[26] Catharine Traffis, "Active Versus Passive Voice," *Grammarly*, https://www.grammarly.com/blog/active-vs-passive-voice/ Accessed March, 2022.

The heart in this text is a Cognitive-Experiential Center. As such, the "eyes of your heart" metaphorically represents the innermost faculty of perception. Wright affirms that this enlightenment refers to knowledge that transforms worldview from within.[27] Thielman adds that this imagery was common in both Graeco-Roman and Jewish traditions for gaining religious insight that transcends mere mental assent.[28]

The Outcome: Oida as Conscious Awareness (1:18b)

Epistemic Result**:** Εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι (*eis to eidenai*, "so that you may know") introduces the purpose clause. The verb οἶδα (*oida*)—perfect active infinitive—means "to have seen or perceived," resulting in conscious awareness or learnedness unlike the passive reception of enlightenment (φωτίζω), οἶδα which appears in the active voice. This indicates that while revelation is divinely given, the recipient bears responsibility for becoming conscious of and applying what has been revealed. Snodgrass avows that Paul prays not merely for propositional knowledge about God but that the inner being receives light to see.[29] Two specific objects of knowledge are identified: (1) the hope of God's calling—the consummation of salvation[30] and the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints—the church as trophy of divine grace.[31]

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[27]N.T. Wright, "The Letter to the Ephesians," https://ojs.standrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/article/download/1215/931/ Accessed March, 2022.

[28] Frank Thielman, Ephesians (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 98.

[29] Klyne Snodgrass, Ephesians*: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 23.

[30] Jerry Falwell, Edward E. Hindson, and Woodrow Michael Krol, eds. *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty Press, 1978), 508.

[31] Michael A. Eaton, The *Branch Exposition of the Bible: A Preacher's Commentary of the New Testament* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2020), 709.

DISCUSSION

Revelation Knowledge as Non-Cognitive

The exegetical findings establish that revelation knowledge (ἀποκάλυψις) operates through a different mechanism than cognitive knowledge (γνῶσις). While cognitive knowledge is acquired through inquiry, investigation, and rational processing, revelation knowledge is imparted by divine initiative. Paul, despite his erudition (Pharisaic training, Greek education), understood that this knowledge cannot be taught or learned through conventional pedagogical methods. The subjunctive mood of δῴη underscores divine prerogative: God may give revelation but retains freedom to withhold it.

The Volative Optative and Prayer

Wallace identifies the volitive (voluntative) optative as expressing an obtainable wish in prayer—frequently an appeal to divine will.[32] Paul's prayer for the Ephesians models appropriate epistemological humility: one may earnestly seek revelation knowledge, but its bestowal remains subject to divine sovereignty rather than human technique or merit.

Oida as Epistemic Transformation

The perfect tense of οἶδα ("to have seen/perceived") indicates a resultant state of consciousness following revelatory illumination. Authentic revelation necessarily produces οἶδα—conscious awareness that renders the recipient able to articulate and apply the revealed truth. The absence of οἶδα suggests the absence of genuine revelation. This finding has practical implications for evaluating claims to revelatory knowledge in contemporary contexts.

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[32]Wallace, 481.

Theology to Epistemology: Systematic Connections

Several systematic conclusions emerge: First, revelation knowledge challenges the sufficiency of rationalism (reason alone) and empiricism (sense perception alone) as exclusive epistemological sources. Truncellito notes that standard epistemology privileges propositional knowledge over knowledge-by-acquaintance.[33] Revelation knowledge, as presented in Ephesians 1, operates in the latter category—personal, relational knowledge of God rather than merely propositional knowledge about God. Revelation does not negate other knowledge forms but occupies a distinct epistemological domain. Cognitive knowledge explains observable phenomena; empirical knowledge verifies measurable claims; revelatory knowledge addresses ultimate questions of origin, purpose, and destiny that empirical methods cannot adjudicate.[34]

It is also important to note that validation criteria differ across epistemological domains. While empirical claims are validated by sensory verification and rational claims by logical coherence, revelation claims are validated by divine authority and transformative experience. This does not render revelation claims immune to rational scrutiny but recognizes different validation frameworks for different knowledge types.

Interdisciplinary Implications

Cognitive Science: Paul's language of "enlightened eyes of the heart" finds resonance with contemporary cognitive research on perception and awareness. McLeod posits that perception involves not merely sensory input but interpretive processing using internal cognitive structures. [35]Revelation can be

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[33] David A. Truncellito, "Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/epistemo Accessed March 26, 2026.

[34]Clavier, 255–68.

[35] Saul McLeod, "Piaget's Theory and Stages of Cognitive Development," *Simply Psychology*, https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html Accessed March 26, 2026.

understood as divine agency transforming human interpretive frameworks, enabling perception beyond ordinary cognitive capabilities.

Science and Technology Studies (STS**):** Knowledge systems are often socially constructed with privileged status accorded to rational and empirical methods. However, STS scholarship recognizes limitations of purely empirical approaches for addressing metaphysical and existential questions. Revelation knowledge functions complementarily—offering epistemic access in domains where empirical investigation reaches its boundaries.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study suggest several trajectories for future investigation:

1. Comparative Epistemology Studies: Comparative analysis of revelation epistemologies across biblical texts (prophetic, apocalyptic, Johannine, Pauline) would illuminate distinct models of divine disclosure.
2. Theology and Cognitive Science Integration: Empirical research examining correlations between reported revelatory experiences and measurable cognitive changes (neural correlates of transformed perception) represents a fertile interdisciplinary frontier.
3. Biblical-Text-Based Epistemological Studies: Extended exegetical analysis of other knowledge-related passages (e.g., 1 Corinthians 2:6–16; Colossians 2:2–3; 2 Peter 1:3–4) would further develop a biblically grounded epistemology.
4. Practical Applications: Research on pedagogical approaches for cultivating receptivity to revelation knowledge while maintaining epistemological discernment would benefit ministry and spiritual formation contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated revelation as an epistemological source through exegesis of Ephesians 1:17–18. The analysis establishes three primary findings:

(1) revelation knowledge (ἀποκάλυψις) is divinely given rather than cognitively achieved, operating through passive illumination (φωτίζω) of the inner person;
(2) authentic revelation produces active, conscious awareness (οἶδα) that transforms understanding and enables articulation; and
(3) Jesus Christ retains sovereign prerogative over revelation's bestowal, necessitating epistemological humility.

These findings support a holistic epistemological framework where human knowing encompasses cognitive, empirical, experiential, and revelatory dimensions. Revelation does not negate other knowledge forms but complements them—providing access to truths that transcend human inquiry. The study demonstrates that theological exegesis contributes meaningfully to broader epistemological discourse rather than remaining confined to confessional boundaries.

The interdisciplinary implications are significant. Revelation knowledge challenges rationalist and empiricist assumptions regarding the sufficiency of autonomous human reason. It aligns with cognitive science models of transformed perception and STS recognition of knowledge system plurality. For contemporary epistemology, Ephesians 1:17–18 offers biblical warrant for expanding standard epistemic criteria to accommodate divine disclosure as a legitimate—though distinctive—source of knowledge.

While other knowledge forms illuminate the created order, revelation knowledge proceeds directly from the Knower of all things. This study submits that revelation constitutes a

superior epistemological source—not because cognitive knowledge lacks value, but because revelation alone provides access to the self-disclosing God who alone can make Himself known.

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