

Hearken to the Voice of God

*“Hear ye the word
which the LORD
speaketh unto you,
O house of Israel.”
—Jeremiah 10:1*

AMID ALL THE CONFUSION of religious thought, how are we to know that what we have accepted as Truth is in reality the voice of God, and

by obeying that voice we are fulfilling the divine will? This is a question of vital concern to all of us, but one, nevertheless, which we should be able to answer to our satisfaction, otherwise we are left in a condition of doubt and uncertainty. We say we have heard the voice of the Lord, but how do we know?

There are many lines of approach to this question. We know, first of all, that we have heard the voice of God if what we have received is in harmony with the entire Bible and if it is also in accord with all the attributes of God's character—infinite justice, wisdom, power, and above all, love. It should also agree with all known historical facts and with our own experiences and observations. In short, what we have accepted as the voice of God, the voice of Truth, leaves no unanswered questions fundamental to our faith. It does not tell us that there is no such

thing as sickness, when we know there is. It does not tell us that there is no death, when we know people are dying all around us.

There is still another manner in which we can assure ourselves that we have heard the voice of God, and that is upon the basis of his unchangeableness. The Scriptures tell us that God changes not; that in him there is no “shadow of turning.” (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) This being true, it means that the divine purpose as revealed through God’s ancient prophets of old is still his purpose. This, in turn, means that if we have heard the voice of God, we have heard the same things which that voice made known through the prophets and that these are all working harmoniously together toward the grand fulfillment of the Creator’s eternal plan for his human creation.

BLESSINGS FOR ALL

The great fundamental truth of God’s plan, the principal theme which characterized his message through all the prophets, is identified by Peter and recorded in Acts 3:20-23. Here the apostle tells of the blessings coming to all nations as a result of the Second Advent of Jesus. He describes these as “times of restitution [Greek: restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” It was to provide the opportunity for restitution that Jesus died as a “ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:5,6

Ransom and restitution are the dominant chords in God’s great theme-song of love. There are various other details associated with the outworking of this

divine purpose, but the great objective to which these are leading is the blessing of all the families of the earth during the “times of restitution.” Have we heard and appreciated these great fundamental elements of Truth? If so, we have heard the voice of God.

There are many incidentals of the Word of Truth which are good and important in themselves. Even a natural-minded person can appreciate to a large extent the value of kindness, and mercy, and self-control, as well as other manifestations of righteousness. Christians and non-Christians alike, even atheists, may adhere to high principles of righteousness in their daily living. However, no matter how valuable moral and devotional teachings may be to any from the standpoint of righteous living, apart from God’s love for and intention to bless all mankind, they do not constitute the full measure and power of his voice.

GOD SPOKE TO NOAH

It is a blessed thing to hear the voice of the Lord, but it is costly. We find this exemplified in the experiences of Noah. Genesis 6:8 informs us that Noah “found grace in the eyes of the LORD.” As the narrative unfolds, it shows divine favor was manifested toward Noah in that God used him to build an ark and thereby to carry over a few from the first “world that then was,” to the second world, “the heavens and the earth, which are now.” (II Pet. 3:6,7) God also established a covenant with Noah concerning his intention never again to destroy all flesh. (Gen. 9:8-16) These divinely appointed experiences of Noah are referred to in the New

Testament by both Jesus and Peter and are used to illustrate different features of God's plan.—Luke 17:26,27; I Pet. 3:18-22; II Pet. 2:4,5

We read about the building of the ark by Noah but may fail to realize what it meant in the way of wearying toil through the long years it took him and his sons to complete it. It was a difficult assignment, for there was not only the work involved, but there was also the scoffing of the world to endure. Noah preached as well as worked. (II Pet. 2:5) He spoke to an unresponsive public, hence there were no apparent results from his words. Those with but little faith in contrast to Noah, and less appreciative of the fact that God had spoken to them, would have become weary in well doing. They would have concluded that God did not expect them to continue bearing witness to the Truth. After all, nothing apparently worthwhile was being accomplished, only wasted effort on an ark with no evidence of a coming rain or flood of waters.

Noah, however, had heard the voice of God and by it was enjoined to continue serving, irrespective of results. The due time had not arrived for a clear unfolding of the divine program for the blessing of all nations. Nevertheless, God used Noah as an illustration of certain phases of his plan, and this was a great honor. The covenant God made with Noah, that never again would he destroy all flesh from the earth, afforded a veiled suggestion even at that early date of God's intention that mankind in due time should live forever upon the earth.

Having heard God's voice, Noah was faithful to it, despite the cost of weariness, persecution, seeming failure of his efforts and cold indifference of virtually

all by whom he was surrounded. He had heard the divine voice because God had something for him to do, and Noah responded with his whole heart and life to perform the Lord's commission faithfully. Was it all for nothing? By no means! Two important results accrued from Noah's faithful response to the voice of God. Paul mentions them, saying that Noah "condemned the world" around him, and he became "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." —Heb. 11:7

Noah's faithfulness in preaching righteousness to his generation proved the justice of God in destroying the "world that then was." (II Pet. 3:6) When the plan of God is complete, the knowledge of his glory will fill the earth. This means the people will then know that all the acts of the Almighty Creator throughout the ages have been righteous, and that the suffering of humanity has been permitted for a particular purpose. It will be seen that the great catastrophe of the Flood which destroyed the first world was justified by the lack of response to Noah's preaching and the altogether too prevalent evil of those times. (Gen. 6:5-7) Thus, while none but his own immediate family gave heed to his message, Noah's seemingly fruitless preaching will, in the coming age, be esteemed for what it was worth and will help to fill the earth with God's glory.

In addition to the eventual satisfying result of his efforts, Noah's faithfulness made him an "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Among other things, that heirship includes a "better resurrection." (Heb. 11:7,35) Psalm 45:16 also indicates that those who obtain this promised better resurrection are to be made "princes in all the earth."

Did Noah, then, waste his time? Surely not! He heard God's voice, obeyed it, was blessed in his obedience, and will yet be more than fully rewarded for every sacrifice which he made.

GOD SPEAKS TO ABRAHAM

“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 purpose to bless all the families of the earth. So important was this that there was no other reason why God spoke to Abraham than that of inviting his cooperation in the outworking of his plan. Thus, the message and the invitation, or call, were heard together. God said to him, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” but I want you to leave your own people and your father's house and go into a land which I will show you. “Thou shalt be a blessing,” God said, but the patriarch discovered that in order for this promise to become a reality to him it would cost the uprooting of his whole way of life.

God's promise to bless all the families of the earth was unconditional. That promise will be fulfilled regardless of what any individual may do about it. However, when it was made to Abraham, there was coupled with it the invitation to cooperate. Those since to whom the purpose of God to bless

all nations has been revealed have likewise been invited to cooperate. This is God's method of dealing with his people. First, he reveals his plan, and then invites cooperation therein.

Has it not been so with us? How sweet was the voice of God telling us of the great hope of a resurrection for all and restitution for the sin-cursed and dying world. It appealed to us as being just like God, and we rejoiced to think of all mankind being raised from the grave and restored to human perfection, inheriting the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. We soon realized, though, that there was more to it than that. Together with God's sweet voice of love for all mankind, were the words of invitation to us asking our participation in the divine program. We, too, like Abraham, were asked to leave our own people and our father's house.—Ps. 45:10,11; Matt. 19:29

Our "father's house" is the Adamic household. God's invitation to leave this house we recognized as a call to give up the hope of restitution upon the earth for ourselves and in its place to run "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling"—to set our "affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Phil. 3:14; Col. 3:2) This meant more than merely to exchange an earthly hope for a heavenly hope. It meant following in the footsteps of Jesus—steps of sacrifice and suffering even unto death—until that which remained of our present earthly life was wholly consumed in the service of God.—Rom. 6:3-5; 8:16,17; 12:1

Indeed, it was grand to hear the voice of God, but if we continue to respond to it faithfully it will cost us a life of sacrifice, service and sanctification.

When we properly appreciate the message of God's love, we will realize that we do not belong to ourselves, but to him who loved us and died for us. (I Cor. 6:19,20; Col. 3:3,4) We will endeavor not to live for ourselves, but to live for God by participating in the sacrificial work of this age, presenting ourselves and devoting our bodies to God's service, keeping our sacrifice on the altar until it is wholly consumed.

Abraham was asked to give up his home in Ur. For the remainder of his life he lived in "tabernacles," or tents, having no permanent home, no "continuing city." (Heb. 11:8-10; 13:14) Not only was this so, but God continued to test him, finally to the point of asking that he offer his son, Isaac, in sacrifice, which he showed his willingness to do. (Gen. 22:1-18) Abraham learned to know the voice of God more familiarly with the passing years, and he knew that it was a voice which not only promised wonderful blessings, but also invited sacrifice.

AT THE BURNING BUSH

God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, and it meant that thereafter his life was to be wholly devoted to the service of God. Even prior to this Moses was aware of his responsibility to the God of his fathers. The apostle explains that Moses had withdrawn from his position of honor in Pharaoh's palace, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," esteeming it as "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt."—Heb. 11:24-26

Moses had fled from Egypt following an ill-timed effort to relieve the oppressions of his people, the children of Israel. Forty years he had been in

seclusion in Midian, serving as a shepherd over his father-in-law's sheep. (Exod. 2:11-21; 3:1; Acts 7:22-30) Doubtless he often thought of his early life in Egypt. Although he was called an Egyptian, he knew in reality he was an Israelite and that his kinsmen were serving as slaves under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh. From his mother, who was hired to care for him as a child, Moses would certainly have learned much about the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning the development of a seed and also of the blessings which would come to all nations through that seed.

The God of Israel was far from unknown to Moses. Hence, when his attention was attracted by the burning bush and he heard the announcement, "I am the God of ... Abraham, ... Isaac, and ... Jacob," Moses knew who was speaking. (Exod. 3:1-6) He knew he was to receive a message which in some way was related to the promises God had made to his fathers. It was even so, for the time had come when the natural seed of Abraham was to be delivered from Egyptian bondage, and Moses had been selected to serve as their leader in this great Exodus.

It was in the providence of God that the Israelites had gone into Egypt, for thereby the life of the nation had been saved from the seven years of famine which "was over all the face of the earth." (Gen. 41:54-57; 42:1,2; 50:19-21) Now it was necessary for them to be delivered, and for the same purpose. God was watching over his people. They were the natural seed to whom the promises had been made. Through this nation, the Messiah later was to come. Any service, therefore, which related

to this people had to do with the working out of God's plan for the eventual blessing of all nations.

Jehovah told Moses to take off his shoes, for the place where he stood was "holy ground." (Exod. 3:5) It was indeed holy. God chose the spot to meet with his servant, to commission and instruct him to be the deliverer of his people. That ground was therefore being used for as holy a purpose as has ever been given to man to know. True holiness to God today is represented in a full devotion to him and to the service of that same Messianic cause. We too, like Moses, have the privilege of laying down our lives for our brethren, who are the spiritual seed of Abraham.—John 15:12,13; I John 3:16

One of Moses' most notable character qualities was that of meekness, as stated in Numbers 12:3. He felt unequal to the great task which God was asking him to perform. Meekness is an essential quality of Christian character, but true meekness is not weakness. Moses was meek in that he recognized his own limitations, but when God assured him that all his needs would be supplied, his faith laid hold upon the promise, and he was made strong and courageous. God can use only those who rely on his wisdom and strength. This was the experience of Moses, and in the Lord's strength he courageously took up the task which God had assigned to him.

Moses heard the voice of God, and now that he was one of God's servants, he was no longer free to think, choose, act, or do as he might prefer. Henceforth the will of God was to be the guide in his life. God's presence accompanied Moses, and he had peace of heart and mind; but his way was difficult, and his burden was heavy. He had to face and defy the

austere and arrogant Pharaoh. He had to hear and bear patiently the murmurings of his own people and put down rebellion against the divine arrangements. In many other ways Moses had to bear the load of care and responsibility which was his because of the high position of honor God had given him in the outworking of his plan. It was a blessed experience to hear the voice of God, but it was costly!

THE GREATER THAN MOSES

Moses, who under God was the deliverer and lawgiver of Israel, prophesied that one greater than he would be raised up for the blessing of Israel and the world. (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-25; 7:37) Thus he pointed forward to the coming of Christ and to the establishing of his kingdom. The deliverance which will come to the people under the leadership of Christ awaits the inauguration of his righteous rule in the earth. He came at his First Advent to lay the foundation for that kingdom by the sacrifice of his life as man's Redeemer.—I Cor. 3:11

In Galatians 3:8,16, Paul explains that the seed which God promised to Abraham, through whom all nations would be blessed, was Christ. The entire ministry of Jesus was therefore related to the loving purpose of God to give life and peace to all nations. It is in keeping with this that at the outset of his ministry our Lord dedicated himself to God, agreeing to do all that was written of him "in the volume of the book."—Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 10:7

The apostle explains that whatsoever had been written by the prophets was written for "our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." (I Cor. 10:11, *Revised Version*; Rom. 15:4) If this is

true concerning the followers of Jesus, how much more true it was of him! Assuredly, much of what all the prophets had written constituted the voice of God to direct Jesus in performing his part in fulfilling the divine purpose and arrangement.

Not only was Jesus blessed by the revealing testimony of the prophets, but he heard the voice of God speaking to him directly, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) What a blessed assurance this must have been to the Master! He was honored and he was blessed; yet nothing short of the complete sacrifice of his perfect humanity could discharge the responsibility which this honor and blessing had placed upon him. God had spoken to his Son by the mouth of all his holy prophets, and Jesus agreed to do all that they had spoken.

THOU ART THE CHRIST

When Peter identified Jesus as the foretold Messiah saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord explained that this knowledge could come only from the Father. Peter was to be widely used in the divine service, but at a great sacrifice of himself and his earthly interests. He was given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," and he used them in opening up these privileges, first to the Jews, and later to the Gentiles.—Matt. 16:16-19; Acts 2:14-41; 15:7

Surely this was a high honor, and it was a joy thus to be used in the service of God and of his people. However, Peter was no longer his own, but belonged to God whose voice he had heard. When, after his resurrection, Jesus conversed with Peter, he said to

him, “When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.”—John 21:18

The Apostle John explains that this statement to Peter was an indication of the death that he was to die. (vs. 19) It was to be a sacrificial death. He was to be “crucified with Christ,” “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:5) Before he had heard the voice of God, Peter was free to choose for himself, to plan his own life, but now it was to be different. From henceforth he was to be led where his own natural inclinations would not wish to go. The will of God was from that time forward to be the guide of his life, which was to be a life of sacrifice. He had heard the voice of God!

“WHO ART THOU, LORD?”

When, through Jesus, God spoke to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, this devout Israelite realized at once what it signified. Saul first made sure who was speaking, asking, “Who art thou, Lord?” Then, assured that he was receiving a message from the God of the Jews through their promised Messiah, he responded with the inquiry: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:1-6) Saul was acquainted with the manner in which God dealt with his servants in the past. He knew that an experience of this nature implied more than merely that he was being enlightened concerning the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. God allows people to continue on in darkness until he has a place for them in his plan. Saul knew this, and now that he was

enlightened, he realized that God was calling him into service.

Paul was a chosen vessel. He had been selected to bear the Gospel to “the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” What an honor; but at what great cost! The Lord said, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15,16) Here again we find the same principle operating. God had spoken; truth had been revealed; a commission had been given; and great things were to be suffered. The record of the Apostle Paul’s entire ministry demonstrates the sincerity of his question, “What wilt thou have me to do?”

IN THE LAST DAYS

In Hebrews 1:1,2 the apostle explains that in “these last days” God has spoken to his people through his Son. That was true of the Early Church, and it has been true during the entire Gospel Age. It is true in a very special sense at this end of the age. In Luke 12:37,42-44 is recorded a promise by Jesus that at the end of the age he would return and through a faithful servant serve his household with “meat in due season.”

God has served us bountifully! Through his Word of Truth he has spoken to us. His voice has enlightened us. His words have girded and encouraged us, and by them he is leading us forth as light bearers for him and ambassadors of the kingdom. As spiritual Israelites, let us, day by day, faithfully heed the instructions of our opening text, to hear and obey “the word which the LORD speaketh” unto us. ■