

1. The Voice from Heaven

Biblical material: Gen. 3:8, 9; 2 Sam. 12:1-7; Isa. 59:2; Jer. 38:14-19; Ezekiel 4; Amos 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 3:1..

Quotes

- There's a Bible on the shelf there. But I keep it next to Voltaire—poison and antidote. *Bertrand Russell*
- Theologians always try to turn the Bible into a book without common sense. *Georg C. Lichtenberg*
- Scriptures, n. The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based. *Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary*

Questions

How does God communicate with us? How do we know we're not just "hearing things"? On what basis do we decide whether God is speaking? In what way is the Bible a means God uses to communicate? What went wrong in the God-human relationship to make communication so difficult? Why should we "search the Scriptures," and what are the dangers even here?

Discussion/Comment

When it comes to reading the Bible, we all bring many presuppositions to the book. It is virtually impossible to examine it on its own merits, because it has come to mean so many different things to different people. But only as we allow the Bible to speak for itself will this quarter's studies be meaningful.

Someone called the bible the world's least-read best-seller. It is viewed as a good book, but few examine why and how. It may be viewed as literature, and read that way. Some want to turn it into a code book. Others dismiss it altogether as the ramblings of ancient men.

So how are we, who already accept the Bible, able to share the good news with those for whom the Bible is not a trusted authority? How is it possible to convey the idea that this is the word of God without becoming pretentiously pious or sounding weird? How can we use the Bible with those who do not accept it as valid at all?

Some practice what we might call "bibliomancy." This is flipping through the Bible and randomly pointing at a text to determine one's fate, rather like astrology. Others take the words, and apply them literally and directly to their situation, without regard to their original intent. That's rather like reading someone else's mail and believing it's all about you! Still others claim to read the Bible as today's newspaper, applying every aspect to current events.

So how to study the Bible, and how to understand this communication from God? We certainly believe, but how can we best understand, and how can we best share our convictions? That's the theme of this quarter's studies.

While the Bible is a wonderful record of divine-human communication, sometimes we do not hear or understand too well. That's why Jesus came. As the lesson quarterly observes, (Tuesday's lesson): "the coming of Jesus faithfully revealed the true character of God the Father.... Based on from John 14:8-12 we know that those who have seen Him have seen the Father, because Jesus and the Father are 'in' each other. Their intimate relationship is much more than that of a master and a disciple."

So while we value every word of Scripture, we must see the Bible in the context of the coming of Jesus to reveal God to us. As Jesus himself said, to committed Bible students, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” John 5:39 NIV.

Text comments

Genesis 3:8, 9. Why did Adam and Eve hide from their heavenly Father? They certainly did not want communication with him then. God is the one searching calling, “Where are you?”

2 Samuel 12:1-7. The story of Nathan the prophet confronting David is a wonderful illustration of communicating hard subjects. An illustration of how to portray God and his word?

Isaiah 59:2. How is it that God does not hear us? What does sin do to our communication with God? How does God resolve this problem and restore the relationship?

Jeremiah 38:14-19. Jeremiah relays God’s command to king Zedekiah, though he knows this is not what the king wants to hear. How does this apply to us today?

Ezekiel 4. In this acted prophecy, God is trying to get his message across to a disinterested people. Any lessons here? And what about the great controversy?

Amos 3:7. Is it really true that God does nothing without revealing his plans to his prophets? What are we supposed to derive from this? Prophets as God’s spokesmen...

2 Timothy 3:16. Does this really mean *all* scripture? It is also a challenge to use this internal self-confirmation to those who have not yet been convinced.

2 Peter 1:20, 21; 3:1. Clearly scripture is not produced by the prophet’s own intent. The source of inspiration is from God. And as Peter goes on to say, the message is to stimulate us to wholesome thinking—certainly not a obey or else message!

Ellen White Comments

Says the Saviour, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life.” You will have a conflict to be right. I don’t command you to read the Bible--I never shall. I want you to read the Bible because you love it, not because you are driven to it, for then it will be an unpleasant task. But if you neglect the reading of the Bible, you will lose your love for it. Those who love the word of God are those who read it most. By reading and searching out scripture references, you will see the chain of truth, and will see new beauties in the word of God. While you make the Scriptures more your study, and become more familiar with them, you will be better fortified against the temptations of Satan. When inclined to speak, or act, wrong, some scripture will come to arrest you, and turn you right. It is not natural for the heart to love the Bible; but when it is renewed by grace, then the mind will feast upon the rich truths and promises contained in the word of God. {AY 79-80}

Do you ask, What shall I do to be saved? You must lay your preconceived opinions, your hereditary and cultivated ideas, at the door of investigation. If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God’s word. {COL 112.3}

