

• *God's silence*

Sometimes God may go a long time without speaking both in the life of the people of God and in the life of an individual. In the days of Samuel, *'the word of the Lord was rare'*^{□1}.

□1 3:1

• *God's speaking*

God does not have to speak to us in an audible voice as he did to Samuel, although that still happens. However, even without the audible voice what happened to Samuel is comparable to what happens to us when God speaks to us.

1. It is possible to hear God's voice but not know it

1. It is possible to hear God's voice but not know it. Sometimes when God is speaking to us we do not realise it. We can be restless, as when Samuel could get no sleep because the voice of God continued to come to him^{□1}. We might act strangely towards others, as when Samuel kept disturbing Eli. God's convictions might make us miserable. They might make us angry. Samuel was hearing the voice of God but did not realise it. It perplexed him, because he was not familiar with the voice of God coming to him in this way. *'The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.'*

□1 3:2-8a

2. It is possible for the true believer to cease to hear the voice of God

2. It is possible for the true believer to cease to hear the voice of God. Eli was a true believer, but in a bad state at the time we are considering. Samuel and Eli were both lying down in the tabernacle at Shiloh^{□1}. When God spoke, he spoke only to Samuel^{□2}. Samuel was not used to being spoken to in that way^{□3}.

□1 3:2-3

□2 3:4-6

□3 3:7

• *Eli was no longer hearing the voice of God himself*

Eli was **not** hearing God's voice. Yet he had enough spiritual knowledge to know what was happening to Samuel. He was even able to give Samuel good advice^{□1}. Eli was there and the message was about him^{□2} and yet God would not give the message to Eli. It is a high privilege to know that we are being spoken to by God. If God is pleased with us we are likely to be conscious of his voice, conscious of living fellowship with him. When God is displeased with us we are likely to discover he is speaking to others but not speaking to us. We may find that God is revealing to others things that we need to know. In the case of Eli we have someone who had heard the voice of God in days gone by, but was not hearing God's voice at that particular time. Similarly we may find that God will talk about us, but will not talk to us.

□1 3:8-9

□2 3:10-14

• *A sad situation*

When a person has known the Lord but at the present time in his life is distant from God, he may still know a lot. He may be able to give good advice. He can remember days when God blessed him and spoke to him. He recognizes when God is speaking to others. But it is a sad situation to be in. Hebrews says *'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts....'* Some believers no longer hear God's voice. It happened to Saul^{□1}.

□1 28:5-6

3. Wanting to know more of God's voice

3. It is possible to hear God's voice, know that one is hearing God's voice and want to know more of God's voice. The third situation we find in this chapter, is that of Samuel after he has been helped by Eli. Then Samuel **knew** what was happening. Before this time the voice of God was not well-known to Samuel. He had not known the Lord speaking to him in this way. Something like this can happen to us. It may take us time before we realise what it means for us to be hearing from God.

• *Hearing God's voice today*

Someone might want to ask 'is the modern way of hearing God's voice simply a matter of reading the Bible?' I answer as follows. The written Word of God is the greatest form of the Word of God, but there are other forms. God has other ways of speaking. The greatest way is to know we are being addressed through the Scriptures. But there can also be revelations in the midst of worship. There can be 'coincidences' where we know God is saying something to us. There can come convictions by the Spirit, intuitions, spiritual instincts or the direct impulses of the Spirit¹, or the forbidding of the Spirit². A word from God may come through a dream or vision. All of these have to be thoroughly tested but the written Word of God does not have to be tested. It has been tested already a thousand times. Sometimes preaching will come to us with the forcefulness of a word from God. Sometimes the counsel of other Christians convicts us. Sometimes the voice of God comes amidst unusual circumstances.

¹ Acts 8:29
² Acts 16:6,7

• *By the Spirit*

Hearing the Bible by the Spirit is more than just reading. Even when we have the written Word of God we still need the Spirit. The Pharisees had the Old Testament and loved it but did not see Jesus in its pages. They had the Bible; they did not have the Spirit.

• *Asking God to speak to us*


We need first then to ask God to speak to us. When he has spoken to us we need to press on to ask for more, as Samuel did. God often speaks in two phases. Sometimes he tells us a little bit and then waits for us to seek him to get more, to say 'Master speak, your servant is hearing.' He called Samuel by name and then waited for Samuel to want more. He did the same to Daniel. Daniel knew something from God¹ but had to seek for more². It happened to all the prophets. The prophets received one phase of revelation and then had to seek for more³. Then they got another phase of revelation⁴. It happens that way still.

¹ Daniel 9:2
² Daniel 9:3
³ 1 Peter 1:10,11
⁴ 1 Peter 1:12

• *Obedience leads to receiving further words*

When Samuel did hear God, there was a difficult task ahead of him¹ but he did what he knew he had to do². It was his obedience to what God was showing him that led to his receiving further words from God and that led to his ministry as spokesman for God³.

¹ 3:15-17
² 3:18
³ 3:19-4:1a

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