

# CHAPTER SIX

## HOW GOD SPEAKS TO MAN

### OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- Write the Key Verse from memory.
- List various ways God speaks to man.
- Recognize God is not limited in His ability to communicate to man.

### KEY VERSE:

**Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.  
(Ephesians 5:17)**

### INTRODUCTION

As we mentioned in the introduction of this course, the Bible is a history of methods by which God communicated to man and the response of mankind to the voice of God. This chapter examines the Biblical record to discover the methods by which God communicates to man.

### THE WRITTEN WORD

As we learned in previous lessons, God speaks to man through His written Word. God does not need to speak to you concerning things already revealed in the Scriptures. When God uses other methods to communicate, they will never conflict with His written Word.

### PRAYER

There are many Biblical examples of God speaking as a result of prayer. Prayer and fasting (doing without food for spiritual reasons) resulted in God speaking to Paul and Barnabas:

**And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3)**

Prayer is to include the request for the fulfillment of God's will on earth. Jesus taught His followers to pray:

**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.  
(Matthew 6:10)**

Jesus prayed for direction from God prior to the selection of His disciples:

**And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples; and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles. (Luke 6:12-13)**

Jesus prayed for God's will prior to His death:

**. . . Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. (Luke 22:42)**

### **COUNSELORS**

God communicates His will through Christian counselors. There are many Biblical examples of people seeking guidance from men of God.

The Bible states:

**Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14)**

**The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. (Proverbs 12:15)**

### **CIRCUMSTANCES**

God communicates His plan through circumstances. One excellent Old Testament example of this is the life of Joseph recorded in Genesis 37-50.

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt but he viewed this as the direction of God:

**Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. . . And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.  
(Genesis 45:5-8)**

Through circumstances over which Joseph had no personal control, he was used of God to save the lives of thousands of people in a time of severe famine.

Paul wrote some interesting words in I Thessalonians 2:18. He told believers at Thessalonica he was prevented from visiting them because Satan hindered. Since he could not go to them, he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. Satan's hindering resulted in the book of I Thessalonians and the important message Paul shared had greater impact than would have resulted from a visit. It has been passed down through the centuries for the benefit of all believers.

Nothing occurs apart from God's knowledge. Even when circumstances block what you might perceive to be God's will, God is still in control. God can take any deed, whether of Satan or man, and use it for His own purposes. We have a wonderful promise from God regarding circumstances:

**And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)**

(One word of warning: Caution must be used in considering circumstances alone to determine God's will. For example, God told a prophet named Jonah to go to Ninevah to preach. When he came to the waterfront, there was a boat leaving for Tarsus. He took this boat instead of going to Ninevah. He might have said, "There is a cabin open on this boat going the opposite direction, so it must be God's will that I go.")

Circumstances of life must be viewed in relation to what God reveals through other methods. God had already communicated His will to Jonah. Jonah manipulated circumstances to fulfill his own wishes.

### **OPEN AND CLOSED DOORS**

Circumstances of life result in what has come to be called "open and closed doors." Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

**But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries. (I Corinthians 16:8-9)**

Paul decided to stay at Ephesus because through circumstances arranged by God, there was a great opportunity for Christian service open to him. He called this an open door. On another occasion Paul records his desire to minister in certain areas, but the doors there were closed:

**Now when they had gone throughout Phrgia and the region of Galatia and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,**

**After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. (Acts 16:6-7)**

A closed door does not mean you have missed God's will. It does not mean it is not His will to

do something. Paul later evangelized Asia. God is directing you by closing a door. He leads through closed as well as open doors. Sometimes a door is closed because it is not the right timing in the plan of God. Later, that same door may open to you.

## ANGELS

Lot was given direction by angels who appeared at his home in Sodom. He was told to leave Sodom because the judgment of God was going to fall on the city (Genesis 19). An angel spoke to Philip and told him to go to Samaria (Acts 8:26). The births of John the Baptist and Jesus were announced by angels (Luke 1).

There are numerous Biblical records of angels appearing to communicate the will of God to man. You can find other examples in your own study of Scriptures.

## MIRACLES

A miracle is a supernatural event which is beyond the power of man to perform.

God spoke through a miracle in the event recorded in I Kings chapter 18. The prophet Elijah was told to prepare an altar before the Lord. Elijah prepared the altar and cried:

**. . . Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. . .**

**Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.**

**And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is God; the Lord He is God. (I Kings 18:36,38,39)**

God used this miracle to speak to men who worshiped idols and reveal Himself as the true and living God.

God has also revealed His will through miracles in nature. A pillar of fire and a cloud in the sky gave direction to the nation of Israel by night and day as they traveled through the desert:

**And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.**

**He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Exodus 13:21-22)**

You can find many other Biblical examples of God communicating to men through miracles. Watch for these in your own personal Bible study.

## **DREAMS**

God desires so much to communicate with us that He even speaks while we sleep! God speaks in dreams. These are not the normal dreams experienced by everyone. They are supernatural dreams given by God. They are detailed, specific, and reveal His will.

The following are a few of many Biblical examples:

-God warned Abimelech in a dream about his sin of taking Abraham's wife, Sarah. Genesis 20:3

-An angel spoke to Jacob in a dream to remind him of his vow to God. Genesis 31:11-13

-God used dreams to reveal His will to Joseph. Genesis 37.

-God appeared to Solomon in a dream and gave him the opportunity to ask for whatever he desired. I Kings 3:5

-A dream was used to direct wise men to return to their country by a different route because of an evil king. Matthew 2:12-13

These are just a few of the many examples of how God communicates through dreams. You can find other examples as you continue to study this method of guidance in God's Word.

## **VISIONS**

A vision is similar to a dream but differs because you are awake. It is like having a dream without being asleep. Visions may be seen with spiritual eyes as well as the physical eyes. This means you might not actually see it with your natural eye, but God gives you a picture of something in your spirit.

The following are a few of many Biblical examples where visions were used by God to communicate with man:

-God appeared to Abraham in a vision and made him a great promise. Genesis 15

-The book of Daniel is filled with visions (as well as dreams). God used these to reveal many things about the future of the world. He spoke to many other Old Testament prophets through visions.

-God gave Peter a vision concerning the need to take the Gospel to the Gentile nations. Acts 10

-God called Paul to Macedonia through a vision. Acts 16:9

-God spoke to Paul in the night through a vision. Acts 18:9-10

-The final book in the Bible, Revelation, is based on a vision seen by the Apostle John.

### **AN AUDIBLE VOICE**

God spoke to Paul in an audible voice during a journey along the Damascus road. You can read the story in Acts chapter 9:

**And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**

**And he said, Who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:4-5)**

God also spoke to Samuel in an audible voice:

**And the Lord came, and stood and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. The Samuel answered, Speak: for thy servant heareth. (I Samuel 3:10)**

The Bible is full of the declaration "and God said" or references to the fact that God "spoke" or "commanded." Often this was an audible voice. But there is another voice through which

God speaks. . .

### **THE INNER VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

More often than an audible voice, God uses the inner voice of the Holy Spirit to speak to man. This is called being "led by the Spirit":

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14)**

To be "led by the Spirit" assumes a spiritual life in those being led. A soul dead in sin, with no spiritual life, cannot be led by the Holy Spirit. Being led of the Spirit also assumes an inability to lead yourself. You have learned in previous chapters that this is true.

When you experience the new birth of salvation, God gives you a new spirit which is receptive to His communications:

**A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you. . . (Ezekiel 36:26-27)**

When you are led by the Spirit, the will of God is revealed to your spirit by the Holy Spirit. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is guidance:

**Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. (John 16:13)**

The spirit of man is that "hidden man of the heart" mentioned by Peter (I Peter 3:4). When God speaks to the inner man He is speaking to your spirit. The writer of Proverbs said the spirit of man is the candle, or lamp, of the Lord:

**The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. . . (Proverbs 20:27)**

In the natural world, a candle enables you to see in darkness. In the spiritual world, God uses the candle of your spirit to direct your steps to His will. He enlightens and guides through your spirit.

Once during a journey by ship the Apostle Paul warned the captain of the vessel:

**Sir, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. (Acts 27:10)**

Paul did not say "I had a vision." He did not claim to have a dream or that God had audibly spoken to him. His spirit had a witness from God and that witness proved to be correct.

You must train your spirit to be sensitive to God. Much time is spent on intellectual development through education. Much time is spent on physical development through exercise and athletics. But often, little time is spent on spiritual development. Your spirit can be educated just as your mind. Your spirit can develop in spiritual strength just as your body can be built and trained. You train your spirit by meditating on the Word of God:

**This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:8)**

God also uses the inward voice of the Holy Spirit to convict your conscience. The conscience is an inward awareness of right and wrong given by God.

*Feeling* is the voice of the body. God does not use how you feel to direct you. The flesh is an enemy of the spirit, so feelings can deceive you.

*Reason* is the voice of the mind. God's ways are often beyond human reason. His thought processes are much higher than yours.

*Conscience* is the voice of the spirit of man, convicting and directing you to the perfect will of God. The Holy Spirit speaks to your spirit. The spirit convicts the conscience. Through this you are brought into conformity to the will of God. When the Holy Spirit speaks to your spirit, the conscience is convicted, but if you continue to ignore it, your conscience can become "seared." This means it becomes hardened to the conviction of the Holy Spirit:

**. . . having their conscience seared with a hot iron. . . (I Timothy 4:2)**

The book of Proverbs contains many verses that indicate God controls inner thoughts and the conscience of man to guide him into His will:

**The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord. (Proverbs 16:1)**

**A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)**

**The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will. (Proverbs 21:1)**

## **GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Spiritual gifts are also used by God to speak to man. Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit. Several of these gifts enable you to receive communication from God.

There is a gift of tongues through which God speaks to man in a language he does not know. Interpretation from God follows to translate the message. The prayer language of the Holy Spirit (other tongues) is also used by the Spirit to guide you to the will of God. When you do not know how to pray regarding God's will, pray in other tongues and. . .

**. . . He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is in the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:27)**



There is also the gift of prophecy which brings an immediate message from God to His people. There is a gift called discernment through which God communicates regarding the spirits operating in others. God also communicates through the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. These gifts provide divine insight about people and circumstances beyond what is known by the natural mind.

### **MISCELLANEOUS METHODS**

Two other methods of Biblical guidance are casting of lots and the use of fleeces. We discussed both of these in previous chapters. As we learned, the casting of lots was a method of chance. It was used only prior to the giving of the Holy Spirit in a new dimension. Its use is never again recorded after the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit became available (Acts 2). We learned that a fleece is only mentioned once in the Bible. It was used by Gideon at a time of great national crisis. It was a miraculous sign used for confirmation, not direction.

### **GOD IS NOT LIMITED**

God does not always speak in the same way. We try to limit God to a set pattern. Because God has spoken in a certain way one time, we believe He will always direct in the same way. But as we have learned in this chapter, God has many methods of communicating with man. God is not limited by a set pattern. Consider these examples:

#### **MOSES:**

When Moses was leading the nation of Israel across the dessert to the land God promised them, providing water for two million people was a major challenge. On one occasion God told Moses to strike a rock with his rod. When he did, water poured out of the rock. On another occasion when the Israelites were thirsty God wanted Moses to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses struck the rock as he had done previously. This was displeasing to God, and Moses was punished. This story illustrates the importance of waiting for guidance from God even when facing a familiar situation. God is not limited to any previous pattern which you have experienced.

(Note: You might think God was unjust to punish Moses for such a little thing as striking the rock instead of speaking to it. The rock held symbolic meaning. It represented the Lord Jesus Christ and the living water of redemption which would burst forth through His death. Jesus was stricken once and for all. There was no need for another striking. It was the importance of this symbolism that made the offense of Moses so great.)

#### **ELIJAH:**

God used many supernatural methods to communicate to the Prophet Elijah. Once Elijah had a unique experience which illustrated the importance of knowing God's voice. Elijah was told to go and stand on a certain mountain and wait for God to speak to him. This is what happened:

**And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:**

**And after the earthquake a fire: but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (I Kings 19:11-12)**

There were several supernatural events in this account. There was a wind, an earthquake, and fire. These were methods by which God had previously communicated with Elijah. But this time, God did not speak in all the glorious events that occurred. He spoke in a still small voice. This could have been either an audible voice or a silent voice in Elijah's spirit.

### **PAUL:**

God used many ways to direct the Apostle Paul during his missionary ministry:

- On the Damascus road Paul was directed by a bright light and a voice from Heaven. Acts 9:1-8
- When a plot was formed to murder Paul, he was warned by believers who were used of God to help him escape. Acts 9:20-25
- Barnabas was used by God to establish relationships between Paul and the other disciples. Acts 9:20-28
- Believers were used of God to help Paul escape the angry Grecians. Acts 9:29-30
- When Paul met an occultist, God gave him discernment to bring deliverance. Acts 13:6-12
- Prayer and the Holy Spirit guided Paul into a special missionary ministry. Acts 13:2-4
- Personal prophecy by Agabus confirmed the experience that awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Acts 21:10-14
- God spoke to Paul through dreams and visions. Acts 22:18; 26:19; 27:23-24
- An effectual door of service for the Lord caused Paul to change his personal plans. I Corinthians 16:8-10

### **PHILIP:**

**And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.**

**And he arose and went; and behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning and**

**sitting in his chariot reading Essaias the prophet. Then the spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. (Acts 8:26-29)**

God spoke to Philip the first time through an angel. The second time He spoke through the Holy Spirit and Philip responded immediately. He did not wait for confirmation from an angel the second time God spoke just because that method had been used previously.

**DAVID:**

When David was a young man, he battled an enemy of God's people named Goliath. Although Goliath was a giant and well armed, God told David not to use traditional weapons of warfare. Instead, David used a sling shot. In a glorious victory, David brought down the enemy with one well-directed shot which struck him in the forehead. In later years David could have been slain by a giant named Isbibenob if his nephew Abishai had not come to his aid. Are we to conclude that God was with David when he met Goliath, but not when he confronted the second giant? No. God simply used a different method. The first time God used David's skill with a sling. The second time He used Abishai's military skill.

When God does not choose to speak to you as He has in the past, do not become frustrated. If His will for you in a similar situation is not identical to what it was previously, do not become confused. God is not restricted to certain communication patterns. The great Creator is also a great Communicator. His methods are unlimited.

## SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verse from memory.

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2. Give one of the several Scriptural examples discussed in this lesson which confirm God is not limited and does not always speak in the same way.

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3. List the twelve ways discussed in this chapter as Biblical methods God uses to speak to man.

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4. Read the following statements. If the statement is True, write the letter T on the blank provided in front of it. If a statement is False, write the letter F on the blank provided in front of it.

- a. \_\_\_\_ If you encounter a "closed door" it means you must have missed God's will.
- b. \_\_\_\_ Jesus did not pray for God's will because He already knew it.
- c. \_\_\_\_ Joseph felt he was a victim of circumstances and resented it.
- d. \_\_\_\_ Circumstances are the best indication of the will of God.
- e. \_\_\_\_ Jonah manipulated circumstances to fulfill his own will instead of God's will.
- f. \_\_\_\_ God's other methods of communication will always agree with His written Word.

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Study the following prayers for guidance:

Psalms 25:4  
Colossians 1:9  
Psalms 86:11  
Colossians 4:12  
Ephesians 6:18-20

2. God communicates His will to man, but sometimes man is too hasty in making decisions. Study the following examples of men who acted too hastily, not allowing God opportunity to communicate His will to them:

Moses slaying the Egyptian: Exodus 2

Joshua's league with the Gibeonites: Joshua 9

Abraham and Ishmael: Abraham did not wait for the promised heir: Genesis 16

3. Read the book of Acts. Make a list of the different ways God communicated with men in the early church.

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