

## Hearing God : How does God Speak?

### Hearing God

- “Hearing God” is the faithful, humble, diligent, intentional act of attempting to discern (understand) that which God has communicated (revealed or made known) or is communicating, with the intent of submission to it.
- “Hearing God” is walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), being led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:18), and living in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).
- Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians are enabled to understand God and that which He has communicated and is communicating (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

### Does God Still Speak Today?

- Yes! Jesus once said (John 10:27) : “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

### Why has God Spoken in the Past (Why does God Speak Today)?

- God is relational, and He is actively building relationships with & amongst His people!
- Some Examples (this list is not exhaustive):
  - To Reveal Himself, His Purposes, His Will, His Son (John 5:39)
  - That people would believe in Jesus (John 20:31)
  - To affirm the inspiration of His word (Acts 1:15-17)
  - To protect (Matthew 2:19-24)
  - To enable / equip for witnessing (John 1:29-34)
  - To humiliate or humble (Numbers 22:22-23)
  - To encourage repentance (Genesis 20:1-7)
  - To demonstrate His mercy (Genesis 19:1, 12-13)
  - To facilitate judgment (Exodus 28:29-30)
  - To provide understanding (Daniel 8:15-17)
  - To encourage and comfort (Jeremiah 1:4-9)

### How has God Spoken?

- Examples
  - The Father’s Audible Voice
  - The Son (Jesus)
  - The Holy Spirit
  - His Inspired Word
  - Dreams
  - The Interpretation of Dreams
  - Visions
  - The Interpretation of Visions
  - Angels
  - Prophets
  - Nature
  - Still Small Voice / Conscience
  - Urim and Thummim
  - Supernatural Events / Miracles
  - Animals
  - His Personal Writing
- Clarification
  - God Himself doesn’t change (Malachi 3:6a ; James 1:17 ; Hebrews 13:8); however
  - His chosen methods of communication might change over time or vary person-to-person.

### What are the Normative Ways that God Speaks Today?

- Normative = That which is typical, ordinary, and frequent.
- Hebrews 1:1-2
  - The Living Word (Jesus Christ)
  - The Written Word (Scripture)
- The Living Word
  - Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:1, 1:14)
  - Jesus only spoke that which the Father gave Him (John 14:10)
  - Through the Holy Spirit Jesus’ words were recalled and written (John 14:25-26).
- The Written Word
  - The Word was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
  - Peter described Scripture as “more sure” (ESV, NASB) than even the audible voice of the Father (2 Peter 1:16-19).
  - The Written Word is complete (Jude 3; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19)

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- The Holy Spirit
  - The *parakletos* (Greek) not only indwells children of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), He comes alongside us like a lawyer (figuratively speaking) in order to:
    - Make the word of God living and active (Hebrews 4:12);
    - Teach (John 14:26) and bear witness of the truth (John 15:26);
    - Convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8); and
    - Search the deep things of God that we may know Him and them (1 Corinthians 2:9-14),
    - Often guiding our conscience, or communicating as a still small (but not necessarily audible!) voice (1 Kings 19:11-12).
    - Note that He often accomplishes these things “indirectly” through other people or circumstance.

- Nature
  - Romans 1:20

### What are Some of the Non-Normative Ways that God Speaks Today?

- Definitions
  - Non-Normative = That which is atypical, extraordinary, and infrequent.
  - Cessationism = the belief that God has ceased to communicate in non-normative ways.
- Recognition
  - Some in the broader Christian community, including at Hope Christian Church, believe that some of the following proposed “non-normative” means are, or should be, “normative.”
  - “Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind (Philippians 2:1-2).” Let us maintain unity of the Spirit and not let the Enemy gain a foothold and use our differences of understanding or interpretation to cause unhealthy schism in the body of Christ!
- Examples in Scripture
  1. Animals
    - God only communicated **once** in Scripture through animals, specifically, that being Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22:22-33).
  2. Urim and Thummim (Lights and Perfections) / Lots
    - The principle of God communicating through lots is in Scripture (Proverbs 16:33);
    - No one is truly certain as to what these two items --- located on the priest’s breastplate of judgment (Exodus 28:30) --- were, or exactly how they were used to discern God’s will.
    - There’s only **one** incident in the New Testament in which lots were used (Acts 1:15-26), in which the disciples used lots in an attempt to discern who God desired to serve as apostle in place of Judas. Considering God’s later choice of Paul, they likely “got it wrong.”
    - After Pentecost, there are no recorded incidents of the use of lots.
  3. The Father’s Audible Voice
    - The Father spoke audibly at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:17), Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:7), and shortly prior to Jesus’ crucifixion (John 12:18). That’s only **three** instances in the NT!
  4. God’s Personal Writing
    - God personally scribed the two tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 31:18), a proclamation of judgment on a wall in Babylon (Daniel 5:1-5; 25-28), and “His words” on the ground in Jerusalem (John 8:2-9). That’s only **three** recorded instances in Scripture.
  5. Angels
    - In the New Testament, outside of dreams and visions, angels directly communicated on behalf of God in only **five** circumstances: the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-37), the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-20), Jesus’ resurrection (Matthew 28:1-8), to free the apostles from prison (Acts 5:17-32), and to direct apostolic preaching / evangelism (Acts 8:26-27).
    - Warning : “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).”

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### 6. Miracles / Signs

- A study of the New Testament indicates that miraculous signs were primarily conducted by Jesus, His apostles, and those working with the apostles. Why? To authenticate (1) Jesus and His word (Hebrew 2:1-4), and (2) apostolic and prophetic ministry in laying the foundation for the church (Ephesians 2:19-22). Harkening back to Hebrew 1:1-2, miracles authenticated the Living Word and the Written Word.
- There are only **two** passages in the epistles which indicate a continuance of God communicating through miracles, Galatians 3:5 (which in context seems also to have been to authenticate the Gospel as presented by the apostle Paul), and 1 Corinthians 12 (in which case said miracles were and are for the benefit of the entire body of Christ).
- Warning : “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Mark 13:22).”

### 7. Prophets

- In the Old Testament it's clear that the Lord communicated to prophets directly through dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6). He would put His words in their mouths, command them to communicate His words, enable them to communicate His words, and then bring about the fulfillment of His words (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Jeremiah 1:4-9). Prophets were typically reluctant to share God's word, as it often resulted in their persecution and death (Hebrew 11:35-37).
- In the New Testament, prophets likewise shared the revealed words of the Lord, which was instrumental, as mentioned above, in the building of the church in lieu of God's Written and Prophetic Word (Romans 16:26). Although the apostle Paul wrote about the appointment of prophets by God in the church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11), he and others also wrote about the prophets and the prophetic word in the past tense, using terms such as:
  - *has been revealed* (Ephesians 3:1-5)
  - *spoke* (Hebrews 1:1; James 5:10)
  - *were spoken* (2 Peter 3:2)
  - *have inquired and searched* (1 Peter 1:10)
- Personal Conclusion : The canon of Scripture is closed, such that God's communication through prophets is extremely **rare** and largely limited to sharing that which has already been revealed. However, if He so chooses to call a person into the role of prophet, said prophet will possess the characteristics of a prophet in Scripture, most importantly that said person's words, when spoken in the Name of the Lord, shall be 100% consistent with Scripture and 100% accurate.
- Clarification : There are many in the Christian community, including at Hope Christian Church and amongst the Elder team, who believe that there is a distinction between a prophet (an office into which one is called) and a “prophetic voice” (i.e., the spiritual gift of prophecy given to some people in the body of Christ). This will be discussed in more detail during the forthcoming series on spiritual gifts.
- Warnings:
  - “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).”
  - “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).”

### 8. Dreams and the Interpretation of Dreams

- There are only **ten** passages in the New Testament [see Appendix A : Dreams] that appear to address dreams (note that for simplicity I'm differentiating between visions and dreams as dreams occurring while asleep and visions occurring while awake).
- Of these, one (Jude 1:8) deals with "dreamers" who are likely some form of false teachers, and one (Acts 2:17) is more of a general prophetic allusion (referring to a sign by "old men" during the last days --- see Prophets).

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- Setting those two passage aside, of the remaining 8 passages:
    - 5 deal with incidents surrounding the birth and early life of Jesus;
    - 1 was by Pontius Pilate's wife (with regards to Jesus);
    - 2 involved Paul (and they may have been visions); and
    - 7 of 8 involved explicit, clear communication by God Himself or an Angel of the Lord for a specific, immediate purpose.
    - None involved symbolism that needed interpretation (none were ambiguous).
  - Summary : There are only either **0 or 2** specific instances of God communicating through dreams since the day of Pentecost.
  - Warning (Jeremiah 23:28-32): “The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD. “*Is* not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’ Behold, I *am* against those who prophesy false dreams,” says the LORD, “and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,” says the LORD.
9. Visions and the Interpretation of Visions
- There are only **eight** specific circumstances in the New Testament in which God used visions to communicate (although there are at least three others --- Luke 1:22, Luke 24:23, and Acts 12:5-17 --- in which people thought they had seen a vision when in fact, according to the context, they hadn't):
    - To Peter, James and John during Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9);
    - To Paul and Ananias during Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1-12; Acts 26:1-23);
    - To Peter and Cornelius about God's granting of the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18);
    - To Paul to redirect his missionary activity (Acts 16:9-10);
    - To Paul to provide comfort, encouragement and instruction (Acts 18:9);
    - To Paul about Paradise (2 Corinthians 12:1-4);
    - To John about the seven churches and the end times (Revelation)
    - To Peter at Pentecost as a prophetic allusion to the last days (Acts 2:17).
  - In only **one** circumstance was symbolism used and an interpretation was required, and that was accomplished by Peter himself within a day of receiving the vision.

### **Summary**

**God as Sovereign is free to choose to & through whom He will communicate, as well as how, when, and why.**

Do not quench the Spirit.  
Do not despise prophecies.  
Test all things; hold fast what is good.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

### **Small Group Questions**

- 1) What are the risks and benefits associated with believing that God still communicates today? (to wrap-up your conversations from last week)
- 2) What do you think about the presented distinction between "normative" and "non-normative" means of God communicating? What are the potential benefits of this distinction? What are the potential drawbacks of this distinction?
- 3) Do you believe that God still communicates today in any "non-normative" ways? Why? Explain your reasoning.

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### Appendix A : Dreams

Reference	Who Received the Dream?	Who Communicated in the Dream?	Dream Type (Explicit, Images/Symbols, Both?)	Why Did God Communicate through this Dream?	Who Interpreted the Dream?	Who was the message for?
Matthew 1:20	Joseph	An Angel of the Lord	Explicit	Revelation about the Immaculate conception; to influence Joseph's decision; to assuage his fears.	Not Needed	Joseph
Matthew 2:12	Wise men from the East	God ("divinely")	The implication of the text is that it was explicit.	To protect Jesus, Joseph and Mary; possibly to protect the wise men also.	Not Needed	Wise men from the East
Matthew 2:13	Joseph	An Angel of the Lord	Explicit	To direct and protect Jesus, Joseph and Mary.	Not Needed	Joseph
Matthew 2:19	Joseph	An Angel of the Lord	Explicit	To direct Joseph to lead his family out of Egypt.	Not Needed	Joseph
Matthew 2:22	Joseph	God	Explicit	To direct Joseph and his family away from danger (Archelaus) to Nazareth, that Scripture would be fulfilled.	Not Needed	Joseph
Matthew 27:19	Pontius Pilate's Wife	Not disclosed in the text	Explicit	As a warning to Pilate about what he was planning to do with/to Jesus.	Not Needed	Pontius Pilate and his wife
Acts 2:17	"old men"	The Holy Spirit (Implied)	Not clear in the text.	This passage indicates a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the birth of the Church and/or the beginning of the last days (that it marked a unique event).	Not clear in the text.	Not clear in the text.
Acts 23:11 *	Paul	The Lord	Explicit	To encourage Paul and to clarify His purposes for him.	Not Needed	Paul
Acts 27:23 *	Paul	An Angel of God	Explicit	To encourage Paul and those with him.	Not Needed	Paul (primarily), but also those with him
Jude 1:8	"dreamers"	The implication in the text is that the "dreamers" themselves were false teachers who were claiming to have received their false doctrine and practice through dreams.				

\* It's not entirely clear if Paul was dreaming when this event occurred; these may have been visions (while he was awake).