

Hearing God

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I want many things for this congregation. I want it to be known as a home for Jewish believers in Yeshua. I want it to be known as a place where Jewish and Gentile believers serve God in unity, harmony, and equality. I want it to be known as a congregation of learners and prayers. But most of all, I want it to be known as a place where we can experience God.

Part of experiencing God is hearing His voice. How many of us hear God's voice? Some of us know that we do, some of us think that we do, some of us question whether we do, and some of us doubt that we do. And of those of us who would say "yes, I hear God's voice," how many of us would say we hear Him accurately?

Hearing God tell us something that He wants us to repeat to another is what we ordinarily call prophecy. But when God tells us something that is just for us alone, we may call it revelation or something else, but it is the essence of prophecy nonetheless, and any time we hear His voice, we are engaging in a prophetic function. Hearing God's voice is a very important part of having a personal relationship with Him. We can talk at someone all day long, but unless that person talks back to us – unless we can have a dialog with that person – we really do not have a meaningful relationship.

God speaks many kinds of words to us. Some of God's words are predictive – telling us that something will happen in the future. Some of God's words are directive – instructing us to take certain actions or refrain from certain actions. Some of God's words are corrective – chastising us and turning us away from sinful conduct. Some of God's words are interpretive such as when He shows us what a passage of Scripture means or how it applies in our immediate situation. Some of God's words tell us things He wants us to know, or give us understanding of things that would otherwise elude us. These are sometimes called words of knowledge or words of wisdom. But most often, God's words to us are words of fatherly comfort and friendship – words of assurance that He knows us, loves us, and is always with us.

The first regular and consistent Bible teaching I received when I became a believer was from fundamentalist Christian radio teachers like Vernon McGee and Carl MacIntyre. In those days I spent a lot of time driving the Washington Beltway because I was teaching law courses in several community colleges. One day I heard one of these teachers quote a passage of Scripture that changed my perspective forever; it was Genesis 5:24:

"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

"And Enoch walked with God." "And Enoch walked with God." I couldn't get the picture of it out of my mind. Imagine anyone walking with God – the friendship – the intimacy. That was

what I wanted. That was what I wanted my relationship with God to be. I wanted to walk with God, and like the old Christian hymn “In the Garden,” I wanted to be able to sing: ¹

“And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.”

I KNEW what it was like to feel God and hear God because when He first came to me as a new believer, I both heard Him and felt Him. But this – THIS was a new concept – a new depth of knowing God. To be able to constantly WALK with Him. That desire burned in my consciousness. I wanted that, and somehow I knew I could have it just by taking it. And I have been conscious of walking with God ever since.

Now don’t get me wrong. I don’t mean that I haven’t sinned and sometimes walked away from God. But God has gone after me and has been faithful to send His Holy Spirit to convict me and bring me back, so more often than not, I sense the presence of God everywhere I go. Knowing God with that kind of intimacy is intensely liberating. There is no fear of life’s circumstances, no compulsion to protect and to strive, and there is indeed a peace that passes all understanding.

Now there would be no reason for me to tell you all of this if I were some kind of special person who had this special connection to God that others could not have. But consider that I received the revelation off of the radio that thousands of people were listening to. How special could I be? The fact is, that Scripture promises this intimacy with God to anyone who will believe for it and take it. Notice I didn’t say ASK for it, though you might ask just to be polite. But God has already given it to you, and all you have to do is take it. To confirm the correctness of what I am telling you, all you need do is look at a few Scriptures – first Scriptures assuring us that we can all hear His voice:

Psalm 95:7 “...Today, if you will hear His voice; Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness,”

John 10:27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

John 18:37 “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

And here are Scriptures that guaranty that we can all know Him:

John 14:7 “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

John 14:16-17 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it

¹ C. Austin Miles, March 1912, inspired by John 20:15.

neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

1 John 5:20 “*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true;...*”

And the grand daddy of all the New Covenant Scriptures – the one that predicts the New Covenant itself – Jeremiah 31 and, in particular, verse 34 (that is repeated in Hebrews 8:11):

“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD...”

Not only has God told us that we can hear His voice and know Him, He has also told us in Hebrews 13:5:

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Now if we are convinced that we CAN hear God, the next logical question is: “How do we do it?” Okay, first things first. It is hard to hear God if we are far away from Him, and Proverbs 15:29 reminds us:

“The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.”

So the first thing we need to do is clean up our lives, and ourselves, so that God can hear us and answer us. If we don’t, we WILL still hear God, but we won’t like what we hear because we will hear only one thing over and over: “Stop sinning.” “Repent!” “Stop sinning.” “Repent!” Not very pleasant listening. We don’t want to hear God saying that to us but, if we do, we had better obey Him because we can only draw near to God to hear His voice if we first repent of our sins, for as

James 4:8 states:

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Okay, let’s now suppose that we have repented of our sins and are in a position for God to hear our prayers. So we pray and ask God to speak to us – to let us hear His voice. And too often we DON’T hear His voice. So we may pray some more and we still don’t hear His voice. And we pray some more, and ask God why! And at that point some of us finally hear God shouting over our chatter, telling us: “I HAVE been speaking to you, but you’ve been so busy yapping endlessly that you didn’t hear a word I said. And then – only then – we remember Psalm 46:10, which instructs us:

“Be still, and know that I am God;”

There is an example in Scripture where Elijah could not hear God at first because of all the noise around him. In 1 Kings 19:11-12, God says to Elijah:

"Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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."

And so we finally quiet down and listen, and what do you know? We can finally hear God.

I probably don't have to say this, but when we speak of hearing God's voice we are ordinarily not talking about hearing sound with our ears. Although God has been known to speak audibly and even loudly, more often He speaks softly and directly to our spirit. This takes some getting used to because our spiritual receptors are sometimes dulled from disuse and need to be dusted off. Biologists have discovered cells responsible for our sense of touch, smell, sight, pain, taste, and hearing, but tools of science cannot find our spiritual receptors that are just as real. Yet it is normally through these spiritual receptors that we hear the voice of God.

Now here is a caution. What we believe to be the voice of God cannot be trusted to be the WORD of God unless we properly discern it, and check it out by comparing it against the Scriptures. Consider the Bereans for example. Acts 17:11 applauds their process of diligently discerning the Word by explaining:

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

The WORD they received was what was told to them by disciples of Yeshua, but they only trusted what they had heard after they confirmed it in the Tanakh. The apostle Paul gave similar instructions to Timothy when he told him that the Scriptures of the Tanakh were to be trusted for all things; in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 he said:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Proverbs 30:5 tells us that *"Every word of God is pure,"* but verse 6 warns us:

"Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar."

So it is necessary that we test all words we hear, or think we hear, against the certainty and reliability of Scripture, because the voice of God will never contradict His written Word which are the Scriptures. We can think that we have heard God's voice, but we are all fallible; THAT is why Words given publicly during Ohev services are judged by the plurality of the elders, and that is why when we are alone and think we have heard God's voice, we have a responsibility to judge it by the Scriptures as well.

Like the chicken and egg paradox, the voice of God is heard when we have faith to listen for it, but as Romans 10:17 assures us:

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

So we must have faith to hear, but we must hear to have faith. If that's confusing, let's not worry about it and just let God do a work in our lives.

Now let's summarize!

First: Our ability to have intimacy with God and know Him in the New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah.

Second: The promised intimacy with God comes from our being able to hear his voice via the *Ruach HaKodesh* – the Holy Spirit.

Third: Our ability to hear God's voice and converse with Him is normal for the believer, but we must be repentant of our sin to hear it clearly.

Fourth: We should expect to hear God's voice, but not expect it to be loud and booming; rather expect a small quiet voice speaking to our spirit within us.

Fifth: If we want to hear God's voice we must not drown it out by incessantly talking during prayer. We must often stop to listen quietly, "and know that He is God."

Sixth: We must be like the Bereans and test that which we believe to be the voice of God against Scripture.

Seventh and finally: We must remember the paradox that we must have faith to hear, but hear to have faith.

As Enoch did, so we too can walk with God in the garden and give testimony that

"He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known."