

Q. Does God still directly communicate with His people?

A. The questioner is referring to audibly hearing God, God directly communicating with our minds, and His giving us visions and dreams. The Holy Spirit's causing us to have strong desires, so that we do something God wants us to do, might also be included. Most charismatic and Pentecostal churches would answer the question with a definite yes. But many Protestant and Baptist churches would say that direct communication from God has ceased. (As far as the leading of the Holy Spirit, many might agree that the Holy Spirit often leads us, but they might disagree over how compelling that leading can be.) But can there be a third answer that is in-between both extremes? I believe that there is, and I am going to tell you of an incident in my own experience.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we find that God used dreams, visions, voices, direct inspiration and so forth to reveal important information to His people through individuals (often, but not always, the prophets and apostles). Sometimes, however, God gave knowledge that He intended only for an individual or small group of people (see, for example, 1 Kings 17:1-9; Acts 16:9-10; 21:10-11; 23:11; 2 Corinthians 12:9).

In the New Testament, the brethren who received revelation from God and passed it on to the rest of the saints had one of three gifts: knowledge, prophecy, or tongues. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, Paul, in emphasizing the eternity of love, points out that the gift of receiving prophecy from God, the gift of speaking in tongues, and the gift of receiving knowledge from God will end. He says this will happen when that which is perfect or complete has come. The Greek word translated "complete" (or "perfect" in the King James Version) here is *teleios*. It means "complete." Something has reached its perfection when it is complete. I believe that what Paul is referring to here is the canonization of Scripture. Once God put all of the knowledge He wanted his people to have into the assembly through the gifts of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy—and all of this was recorded in Scripture—then He stopped giving those gifts. In this way, I agree with

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the Protestant/Baptist position. God is no longer giving revelation that He intends for the assembly. He is not adding to Scripture.

But what about God revealing something to someone that He intends only for personal instruction or guidance? Does God continue to do this today? Well, nothing in the Bible prevents this from being the case. What ceased were the specific gifts that some people had to receive knowledge from God and pass it on to the assembly. But nothing says that God cannot now still communicate with people for personal reasons.

Of course, we must be careful. I am always wary of people who commonly say things like, "God told me," or "I talked to God today and He said..." as if a personal message from God is just a phone call away. When these people speak, all conversation and dialogue on a topic is stifled because, according to them, "God has spoken." This is an easy way for these people to get what they want and squelch all opposition. It is also apparently an easy temptation for people to fall into. And at least some people who talk like this are themselves deluded into believing that their hunches and opinions are actually God speaking to them.

What does a wife say when her husband claims, "God told me to buy a Lexus LS"? What does a congregation say when its pastor says, "God told me we need to build a new church building"? What should the followers of Oral Roberts have said when he claimed that God told him in March 1986 that he had to raise \$8 million in one year or "God would take him home"? What are we to say when the pastor says, "I asked God why we are having so much sickness in our church and His answer was that you're not giving enough"? The answer is, "Baloney," "Hogwash," "Rubbish," "Rot." Take your pick.

There is no way people who make such claims can prove what they are saying, and there is no reason to believe it. God does not expect us to follow someone's lead simply because he or she says it is from God. And it should hardly need saying that if someone says he has received a revelation from God, and if that revelation contradicts Scripture, we should reject the so-called revelation. Either that person has had a hallucination, has been deceived by a lying spirit, or is himself lying to you. "Test all things," Paul wrote, "and hold firmly that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

But the kind of revelation I am saying can still occur today is personal. It does not add to the storehouse of knowledge in the Bible. It is not

an order for other people to do something on your say-so. It does not require that other people believe you. It can be as simple as a man hearing "Stop!" when he carelessly steps into the street in front of an SUV. Or it might be a woman who gets an overwhelming urge to cancel her airline flight, the flight that later crashes.

Now I'm going to tell you of my own personal experience with such revelations. There is no way I can prove any of this to you. It does not involve your having to take any action or change any of your beliefs. You don't have to believe me. But I am going to relate it only as a way of explaining why I believe personal revelation can still happen and to give you an example of the type of revelation I mean.

This occurred before I was married, and I have now been married for thirty years. I did not own a vehicle at the time, and I was living in New Jersey. In a couple of days, I had to be in Virginia, and I had no easy way of getting there. I had told some church acquaintances that I would be going to Virginia, but none had a solution to my transportation problem. I had resigned myself to the probability that I would have to take a Greyhound bus, but for some reason wasn't happy with the prospect and hadn't yet bought the ticket.

On this day, a couple of days before I had to be in Virginia, I was getting a ride to church with some friends. About halfway there, I unexpectedly had the overwhelming urge to speak to a certain man when I got to church. I did not know the man especially well. The desire to see him seemed irrational. But I couldn't put it out of my mind. My longing to see this man was all I could think about. I had no idea why, yet I knew I had to see this man. But we arrived at church just in time for the service, and there was no time to find and talk to anyone.

As I sat listening and paying attention to the sermon, my inner voice, what psychologists sometimes call the internal monologue (the voice in our heads with which we think), suddenly asked me a question. This startled me because, obviously, the voice in our heads is always under our control. But I had no idea why the voice asked me this totally off-the-wall question: "If you had to shake a man's hand, and he had no hand, what would you do?" I was trying to pay attention to the sermon, so I dismissed the question. A few seconds later, the voice, now louder in my head, again asked, "If you had to shake a man's hand, and he had no hand, what would you do?" I shook my head and wondered what was wrong with me, but I didn't answer the question. Some seconds later, for the third time, the voice, now quite loud in my

head urgently asked, "If you had to shake a man's hand, and he had no hand, what would you do?" The voice had definitely gotten my attention, and now I tried to think of an answer. "I suppose," I thought, "that I would shake whatever he held out."

That was it. I was now left in peace for the rest of the church service, except that the man I had desperately wanted to see sang for special music. When he sat down, I noted that he took a seat on the far side of the room.

When the service ended, I immediately started making my way through what was quite a crowd to the other side of the room. As I tried to quickly squeeze my way between tightly packed people, I instantly felt as though I was about to step on someone, a child I supposed. I looked down, expecting to see a boy or girl look up at me. Instead, what I saw was a face with a dark moustache. I was looking down at a very short man who smiled up at me and said, "Hi, my name is Tony!" (I've changed the name.) At the same time, I noticed him wiggling his shoulder, and then I thought he was extracting his arm from some sort of special crutches. But what he took out of the loop at the top of the crutch was not a full arm. It was a stump that he held out to me. Now, being the inexperienced young man that I was, I know that I would have hesitated at that point if God had not prepared me only a little while earlier by asking me what I would do in this situation. Of course, I immediately held out my hand and shook Tony's stump, smiled, and introduced myself. I think that God did this for Tony's sake, not mine, as my natural hesitation might have offended him.

After spending some time getting to know Tony, I resumed making my way across the crowd to the man I wanted to see. As soon as he saw me, he smiled and said, "Peter, you're just the man I wanted to see! I want to introduce you to Phil (name changed)." Phil was sitting in a chair nearby. As I talked to Phil, I learned that he was on his way to Virginia and would love to have someone share the driving with him. And so, God worked it all out perfectly and miraculously.

God's giving me the longing to see the man who introduced me to Phil and His speaking through my inner voice both concerned personal matters. These things did not add to God's revelation in the Bible. They were not something I was to preach to anyone. This happened thirty-five years ago, and this is the first time I have ever published this account. And the only reasons I am doing it now are merely to explain why I believe God still does this kind of thing and to give you

an example of what I mean. But, if there had been anything about what happened that contradicted the Bible, not only would I not be telling it to you, I would have dismissed it as not being from God. But there is nothing in it contrary to Scripture, and I am struck by how it shows God's concern for Tony.

I have since had far more serious matters arise in my life when I wished God would speak to me as He did that day. But He chose not to. God sovereignly decides when to miraculously communicate with us and when not to.

We must not forget, too, that not hearing a voice, seeing a vision, or having a revelatory dream does not mean God has not communicated with us. He has miraculously regenerated us through the power of the Holy Spirit and saved us when the Spirit, who lives in us (John 14:17), caused us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior (Romans 10:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). God has entrusted us to His Word (Acts 20:32), which is truth (John 17:17).

So, while God does not still directly communicate with us through dreams, visions, and so forth to add to the revelation we have in the Bible, I believe that He can at times directly communicate to convey a personal message. But bear in mind that experience is not reliable. It is the Scripture that cannot be broken (John 10:35).

God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds.

Hebrews 1:1-2

Peter Ditzel