

# Does God Still Speak?

## *Reasons to believe God still speaks today:*

### **1. The recorded witness in the scriptures of human beings who heard God's voice.**

Even a cursory read through the Bible indicates that it is completely normal for God to converse in intelligible ways with human beings. We see continual and constant evidence of a God who speaks to his people:

(Adam & Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Joshua, the nameless wife of Manoah, Samuel, Elijah, David, Nehemiah, Job, Mary, Peter, John, Paul, Philip and Annanias, etc.)

There is nothing general or second-hand about these experiences; they didn't happen vicariously through someone else – they were personal.

John Eldredge makes the point that, if this was not to be our experience also, why would God give us a book of exceptions? Why would He say: *This is how I used to relate to my people, so what do you think? Pretty cool, eh? but I don't do that anymore.* Rather the Bible is a book of examples of what it looks like to walk with God. Their stories are there in part to help us figure out our stories.

### **2. The recorded witness of post-biblical saints over the past 2000 years.**

Beyond this, we have the ongoing witness of countless post-biblical saints who tell stories of hearing God's voice: Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Mueller, Andrew Murray, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, A.W. Tozer, Francis Shaeffer, James Dobson, Elizabeth Elliott, Charles Swindoll, Richard Foster, Francis Chan, John Ortberg, Rick Warren, and so on.

In other words, it isn't just people in the Bible who have claimed to hear God's voice. In the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter, quoting from the prophet Joel in Acts 2, reminded us that this was always God's intent for us:

#### **Acts 2:17**

*"In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.*

Now sometimes people think that we only need the Bible and everything else beyond that is suspect at best, and believe that God stopped speaking after the Bible was complete.

But we need to remember that it is...

### **3. The Holy Spirit helps us understand and apply the scripture.**

In other words, the reason we can understand and apply the Bible is because the Holy Spirit opens our minds to this.

If it is not the Holy Spirit who helps us with this, then the only other option is to believe that the best interpreters of God's revelation are the ones who have the best interpretive methods, most knowledge in the original biblical languages & the historical backgrounds of the biblical period – the ones most intelligent & disciplined. And that unless you have access to that kind of background, you can't really understand the Bible for yourself. Yet we read...

**Luke 24:44-45 NIV** *He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

**Luke 10:21 NIV** *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

Who were the most 'wise and learned' of Jesus' day? Who knew the Scriptures inside and out?

The Pharisees. As you think about the Pharisees' interaction with Jesus, was it enough to have studied the Bible better than anyone else when it came to recognizing the very person of God among them?

No – their minds had to be opened; the truth of the Scriptures had to be revealed to them. Notice that Jesus says that kingdom secrets cannot be unearthed by human intelligence or education alone.

If God stopped speaking once the Bible was complete, who would help us understand what it's saying and to help us see Jesus?

#### 4. The Holy Spirit helps know and understand the will of Jesus.

Consider John 14. The context here is that Jesus is having the Last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion and they are concerned that Jesus is talking about leaving them.

Listen to what Jesus says in 14:26: *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us and teaches us about Jesus and brings understanding *after* Jesus has returned to the Father.

**John 16:13** *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

Jesus said that the Spirit would speak to us, teach us and guide us.

## A Response to Cessationism

(Taken from “The Word & Power Church” by Doug Bannister: Appendix One)

**1 Corinthians 12:7-11** *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

- Some in the body of Christ hold a cessationist position about these gifts arguing that there are no miraculous gifts (prophecy, tongue and healing) of the Holy Spirit today. They believe these gifts were confined to the first century and were used at the time the apostles were establishing churches and the New Testament was not complete.

## **Main Arguments for the Doctrine of Cessation and their Non-Cessation Responses**

### **1. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teaches that the miraculous gifts passed away with the completion of the New Testament.**

- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12-14 to answer questions the Corinthians were having about the use and abuse of spiritual gifts in their fellowship encouraging them to love one another because love is greater than any gift (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).
- The miraculous gifts such as tongues and prophecy will cease “when perfection comes.”
- Cessationists argue that “perfection” refers to the completed canon of Scripture.
- They believe that the first-century church needed these miraculous revelatory gifts because the Bible was not yet complete, and when God completed the scriptural canon, these gifts were no longer needed and passed away.
- Non-cessationists believe that “perfection” refers to the second coming of Christ. They believe that these gifts are intended for the present church age but will no longer be needed when Jesus Christ returns.
- The majority of biblical interpreters have concluded that “perfection” refers to the second coming of Christ and not the completion of the canon.
  - Paul says that when the perfect comes, we will see God “face to face.” The phrase “face to face” is used in the Old Testament to mean seeing God personally.
  - Paul says that, for us, when perfection comes, “I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” The Scriptures help us know many things, but it could not be said that we know God fully because of them. God will be known fully to his people when his Son returns.
- It is doubtful that when the Corinthians read this letter, the concept of a closed canon would have occurred to them. A far more common theme in Scripture is the return of Christ. When Paul pointed his Corinthian readers to a future day when they would see Christ face to face, they are far more likely to have thought of Christ’s return.
- The most reasonable interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says that Paul is teaching that the gifts will cease when Jesus Christ returns.

## 2. The miraculous gifts ceased with the death of the last apostle.

- B.B. Warfield, a professor at Princeton Seminary, wrote a book in 1918 called *Counterfeit Miracles*. Warfield taught that the purpose of these gifts was to authenticate the apostles as trustworthy bearers of doctrine; when they died, this authenticating power died with them.
- The major problem with Warfield's argument is that its conclusion does not follow from its premises.

Major premise: The apostles, as the foundation of the church, experienced unique wonder-working powers to authenticate their ministry.

Minor premise: The apostles are dead.

Conclusion: No one experiences wonder-working power in ministry today.

- While it is true that the apostles had unique miraculous powers and it is true that they are dead, it does not logically follow that no other Christians can experience the miraculous gift. Jack Deere points out how flawed this reasoning is when applied to church planting. We could say:

Major premise: Only the apostle's planted churches in Acts.

Minor premise: The apostles are dead.

Conclusion: No one should plant churches today.

- All that is needed to refute this view from a scriptural standpoint is to find examples of non-apostolic Christians using the miraculous gifts in the New Testament such as:
  - Mark 9:38-39: An unknown man casts out demons in Jesus' name.
  - Luke 10:9: Jesus commissions seventy-two disciples to preach and to heal.
  - Acts 9:17-18: Ananias heals Paul.
  - Romans 12:6: Paul refers to the gift of prophecy in Rome, a church not yet visited by an apostle.
  - I Corinthians 12:8-10: Gifts of healing and miracles are experienced in the Corinthian church without an apostle present.
  - Galatians 3:5: Paul refers to the Holy Spirit who "work[s] miracles among you." The "you" is plural and must refer to the entire congregation, which was not led by an apostle.
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:20: Paul demands that the Thessalonians not hinder the prophetic gift.

- The list of miraculous gifts experienced by non-apostles in the New Testament grows much longer when we include tongues.

### **3. Allowing miraculous gifts such as prophecy undermines the sufficiency of Scripture.**

- This argument is concerned with protecting the Scriptures as the final and authoritative revelation of God's inerrant Word.
- The history of the church records numerous spurious groups that plunged into heresy when they became unanchored from Scripture.
- The charismatic movement has been criticized as seeming to equate "a word from God" with scriptural authority.
- This argument would be true if the New Testament gift of prophecy were like Old Testament prophecy in its authority. If Paul would have gifts to speak for God just as authoritatively as Isaiah or Jeremiah did, then we would agree that those gifts have passed away. God is not writing new Scripture today.
- New Testament prophecy is not equal to Scripture in authority, and no responsible non-cessationist claims that contemporary prophetic gifts have such authority.
- Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation." Clearly, Paul did not mean that people were speaking with Old Testament prophetic authority! If so why did Paul demand that these revelations be tested by the assembly?
- In the New Testament, the word "reveal" is not always used in reference to Scripture. It can simply mean "divinely prompted guidance or direction." Paul says that "God will make clear" to the Philippians the nature of their attitude (Philippians 3:15). Paul prays for the Ephesians "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelations, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17)
- Pressing this argument to its logical conclusion, one would have to do away with the illuminating, guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit altogether, for these would compromise the sufficiency of Scripture.

#### **4. Church history proves that all evidence of the miraculous gifts passed away after the first century.**

First Response: Even if it would be proved that the gifts passed away in the history of the church, this does not prove that God will not grant them again.

Second Response: History does not prove that the miraculous gifts passed away.

- Stanley Burgess wrote: “Before John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) in the East and Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) in the West, no church father suggested that any of all of the charismata were intended only for the first-century Church.”
- The Patristic era (A.D. 100-600) - an early second-century document, The Didache, was written to ministers. It exhorted the church to “permit the prophets to give thanks as much as they desire” and then proceeded to give instruction on how prophetic utterance were to be tested.
- Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100-165) reminds fellow Christians in a letter that “many of our Christian men... have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out.” Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130-202)
- Origen, writing in the third century, reported that signs and wonders validated the proclamation of the gospel: “The Gospel has a demonstration of its own... this... method is called by the apostle the “manifestation of the Spirit and of power:” of “the Spirit” on account of the prophecies, which are sufficient to produce faith in anyone who reads them... and of “power,” because of the signs and wonders.”
- The Latin theologian Hilary of Poitiers (4th C), affirmed that the miraculous gifts were operating in his day: “The gift of the Spirit is manifest... where there is ... the gift of healings, that by the cure of disease we should bear witness to His grace... or by the working of miracles... or by prophecy... or by discerning of spirits... or by kinds of tongues, that the speaking in tongues many be bestowed as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit: or by the interpretation of tongues.”
- Augustine (late 4th + early 5th C) believed that the gift of tongues was not given to the church in his day, but that the gift of miracle was: “...many miracles were wrought, the same God who wrought those we read of still performing them...”
- The Medieval Era (600-1500) - Colette of Corbi (d.1447) founded a convent and earned a reputation of one through whom God worked in miraculous ways. The Lives of the Saints tells us that the Duchess of Bourbon believed that she resuscitated the dead and comments that “...the fame of the miracles and labors of the carpenter’s daughter was in every mouth.”

- The lives of the saints are filled with stories of the miraculous. Modern-day Protestant scholarship tends to discredit these accounts as legends, but this reactionary approach to church history betrays modernist presuppositions about what sorts of things could and could not have happened in a saint's life.
- One other example of the presence of gifts during the period is the Scholastic mystical theologian Joachim of Fiore (d.1202), who wrote in his theology of the Holy Spirit that the Spirit spoke through prophets and the gift of tongues is imparted by the Holy Spirit by means of the imposition of hands.
- The Reformation and the Modern Era (1500 to present) - It is widely reported that the Reformers did not believe in miraculous gifts therefore it is somewhat surprising to find Martin Luther writing the following advice to a pastor who sought his counsel in ministering to a sick man: "I know of no worldly advice to give. If the physicians are at a loss to find a remedy, you may be sure that it is not a case of ordinary melancholy. It must, rather, be an affliction that comes from the devil and must be counteracted by the power of Christ and the prayer of faith. Accordingly, you should proceed as follows... Graciously deign to free this man from all evil, and bring to naught the work that Satan has done in him... Then, when you depart, lay your hands on the man again and say, these signs shall follow them that believe; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."
- In this century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes: "There is evidence from many of those Protestant Reformers and Fathers, that some of them had a genuine, true gift of prophecy... anyone who is prepared to say that all this ended with the apostolic age, and that there has never been a miracle since the apostles... gives the lie... [and] is to quench the Holy Spirit."



**5. The miraculous gifts were given only during the three periods of history when new revelation was given. Therefore, they are not being given today.**

- This view teaches that miracles happened in the days of Moses and Joshua, during the time of Elijah and Elisha and in the time of Christ and the apostles.
- The major problem with this argument is that a great number of supernatural events occur outside of these three periods. What is more, even if it is shown that the miraculous decreased at certain times, there may be other reasons for the decline, such as rebellion and sin.
- Suggesting that in three periods of redemptive history, miraculous phenomena were more prevalent than at other times does not prove that miraculous phenomena in other times were nonexistent, nor does it prove that an increase in miraculous phenomena could not appear in subsequent phases of redemptive history.

**6. Jesus says, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign” (Matthew 16:4). This means that we should not pray for the miraculous in our ministries today.**

- The problem with this objection is that it fails to consider who Jesus’ audience was. Mathew 16 shows us that the “wicked and adulterous generation” referred to were the Scribes and the Pharisees who came to test Jesus by asking for a sign. Jesus was rebuking hard-hearted unbelievers who mocked him with this request. Notice the greater frequency with which Jesus compassionately responded to a request for a miracle.
- Significantly, Acts 4:30 relates that the apostles and the early disciples prayed for signs and wonders to follow their preaching ministry. Paul, rather than discouraging his readers from seeking the miraculous gifts, told them to desire them eagerly (1 Corinthians 14:1). John writes that “many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.” (James 2:23). Then he reinforces the positive role of signs in proclaiming the gospel: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31).

**7. Seeking miraculous gifts, especially in evangelism, devalues the primacy of the Word of God. The Bible alone is enough to save.**

- Yes, the gospel alone is enough to save, for it is the “power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).
- In arguing that the postmodern church will be more effective when the Word goes forth with power, is the Word of God devalued?
- This is exactly what the apostles themselves expressed! They prayed for God to confirm their gospel with works of power. If signs and wonders did not devalue the Word for the apostles, why would they devalue the Word now?
- No one has ever preached the Word more powerfully than the apostles. Yet God chose to confirm his words through them with attesting signs and wonders. The argument is frequently made: “The apostles needed that in the first century. Those gifts passed away because the church didn’t need them anymore.” The suggestion that the church does not need them anymore implies that the apostles needed more help than we do in preaching the gospel! If the apostles, with their tremendous spiritual gifting and ministering to a world that was still filled with eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, needed the help of signs and wonders, don’t we need them, too?

**8. Jesus warns us that in the end times false prophets will work miracles and deceive the elect. Therefore we should not seek miraculous gifts.**

- The work of God’s Spirit is always counterfeited by the enemy. The scriptural approach is to learn to discern between true and false prophets. Texts such as Matthew 7:15-17, 2 Peter 2:1-22, and 1 John 4:1-6 guide the church to distinguish the false prophet from the true prophet. The Bible says there will be false teachers in the end times. Does that mean we should abandon the gift of teaching for fear of being deceived? Jesus did warn his followers to beware of deceiving false prophets who teach error and work false miracles. The fact that Satan can counterfeit a true ministry of the Spirit should not result in rejecting that ministry of the Spirit.

**9. The epistles rarely speak of the miraculous gifts. This proves that these gifts passed away toward the end of the first century.**

- The line of this argument says that the gifts are not discussed much in the epistles and that, in the letters written toward the end of Paul's life, we do not find Epaphroditus, Timothy, or Trophimus being supernaturally healed.
- This is an argument from silence, which is the weakest kind. Paul does not speak about his gift of celibacy in the later epistles either. Is one therefore to assume that he lost it? Not much can be proved from silence. The epistles do refer to miraculous gifts in Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Galatians 3-5, Ephesians 4:1-16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:20. Moreover, there is no explicit command in the epistles to evangelize. Should one conclude that by the end of the century the apostles have stopped witnessing? Just because Paul did not heal the three men he mentions in the prison epistles does not mean he lost his gift of healing. The scripture simply does not say why they were not healed.
- The greatest problem with this argument is that a contrast narrative literature with didactic literature. The book of Acts is narrative literature whereas the epistles are letters written to churches dealing with specific problems. When the problems related to gifts, as in Corinth, the epistle addressed it. Otherwise there was no reason for the gifts to be mentioned. Furthermore, Paul was in prison when he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These letters will obviously not be filled with stories of Paul working miracles - Paul was locked up!

**10. The miracles worked by the apostles were always successful, instantaneous, and on the hardest cases (such as organic illnesses like blindness or paralysis). If Jesus and the apostles were here today, they would be emptying the hospitals. The miracles today are nothing like the ones in the Bible. This proves that the miraculous gifts have ceased.**

- It has already been affirmed that Jesus and the apostles ministered with extraordinary power. It does not follow from this that believers today cannot minister with these gifts at all. While present-day believers may not witness with this kind of power, they continue to witness. The same is true of these gifts: they may not be used with the power displayed by the apostles, but they are still used.
- There does seem to be a distinction between the apostolic gift of healing and the gifts of healing mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. These gifts of healing may be of lesser intensity, which would account for the difference between apostolic and modern miracles. Samuel Storms writes: "It is repeatedly argued that the extent and intensity of apostolic signs, wonders and miracles has not continued unchanged throughout church history. I agree. But this would only prove that the apostles operated at a level of supernatural power unknown to other Christians, something virtually everyone concedes. It has no bearing, however, on the question of whether the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 are designed by God for the church in every age."