

Do You Hear the Voice of God?

Introduction. A lot of people have claimed that God talks to them in the past. Muhammad said he received revelations via the angel Gabriel, and compiled them into the Quran. Joan of Arc claimed to hear voices of saints (Michael, Catherine, Margaret) instructing her to support Charles VII. William Miller's prophecies (based on what he considered divine calculation) led to the "Great Disappointment" of 1844. David Koresh (Branch Davidians) claimed divine authority for his leadership, with tragic results.

Confusion naturally exists because these people had wildly different conceptions of what they "heard" God say. We know that God isn't the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), but what can we make of this? God has spoken in the past, and does indeed speak to us now, but how does He do it and what do we do with this information? Let's turn into our Bibles and find out!

I. The Bible Says God Has Spoken in the Past

- A. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."
- B. God communicated to several ways.
 - 1. God spoke to Abraham and Moses (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 3:4-6).
 - 2. God warned Abimelech in a dream not to take Sarah as his wife (Genesis 20:3-7).
 - 3. The heavens opened and Ezekiel received visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1).
 - 4. Wise men from the east were warned in a dream not to return to Herod after visiting Jesus (Matthew 2:12).
 - 5. At Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened, the Father's voice spoke over Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21).
 - 6. Peter saw heaven opened before receiving a vision that led to the Gentile mission (Acts 10:1).
- C. But now God has spoken to us through His Son. We're going to lay out what this exactly means.

II. The Bible Says God Is Speaking in the Present

- A. The steps of communication in the New Testament.
 - 1. Truth originates with God (Psalm 31:5; 86:15; 89:14; Isaiah 65:16).
 - 2. Truth was communicated by Christ (Matthew 17:5; 28:18; John 12:47-48).
 - 3. Truth was delegated to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 John 4:6).
 - 4. Truth is contained in the Scriptures (James 1:25; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Jude 3-5).
- B. How God communicates truth in the New Testament.
 - 1. Divine command.
 - a) This is a direct statement. If you were to tell your child to pick up their toys, you've issued a command.
 - b) God told us to observe the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:25). Paul received it from Jesus and gave it to the church (1 Corinthians 11:23).

- c) Commands can either be positive, such as this one, or they can be negative (Colossians 3:9).
- 2. Divine example.
 - a) This reveals practice of the church in the New Testament under apostolic guidance and which the apostles had received from the Lord.
 - (1) It's a description of what someone did, teaching by "show" rather than "tell;" the conduct meets God's approval.
 - (2) You've all known children who pick up cursing from their father or mother. They pick it up because they believe it's an approved example. The examples of conduct in the Bible are immense in number and God must've intended to teach us by example in view of the amount and variety of them (1 Corinthians 10:11).
 - b) We know the time of the Lord's Supper observance because of example (Acts 20:7).
 - (1) Paul received this memorial from Jesus and knew when Jesus wanted it to be observed.
 - (2) He remained in Troas for seven days, obviously waiting for Sunday (Acts 20:6) — the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).
- 3. Divine implication.
 - a) This means that God implied something important in His communication to mankind for us to understand and follow.
 - (1) Several instances in the Scriptures say that Paul "reasoned from the Scriptures" that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25). That required drawing of premises from Old Testament passages and relating them to Jesus to show He was the fulfillment.
 - (2) The fulfillment of prophecy depends on divine implication. This is likened to jury duty. You have the task of evaluating the evidence and making a judgment or a conclusion based on that evidence.
 - b) The frequency of the Lord's Supper memorial rests on divine implication.
 - (1) Acts 20:7 says, "The first day of the week to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Compare this to Exodus 20:8, which says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."
 - (2) If the "Sabbath day to keep it holy" means every every sabbath — as regularly as it comes — then, "The first day of the week to break bread" means every "first day," as regularly as it comes.
 - (3) Religious groups unwittingly accept this when they take up an offering every Sunday, based off of 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. If they understand this to mean giving every Sunday, then they need to observe the memorial every Sunday.
- 4. Divine command, divine example, and divine implication are simply common sense. Jesus taught via this divinely-sanctioned system (John 13:34-35), and we use these methods every day.
- C. Another part of communicating God's will includes understanding generic and specific elements of what we've studied so far.

1. Generic elements mean that there's multiple ways to accomplish what God wants. It includes everything that's generally used. God doesn't specify; therefore, we have a choice. No one has the right to bind a specific method.
 - a) Matthew 28:19 says "Teach." We can teach in private or in public. We can teach in a class setting if we so desire.
 - b) Ephesians 5:19 says "Sing." We can sing using song books or we can sing by memory. We can all sing the same part or we can sing our regular four-part harmony.
 - c) Hebrews 10:25 commands us to not forsake the assembly. Christians must assemble to be pleasing to God. However, we can choose to assemble in someone's home, this building, or in place which we rent.
2. Specific elements mean that there's only one way to accomplish what God wants. It excludes everything that's not specifically identified.
 - a) God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14). Gopher wood excluded walnut, pine, ash, oak, and all other kinds of wood. When God specified gopher wood, no one had the right to add another kind.
 - b) The Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23). The unleavened loaf and fruit of the vine excludes every other ingredient.
 - c) Ephesians 5:19 says "Sing." This excludes every other "kind" of music. Instrumental music is excluded by the fact that God specified "sing" and that doesn't include "playing" on an instrument.

III. What Do We Do for the Future?

A. Know the Word.

1. Study, don't just skim. Read slowly, paying attention to context: author, audience, historical setting, and literary genre (Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6).
2. Simple inductive questions as you read a passage will help.
 - a) What does it say? (Observation: repeated words, structure, key ideas).
 - b) What does it mean? (Interpretation: context, cross-references, theology).

B. Live the Word.

1. Pursue holiness by refusing to let sin rule your life and choosing what's pure and good in God's sight (Luke 11:28; Philippians 2:14-16).
2. Practice love as your ruling principle: forgiving, serving, and speaking truth with grace toward others.
3. Guard your words and conduct so your life "commends the gospel" and makes Christ attractive to others.

C. Teach the Word.

1. Teach both Old and New Testaments, showing God's approach to truth, His character, and His purposes across Scripture (Acts 8:4; 13:4-5).
2. Clarify the original context, key words, and structure so learners see what the text meant before you ask what it means for us.
3. Stress explanation then application: point to the question that if the Bible is true, what should we believe, feel, and do differently?

Conclusion. Through the Bible, God still communicates His will to us. But it's not a message where we have the liberty to subjectively interpret it in any way we

please. God has given guidelines for understanding it, and also understanding what we should do with it. When you hear the voice of God that He intended to convey to you, make sure you respond appropriately.