

# DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY IN AN AUDIBLE VOICE?

To answer the question, a sizable amount of doctrine would have to be explained and understood, but the following **must** be understood.

- A. **Dispensations** - If you study dispensationalism, you will find out that God did some things differently in each dispensation. Just like it would be impossible to know who God is unless we study all His Attributes - not just a few of them.
- B. **Revelation** – All revelation is topside down – no new revelation after the canon was completed. I can only challenge what a person says they experience or believe (what they may have heard or seen) based on scripture.
- C. **Rationalization, Empiricism, Mysticism** – This is how man justifies things apart from Scripture i.e. the things he wants to believe.
- D. **How the Books came to be** - Why only the 66 Books? Why not the Apocrypha? The Apocrypha comes from the Greek word πόκρυφα, meaning "those having been hidden away" or texts of uncertain authenticity or writings where the authorship is questioned.

If God has spoken to so many people in so many ways in the past, can He speak to me today in an audible voice? The answer to that question is both yes and no. God could speak to us audibly today because God can do anything. To say God cannot speak audibly would make Him less than God, but there are many reasons why God does not choose to speak **audibly today**.

God's activity of speaking apart from the Scriptures occurred at a time when those documents were still being written. Interestingly, during that long history of Scripture writing, God's people did live by a "Scripture plus" principle of authority, and, in keeping with that principle, God employed various means to speak His extra scriptural words to them.

However, today the church is faced with a new situation: now, with centuries of Christian orthodoxy, we confess that the writing of Scripture is finished, that the canon is actually closed.

# WHAT I BELIEVE THE BIBLE TEACHES

1. I can only think of four times in the New Testament that there's a record of God speaking audibly, and three of them were occasions where the Father made a public declaration about his Son, Who, incidentally, is no longer with us on this planet in the flesh.

A. **Matthew 3:17 (NASB77)**

<sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (At His baptism)

B. **Matthew 17:1-9 (NASB77)**

<sup>1</sup> And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" <sup>6</sup> And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid. <sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone. <sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (His transfiguration)

C. **John 12:28 (NASB77)**

<sup>28</sup> "Father, glorify Thy name." There came therefore a voice out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (Jesus foretells His death)

2. The only other record of anyone being talked to by God audibly was Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus. Add to that the fact that many Christians don't like to consider: Hearing voices when there's no discernible source can be a manifestation of a psychosis. I'm not saying it is but it can be.

There are people who do suffer from hallucinatory experiences in which they hear voices as a result of chemical imbalances and so on. I can't think of anyone who has ever told me they actually heard the audible voice of God, but if they did, I would be concerned about their mental state. I wouldn't conclude immediately that they were crazy, but I do not think it is normal or expected in the devout Christian life to be hearing the audible voice of God.

3. God has already said everything He wants to say in Scripture, the Bible. The Canon of Scripture is complete. I believe ***with the closure of Scripture, direct, infallible, authoritative revelation from God has ceased for this age:***

***Revelation 22:18 (NASB77)***

<sup>18</sup> *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; (there is a real danger to make such a claim).*

***Jude 1:3-4 (NASB77)***

<sup>3</sup> *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which **was once for all (never again)** delivered to the saints.* <sup>4</sup> *For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

***2 Peter 3:2 (NASB77)***

<sup>2</sup> *that you should remember the **words spoken beforehand** by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken **by your apostles**.*

It is instructive to note when Paul wrote his last epistle to pastor/friend Timothy about leading the church of God, he did not encourage Timothy to focus on new revelations, impressions, feelings or hunches. Rather, he ***continually turned him to the Word of God and the doctrines contained therein (2 Timothy 2:2-14, 15; 3:15-17; 4:2-4).***

4. If God did speak audibly today, His message would have to be consistent with what He has already said. Some people periodically claim to have heard God speak audibly. The question might be asked, "If God told someone something different than Scripture then why did He not tell others this important message?"

In the Old Testament, if a prophet claimed to have a message from God that was inconsistent with previous revelation, that prophet was exposed as a false prophet (***Deuteronomy 18:20-22***).

Testing the spirits of those who claim to have heard from God in an audible voice helps us discern truth from error (***1 John 4:1***).

5. **God spoke apart from the Scriptures in history only while the Canon of Scripture (the Bible as we know it today) was being completed and not after.** But when the writing of Scripture ended, so did all forms of ongoing revelation. The Canon is closed. Hence the apostle Paul warns us in:

**1 Corinthians 4:6** - *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you **might learn not to exceed what is written**, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other, i.e. that God is speaking to me but not you.*

**1 Corinthians 2:16 (NASB77)** - *<sup>16</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. We do not need any more revelation – we have the mind of Christ.*

6. ***The completion of redemption (God's saving work) is accompanied by the completion of revelation (God's saving Word).*** Historically speaking, God's giving of revelation was always joined to and qualified by God's work of redemption. Now that God has accomplished His work (salvation through Christ) once-for-all, He has also spoken His Word (the Bible) once-for-all in Christ and in those He empowered especially for that purpose (**Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4; Matthew 16:15-19; John 14:26; Ephesians 2:19-20; Jude 3**). The completion of salvation in Christ brings with it the cessation of revelation.

God's revelation had a goal, a purpose: *to make known the way of salvation for sinful people who are hopelessly lost apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. This goal has been completed.*

This is what we learn from **Hebrews 1:1**: *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup>in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

God spoke in various ways in the past, but now that his Son has come, the last stage of human history has arrived and He has spoken definitively through His Son. Through knowing Him, we may know the Creator. The completion of this goal should not be lamented, it should be celebrated. Throughout history, God was lifting the lid on the treasure chest of salvation and now through the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation is complete.

The Greek word (*hapax*) means, "once-for-all, never to happen again." This word describes the completion both of Christ's redemptive work and of God's revelation.

Consider in the **Hebrews 7:27** - *“who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”*

**Hebrews 7:27** - where it is said of Christ, in contrast to the Old Testament priests, that he sacrificed *"once for all (hapax) when He offered up Himself"* and **Hebrews 9:12** *“and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”*

Where we read that Christ "*entered the Most Holy Place once for all (hapax), having obtained eternal redemption.*" It is this same word, *hapax*, which later describes God's revelation. Jude summons us in verse three to "*contend for the faith which was once for all (hapax) delivered to the saints.*" Here '*the faith*' refers to the sum of Christian teaching or the sum of God's revelation.

7. The revelatory gifts of the apostolic community were the vehicle -- apart from the oral teachings of Jesus Christ -- that God chose to communicate His new covenant message to the church and future generations. Once the canon of Scripture was completed, the function of these gifts (temporal gifts) was fulfilled and they disappeared. Why? We have the completed Bible.
8. As Bible believing Christians, we all agree that Scripture, and Scripture alone **MUST** provide that evidence. Our personal experience or personal beliefs must be subjected to God's own revelation. Without that foundation, everyone on both sides of the issues would be lost; everything would be subjective.
9. When we look at the average "person" in Scripture, clearly, the normal way God spoke to people was through His Word, **NOT** direct revelation. The prophets were given that word to give to the people. Over time, that word was written down as Scripture. And if we look at the normal course of events, God intended for the average person to receive His Word, **THROUGH** that Scripture. For example, in ***Joshua 1:8*** God specifically says that Joshua was to meditate on the Word. It was through meditation, and diligent application that God would guide and direct Him. So here in another narrative portion of Scripture, even when God is directly speaking, He is telling Joshua that usually He will speak through His Word!
10. Thus, in order to prove that God speaks to US in a small voice, we need better evidence than one incident from the life of Elijah (which was in the Jewish Dispensation, before the completed Canon of Scripture). We would need clear instructions from other portions of Scripture that would demonstrate that this method of communication was both general and still in use by God today. However, having said that, every one of us have had impressions, feelings and sometimes even inner confidence that God **WAS** speaking something special into our hearts. Isn't this really the same thing as what Elijah experienced? Well, there is a problem here because we are interpreting the Word of God by our experience, rather than our experience by the Word of God. Thus, we are implicitly assuming that our experience actually takes precedence over God's Word.

We cannot, however, generalize from Elijah's experience. We do have general principles from God Himself that His Word is the way that He normally speaks to us. We know that we have a conscience which God uses to guide and direct us. Therefore, we do not need to speculate that God is speaking in a "soft, inner" voice.

But the real issue is that we LIKE the idea of God speaking to US personally. It makes us feel special and privileged. We feel as if we are losing something because He doesn't speak to us audibly today. Trust me, I understand that fear; but what if I could promise you something even greater, and more precious and special? Jesus said, those who worship God must worship Him in "*spirit and in truth*" (**John 4:24**).

And when He DOES speak through that Word, it will really be His voice. But it will take some time; it will take some study; it will take a lot of humility.

11. We need to read and meditate on His Word. We need to study it diligently, talk about it freely and encourage and exhort each other to apply it in our lives (*cf. Joshua 1:8. Colossians 3:16, Deuteronomy 6:4ff, 2 Timothy 3:16-17*), THAT is where we can expect God to speak.
12. There are numerous passages which employ a present continuing tense when citing other Scripture (**Matthew 22:43; Acts 2:17; 7:48; 8:34; Romans 10:11-21; 15:12**). God speaks to us (present tense) through his Word. In the Word, we find his thoughts and ideas, and as we study it and meditate on it, they become ingrained in us. We no longer need a voice, we have God's mind. The Holy Spirit helps us in this regard, to remember the Word and apply it when we need it.
13. The Bible gives us no reason to expect that God will speak to His children today apart from the Scriptures. Those who teach otherwise need to explain to God's children how these words "freshly spoken from heaven" can be so necessary and strategic to God's highest purposes for their lives (and others) when their Father does nothing to ensure that they will ever actually hear those words.

Indeed, they must explain why this is not quenching the Spirit (teaching opposite of the truth). Moreover, the promise of such guidance inevitably diverts attention from the Scriptures, particularly in the practical and pressing concerns of life. Let us never underestimate just how serious this diversion really is. In the Bible, the church hears God's true voice; in the Scriptures, we know that He is speaking His very words to us.

14. **Illustration:** James Ryle told about the fact that God gives him revelation through dreams, and that God revealed to him in this incredible dream - "Pictures of guitars, blue guitars, and iridescent blue guitars." And then in the dream God showed him amplifiers, and then God told him that, "The guitars and the amplifiers belong to the Beatles." And God told him that, "The Church will win the world to salvation when it goes into the world and sings anointed music like the Beatles." The tape is filled with statements, "The Lord said, the Lord said, the Lord said, the Lord said." And here are some quotes, "The Lord said, 'I called those four lads from Liverpool to myself. There was a call from God on their lives. They were gifted by my hand and it was I who anointed them (speaking of the Beatles). The purpose was to usher in the Charismatic Renewal with musical revival around the world.'"

Then the Lord said, "The four lads from Liverpool went AWOL and did not serve in my army. They served their own purposes and gave the gift to the other side." And then the Lord said, "I lifted the anointing and for twenty years I've held it in my hand and I am about to release it again." And then the Lord said, "It doesn't belong to the world, it belongs to the Church." And then the Lord said, "I will release an anointing in music that will take the world by storm like the Beatles when they first came. New, anointed music that will capture men's hearts." And then the Lord said, "The same kind of reaction that the Beatles extracted will come, only this time the girls will not scream, Ringo, John, George, or Paul, they will scream, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

Did the Lord say that? Did the Lord say any of that? He says he did.

Who is James Ryle? He has been the Pastor of the Boulder Valley Vineyard Christian Fellowship since 1984. He has also been the Chaplain of the University of Colorado football team where he met Coach Bill McCartney, who soon became the Founder of Promise Keepers (PK). Bill McCartney now sits under James Ryle's teaching at the Boulder Valley Vineyard, as does the President of Promise Keepers, Randy Phillips. Ryle himself is/was/is on the Board of Directors of Promise Keepers, and is a featured speaker at PK men's conferences. Ryle also travels throughout the States to speak at other Vineyard meetings and conferences, is on the ministry team of James Robison's Life Outreach International, is a frequent guest on Pat Robertson's *700 Club*, and writes articles for *Charisma* and *Ministries Today* magazines.

Ryle also wrote a book that was published in 1993 titled *Hippo in the Garden*, named after a dream that Ryle had in the autumn of 1989. Ryle supplemented *Hippo* in 1995 with his second book, *A Dream Come True*. This second book is advertised on page 51 of the Nov/Dec 1995 issue of *New Man* magazine, the chief organ for Promise Keepers.

As the reader might have guessed at this point, both of Ryle's books have a lot to do with dreams, especially dreams (visions) that he claims are communication from God to himself and other Christians today. Ryle doesn't want his readers to miss any "divine revelation" that may come their way, wherein "God speaks" through Scripture (beyond the context), not to mention in a "still, small voice," and through dreams, visions, and "Prophetic Ministry" (modern-day apostles and prophets) today. According to Ryle, the issue is not if Christians today should expect God to speak "in every circumstance of life," but rather, are Christians today willing to "get past the barriers of unbelief" and listen to what "God is saying."

15. **Illustration:** Surely the most famous of all the Lord's speaking to Charismatic's is the famous, "Oral Roberts Death Threat Prophecy" a preposterous and fabricated supposed "Word from the Lord." Roberts told his nationwide audience in 1987 that God had threatened to call him home if he couldn't raise 8 million dollars by his creditor's deadline. Whether or how that threat might have been carried out the world will never know because Roberts received a last minute reprieve in the form of a large check from a Florida dog track owner, as you remember.

Two years later when Roberts was forced to close his massive, multi-million dollar City of Faith Medical Center anyway, in spite of the 8 million dollars, he asked God, "Why?"

And Oral Roberts said God spoke to him and God said, "I had you build the City of Faith large enough to capture the imagination of the entire world, about the merging of My healing streams of Prayer and Medicine. I did not want this revelation localized in Tulsa, however, and the time has come when I want this concept of merging My healing streams to be known to all people and to go into all future generations." So, said God. Roberts said, "It is clearly in my spirit, as I have ever heard Him, the Lord gave me an impression, 'You and your partners have merged prayer and medicine for the entire world, for the Church World and for all generations.' And then He said, 'It is done.'"

And then I asked, 'Is that why after eight years you are having us close the hospital and after eleven years the medical school?' And God said, 'Yes, the mission has been accomplished in the same way that after three years of public ministry, my Son said on the cross, Father, it is finished!'"

Putting yourself in company with Jesus Christ is a bold move.

16. Now, the question is, "Did God talk to this man about the Beatles? Did God talk to Oral Roberts about the City of Faith? Are we to believe that as revelation from God?"

If the Bible is complete, then it represents a closed system of truth. If it entails a fixed and absolute standard of truth, then the teaching of Scripture must be ascertained and dogmatically asserted.

If God is still granting new revelation, then the truth of God is still being progressively revealed; and if this were the case, our duty would be to faithfully listen to today's prophets as they unraveled God's truth and new and clearer representations than we find in Scripture.

17. How are some of the ways God guides us today?



## **DIVINE GUIDANCE: MECHANICS**

### **I. Introduction: Acts 11:1-16**

- A. V. 1: Peter received the news of the Gentile Pentecost.
- B. V. 2: Followed by inevitable opposition from legalism.
- C. V. 3: There is criticism of Peter so Peter begins to relate various factors in God's leading as he came into contact with the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea.

### **II. Mechanics of Guidance:**

- A. **Guidance through Prayer: v. 5:** Guidance through prayer is authentic only when a believer is confronted with a situation which is not specified by some direct command in Scripture.

*Example:* A believer should never pray about marrying an unbeliever.

**2 Corinthians 6:14** commands no marriage is to be contracted between a believer and an unbeliever. However, the believer should use prayer in the doctrine of right man and right woman.

- B. **Guidance through the Mind: v. 6 - "I Considered":** To put your mind down on something. Objective thinking, to ponder it carefully. God always leads in compliance with His Word. God never leads contrary to the Word. Basically guidance comes through the Word, but the Word must be in the mind in order to be applied.
- C. **Guidance through the Word of God: v. 7-10** - Peter was guided through divine revelation, which today is the WORD OF GOD AND ONLY THE WORD OF GOD. Today, we do not hear from God in an audible voice, dreams, or visions.
- D. **Guidance through Providential Circumstances: v. 11** - Three men had arrived even while Peter was still on the rooftop. They had left Caesarea some time before and had made the day's Journey to Joppa and to the house. This was providential circumstances. We are to test a providential circumstance. It must not conflict with statements, doctrines, and principles of the Word of God.

E. **Guidance through The Holy Spirit v.12** - The Holy Spirit never guides the believer apart from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit cannot guide apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of doctrine.

1. v. 7: "*hearing the voice*": Word
2. v. 5: "*seeing the vision*": Canon (for us - the completed canon of Scripture)
3. v. 12: "*Spirit bade me go*": Teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

F. **Guidance through Comparison: v. 13-15** - The parallel phenomenon of Pentecost in Jerusalem confirmed the fact that Gentile believers were just as much "church" (body of Christ) as Jewish believers *Ephesians 2:14*.

G. **Guidance through Scripture Memory: v. 16** - Peter remembered what Jesus spoke in *Acts 15*. The memory of Scripture contributed considerably to his guidance. Peter remembered it at the proper time, and therefore was guided by it.