

Heeding the Voice of God

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What it means to obey God's commandments (i.e., those written down by Moses) is clear, but what is not so clear is what "listening to God's voice" means. I raise the issue because Scripture is replete with commandments to listen to and obey God's voice; here are a few of them from the *Tanakh*:

"If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the LORD who heals you." (Exodus 15:26b)

"You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him." (Deuteronomy 13:4(5))

"Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today." (Deuteronomy 27:10)

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God .." (Deuteronomy 28:1-2)

"Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God," (Jeremiah 11:4b)

And here are three from the New Testament that don't use the word "voice," but speak of "hearing" God's spokenWord:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:" (Matthew 7:24)

".. blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28b)

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;" (James 1:22-23)

I do not believe, as some in Rabbinical Judaism do, that "hearing God's voice" refers to the existence of an "Oral *Torah*." – that is to say, words spoken to Moses that were not written down, but rather conveyed verbally (as an oral tradition) from generation-to-generation. I also do not believe that "listening to God's voice" is a mere metaphor for comprehending what the

written words of *Torah* say literally, or that it means hearing the *Torah* read aloud as in a classroom.

The Israelites under Moses heard and were guided by God's voice in three ways:

1. Hearing God's Voice directly from Mount Sinai:

“And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.” (Exodus 19:9)

“For ask now concerning the days that are past which were before you since the day that God created man on the earth, and *ask* from one end of heaven to the other whether *any* great *thing* like this has happened or *anything* like it has been heard. Did *any* people *ever* hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?” (Deuteronomy 4:32-33)

2. Hearing God's Voice from an angel:

“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name *is* in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.” (Exodus 23:20-22)

3. Hearing God's Voice from a prophet:

(a person who is specially gifted to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and repeat it to the inquirer):

“Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.’” (Numbers 12:6)

“And the LORD said to me [Moses]: ‘What they [the Israelites] have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’” (Deuteronomy 18:17-18)

God's Voice that was spoken in any of these ways in the time of Moses can be heard by us today at least as clearly, because today we have the great gift of the New Covenant that was prophesied in Jeremiah 31(30)-34(33):

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 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."

So today, each of us can hear God's voice speak to us in the same way as (in fact, more clearly than) the prophets of old heard Him. And as Jeremiah prophesied, we no longer have to inquire of our neighbor or our brother about what God is saying, because we all can know Him, and hear Him for ourselves.

It is clear to me that God's voice, as heard by men is, and always has been, the voice of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, God speaks through the words of His written commandments, but it is the Holy Spirit that explains how we ought to apply them in our individual lives and circumstances. Interpretation of the commandments is necessary because they are a body of law that was given centuries ago when everything was in place governmentally to enable the Israelites to comply with each and every commandment as written. They had the Tabernacle and its altar; they had a functioning Levitical priesthood; they had anointed prophets; they had judges, and they had governing elders. Today, we have prophets and elders who also serve as judges, but we do not have the other things that are needed to obey all of the commandments literally.

Clearly, we cannot comply with the many *mitzvot* that require some form of animal sacrifice, but let me give you an example that doesn't involve sacrifice. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 says this:

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and *who*, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear."

If we lived during the time of Moses, we would not have blinked an eye about the appropriateness of complying with this commandment but, if we tried to do it today, we would be in a heap of trouble. But, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

"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."

So, in what way is the Scripture on stoning our stubborn and rebellious son profitable? Is there an application or principle that it teaches that would be acceptable both to God and to our secular government today? We can take guesses at it, but the only way we can know for sure is to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who, if we ask Him, will reveal it to us.

There are several times in Scripture, in which the Holy Spirit led Yeshua to interpret *Torah* commandments in a way that was not literal. In Deuteronomy 24:1, we read:

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house,” etc.

This Scripture that seems to recognize a liberality in divorcing one’s wife, is interpreted by Yeshua in Matthew 19:3-9 this way:

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.””

Here is another example of where Yeshua was led to interpret the *Torah* in a non-literal way. Exodus 20:13 commands:

“You shall not commit adultery.”

Adultery has always been understood to mean a married person having sexual relations with whom he or she is not married. But we read Yeshua’s wider interpretation of the commandment in Matthew 5:27-28:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

I will give you one more example of non-literal interpretation; this one has to do with the *Torah* commandment to not work on the Sabbath, and Yeshua’s reference to another commandment, that no one but a priest is allowed to eat the Tabernacle’s holy bread. Leviticus 24:5 and 9 states:

“And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths *of an ephah* shall be in each cake.” .. “And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it *is* most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute.”

And Leviticus 22:10 states:

“No outsider shall eat the holy *offering*; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing.”

Yet, in Mark 2:23-27 we read:

“Now it happened that He [Yeshua] went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God *in the days* of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?" And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.””

Now, Yeshua could not have come by any of these interpretations of *Torah*, except that the Holy Spirit connected Him to the Father and revealed them to Him:

“Then [Yeshua] answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”” (John 5:19)

“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”
(John 5:30)

All of this is to say that the Holy Spirit connects us to the Father and to Yeshua (who is now at the right hand of the Father) in the same way as He connected Yeshua to the Father while Yeshua was here on earth:

“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. (1Corinthians 2:13-15)

It is important that we expect to hear God's Voice through the Holy Spirit with a mind to obey (John 14:15, 21). So much so, that Romans 8:14 says of it:

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

The Holy Spirit can speak to us loudly and He can speak to us softly, but most often He speaks to us as described in 1 Kings 19:12:

“.. and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

One last thing: Because our hearing of God's voice can be faulty, we are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to “Test all things; hold fast what is good.” It is the approach that was used by the men of Berea, and Acts 17:11 says of them:

“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 (i.e. that which Paul taught them) were so.”