

God Speaks to His People

***“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”
—Hebrews 1:1,2***

WHEN WRITING TO THE Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul explained that it was through the inspired mouthpieces of God that he gave special instructions to his consecrated people. The Prophet Hosea confirms this fact, when he wrote, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.”—Hos. 12:10

God speaks to those who are willing to share and cooperate in the outworking and ultimate purpose of his eternal will. This means that, when we hear the call and respond to it, we must devote ourselves unreservedly to the commitment we have made. During the present Gospel Age, this has meant the setting aside of our own wills and denying self so that God’s will may be done in us. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he

hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”—Eccl. 5:4,5

DIVINELY INSPIRED

We can have confidence that God has spoken to us because what we have heard is in harmony with the entire Bible. Paul explained to Timothy, saying, “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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”—II Tim. 3:16,17

There is an old saying that the Bible is a fiddle upon which any tune may be played. Furthermore, by avoiding certain scriptures all sorts of tunes can be played, but they will not provide a true and harmonious sound. Even Satan, the Devil, quoted scripture when he tried to tempt Jesus at the beginning of his earthly ministry. The scriptural account provides the setting, where we read, “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” (Matt. 4:5,6) Jesus, however, was well acquainted with the Scriptures, could recall them perfectly, and was guided by the Holy Spirit of God. In his reply, he confronted Satan with another text of scripture that left the Devil speechless. “Jesus said unto him, It is written

again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”—
vs. 7

UNCHANGING HARMONY

The words of our Heavenly Father are in harmony with his character. They reveal that he is absolutely just, unerring in wisdom, almighty in power and, above all, abounding in love. We may also be assured of his perfect and wonderful character, and can trust him on every occasion because the Scriptures further show that he is unchangeable. This fact is taught to us in both the Old and New Testament scriptures, where we read, “I am the LORD, I change not.” (Mal. 3:6) This marvelous trait is also brought to our attention by James who wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”—James 1:17

The divine purpose, as revealed by God through his prophets of old, is still the same divine purpose many centuries later. If God has spoken to us through his servants it means that we now hear and believe the same thoughts and teachings that were made known a long time ago. The working out of God’s plan and purpose varies in detail from one age to another, but the plan itself does not change. God’s ultimate purpose is to bless all the families of the earth in due time. How that purpose is eventually accomplished has been in preparation for centuries.

FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

One of the fundamental truths of the divine plan of the ages includes the world’s recovery from the

ravages of sin and death. God's purpose was declared in the message of restitution that was spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:21) It was to provide an opportunity for this wonderful recovery from sin and death that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all. Ransom and restitution are two prominent teachings of God's great love for his human creation. Isaiah was one of God's holy prophets who wrote concerning this wonderful promise. "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:10

Fallen men and women who are in their graves and yet awaiting the resurrection will not only return from death on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, but will receive rich blessings of life under the administration of Christ's glorious, future kingdom. At that time, 'they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' as written by the Prophet Isaiah. Those who are obedient to the laws of God will be restored to a state of perfection on a perfected earth, and will enjoy communion with their Creator forever.

There are various arrangements in the outworking of God's plan and purpose, but the great objective to which they lead is the promised blessing of all the families of the earth. God made that promise to faithful Abraham, and it permeates the whole message of the Bible. "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of

his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:17,18

Our all-wise and loving Heavenly Father declared his purpose to his servant Moses, when he revealed, “As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.” (Num. 14:21) If we have heard and appreciated these fundamental truths that were written many years ago, then we have heard the voice of God speaking to us.

DIVINE FAVOR

The blessedness of receiving divine favor is emphasized in the lives of those to whom God has directly spoken. This was especially true in the experiences of Noah. From God’s Holy Word, we are told that, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8), and God made a covenant with him. “God spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.” (Gen. 9:8,9) This was confirmed, “And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.”—vss. 12,13

Noah’s experiences are referred to in the New Testament and are used to illustrate certain features in God’s ultimate plan and purpose. Noah was building the ark over a long period of time, and he endured much scoffing while doing so. While working, he also preached to an unresponsive and indifferent public, but with no apparent results.

Noah had faith and fully appreciated the fact that God had spoken to him and given him a task to perform as a servant of God. He continued to preach and work irrespective of results. He was faithful despite the cost of weariness, scoffing and indifference. He responded wholeheartedly to fulfill the divine command faithfully. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."—Heb. 11:7

NOAH HEARD

When the plan of God is complete, the knowledge of his wondrous glory will fill the earth even "as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9) It will then be seen that the destruction of the first world was justified by the lack of response to Noah's preaching, and the level of evil among the people that was prevalent in those early times of human creation. That which Noah accomplished and preached will be appreciated during the future age of the world's blessing. Perhaps it will help to fill the whole earth with God's glory as spoken by the Prophet Isaiah.

The Apostle Peter said, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto

them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”—I Pet. 2:12-15

ABRAHAM HEARD

As we also read, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 12:1-3

In God’s message to Abraham, we have the first definite statement of his ultimate plan and purpose to bless all the families of the earth in due time. Paul also confirmed this wonderful fact to the brethren at Galatia, where he wrote, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”—Gal. 3:8

It was surely good news for Abraham to learn that it would be through his seed that all the families of earth were to be blessed by divine arrangement. We know this promise is true because it was God himself who announced it to Abraham. However, his faith was also to be tested for he was asked to give up his home in Ur, and for the remainder of his life he had no permanent home.

Of him, Paul wrote, “By faith Abraham, when he

was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”—Heb. 11:8-10

The Heavenly Father continued by testing Abraham very severely, even by asking him to offer up his dearly beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice. However, he showed his willingness to serve his Heavenly Father, and learned that God’s voice not only meant blessings, but also sacrifice. God spoke to Abraham to invite his cooperation in the outworking of his marvelous plan, and the message and the call were heard together.

Abraham discovered that in order for God’s promise to become a reality to him it would cost the uprooting of his whole way of life. All those, to whom the purpose of God to bless all nations has been revealed, have likewise been called to cooperate. This is God’s method of dealing with his people. He speaks to us by revealing his plan, and then invites cooperation therein.

MOSES HEARD

God also spoke to Moses at the burning bush. He instructed him, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” (Exod. 3:5,6) God told Moses to

take off his shoes, for the place whereon he stood was 'holy ground.' It was holy because God chose that place to speak to Moses.

One of Moses' main characteristics was being meek. He felt incapable to carry out the great task that God had asked him to perform. We read, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3) However, meekness is an essential quality of Christian character which all members of the Christ must develop. Jesus, therefore, said, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."—Matt. 11:29

The world often mistakes meekness for weakness. However, true meekness is not weak. Moses was meek in the sense that he recognized and acknowledged his own limitations according to the flesh. When God assured him that all of his needs would be supplied, his faith made it possible for him to hold on to the promises of God. Thus was he made strong and courageous. We can only be used of God as we rely upon his wisdom and strength. The expression "When I think of self I tremble, and when I look to thee I'm strong" was the experience of Moses. In the strength which God supplied, he courageously took up the task which God assigned to him.

God spoke to Moses and, having responded, he was no longer his own. No longer was he free to think, to choose, to act, or to do as he preferred. Henceforth, the will of God was to be the guiding star of his life. God's presence accompanied him, and he had peace of mind and heart. Yet, his way was difficult, and his burden was heavy.

Moses had to face and defy the austere and arrogant Pharaoh. He also had to patiently bear the murmurings of his own people. He had to put down rebellion against the divine arrangements concerning Israel. In many ways, Moses had to bear a load of care and responsibility that was his because of the high position of honor God had given him in the outworking of his plan. His was a blessed experience when he heard the voice of God and, like Noah and Abraham, he too found it very costly.

THE GREATER MOSES

The life of Moses illustrated the future work of a 'greater than Moses.' "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." (Deut. 18:15) These prophetic words speak of our Lord Jesus. "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."—vss. 18,19

The Psalmist David also spoke of our Lord Jesus, saying, "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.”—Ps. 40:7-11

Much of what the prophets had written concerned the manner in which God would speak to Jesus—directing him in performing his part in the divine plan. Not only was he blessed by the revealing testimony of the prophets, but he heard the voice of God speaking to him directly. “Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:17

What a blessed assurance this must have been to Jesus. He was honored and blessed, but it proved to be very costly. It meant the laying down of his human life until it was consumed at Calvary. As Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”—Matt. 20:28

Jesus came at the First Advent to lay the foundation for his future kingdom that would bless all the families of the earth. He did so by sacrificing his own life as man’s Redeemer. He dedicated himself to God and agreed to do all that was written of him. On one occasion during his ministry, he was speaking to some of his critics, and in doing so referred back to the life of Moses as an apt illustration. He said, “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have

believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"—John 5:43-47

In harmony with the spirit of Jesus' ministry, we have the words which he spoke to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus after his resurrection from the grave. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."—Luke 24:27

FAVOR TO US

How blessed it was when we first heard God speaking to us, and telling us of the great plan of recovery for the sin-cursed and dying world that was based upon the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. It appealed to us and we rejoiced to learn that all mankind, who are the ransomed of the Lord, will be given opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness into Christ's future kingdom. Not only did we come to the light, but we also desired to walk in the light. We learned that together with God's love for all mankind there was also an invitation of the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age.

Like the worthies of old, we, too, were asked to leave our own people and our father's house, which is the household of Adam. We responded to a call to give up the hope of earthly restitution for ourselves, and in its place to run for the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. Henceforth, we were to touch lightly the things of this earth, esteeming them only of trifling worth. This is more than merely exchanging an earthly hope for a heavenly hope. It means following in the steps of Jesus, and walking in the way of sacrifice and suffering,

even unto death. We are to do this until that which remains of our present earthly life is wholly and acceptably consumed in God's service.

As were God's servants of old, we rejoice to know that by means of the ransom and the promised restitution, all the willing and obedient of mankind are to be blessed with everlasting life and enjoy peace and quietness and assurance forever. The clear distinction made by the Truth between the heavenly hope of the church and the earthly hope for the world emphasizes the importance of Jesus' earthly ministry in the ultimate plan and purpose of God for the reconciliation and uplifting of the human creation. How truly satisfying it is to know that God has a future blessing for all others, as well as for the footstep followers of this present Gospel Age. How it enhances our appreciation of the high and heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. The test upon all God's people is to hold fast to the Truth and in the spirit of Truth. Let us praise God for speaking to us through his servants of old, and thank him for all the way he has led us. ■