

GOD'S MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Our loving God is a God of communication. From the very beginning, He has communicated with His creation. In fact, He not only communicates with us, He also urges us to communicate with Him. In addition, He invites people to communicate with one another in the same loving manner.

I - HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT COMMUNICATION TERMS

The Hebrew Bible uses several terms to describe God's means of communication.

1. "To say" (Hebrew: *amar*)

The Scriptures open with the seven famous Hebrew words that are translated: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Notice that immediately after the verb "to create," which identifies God as the supreme Creator of the universe, the next verb that refers to God describes Him as a communicator. It is the verb "to say." Indeed, the inspired record states that on Day One of creation week "God said, let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). He could have created our world without words, but instead He chose to speak, to communicate orally.

2. "To call" (Hebrew: *qara*)

The second communication verb used in reference to God in the Bible is "to call" (Genesis 1:5; 3:9). This almost always carries the connotation of "shouting." It is interesting that when

Adam and Eve sinned and hid from God, two communication verbs are used in the same

sentence to describe God's actions: "Then the Lord God *called* to Adam and *said* to him 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9, italics supplied). God not only spoke to Adam when he was hiding and not responding, He also called to him in a loud voice. Without being irreverent, we might describe this encounter between God and Adam and Eve as the very first game of "hide and seek."

It appears that God played the same game with them that we play with small children. Little ones enjoy hiding and then imagining that we adults do not know where they are. If we play the game well enough, we take our time in

“finding” where they are. Adam and Eve, like little children, were hiding, apparently not realizing that it is impossible to hide from God, not even behind trees in a lush garden (Genesis 3:8). Even so, God lovingly played the “game” and asked, “Where are you?” as if He did not already know.

Today, God still calls His wayward children. He calls us over and over even when we try to hide from Him and do not want to communicate with Him. In fact, it is because of accepting His call that we are here today worshiping in His presence.

3. “To speak” (Hebrew: *dabar*)

The third communication verb used in connection with God is “to speak.” In Hebrew, the term generally conveys a forensic meaning. For instance, it is used in the expression “Ten Words,” usually translated as “Ten Commandments” (cf. Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4). The “Ten Words” were the basis of God’s covenant with humankind. For this reason the two tablets containing them were kept in the ark of the covenant that was located in the most holy place of the sanctuary. The expression, “Ten Words,” distinguishes this set of ten principles from all the other Hebrew laws and commandments. Such distinction becomes all the more relevant if we connect the “Ten Words” of the Old Testament with their Author, the Word (*dabar* in Hebrew; *logos* in Greek) in the New Testament. It is therefore not surprising that Jesus would affirm that His “words” (commandments) would never lose their validity. The “Ten Words” express the loving code of God’s covenant with us, which on the cross of Calvary was confirmed, renewed and sealed, once and for all, by the precious blood of Jesus.

4. “To reveal” (Hebrew: *galah*)

The fourth verb used in the Bible to express God’s means of communication is “to reveal.” We

read in Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things

which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of

this law.” We notice with amazement that, even as sin widened the gap between God and humanity, God never gave up communicating. In fact, contrary to the teachings of other world religions where humans feel that through sacrifices and offerings they must appease their gods’ anger, our loving God has always taken the initiative to reconcile us to Him. Continually, He invites His children to reestablish our lost communication with Him.

II - GOD'S AGENTS OF COMMUNICATION - HOW HE COMMUNICATES

1. Through His prophets (Hebrew: *nabi*).

Originally, the Hebrew term for “prophet” was used in the context of a general spokesperson. Thus, Aaron was called the prophet of his brother Moses (Exodus 7:1). However, in the same context the term was also used to refer to Moses as God’s spokesman. In the Old Testament, prophets were chosen by God until the time of Malachi. Later, God decided to raise up His greatest prophet, John the Baptist, to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we see that by choosing someone to be His spokesperson, or prophet, God has been revealing His messages via human agents throughout Earth’s history.

In Amos 3:7 we read, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” God has faithfully fulfilled His promise not to let His people live in anxiety regarding what will happen tomorrow. That is part of the message that God’s prophetically-called, end-time people are to give. He also pleads with His people never to despise His Word as revealed through His prophets. Thus, in its original setting, the following admonition becomes even more relevant when we recall that it is found in the last book of the Hebrew Bible: “Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20).

2. Through His priests

Old Testament priests were the human agents appointed by God to provide communication between humans and Himself. Thus, while prophets communicated between God and His children, priests communicated between Israel and God. Although priests belonged to the family of Aaron and his descendants, prophets were always chosen individually by God Himself.

Regarding the sacrifices offered by the priests, it is worth recalling that they were never made to appease God. They were symbolic bridges that prefigured our supreme Bridge, Jesus Christ. They were not *ex opere operato* (“with value by itself”). No sacrifice would have had any meaning had Jesus not succeeded in His supreme sacrifice on the cross. But because of Calvary, He has become our Bridge, our High Priest, our Advocate, and as such, our only means to reestablish communication with God the Father.

3. Through the Urim and Thummim

For a limited time in the Old Testament, God communicated with the people of Israel through the Urim and Thummim, two stones encrusted on the breastplate of the high priest (cf. Exodus 28:30). God revealed His will through a “yes” or “no,” according to the way the stones would supernaturally shine.

4. Through animals

As unbelievable as it may seem, when humans refused to hear God's messages, He had no hesitation about speaking through animals. Didn't God call animals to enter Noah's ark after most humans refused to obey? Didn't He correct Balaam through a donkey when the prophet stubbornly persisted in following his own way (Numbers 22:28-30)? Didn't God speak to the fish that swallowed Jonah when the prophet refused to go to Nineveh (Jonah 2:10)? If even animals listen to God, shouldn't we listen to Him as well?

5. In "various ways"

We are told in Hebrews 1:11 that "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times, and in various ways." Ellen G. White wrote: "The system of education instituted at the beginning of the world was to be a model for human beings throughout all time. As an illustration of its principles a model school was established in Eden. The Garden was the schoolroom, nature was the lesson book, the Creator Himself was the instructor, and the parents of the human family were the students" (*True Education*, p. 14).

Later, many years after the fall of humankind, David would sing, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1; cf. Job 9:7). Indeed, God has always used creation as one of His "various ways" to communicate with us.

6. Through His Son

When it seemed that communication between God and humans could no longer continue, God spoke to us by His Son (cf. Hebrews 2). As a result, through Christ's merits we now have permanent access to the throne of God. Thus, the lines of communication will remain open forever, as long as we maintain a daily relationship and dialogue with Him. But even if we hide, as did Adam and Eve, the Holy Spirit is present to lovingly invite us to repent and to have our communication with God restored. Yes, my friends, at the first coming of Jesus, God's people entered in the decisive final race to reach eternity. When Jesus overcame death after being crucified on the cross of Calvary, humanity was enabled to enter into direct communication with God through Jesus Christ.

7. In New Testament times

Did God stop communicating through His prophets? The Jewish people thought He had after the death of Malachi in Old Testament times. But God decided to call another prophet, this time the greatest of them all, John the Baptist. At a

time when almost no one followed God, John was called to prepare the way for God's only begotten Son, our Saviour, Jesus the Messiah. It is not by accident that the first words recorded by Matthew concerning John's message were the very same words used by Jesus when He started His ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17).

Still today, those who accept Him as their Saviour are elected and chosen to become priests and disciples/messengers to announce the good news of His kingdom. Since the days when Christ lived here on earth, this good news has been preached everywhere. The evangelist, Matthew, quotes the words of Jesus who announced, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Today we see that happening. The gospel of the kingdom is being preached in all corners of the earth. Praise God! But even more, the message of the kingdom is not only to be proclaimed, it is to be lived by each one of us (cf. Romans 14:17).

III - GOD'S SPECIAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN MODERN TIMES

1. True prophets of God

Some difficult messages communicated to Daniel the prophet in the Old Testament were dramatically clarified by John the Revelator in the New Testament. The book of Revelation makes clear that the great conflict between God and Satan is about to end. This is the primary secret not plainly revealed in the book of Daniel.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was called into existence to confirm that Jesus will soon return to earth. The special messages contained in Daniel 8, as well as in Revelation 12-14, are to be proclaimed with particular emphasis. Even though the Adventist Church recognizes and teaches that there will be people redeemed from all churches and cultures, it holds the firm belief expressed by John the Revelator: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). Furthermore, the Adventist Church believes that God has given it a special gift, specified by the apostle Paul, namely, the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:1-6). This gift is to be found among many other gifts also bestowed upon God's people (cf. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14). Such a gift was predicted in the Old Testament by Joel the prophet, "And it shall come to

pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:18). The Adventist Church believes that such a gift was bestowed in a special way upon Ellen G. White, who referred to herself simply as the Lord's "messenger."

2. God's messages through Ellen White

What was God's message through Ellen White? The answer to this question is more important than asking whether one needs Ellen White's writings in order to be saved. Mrs. White did not praise herself. She did not introduce new doctrine. Together with the Adventist pioneers, following the Millerite revival movement of the 1840s in the United States, she emphasized the need to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. She emphasized Jesus as our Saviour as well as His present role of being our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. She emphasized John the Baptist's call to return to God, for the Kingdom is at hand. She called for revival and reformation in order to receive the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She emphasized the absolute need to love Jesus and His Ten Words. She emphasized the need to live up to the message we proclaim, because our lifestyle has to match our high calling. She emphasized the great controversy between good and evil, something not generally taught by theologians or other Christian churches. She is in absolute harmony with the teachings of Scripture. She does not give us a new Bible, but the source of her messages is the very same as that of God's prophets and apostles throughout time. Fellow believer, the key question is, Did God choose Ellen White as His messenger? And if He did, what are we going to do with the messages God has given us through her?

3. Divine messages/human messenger

Was Ellen White infallible? No. Nor were God's prophets of the past. But their basic teaching always reflects God's teaching. The Word of God is not produced by the will of man, but by the will of God. We are told that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God [in the original it is said that all Scriptures come out of God], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

In other words, what comes out of the mouth of God is infallible, though what prophets understand may sometimes be inaccurate. When Nathan agreed with David that the king was the one to build the temple in Jerusalem, this was not God's plan. Both David and Nathan were true prophets, but both misinterpreted God's will. However, when such serious mistakes are about to be made, God always corrects His servants the prophets. In the end, the

temple was not built by David, but by his son Solomon. We may know with certainty that God never leaves the prophet in error when his or her basic doctrine is not accurate. (See 1 Chronicles 17).

Are Ellen White's writings a second Bible? They are not. In fact she considered herself a lesser light helping to understand the greater light found in the Holy Bible (2 Peter 1:19, 21). Through out her life she kept pointing to the Bible. (See CM 125; EW 78, MH 465; GC 593)

4. Beware of false prophets

What about false prophets? Throughout history there have been countless counterfeit prophets. Satan has always had his own spokespersons whom the Bible denounces as false prophets. They, too, communicated with the supernatural. They, too, claimed to be from God. But their real purpose was to sow confusion by preaching messages that were not from God. Today we still have false prophets. How can we discern the true from the false? This is an important question!

Some years ago, during a seminar on Revelation, a young man in attendance claimed to be a prophet of God. Each time those present were given an opportunity to ask questions or make comments, the young man would raise his hand, only to argue against what had been presented in the seminar. After one-and-a-half days of struggle, it became clear that things could not continue as they were. But what to do? The group decided to kneel and ask for God's help. After praying for about fifteen minutes, a noise was heard. Someone was leaving the room. When the season of prayer ended, the young man was gone. He could not stand the power of God.

Instead of arguing, criticizing, or entering into a fruitless dialogue, when dealing with those who claim to be prophets, we need to invite the church to pray for God's guidance. When this is done with persistence until we receive an answer, the Lord will never let His people down.

Although always on the lookout for false prophets, we must also be sure never to silence anyone who may actually have been called by God. We have to learn to test the spirits. Most often people who claim to speak on behalf of God say they have been given messages against certain church members, or against the church at large. Often they claim to have a burden to cleanse the church.

Dear fellow believer, God does not send messengers to accuse members regarding things already known by many, nor about rumors that are not even true. God wants to cleanse with love. He wants to build unity by the Spirit.

Jesus did not come to this earth to condemn; He came to save. Those who spend their time criticizing and faultfinding in the name of God would much better spend their time in prayer, interceding for those who have stumbled, or in asking for wisdom in order to find lost souls who are ready to be brought to Jesus.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we ought to seek the discernment necessary to recognize both “false teaching” and “false prophecy,” and to cling to God’s truth. Let us remember that God has never ceased to communicate. His Spirit is present among us, to comfort, to correct, to teach, to strengthen. Jesus has promised to be with us—and to communicate His will for us—until the very end of the age.

5. A call to serious study

The correct study of God’s means of communication, as described in the Bible, shows that God never contradicts Himself. We are invited to turn to God’s Word (the Law) and to His testimony (the prophets). If they do not speak according to God’s words, there is no truth in them (Isaiah 8:20). This is why it is crucially important that we study, with prayer and perseverance, what the Scriptures and Ellen White’s writings have to say for us today. Such sincere study will confirm God’s unified message. Yes, dear fellow believer, God is a God of communication. He ever has and always will communicate with His children. He is still speaking to us today, to you and to me, through His Word and through His Holy Spirit.

It is high time to earnestly seek God. It is time to ask for wisdom to discern His Spirit from that of other spirits. It is time to humble ourselves. The Adventist Church is not composed of proud people. Rather, it is composed of those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness and innocence through the blood of Jesus. We all acknowledge that there is a tremendous need for revival and reformation in this church we love. Such revival and reformation requires the unconditional unity of all of us in the same Spirit. Satan, our accuser, finds incredible satisfaction when he succeeds in dividing God’s people. God never divides. He always unites. When we pray for unity, those who are not with God will leave by themselves. Wasn’t this the method used by Jesus, who accepted Judas until he himself chose to leave?

Through His messengers, the Biblical prophets and Ellen White’s writings in these end times, the Adventist Church has enough light to go forward without fear. We have nothing to fear for the future, unless we forget the marvelous way God has led and taught this Church in the past. (cf. *Life Sketches*, p. 196.) We are not to remain parasites of the Church by always taking for ourselves

and never sharing with others. Instead, we are called to help build the Kingdom of God. We all have various gifts of the Spirit as described in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. It is our sacred responsibility to discern those gifts, and to use them for God's glory. We are not called to be consumers. Rather, we are called to be producers.

CONCLUSION:

Through Ellen White we are reminded that the price of the cross was not cheap. We are called to love Jesus with the same kind of love with which God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. This Church must respond to God's call to remain *united* in the same Spirit. Only thus will we be enabled to *grow* by the same Spirit. All is accomplished by grace. We just have to respond to His amazing call with total consecration.

Yes, as God continuously communicates with us, we are called to communicate God's love to others in order to help prepare His Church to meet Jesus. Let us pray for wisdom to fulfill God's will. Let us pray for humility to be fully used by Him so that others may see Jesus in us. Let us pray that our faith may be increased, a faith that is based on the cross of Calvary. "If Jesus did not resurrect from the dead, our faith is in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:17). Let us pray for courage to stand firm and faithful, for the days that lie ahead will not be easy. Let us pray for the precious oil of the Holy Spirit, so necessary to prevail until the end.

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