

## ***The Prophetic Gift***

# ***Heaven's Means of Communication***

Lesson #1 for January 03, 2009

Scriptures: Genesis 18:1-33; 32:30; Exodus 4:10-17; Psalms 19:1-6; John 1:14; 3:16; Colossians 2:9.

1. This lesson focuses on the different ways in which God can and does communicate with human beings. God speaks to us through “general revelation” in two categories: 1) “Internal revelation,” through reason and conscience (Romans 2:15; John 1:9) i.e. How does God speak to the heathen? and 2) “External revelation” in the works of nature. (Psalms 19; Romans 1:20) i.e. How is God’s character revealed through nature?

Under the category of “special revelation” is the special work of the Holy Spirit as demonstrated through the works of the prophets and the apostles as recorded in the Bible as well as the writings of Ellen White.

2. Does God communicate with us through our consciences? If yes, how does He do that? Is the conscience just a collective internal guide that reminds us of what our parents taught us when we were young? Or does God “reach” directly into our nervous systems—our brains and our minds—and give us impressions? How does that compare with the way Satan “reaches in” and tempts us? Is that manipulation?

The brain nerves which communicate to the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man, and affect his inmost life.—2T, p. 347. {CG 446.3; Ed 209.2; HL 54.3; 1MCP 73.1}

How many of our senses does God use? How many does the Devil use? Remember that James 1:14 says that most of our temptations come from “our own evil desires”! Where do our “evil desires” come from? How can we come up with creative ideas if our only input is through the five senses. Do we combine ideas and impressions from the past to come up with new ideas? How does that work? Unless we learn from a teacher, how can we “grow” spiritually if God does not work directly on our brains? Can God or the Devil work through the mechanism of bringing up past memories and experiences?

3. How much can we learn about God from nature—through general revelation? How much of what we see in nature today has been corrupted by the work of the Devil? If we see “evil” happening in our world, did God create that or did the Devil corrupt God’s creation to produce that?
4. Could you learn enough through nature to be saved? Compare Romans 1:20-23 and Acts 4:12. And what is the role of our choices? The book of nature is much older than the Bible. What did Job and Abraham have to look at? Can we learn anything specific about Jesus Christ and His means of salvation by looking at a beautiful rose?
5. What does the Bible tell us about the revelation that comes through nature? (Psalms 19:1-6; 33:6-9; Romans 1:19-23) Sin has corrupted and changed nature since it was created by God. How do you think the plants that were present in the Garden of Eden compare with the ones we see today? God “never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 186.

Agricultural experts tell us that there is very little difference in the DNA to produce a leaf and

to produce a thorn. Did Satan produce those tiny genetic changes in God's creation? Did he do that to "cloud" the picture of God in nature—to make it harder for us to learn about God through external revelation?

6. We should have no trouble recognizing God's majesty and power as we contemplate His creative acts in making our universe. Our Milky Way galaxy has about 200 billion stars. Beyond our galaxy there are several hundred billion other galaxies. The star which is nearest to us, known as Alpha Centauri, is 4.37 light years away. If we could travel 100,000 miles an hour, it would take us 29,000 years to get there! And our Milky Way galaxy is not just 4.37 light years in diameter but rather 100,000 light years in diameter. Furthermore, the largest galaxy of which we are aware and which scientists have been able to somewhat measure is 13 times larger than our galaxy. Surely, these facts are just a glimpse into God's majesty and power.
7. But think of all the things in nature that might even seem to misrepresent God. Carnivorous animals, destructive storms, earthquakes, fires, tsunamis, etc. To what extent is God responsible for those things? What is an "act of God"? Where did that name come from? What that really means is, if something like that happens, we refuse to take responsibility! What things in nature speak to you about God's love? How fully does nature reveal God's character? What about baby animals? Beautiful sunsets? A mother animal caring for her young? Yosemite National Park? Yellowstone National Park? A rainbow? The fantastic array of colorful fish in the ocean?
8. Recently, scientists have discovered that the sun has a kind of "song." The surface of the sun is actually vibrating up and down in harmonic waves that make a kind of sound. Those waves reveal to us something about what is happening inside the sun. What kind of majesty and power would it take to create a sun like ours?
9. Turning to "special revelation," what terms were used in the Old Testament to describe the people to whom God communicates? They were sometimes called *seers* and sometimes called *prophets*. What is the difference between a *seer* and a *prophet*? A *seer* is someone who "sees" something in a prophetic dream or vision. It emphasizes the "seeing" aspect of the prophet's role. A *prophet* is someone who speaks on behalf of another person. His role could be compared to an ambassador or a spokesperson. That role emphasizes communicating God's will to human beings. The word *prophet* comes from two Greek words *pro* which means *for* or *on behalf of* and *phemi* which means *to speak*.
10. Read Genesis 18:1-33. How often do you think God communicated with Abraham? On what was Abraham's faith based? In Genesis 18 does it seem like Abraham was comfortable speaking to God? How did God communicate with human beings prior to the writing of any Scripture? When God said to Abraham that in one year they would have a baby, Sarah, listening from inside the tent, laughed! But when God said, "Why did you laugh?" She denied it! So they called the baby Isaac which means *laughter*.

Soon Abraham and God were in an intense conversation about Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham began to "bargain" with God! He must have known God well! When he got down to ten righteous people, he must have felt that there surely were at least ten people that Lot had influence! How does God feel when His "friends" bargain with Him? Wasn't that real conversation?

In between God's physical visits to Abraham, did the Holy Spirit communicate with Abraham through His usual channels? If "faith" is a trusting relationship with another person, how did Abraham develop that relationship with God? Didn't he get to know God pretty well? How did

Abraham know for sure that it was God asking him to take his son out and offer him as a sacrifice?

11. Review some of the examples we have in Scripture of the times when God communicated directly with human beings. God “spoke” with: 1) Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8); 2) Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24); 3) Abraham (Genesis 18:1-33); 4) Jacob (Genesis 32:30); 5) Moses (Exodus 3:1-4:17; 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10-12); 6) the people of Israel (Exodus 20:18-20; Deuteronomy 5:23-27); 7) Gideon (Judges 6:22-27); 8) Samson’s parents (Judges 13:2,3); and 9) Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5-8). Compare John 1:18; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2. Why does the Bible seem to suggest that no one can see God while at other times, people apparently did see God? (Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:1-28; Compare Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 237,238) How do we deal with such apparent contradictions?
12. Why do you think so many of the prophets felt inadequate to the task when God approached them? Consider Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and even Solomon. Does God have available to Him any “perfect channel” for communicating with us? Were these prophets the best “channels” that God had available?
13. God is anxious to restore us to the kind of relationship He had with Adam and Eve in the beginning. What must be accomplished for that to be possible?
14. Notice what God said to Moses about the role He wanted him to play. Moses was to speak on God’s behalf to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt as well as to the children of Israel. (Exodus 4:10-17) Moses did not think that his Egyptian language skills were adequate to the task, so God gave him Aaron to speak on his behalf. Did Aaron become a “prophet” for Moses?
15. Later in the history of the children of Israel when kings became powerful, the prophets often served to speak to—or even to rebuke—the kings on God’s behalf. They were to guard God’s law and to teach about the theocracy.
16. What does the Bible teach us about the specific tasks connected to the work of being a prophet? In Exodus 19:7, it says that God spoke to Moses and gave him instructions to speak to the children of Israel. In Numbers 12:6, God said that He revealed Himself to prophets through visions and spoke to them in dreams. On several occasions Joseph and Daniel were called upon to interpret dreams. (Genesis 40; Daniel 2; 4) God told Amos that He reveals His plans to prophets. (Amos 3:7) At times, God gave very specific instructions about what He wanted His prophet, apostle, or even king to do. (2 Samuel 2:1; Acts 16:9; 18:9; 22:18) Many times, prophets and apostles were told to write down what they saw. Often, God instructed prophets to write down what they were told or what they were shown. (Exodus 34:27; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 30:2; 36:28; Ezekiel 43:11; Revelation 19:9; 21:5) But sometimes, they were told not to write things down. (Revelation 10:4)
17. So, what does it mean to be “inspired”? The word literally means *God-breathed*. The classic texts on inspiration are found in 2 Timothy 3:16,17 [there is good evidence to suggest that this verse should be translated: “Every inspired Scripture...] and 2 Peter 1:21. **Inspiration happens when God communicates an idea through the Holy Spirit and sometimes using angels to a “prophet” who in turn writes it down or speaks the message to the person to be addressed. It may later be copied many times and eventually gets translated into many languages. Finally, if you read it in a language that you can understand, and the idea which God had is more or less the same as the idea which**

**you understand, then inspiration has happened. Inspiration is not primarily in books, inspiration happens in people and books are just tools to that end.**

But many people down through the generations wrote books which they claimed were inspired by God but which we do not include in our Scriptures. How do we decide what should be included in the Bible and what should not be included? The *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* on Tuesday, December 30 says, "This does not allow for us to decide which part of Scripture is inspired by God and which is human invention." When Protestants rejected the 14 books of the Apocrypha, were they deciding which parts to reject? What about the Pseudepigrapha? Or the New Testament Apocrypha? Do we need to decide for ourselves which parts of a collection of writings or Scripture are inspired by God? Can one tell just by looking at a sentence or two or maybe a paragraph if something is "inspired"?

18. One of the basic fundamental concepts in Christianity is that it is a "revealed" religion. By that, we mean that it is based on messages received from God and spoken or written down through prophets and apostles. There is no way we could have discovered the "gospel" by ourselves.
19. Isaiah suggested that one of the ways in which God proves that He is superior to false gods is that He can predict the future. (Isaiah 42:8,9; 43:8,9,12,13) Thus, we see in such places as Matthew 1:22; 2:15,17; and 4:14 that the events of the life and death of Jesus were prophesied in the Old Testament. That is proof that the Bible is supernatural. But prophecy is not primarily revealing the future. God speaks to human beings, and because He has the power to know the future, He may at times reveal a portion of the future to one of His "prophets." But prophecy is much more than just foretelling the future. Is it impossible for any human being to prophesy events so many years in advance? What about Satan?
20. The apostle John tells us that stories in the Bible were written down so we can believe. (John 20:30,31)
21. Christians suggest that the Bible is a unique book. What characteristics of the Bible set it apart from every other book? It is nothing short of miraculous to have a book written by about 40 authors over a period of 1600 years and to have it be so consistent throughout. While skeptics have tried to point out inconsistencies, there are no inconsistencies which cannot be easily explained on the basis of a careful reading and an understanding of the context.
22. Furthermore, the Bible presents a unique view of history and particularly the history of the children of Israel. William F. Albright, the greatest archaeologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote:

Hebrew national tradition excels all others in its clear picture of tribal and family origins. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we look in vain for anything comparable. There is nothing like it in the tradition of the Germanic peoples either. India or China can't produce anything similar.— *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper, Torch Book, 1963), page 27.

But we are Gentiles living thousands of years away from the events recorded in an essentially Jewish book. So what does the Bible have to do with us? It can only be relevant to us if we believe that the Bible is a book for all mankind.

23. Furthermore, the Bible has survived an incredible number of attacks from every possible direction, all inspired by the Devil. Despite that, no other ancient writing comes even close in terms of the number of copies still surviving. Homer's Iliad has 643 manuscripts that we know

of. The New Testament Scripture has over 5000. The reason for its survival, of course, must be attributed to the direct interventions of God. For example, think of the work of the Waldenses.

24. But clearly, the most important revelation that God gave to His children on planet Earth was the life and death of Jesus. (John 1:1,14; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3) We have only begun to scratch the surface in understanding everything that Jesus did. (John 20:30,31) The life and death of Jesus will be “our study” throughout eternity.
25. God intends that His Book—the Bible, the 66 books of Old and New Testaments—will be the “guiding light” for Christians until He returns again. (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20)
26. But Satan is alive and well, and we have been warned that many false prophets will be sent also. (Jeremiah 14:14; Mark 13:20; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1) What criteria can we use to identify false prophets? Can you name some false prophets that have lived and written fairly extensively in the last 200 years?
27. We have only a very small part of the information we would like to have about the life and death of Jesus. But, based on the information that has been revealed through the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, what stands out in your mind as the most important things that we can learn about God? In studying the life and death of Jesus, should our focus be on what God can do for me or on what God has done to answer the questions in the great controversy—what God has taught us about Himself?
28. So, reviewing what we have studied this week, what have you learned recently about God from nature? What new truths have you discovered in Scripture? When photographers of nature set out to document the lives and behaviors of some of the creatures that are less well known in God’s universe, the results amaze us. Kjell Sandved found a perfect letter *F* on the wings of an orange sphinx moth. Over the next 20 years he photographed—in natural settings—all the letters and numbers of our alphabet and counting system on butterflies and moths. Thus was born “The Butterfly Alphabet.” But much more amazing things can be learned by viewing nature documentaries such as “The Blue Planet” and “The Planet Earth” produced by the BBC.
29. Ellen G. White wrote:

Christ came to teach human beings what God desires them to know [about Himself]. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, His wisdom, His love. But not from the stars or the ocean or the cataract can we learn of the personality of God as it is revealed in Christ.

God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to reveal, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God.

**Christ revealed all of God that sinful human beings could bear without being destroyed.** – *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 265, 266.

30. So, has God provided sufficient evidence on which to base our faith? (*Steps to Christ*, 105) Are there some things happening in nature which disturb your faith? Do we have sufficient evidence to continue trusting God despite hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters? What picture of God would you develop if you had only general revelation? Is it

significantly different from the picture of God that we get from special revelation?

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