

Hearing God's Voice

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Chapter One The God Who Speaks

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

Romans 10:17

Faith. Everyone has heard about it, many have seen it, but relatively few have experienced it in any depth. Yet Hebrews 3 and 4 tell us that Israel could not enter into God's Rest because they did not have the faith required of them to enter into that level of experience. But why? Had they not seen all the miracles Moses did? Had they not seen the parting of the Red Sea, the manna sent from heaven, and the fiery presence of God upon Mount Sinai? Of course they did, and they were certainly convinced that these things came from God. Nonetheless, they did not have the faith necessary to enter the Promised Land. The question is: Why not?

There is a difference between mental persuasion and faith. One can be totally convinced of the authenticity of Scripture and that Jesus was the Son of God who died and rose again for us, and yet not have the level of faith needed to enter the Promised Land. If it takes faith only the size of a mustard seed to move a mountain, as Jesus said, then how little faith we must have! When we are confronted by mole hills, we are often frustrated and helpless to do anything. Or if we do, we seem to resemble the prophets of Baal in our antics as we try to manipulate God into doing something for us, rather than Elijah who simply prayed and got the job done.

Prayer is something that most people do not really believe will work for them. For this reason, prayer meetings usually fail to draw more than a handful of interested people, and many of them seem to attend more out of duty and pastoral compulsion than from a genuine interest. Most are not excited by the prospect of a prayer meeting, because they do not really expect much to be accomplished by their prayer. Thus, only the dutiful and the disciplined are able to enter that labor, and seldom is it a joyous celebration of God's interaction with men.

Heb. 3:19 says, “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” The kind of faith mentioned in this verse is not the kind that is necessary to “get saved.” All Israel were justified by faith when they left Egypt at Passover. In observing Passover, they were proclaiming their faith in the blood of the Lamb, and they all believed God on this level, or else they would have lost their firstborn sons. This gives us the type and shadow of the evangelical Christians today who have left the world (“Egypt”) and are on their way to the Promised Land.

The problem is that many Christians leave Egypt and even cross the Red Sea (that is, they are baptized—see 1 Cor. 10:2); but then they settle down on the far shore of the Red Sea, build a house (denomination), and assume they are in the Promised Land. In time, some become dissatisfied, realizing that there is yet more of God to experience beyond the Passover-Red Sea experience, and so they follow the Spirit (the pillar of fire) to the foot of Mount Sinai. This was the place where God came down as fire, and the people all heard the voice of God speaking to them in their own language. God revealed the Ten Commandments to the people on the day later celebrated as the day of Pentecost, or the feast of weeks.

This was supposed to be the day Israel attained the second major level of faith on their way to the Promised Land. Paul says in Rom. 1:17 that “*the righteousness of God (is) revealed from faith to faith.*” That is, God reveals Himself to men from one level of faith to another as we hear His voice. As He speaks, and as we hear, we move from faith to faith. There are three main levels of spiritual experience and faith, each typified by Israel’s experience in the wilderness and commemorated by a Feast Day. They are Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

When Israel came to Mount Sinai and God revealed His character to them by the law, the people were too fearful to enter into the second level of faith. We read in Ex. 20:18-21,

18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off. 19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not,

for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. 21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick dark-ness where God was.

Because the people were afraid to die, they ran from God and from hearing His voice. Thus, they were unable to enter into the Pentecostal level of faith that God intended for them. Their refusal to hear the divine law meant that the law would not be written on their heart, but would remain only on tables of stone. The Spirit of God would not work within them to begin changing their hearts, but rather the law would be imposed upon them from the outside and regulate their actions through discipline. So the fulfillment of Pentecost would be postponed for another 1,500 years until after Jesus death and resurrection. The disciples in the book of Acts gathered in the upper room for the purpose of hearing His voice and receiving the divine revelation of Pentecost. They did what their forefathers had refused to do on that same day many years earlier.

Because Israel under Moses refused to hear the voice of God and allow the law to be written on their hearts, they were unable to enter the Promised Land the following year. The twelve spies saw that the land was bountiful, and as evidence they brought with them huge clusters of the first ripe of the grapes (Num. 13:20). This tells us that it was now the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar (about September). Ten of the twelve spies gave an evil report, reflecting the faithless condition of the people, and thereafter this day was observed as the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance for refusing to enter into the Promised Land. If they had blown the trumpet signaling their decision to get ready to enter Canaan, it would have been the trumpet of the Jubilee. This was, in fact, the 50th Jubilee from Adam, and they should have “*returned every man to his possession*” (Lev. 23:9-13).

However, they did not have the faith to enter the Land, because they had refused earlier to hear the voice of God at the foot of Sinai on that first Pentecost. One cannot go directly from Passover to Tabernacles. One cannot go directly from Egypt to the Promised Land. One cannot bypass the revelation of the law at Sinai. Those who attempt to do this are called “*lawless*” (*anomia*) in the New Testament.

It would therefore be profitable for us today to learn the lessons of these Old Testament types and shadows. We see from the biblical account that there are Christians having differing levels of faith, depicted by Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In addition, from Moses to the Cross was a Passover Age. From Acts 2 to the present has been a Pentecostal Age. We are now entering into a Tabernacles Age. But in Jesus' day, while most of the people observed Passover on a physical level, only a small portion of them actually had a revelation of Passover, which would have allowed them to move into the next level of faith: Pentecost. Most stumbled at the Cross (1 Cor. 1:23) and continued in the religious traditions of Judaism, unable to grow in faith.

At our end of the Pentecostal Age, we find the same thing happening on the next level. Many have stumbled and failed the test of Pentecost and are therefore ineligible to move further into the faith of Tabernacles. How have they failed? Primarily, it is because, like Israel of old, they are afraid to hear God's voice, or they are afraid to die to the flesh. Instead of stepping fearlessly into the fire of God, as Moses did, they run the other direction. God has never tried to hide the fact that drawing near Him to hear His voice will indeed kill the flesh. A true revelation of God will *always* require a sacrifice of flesh as God writes His fiery law upon our hearts. Paul died daily, because God spoke to him daily (1 Cor. 15:31).

But today, many who consider themselves Pentecostal or Charismatic have been told that God wants us to be prosperous, and any adversity is certainly not of God. By this teaching, especially in America, we have come to think that we can enter God's Rest without dying to the flesh, with no discipline, and in a lawless spirit. Such people may call themselves Pentecostal, but like Israel of old, they have come to Sinai in vain. They prefer the golden calf to the fire of God. That is, they prefer a god who promises them wealth and prosperity to the all-consuming Fire that kills the flesh as He writes His law upon our hearts. This is what is disqualifying the Church today from entering the Promised Land.

The God of Revelation

The idols worshipped by men "*neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell*" (Deut. 4:28). Only the God of the Bible sees, hears, and speaks to men. The nation of Israel was given such a demonstration in the

days of Moses when God came down upon Mount Sinai as a consuming fire and revealed to all of them His law. In Deut. 5:24, Moses told the people:

²⁴ . . . And we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

In other words, the day of Pentecost is the day when God revealed to the nation of Israel that He is a God that can talk to man without killing him. And yet, He is a consuming fire that will destroy the flesh in man, as we read in the people's response:

²⁵ Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. ²⁶ For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

The people were half right. They were correct in saying that the voice of the living God would kill the flesh. They just did not understand that this was the whole idea behind Pentecost. God fully intended, by the hearing of His voice, to kill all flesh, so that they could be spiritually minded without the encumbrances of the flesh. The problem was that the people were afraid to die and wanted to hang on to their carnality, their flesh. They did not understand that the flesh that they so dearly wanted to keep alive was in reality already dead. They did not realize that the only way to true life was through death. This is the great paradox of the Christian faith. One cannot find life by seeking life. One must find it by the door of death. And this door is Jesus, who was crucified to show us how to die. But the Cross is too often the stumblingblock.

I have yet to see a true word from God that did not in some way kill any flesh that would block the path of obedience. The Word is a consuming fire. To the carnal man it is frightening. To the novice it is awesome. To the spiritual it is a way of life.

God's main purpose in speaking to man is to instruct us in His ways. Deut. 4:36 says, "*Out of heaven He made thee to hear His voice, that He might instruct thee.*" Instruction implies an impartation of knowledge. The method of instruction begins with commands, much as a father tells a small child what to do with little or no

explanation. The child must learn to obey whether he understands or not. Simple obedience for the sake of obedience must be learned first. Then as the child grows, he learns to ask questions, which the Father will answer after the child has obeyed.

Finally, as a child approaches spiritual maturity, the Father gives understanding, by which the child is able to see the Father's intent—and by this understanding, he is able to do the will of the Father without a specific command. Finally, as a fully mature son (or daughter), he does only what he sees his father do and says only what he hears his father say. In all respects, he is now in the image of his heavenly Father. He is fully in agreement with his Father and does the Father's will not out of compulsion, but out of love and full agreement.

God's Roles as El Shaddai and Yahweh

Before Moses, God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob only by the name of El Shaddai (Ex. 6:3, where the name is translated "God Almighty"). This is the name of God in His motherly role of creation and genesis. Even as a child is nurtured primarily by his mother during his infancy, so also did God nurture creation.

Many years later, God revealed Himself to Moses by the name of Yahweh. This is God as Father, who came to bring discipline to His people by means of His law, in order to bring us to maturity in Christ (Gal. 3:24). Without the discipline of the law, we would remain lawless and grow up to be as spoiled children who have little regard for the rights and property of others. The law of God is designed to teach us *phileo* love, in order that we might mature into the *agape* love of God that is to characterize mature sons of God.

Finally, God reveals Himself to us the ways of El Elyon, the Most High God. This is the God of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), of which Order Jesus is the High Priest and we, His sons, are priests under His leadership. These are the priests of God and of Christ who reign with Him on the earth (Rev. 5:10; 20:6).

Beware of those who teach that you may bypass either El Shaddai or Yahweh in the attempt to go directly to El Elyon. No child can bypass the nurturing of his mother in early childhood. Children who never learn to crawl do not develop the proper coordination needed to walk and run as they grow older. No child can bypass the discipline

of a loving Father and still mature into a trustworthy son. Even as it takes time to bring a son to maturity, so also it takes time to bring spiritual sons into spiritual maturity. This is evident in the story of Israel in the wilderness under Moses, and we are reminded of these things each year in the three feasts that commemorate these stages of spiritual development.

Passover represents the first stage of spiritual development, in that it is the beginning of our personal relationship with God. Though justified by faith, these are yet babes in Christ who have need of the milk of the Word. They make many demands of God, much as a baby demands to be held, fed, and changed. It is the most immature of relationships, and yet the baby Christian believes that now that he has been "born again" he has now somehow "attained" all authority reserved for the children of God. In his conceit, he has little concept that he yet "*differeth nothing from a servant*" (Gal. 4:1).

Pentecost was (and still is) the celebration of the giving of the law by the voice of our Father God. Pentecost is the feast that separates God's children into two classes: obedient and rebellious. This is evident in the story of Israel in the wilderness, where the people refused to hear the Father, but Moses was obedient. Later, we see that Caleb and Joshua also had ears to hear, for they disagreed with the other spies who had given an evil report. In the Church of the Age of Pentecost, we find the same pattern manifested. God gives messages to the seven churches, but only the Overcomers actually hear God and are obedient. Only the Overcomers are *True Pentecostals*. Only the Overcomers are willing to hear the divine law, so that it might be written on their hearts.

If Israel under Moses had been receptive, God would have begun to write His law upon their hearts and make it a part of their very nature. The people would have obeyed the law naturally—because they wanted to—not because they had to be obedient, lest they be disciplined. However, Israel refused to hear God's voice directly, preferring to send Moses up the mount to hear God on their behalf. So the people only heard an indirect voice when Moses told them what God had said. The law remained *external*, imposed upon them from the outside even as a father's commands might be imposed upon a rebellious child who prefers to go his own way. In some ways the law seemed stern or even harsh, but it was designed by a loving Father to

break the will of His rebellious children, so that they would eventually be able to say with Jesus, “*Not My will, but thine be done*” (Luke 22:42).

This is the cry of the son who has learned obedience by the things he has suffered. The disciplines of the Father are at first grievous in our immature eyes, but by the loving disciplines of the divine law we know that we are legitimate sons-in-training (Heb. 12:5-8). Without such discipline, we will never come into spiritual maturity.

Letting Moses Hear for Us

Today most Christians prefer to depend upon a preacher or a denomination to go up the mount to hear the word of God on their behalf. The preacher then comes down once or twice a week to tell the people what the word of God is. Even if the preacher truly receives the genuine word from God, that word is preached AT the people, and hence it is coming to them from an external source. There is nothing wrong with hearing the word of God through an external source, for God often speaks through other people. The problem comes when the people hear the man, not the voice of God speaking through him.

When we are truly led by the voice of God within our hearts, the Spirit bears witness to the word and teaches us things that even the preacher does not know as he is preaching. There will also be times when the Spirit will NOT bear witness, and here is where the problems arise. If the preacher or denomination allows the people the freedom to hear the voice of God for themselves, there will inevitably be a diversity of opinions. It is not that God contradicts Himself, but (1) because our ability to hear is dependent upon the condition of our hearts; (2) God often gives certain details to one person, and other details to another.

Diverse thinking appeared in the Church from the earliest beginnings, even among the Apostles themselves. In the fourth century Church, after the persecutions had ceased and Christianity had begun to turn into a religion, a systematic attempt was made by means of Church Councils to stamp out diversity and bring all men into a single view called “Orthodoxy.” It was not long before Christians were being killed and even tortured as sacrifices upon the altar of Church unity. Soon the Church removed from men the right to hear from God for themselves, on the grounds that this could only

produce disunity. The right to hear from God came to rest upon a single man, the bishop of Rome, who became the final authority of truth. Christianity became a religion and men were forced to hear the voice of men rather than the voice of God.

From the first Church Council at Nicea in 325 AD, the bishops decided the matters of doctrinal orthodoxy by political force, compromise, scholarship, and threats of execution and excommunication, rather than by divine revelation. They should have followed the example of Moses, who went to God in prayer whenever a matter arose that God had not yet specified in His law. (For example, see Num. 9:6-14.) If the bishops had done this, it would have forced them to repent of their own pride and of seeking their own desires, rather than truly desiring to hear from God and know His mind. Instead, their Councils began to establish Church traditions in the same way that had been done under Old Testament religion by the time of Christ.

After 1500 years of this, the Protestant Reformation split the Roman Church, and soon there were many different opinions. Most of these early denominations made some attempt to force their views upon others by various levels of persecution. But finally, especially in America, it was decided that all men needed the freedom of conscience to follow God’s voice as he would hear it—or the voice of men, if they so chose to hear and obey men. This did not solve the ultimate problem, of course, but at least it allowed everyone the freedom to truly hear God’s voice. Nonetheless, denominations often established themselves as “The True Church” and made salvation requisite upon joining their organization, submission to the decisions of the leadership, and accepting the doctrinal statements established by its traditions.

Through all this, Christianity has moved from a single Orthodox religion into a multitude of smaller religions, each thinking that The True Church is their own earthly organization. Many do not comprehend the idea that the Church is *people*, not organizations, and God is interested in having a personal relationship with—and speaking with—each person individually. While each should hear God’s voice independently, there is an inter-dependence of the people as well, based upon the law of the double witness that establishes all truth. But this principle only works if the divine law is written on our

hearts, for God must teach us all how to apply the law of the double witness properly, or else it will not work. Only when we know the *intent* of the law will we know the mind of God in these earthly matters.

Our ability to hear the pure voice of God is fully dependent upon the attitude of our hearts. Are we in agreement with God's law, or do we oppose His will? If we do not understand the law, do we cast it aside as unworthy of our obedience, or do we ask God to teach us His ways and explain it to us that we might know the mind of God? This is the true test of Pentecost, and most who consider themselves Pentecostal today could easily fail, even as Israel failed that first test at the foot of Mount Sinai. Let us ask God to write His law upon our hearts, that we might be found fully in agreement with Him and know His ways. Let us ask God to help us pass the test of Pentecost, so that we might receive a fresh vision of the Feast of Tabernacles and not fall short of entering into all His promises and blessings.

Chapter Two

Hearing Without Idols

In talking to Christians one often hears them say, "*God spoke to me and told me such-and-so.*" Others say, "*God led me to do this.*" Such people generally need no one to convince them that the God of the Bible speaks to people today. However, many people—by their fruits—often bring into disrepute the idea of hearing God's voice. For this reason many denominations and individual pastors warn their parishioners against trying to hear God's voice. They say that this could easily lead to deception. They usually mean that if people allow the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth (John 16:13), it is probable that they will come into conflict with Church doctrine.

In a way this warning is valid. Indeed, many people do come into deception as they attempt to hear God's voice. There are always those who believe God told them to kill their neighbor or commit adultery. Such people are lawless in their heart, and so the word they "hear" is not from the Spirit of Truth. But hearing God's voice does not cause deception. Deception is brought about by heart idolatry. This is why the Israelites who came out of Egypt soon set up the golden calf. Just because they were justified by the blood of the lamb at Passover did not mean that they had dealt with the problem of heart idolatry. The same is true with Christians today.

Passover deals with our justification by the blood of the Lamb of God; Pentecost deals with our ability and willingness to hear His voice. That voice calls us up the mount into that all-consuming fire. It is a call to die, and most people today, like in Israel's day, run away from this sure death, wanting to preserve their mortal lives and carnal beings. Hence, we read in Heb. 3:15,

¹⁵ While it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

In other words, be not as Israel in the wilderness, who stood afar off and refused to draw near to God in the all-consuming fire to hear His voice and have His law written on their hearts. They preferred to remain fleshly, retaining the idols in their hearts. They preferred their

own will, their own understanding, their own ways—which is idolatry.

An idol is formed when we create God in our own image; that is, when we formulate an image of God in our minds according to our own carnal understanding. It is important that we not confuse the word of God from our understanding of the word, lest we end up worshipping an image that we have assumed to be the true God.

One of the underlying purposes of Pentecost is to present God only as a consuming fire, distinct from any image, or personal understanding of God, for Moses said, “*ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude* [likeness, or image]; *only ye heard a voice*” (Deut. 4:12). The consuming fire that God lights in us through Pentecost will consume our flesh and begin to transform us into the very image and likeness of God. By this, God means to manifest Himself in us, or express Himself through us. This process is completed by the Feast of Tabernacles, wherein it can be said of the body of Christ as with the Head, “*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*” (John 14:9).

Inquiring of God With Preconceived Opinions

One of the most notable Scriptures dealing with the idols of the heart is found in the writings of Ezekiel. God revealed the most about this particular problem to this prophet, setting the stage for this revelation in chapter four, where he was called upon to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right for another 40 days, eating food cooked with (or over) dung. The dung in Ezekiel represents the traditions of men, which the priests were feeding the people after eating the true bread of the word. The priests processed it by the flesh and then gave the people the remains—dung. (See our 20-page booklet, The Laws of Wormwood and Dung.)

In Ezekiel’s day there were those who came to him asking for a prophetic word, but they had already made up their minds and were coming with preconceived opinions. They came to the prophet not to truly seek the word from God, but rather to seek a confirmation of their own beliefs and opinions. They had no intention of following the word from Ezekiel, if that word should contradict what they already believed to be true. The story is found in Ezekiel 14.

¹ Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me and sat before me. ² And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, ³ Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face; should I be enquired of at all by them? ⁴ Therefore speak unto them and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; *I the Lord will answer him according to the multitude of his idols;* ⁵ *That I might take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from Me through their idols.* ⁶ Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

This was, in effect, a Supreme Court ruling from the Court of Heaven. The divine law had not specifically addressed the issue of whether God should answer people who ask Him for a word having preconceived beliefs. In this ruling God says, “*I WILL answer him.*” However, the word would simply confirm his incorrect beliefs, “*that I might take the house of Israel in their own heart.*” The result of this is found in the next verses:

⁷ . . . I the Lord will answer him by Myself; ⁸ And I will set My face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. ⁹ And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, *I the Lord have deceived that prophet,* and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. ¹⁰ And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him.

The traditions of men would say that this is impossible, for “God cannot lie.” But the traditions of men are not the Supreme Court rulings of God. Traditions are only man’s rulings based upon his scholarship and a limited understanding of God. In fact, these traditions of men make void the law of God (Mark 7:13).

When Moses and the prophets needed to know a further detail about the law of God, or its true interpretation or application, they went to God's Supreme Court with no preconceived ideas about what God ought to say. But when religious leaders have their own opinions or ideas, they usually are more interested in establishing what is "right" (in their own eyes, of course) than in admitting that they really do not know the answer and hence must seek the answer from God. For this reason men establish their own traditions—their own views of the law—rather than praying to God out of a heart free from idols.

It is absolutely true that God cannot lie. But God says that if men want to believe a lie, God will give them what they want. He will answer them according to the idol of their heart. If they want to worship the idol in their heart—holding their own views and wanting God to rubber-stamp those views with the stamp of truth—then he will give them the answer that their own idol would give them. Because the Church is so full of the traditions of men, Ezekiel's revelation may be difficult to understand. But this ruling came from the divine court.

Israel Desired Flesh and Got It

As we said earlier, there was no specific law in Moses' day that specified what God would do if a man inquired of God with an idol in his heart. Nonetheless, we do see in Moses' day a precedent already set in Numbers 11 when the people desired flesh to eat, rather than the manna that God had provided for them. Num. 11:12-34,

¹⁸ And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and ye shall eat flesh; for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, *Who shall give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt; therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.* ¹⁹ Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; ²⁰ But even a whole month until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loath-some unto you ³³ And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. ³⁴ And he called the name of that place, Kibroth-Hattaavah [*"the graves of lust"*]; because there they buried the people that lusted.

The word *lust* is simply DESIRE. The people desired flesh to eat. Their desire to eat flesh was based upon their spiritual desire to go their own way, to form their own opinions, to make their own laws, to define for themselves sin and righteousness. It is what the New Testament calls "the lusts of the flesh." They did not want the true manna, the true word of God. They were not interested in His law; they came to Moses with this fleshly idol in their hearts, seeking flesh from God.

This is precisely what the elders did in Ezekiel's day when they came to him with an idol in the heart. They were asking Ezekiel to rubber-stamp their traditions. They were asking for God's approval of the traditions that they had already agreed among themselves was the truth. They wanted flesh to eat, so God gave them flesh to eat and then judged them for believing it.

Paul tells us in Rom. 7:7,

⁷ I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known LUST, except the law had said, Thou shalt not COVET.

Paul equates lust with coveting. This tells us that the tenth commandment prohibits us from following the works of the flesh—human desires that are not submitted to God. So when Paul concludes in Romans 7:25 by saying, "*with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin,*" He was referring specifically to the tenth commandment. Our fleshly desires covet, or lust after, the things of the flesh—including the traditions of men. The mind of the Spirit, on the other hand, serves the law of God and is in agreement with His commands and Supreme Court rulings.

The most pervasive problem that the Christian faces in learning to hear the voice of God is his own carnal lust. We must learn to seek Him with no preconceived traditions, lest God give us our desires and turn us over to our own lusts, and they bury us in the graves of lust. This is meant to be a clear warning to us.

But lest some think we should stop trying altogether to hear His voice, let me say that if we ask God to overthrow the idols of our hearts, He will do so. If we are but willing to give all hidden idols to God for destruction, He will treat us like His true sons and daughters. That is, He will bring us up through discipline (Heb. 12:5-7). It may be a bit traumatic each time He overthrows an idol in our heart, and

we may feel somewhat like an abused child at first; but the discipline is well worthwhile in the end, as we mature and come fully into agreement with His will and plan for our lives.

The Lying Spirit From God

Another sobering precedent that teaches us how God treats those who have idols in their hearts is found in 1 Kings 22. In this story, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was allied with Ahab, the king of Israel. They decided it was an opportune time to attack Syria and retake some of the Israelite cities that Syria had conquered earlier. This seemed good and right in their eyes, since God obviously would want all Israelites to be free. They did not understand, however, that it was not right to bring those Israelites out of Syrian bondage only to bring them into another bondage under the idolatrous king of Israel. Bondage to Syria was a God-ordained judgment against Israel for their sin and rebellion. 1 Kings 22:5, 6 says,

⁵ And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. ⁶ Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.

The false prophets were those who probably had a genuine prophetic calling, but they had idols in their hearts. They were in submission to men, not to God. *They knew better than to prophesy anything contrary to the will of the king.* They were therefore the king's prophets, not prophets of God. Or perhaps they were in submission to the religious leaders of the day, in which case they were "church prophets," not God's prophets. Whatever the case, the Scriptures call them false prophets—not necessarily because they prophesied falsely, but because they were false to God and not in submission to Him above all others. Remember that even Balaam, the classic false prophet of Num. 22-24 did not prophesy false things. He was false only because he had idols in his heart—money and power—which took precedence over the will of God.

Jehoshaphat was a righteous king who had a heart for God, but in making alliance with king Ahab of Israel, he found it difficult and contradictory to please both Ahab and God. When the false prophets

prophesied good things about the coming battle, Jehoshaphat was uneasy about it, discerning that something was not quite right. So he asked to hear a prophet of the Lord. This was why they called Micaiah:

⁷ And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him? ⁸ And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. ⁹ Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. ¹⁰ And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria [the capital city of the northern house of Israel]. ¹¹ And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made the horns of iron; and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. ¹² And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper; for the Lord [Yahweh] shall deliver it into the king's hand. ¹³ And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth. I pray thee, be like the word of one of them and speak that which is good. ¹⁴ And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak. ¹⁵ So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, *Go and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

Take note here that Micaiah promised the messenger that he would speak only what the Lord [Yahweh] had spoken. He then proceeded to tell the king exactly what the false prophets had prophesied earlier. Well, Jehoshaphat discerned immediately that something was fishy. In fact, even king Ahab knew something was wrong, because Micaiah had never prophesied in accord with all the other prophets.

16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?

When one is ADJURED to speak the truth, it means that one is required before God to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The Hebrew word is *shaba*, which means an oath. For example, Beer-sheba means “the well of the oath.” Hence, King Ahab was telling Micaiah that he was under oath before God to speak the truth in the divine court. And if I may add a further example of adjuration for your study, this is also what the high priest said to Jesus in Matt. 26:63, forcing Jesus to speak the truth of who He was. The Greek word for “adjure” in this verse is *exorkizo*, which means “to exact an oath.”

And so, in adjuring Micaiah, King Ahab appealed to God’s Supreme Court.

17 And he [Micaiah] said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a [good] shepherd; and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.

Wait a minute! Did the people not have two kings: one in Jerusalem, and the other in Samaria? What does this mean, “*they have no master*”? The people had no proper shepherd or master, one who would rule by the divine law as the expression of God Himself. All they had were kings like the nations who were oppressors ruling by the traditions of men. Ahab himself ruled by the laws of his father, King Omri (Micah 6:16).

18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? 19 And he [Micaiah] said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. 20 And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21 And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him. 22 And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, “I will go forth, and I will be

a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also; go forth, and do so. 23 Now therefore, behold the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Micaiah’s vision gives us the stark reality of the situation. The prophets of Ahab had a preconceived idea when they came to God to get a word from Him. They desired the prestige, power, and monetary support from king Ahab and knew that to keep it, they had to prophesy good things about this battle. I have no doubt that these prophets really did believe that they had received a word from the Lord. But I also see from Micaiah’s vision that God had answered them according to the idol of their hearts.

They put Micaiah into prison until such time as they could prove him to be wrong. Once they would win the battle against Syria, then Micaiah could be stoned as a false prophet. I find it hard to believe that Jehoshaphat went along with Ahab into battle, but he did (1 Kings 22:29). Jehoshaphat, after all, was the one who wanted to hear from a prophet of the Lord. It is tragic that he was influenced by Ahab to the point where he was convinced that Micaiah was wrong. After all, surely 400 prophets cannot all be wrong!

I often wonder if this 400-to-one ratio might be a prophetic ratio that is still applicable today. How many prophets today have never really dealt with the idols of their heart? How many are church prophets, and how many are the Lord’s prophets? If we were to take a poll, asking them if they are church prophets or the Lord’s prophets, how many would know the difference? Would they know the difference between submitting to their church or submitting to God?

King Ahab was killed in the battle with Syria, in spite of his attempt to disguise himself. In fact, according to Josephus, Ahab convinced Jehoshaphat to put on his (Ahab’s) clothing, because the Syrian king had given orders to kill no one but Ahab. It appears that Ahab betrayed Jehoshaphat in this way, because the ruse almost worked. But when the Syrians were about to close in on Jehoshaphat, they discovered it was not Ahab, so they left off pursuing him (1 Kings 22:33). It was quite by “chance” that “*a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of his harness*” (1 Kings 22:34). Ahab died at sundown.

Josephus also tells us who killed king Ahab. In Antiquities of the Jews, VIII, xv, 5 it says,

“and when they sought to kill Ahab alone, but could not find him, there was a young nobleman belonging to king Benhadad, whose name was Naaman; he drew his bow against the enemy, and wounded the king through his breastplate, in his lungs.”

King Ahab was killed, and Syria won the battle, thus allowing them to keep their captive Israelites. Among these captives was a young girl of Israel who was a bondservant to Naaman’s wife. A few years later, Naaman developed leprosy, and the little captive girl was very distressed over it. In 2 Kings 5:3 she said,

³ . . . Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

So Naaman, the Syrian captain who had killed Ahab, came to Israel to the prophet Elisha to be healed of leprosy. Naaman was obviously a kind man for his little captive to be so concerned for his health. God in His mercy then taught him a lesson in humility as well, first in that he had to do the bidding of a little girl, and secondly, that he had to fulfill the law of the cleansing of lepers found in Lev. 14:1-7 at the Jordan river.

Naaman did not realize it, but he had begun to learn to hear the voice of God. He heard God’s voice through a little Israelite girl who had faith in God and was concerned for her master. Like the prophet Elijah, Naaman had begun to learn that the voice of God was not to be found in the whirlwind or in the great fire, but in a still (silent, inaudible), small voice that most people would dismiss as nothing. It was a quiet voice, the sound of a breeze, as the Septuagint (Greek) translation says. That voice is like the sound of a breeze, because you do not see it, but you know it by its effects.

Many today are waiting to hear God’s voice in the big lightning strikes or in the great conflagrations of judgment. They think that because God is all-powerful, surely He would speak with a mighty voice of thunder. Sometimes He does, but these are unique manifestations that come in unique circumstances. For the most part, God speaks to average people with an inner voice that makes no outward sound at all. Often it is a mere knowing. Other times we hear

it from the most unusual sources, perhaps from nonchristians—even from those who hate us.

God is not looking to get people’s attention by coming down as fire upon a mountain. He does not do the obvious things except in very rare instances. Why? Because such momentous and outstanding manifestations do not necessarily produce faith in people. The fire on Mount Sinai in the days of Moses did not produce any faith in the Israelites. It only made them fearful. Faith is primarily produced in people who learn to hear the voice of quietness, the silent voice that comes from within our spirit where God dwells.

This is the lesson of Naaman, and it is the beginning of our own cleansing from the leprosy that we all inherited from Adam—mortality. Only by following the leading of the Spirit of God within our own spirit will we be led to the Promised Land.

King Saul and the Famine of the Word

In our 56-page book, The Wheat and Asses of Pentecost, we explained how King Saul was a Pentecostal. 1 Sam. 12:17 says he was crowned king on the day of wheat harvest, or Pentecost, and he reigned 40 years. Saul was therefore an Old Testament type and shadow of the Church under the anointing of Pentecost during the 40 Jubilees from 33 to 1993 A.D. We are now in a post-Pentecostal era and are in the transition into the era of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The history of the Church during this past 40 Jubilees was foreshadowed by the history of King Saul. In fact, we cannot truly understand Church history unless we see it in the light of Saul’s life and his relationship with David (the Overcomer). Saul was the best in the land and the most qualified to be king (1 Sam. 9:2). But he was only the manifestation of the heart of the people. The people had demanded a king like all the other nations (1 Sam. 8:5); and so God gave them what they wanted, even as He had given Israel flesh in the wilderness when they demanded it. The people did not understand that often God judges us by giving us what we want. This includes giving us a fleshly word of prophecy that we also may demand.

As we mentioned briefly in Chapter One, the Church gradually removed the right for ordinary men to hear God for themselves, making it a law that men had to obtain the word of God through the priesthood and the pope. This is one of the first lessons we learn in

the biblical narrative about the reign of King Saul. In 1 Sam. 14 Israel fought a battle against the Philistines. In the story Jonathan represents the aspiring Overcomer in the Age of Pentecost. Jonathan and his armor bearer defeated the Philistines in battle, and the Israelites had to come running in order to do anything at all. Then verse 24 says about the battle,

²⁴ And the men of Israel were distressed that day; for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food. ²⁷ But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath; wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. ²⁸ . . . and the people were faint. ²⁹ Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land; see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found? For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?

Jonathan tasted of the land flowing with milk and honey, and his eyes were enlightened. He was greatly strengthened by it and was able to overcome more flesh (“the Philistines”) than any other. The rest of the people were faint with hunger. In the same manner also, the Church under the anointing of Pentecost laid a curse upon all those who would obtain their spiritual food directly from God without first checking it out with the priest or pastor. All divine revelation had to receive the stamp of approval from the Church leadership who administered the traditions of men, rather than the law of God, before it could be considered as Truth.

This created a famine of hearing the word of God, and thus came to pass the prophecy of Amos, who prophesied in Amos 8:11,

¹¹ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. ¹² And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north

even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. ¹³ In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.

The famine for the word was brought about by Saul’s curse—the ban on eating food until the day (Pentecostal Age) had ended. This caused such a tremendous hunger that it caused the people to eat unclean food when they were allowed to eat at all. 1 Sam. 14:32 says,

³² And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people did eat them with the blood. ³³ Then they told Saul saying, Behold, the people sin against the Lord in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed; roll a great stone unto me this day.

Because of the famine of hearing the words of God, many Christians today travel long distances to attend meetings and hear the words of reputed prophets. This merely evidences the tremendous hunger among Christians and nonchristians alike. The problem is that in their ignorance of the Word, they do not know how to discern clean from unclean food. Too often they will accept any word given from the pulpit without knowing how to discern it properly. The food laws in Lev. 11 are the keys to knowing how to discern whether or not the food dispensed from the pulpit is clean or unclean. (For a complete study on this subject, listen to our 90-minute audio tape called *How to Discern Clean Spiritual Food*.)

Saul took no responsibility for his actions here. He simply blamed the people for sinning against God, caring nothing that he had caused them to sin by his traditions. Saul then decided to continue to battle the Philistines the next day—but this time he allowed the people to eat food during the battle. So he built an altar to God and got a revelation to do battle the next day. Saul was learning how to ask God for things, but he neglected to deal first with the idol in his heart. I suppose it was therefore quite easy for him to obtain such a revelation from God.

But then a priest stepped forward and said, “*Let us draw near hither unto God*” (1 Sam. 14:36). Saul agreed. “*And Saul asked counsel of God*” (14:37). But this time he received no answer from

God. Saul then became frustrated when God refused to speak with him, but he still had no clue that the fault lay in his own heart.

³⁸ And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people; and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. ³⁹ For as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him.

Now they drew lots by the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of the priest, as was their custom, to see who was responsible. The lot fell upon Jonathan.

⁴³ Then said Saul to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die. ⁴⁴ And Saul answered, God do so and more also; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.

Fortunately for him, however, the people would not allow Saul to execute his son. Even so, we see manifested in this story the heart of the Church in the pentecostal era, for the Church too has refused to hear the voice of God and has instead sought power and wealth as the idol of its heart. The Church in general has followed its own traditions—the doctrinal positions established by its greatest doctors of theology—rather than following the law and the Supreme Court rulings of God Almighty.

Worse yet, the Church leadership, more often than not, has taken away the word of God from the people, placing a curse on all who would hear the voice of God for themselves. In past centuries they would actually torture and kill people for “heresy.” This was all done in the name of the god of Unity in the Church. They even justified burning women and children at the stake on the grounds that these people were soon going to burn in hell for ever anyway—so they were only administering the judgments of God. In all this they have fulfilled the prophecies in the story of King Saul.

The Evil Spirit from God Troubles Saul

In the eighteenth year of Saul’s reign, when David was just a boy of about eight, God told Samuel to go to Bethlehem to the house of

Jesse and anoint one of his sons to be the next king. There the prophet found David and anointed him. We read in 1 Sam. 16:13-16,

¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. ¹⁴ But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and *an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.* ¹⁵ And Saul’s servants said unto him, Behold now, *an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.* ¹⁶ Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man who is a cunning player on an harp; and it shall come to pass, when *the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.*

Here we find the first mention of the evil spirit from God coming upon Saul. This was not merely the opinion of Saul’s servants. Verse 14 makes it clear that this really was true. More than that, one would think that if Saul recognized this was an evil spirit from God, surely he would pray for its removal. Surely he would repent. Surely he would want to know why this had come upon him. But Saul’s priority was not to know the will of God; his priority was to rule Israel, corral as many servants as he could, and take of their wealth as taxes (tithes), even as God had said at the beginning (8:11-18).

This is the Denominational Spirit even today. It is a poor substitute for the Holy Spirit. Yet in all of this, God was merely giving Saul the flesh that he desired. The problem was that Saul could not distinguish the Holy Spirit from “the evil spirit from God.” Both were from God, but they were based upon different foundations. The Holy Spirit’s job is to lead us into all Truth; the job of the evil spirit from God is to give us the flesh that we desire. Or, to put it in Ezekiel’s terms, the evil spirit will give the people and the prophets the word that suits the idol of their heart. As Micaiah would say, it was a “lying spirit” sent by God as a judgment against the people that would cause them to fall.

It is no coincidence that in the story of King Saul, the evil spirit from God is mentioned just seven times (1 Sam. 16:14, 15, 16, 23 [twice]; 18:10; 19:9). I believe this has reference to the seven Churches of Revelation, which are prophetic of the seven Church ages within the era of Pentecost. In each of the Seven Churches and

the Seven Church Ages, the Church has had to contend with this evil spirit from God. This evil spirit created a demand for music to keep Saul from going totally insane. Is it just a coincidence that the Church today has perfected music, and that God has sent into its midst many great artists? David loved music; but Saul needed it. Is this what is happening again?

The evil spirit from God caused Saul to take up a javelin and throw it at David. The Holy Spirit does not act so, but the evil spirit from God does. One can almost hear Saul justifying his actions on the grounds that David was trying to overthrow him in direct defiance of Samuel who had anointed Saul to be king. The more David tried to be a good servant, the more Saul became fearful and jealous of him. So it is today. Nothing has changed.

In 1 Sam. 18:10 we find the most astounding and profoundly prophetic statement in the entire story—and perhaps in the entire Bible.

¹⁰ And it came to pass on the morrow that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house . . .

Here we find Saul prophesying under the power of this evil spirit from God. Under this influence, he cast a javelin at David. It is doubtful if Saul could ever discern the difference between the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit from God. In the Church of the twentieth century and perhaps for the past 2000 years, many spiritual gifts have been manifested. But perhaps the most crucial one has been lacking—the discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10).

The Church today does not have a critical shortage of miracles, or of tongues, or of the word of knowledge or wisdom. All of these can be found if one searches. But the Church has seldom been able to discern whether the spirit that comes upon them is really the Holy Spirit, or a spirit that the flesh has desired. For this reason, the Holy Spirit has not yet led us into all truth, as Jesus prophesied in John 16:13. The denominational spirit *thinks and claims* to have all truth, but in reality, it is an evil spirit masquerading as the Holy Spirit, and the people do not know the difference.

The difference will be seen only as we yield to God and seek to come into full agreement with Him, rather than seek our own carnal

desires. The tenth and final commandment is the key to being led by the Holy Spirit into all truth. God saved it for last on His list of commandments. *Thou shalt not covet* is a call to put away the desires and lusts of the flesh, which prevent us from hearing the voice of God as we should.

Beginning to Hear God's Voice

Hearing the voice of God is highly subjective and is therefore difficult to teach or even to explain. It would be much easier if God would speak to us in an audible voice, although the problem then would be to understand how to apply what He said. In my own experience and in talking to others, I have concluded that there is no particular advantage in hearing God speak in an audible voice (except to the hearing impaired). The quality of revelation is neither enhanced nor diminished by the loudness of his voice.

Elijah once needed to hear from God while sitting in a cave at Mount Horeb. First a great wind blew, “*but the Lord was not in the wind*” (1 Kings 19:11). Second, there was an earthquake, but “*the Lord was not in the earthquake*” either. The same was true with the fire. Finally, “*after the fire a still small voice*” came to him, and this proved to be the voice of God. Elijah’s experience in hearing the “*still, small voice*” was meant to teach him and us that God’s desire is to speak to us from within, not from the outside in a booming voice. It is God’s desire that we develop spiritual ears that we might hear Him speak through any situation or agency or person, no matter how humble the source.

In fact, part of God’s training is to speak to us a variety of ways. He does this to prevent our falling into a rut, where we are able to hear Him speak only through certain people. Perhaps the most obvious problem in the Church today is that many Christians can hear no one except the priest, pastor, or the recognized prophet in their midst. They cannot hear the voice of God through the little child, the visitor or guest, the known “heretic,” or the enemy. This is partly due to the control apparatus in the structure of the Church, justified by the pastor’s need to defend the sheep from predators. Yet often the underlying motive is to make the people dependent upon their own church or pastor, in order to keep them in the corral of the church or denomination.

Unfortunately, such “protection” tends to keep people from growing spiritually. One cannot truly learn to hear the true voice of God without also learning to deal with revelation that comes from the

Chapter Three

idols of man's own heart. Leaders must allow even false revelation to be spoken freely in order to teach the people how to discern for themselves why it is false. This, too, is part of God's training. For this reason God has given us laws and principles by which we may know and discern the true from the false. But if only one point of view is ever allowed, the people can never practice the art of spiritual discernment.

It is ironic and even a bit tragic that Church leaders are torn between wanting their members to grow spiritually and wanting them to remain spiritual babes, lest they become old enough to leave home. It is the God-given duty of the leadership to act like spiritual fathers. That is, in a sense they should work themselves out of a job. They should bring people into spiritual maturity, so that they in turn might become spiritual fathers to other babes in Christ.

But even as our physical children seldom share all the same views and values of their fathers, so also is it with spiritual children. The result is that spiritual growth is too often sacrificed upon the altar of unity. Church leaders fear diversity, because they equate this with disunity—and, indeed, too often this happens. But the solution is not to fight diversity of views or of revelation. The solution is to instill in the people a heart of love, whereby this diversity will not produce disunity and eventually erupt into splits. In an imperfect world this is difficult to maintain, but it is the responsibility of the spiritual fathers to set the example of Christian love. Most of the people would respond to such examples, and those who do not should be free to leave.

How I Began to Hear in My Early Life

In retrospect, I now recognize that I had often heard the voice of God in my early life. To some extent I even knew that God had spoken to me, or at least that He had revealed Himself to me on occasion. I think that most sincere Christians could point to examples in their lives as well where God interacted with them on some level. In fact, this is how we know there is a God. It is not by scientific measurement, but by the subjective manner in which God interacts with us on a personal level. These experiences become a part of our being, our spiritual genetics, and we can no more deny the existence of God than we could deny that we breathe air that we cannot see.

I was raised in an evangelical church as the son of a missionary. I never recall a time when I did not have faith in God. At the age of seven I was coaxed into “giving my heart to God,” and then was told I was “saved,” but I know now I had faith in God long before it was formalized and established at any church altar.

Of greater significance was the day I was baptized at the age of twelve in a river in the Philippine Islands. I had held off being baptized, because I was not yet perfect, and in my young mind I had interpreted church teaching to mean that I was not truly saved until I was perfect. I had asked God for salvation hundreds of times, of course, but always by the next day I had sinned in some fashion—perhaps by quarreling with a fellow missionary child or by losing my temper. This proved to me that I had not really been sincere in asking God for salvation. After all, if I had *really* been sincere in the times I had asked for salvation, I would surely not have sinned so soon again!

Hence, I could not with good conscience be baptized with the other children that day in May 1962. But just two hours before we were scheduled to go to the river, God suddenly brought to mind that the missionaries themselves were not perfect either. I had heard some missionaries talking about others who were quarrelsome and difficult to please. It was quite plain that they had the same problems that I did at the age of twelve. And yet I had no doubt that they were Christians. Therefore, I concluded that one did not have to be perfect to be saved, because if that were the case, then the Church itself would be in serious straits.

I was baptized that day in 1962. More importantly, God had spoken to me in a still, small voice, and my whole life changed from that day forward. *I knew* from that day forward that I was a Christian—not because I had been baptized, but because of divine revelation. With the hearing of God's voice, faith was born on a level I had not experienced earlier.

A Higher Level of Hearing Experience

I was an assistant pastor in Arizona for six years from 1975 to 1981 and then started my own church in New Mexico. But God had other plans for me. I had known even from my early life that I was called into the ministry, and yet I knew from the beginning that I was not called to be a pastor. Nonetheless, as an assistant pastor I was

expected to be in training to start my own church some day. It seemed that “the ministry” was synonymous with being a pastor.

When I finally did begin my own church in 1981, my pastoral experience lasted only a few months. Then God took me out of the ministry rather forcefully and put me on a disciplinary time cycle of 414 days, which we call “Cursed Time” (See our book, Secrets of Time.) During this 414-day period in 1982, God brought me utterly to the end of myself. Only then did I learn to hear God’s voice on a level I had never thought possible.

I resigned as pastor of the church on December 5, 1981 and spent the next year seeking God, not knowing what direction He had for my life. I did know one thing almost immediately: I knew that I would never be a pastor again. I remembered from my early life that this was not the type of ministry God had for me. And so, although I had about six offers from various groups to pastor, I refused them all. In February 1982 I came to know a family in Texas who knew how to pray and hear the voice of God. For the first time in my life I saw it might be possible to pray and actually get immediate answers from God! This was revolutionary.

On the 20th of March 1982 I came to the place where I knew that I had to hear from God Himself. Had God cast me off? Had He forgotten me? Was I really called of God into the ministry? If so, what kind of ministry? I knelt down on the floor of the little house in the back woods of Wisconsin and prayed with all my heart to know His will for my life. I received no revelation at that moment, but ten days later I went to a Passover conference in Lexington, Kentucky, where I did hear from God.

On the first morning of this conference, April 1, 1982, they had an informal time of prayer for people in need. In that time a man I had never met walked up behind me to pray for me. He laid his hand upon my shoulder and began to prophesy. In that prophecy God gave me the answers to all my questions I had asked God on March 20th. I had heard prophetic utterances in meetings a few times in the past, but this was the first time God had ever spoken to me directly and personally in this manner.

Then I knew why God had given prophets to the Church (Eph. 4:11) and why we still needed the gifts of the Spirit in the Church today. Perhaps others might not have needed a word from God after

the first century, but I knew that I certainly needed it. The manna of that word sustained me during the rest of that very difficult year.

Seven weeks later I went to Canada for a conference at the time of Pentecost (late May). By this time I had no car and very little money. So I bought a one-way ticket, because I was short ten dollars to purchase a round-trip ticket. One of the great teachers at that conference was brother Gustav Hoyer, a professor’s professor, mathematician, astronomer, and Bible teacher with a beautiful spirit. The one thing I remember that he said which impressed me enough to write it in my notes was this: “*The first thing we need above all is the spirit of discernment.*”

Ralph Barney and John Green brought a very anointed message on the final evening of that conference about *stepping through the third veil*. The call went out for those who could hear to step forward and declare, “*By faith I step through the third veil into the Holy of Holies.*” I was one of many who did so. I do not know how this affected anyone else, but it had a profound effect upon my life, for from that moment on and for months afterward, I noticed that every time I went into prayer, the Spirit of God would come upon me. I could feel it physically. At first I thought it was coincidental, but it remained even after I returned home.

The last day of the conference, I found a little time to play the piano (a hobby that I enjoy on occasion). While I was playing, a woman came up behind me and put something in my shirt pocket. When I finished the song I was playing, I looked to see what it was. It was ten dollars. God was reminding me that He knew all my needs and would provide and sustain me always.

I returned home on May 26. The next day I began to pray and fast seriously in order to be able to hear God’s voice and to seek His face in preparation for the ministry. On the third day of the fast I studied Jesus’ 40-day fast in the wilderness and how he overcame the temptations. This made me determined to fast 40 days if necessary in order to hear His voice! But God had mercy upon my ignorance and gave my Texas friends a word for me late that same night. They called at 2:00 a.m. with apologies to tell me this word:

Steve perceives well that he is to fast at this time in preparation for a great step of learning which he is about to take. . . Three days should suffice for him to remove

enough of the dross of the world to allow My Spirit to flow freely in his body which is My temple. . . You must not fast long enough to weaken your system.

They were unaware that I had just completed three days of fasting, so I knew that this was a word from God NOT to fast any longer. In retrospect I know that hearing God's voice is not obtained by fasting or by any other discipline. It may be helpful to some, but it is not the deciding factor. It is more a matter of focus and awareness. I came to hear because I focused my attention upon God with an inner desire to hear His voice that exceeded all other desires. In focusing my attention upon Him, I became more and more aware of His presence and was therefore more in tune with Him and able to hear.

On June 5, 1982 I rose early and went to my father-in-law's church to be alone to pray. I first told God everything that I needed to tell Him, so that I could clear my mind of clutter. (Our need to talk to God and unburden ourselves distracts us from hearing Him speak.) Then I became still and focused my thoughts upon Him, asking Him to speak to me.

Presently, I seemed to have thoughts of God speaking to me, and so I wrote what I "heard" in a notebook. I only heard a few things and even then did not know for sure if this was "just me" or if God was speaking. I have learned since this time that the still, small voice is indistinguishable from one's own mind at first. In fact, it is only as we persist and keep records of His words that we can learn the difference. In my records I wrote: "*I asked God for confirmation, so I can tell if it is from Him or my own echoes.*"

The next day, my friends from Texas called again. They had prayed, "Lord, Steve seems to be at a crossroads and asks your guidance." The Lord said to them:

Steve already receives My guidance and is My beloved. He has not yet learned to perceive My words as you have, but the ability to recognize My presence and My blessing and affirmation is a great step forward . . . All who seek Me are able to find Me if they truly open their hearts. They shall find Me within their own souls where I have always been in the secret place . . . Steve must also go where I lead him. He is learning rapidly of My spiritual truth . . . You must walk always in faith, never in fear. You must know always that

My love and protection and guidance go with you everywhere and with anyone else who truly seeks Me.

Again, they were unaware that I had already begun to hear the voice of God and that I had asked for confirmation. In fact, this word puzzled them a bit, because they assumed I was still struggling to hear. Yet God told them He was already guiding me. They telephoned to convey this word to me. When I told them of my recent "hearing," they were overjoyed and said, "*Oh, now this word makes sense! We thought maybe God meant He was guiding you through circumstances in general.*"

This was how I came to know that I had indeed broken through the veil and had come into a new relationship with God that I had not experienced previously. As time passed, I came to understand that *we all hear the voice of God*. The problem is in recognizing that it is God as distinct from our own minds. We constantly hear two voices: our own mind's voice (our conscience) and God's voice. The great challenge is to distinguish between the two.

The conscience is manmade. Our parents, teachers, playmates, and others form and shape our conscience in our early life. The idols of the heart rule over the conscience. The conscience is only an accurate guide as it comes into unity with the voice and character of God. This takes place only as its idols are overthrown.

At first, the voice of God tends to be in conflict with the voice of our own mind, and we often fight Him. It is a battle between God and the heart idol. Whoever wins the battle becomes the supreme ruler in that area of life. If the idol wins, we will not hear God correctly in that area of life until another day when God again challenges the idol and overthrows him. Ultimately, the goal is the renewing of our minds, when our conscience is always in full agreement with the voice of God.

The Testing of Our Faith

After recognizing the voice of God in early June 1982, I basked in the light of His voice for the next few weeks. He gave me many revelations that have proven to be foundational to the calling He had for my life and to my understanding of His ways. These are personal and have no direct bearing on the purpose of this book, which is how to hear His voice. But I did learn one very important principle, largely

by accident, but which I know was divinely inspired. It is the law of the double witness.

Shortly after I began hearing, I asked God for what I called “a personal verse of Scripture.” He then gave me a Bible reference, which I looked up to see what it said. From the beginning I noticed that the Scriptures He gave me always seemed to have something to do with the word that He had just spoken to me earlier. It finally dawned on me that He was confirming His word by the double witness and that the Spirit and the word bear witness to the truth.

This was a simple way to obtain immediate confirmation of His word. Later, I would see that the Spirit would use this not only as a double witness, but also as an occasion to teach me the spiritual principle behind the written word. My records since that time are filled with notes where the Spirit of God taught me how the divine law operates in such things as spiritual warfare, intercession, and administering true justice and mercy to others. By this I began to learn the *intent* of the law, and not just its surface application.

I did not really learn about spiritual warfare until His spoken word had been tested by fire beyond anything I could have imagined. I was too young in these things to know that everything God loves He puts to death—first Jesus Christ, and then all others—in order that we might become one with Him and identify with His death. I suppose I had mistakenly believed that God would test us only to the brink of disaster, but would never push us over the edge. I discovered instead that Christ led the way to the cross for all of us, because He does not ask us to endure what He Himself was not first willing to endure. He died, not so that we could avoid death, but to teach us how to die with meaning and purpose.

During the month of June 1982, God had given me words of comfort, showing me that I was not to fear the future, but have faith that He would provide and lead me. I expected Him to come with great power and majesty and save me out of all my troubles. Instead, I found that when He comes to save us, He slays us, just as He did His only-begotten and beloved Son. It happened that my situation came to a climax in July 1982. Having been unemployed for seven months (and no way to get a job, no matter how hard I tried), I was brought down to the place where I had nothing left except my family. If God

did not deliver me by early July, I would be crushed by debt and would have to work as a slave without pay (quite literally).

On July 9, 1982 I prayed to know if God was going to deliver me as He had promised. I was given Hab. 2:3.

³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry. ⁴ Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

This was definitely not a good sign. I hoped that what God meant was the last phrase of verse 3, indicating that the vision would NOT tarry. I closed the Bible and tried not to think about it further. This was certainly not a word I wanted to hear. Surely God would not do this to me. I had put all my faith in His deliverance, after all. Surely God would honor my faith. I did not know then that God speaks to us to give us faith, and then he adds to our faith *patience*, which comes only by testing and tribulation. James 1:3 says, “*the trying of your faith worketh patience.*” Rom. 5:3 says, “*tribulation worketh patience.*” I definitely did not want to learn patience. I wanted God to pour it into me the easy way. But He did not.

The next day (July 10, 1982) He spoke this to me:

Thou hast borne much for Me, and I will redeem thee. But first go to Egypt. There thou shalt see My mighty works. It is necessary that you go to Egypt. Fear not to go there, for I will be with you always. I will not cut you off. I will continue to speak to you and teach you new things each day.

Father, what of your past promises to me?

They have only been deferred, as I said yesterday. They shall surely come to pass, all that I have spoken. If you would rise to power as did Joseph, you must first be in the dungeon, as he was. Fear not, for I will also teach thee what I taught him and speak to thee, as I spoke to him.

Whereby shall I know that thou hast spoken unto me? I asked rather angrily.

James 1:19. . . . “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

(Later, after cooling down a bit): Why must the vision be deferred?

James 1:2-4 “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials]; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience; But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Then He said simply, “**You have asked a great deal of Me.**”

Well, that was true. I had indeed asked a great deal of God. Like everyone else, I wanted to know Him and the power of His resurrection. I had wanted God to use me in the setting up of His Kingdom. Perhaps it was just carnal ambition cloaked in spiritual robes, but I did not want to be an average Christian who saw little, heard nothing, and knew even less. But I did read the Scriptures that talked about ruling and reigning with Him, and I knew I wanted to be part of that company. And as soon as I discovered that God speaks to people even today, I knew that I would never be satisfied until I had thoroughly searched out this whole area of Christian experience.

And so began a downward spiral into complete death and destruction until I had lost all hope of ever seeing the light again. I moved my family to Minnesota to live with my parents indefinitely. Meanwhile, my mother was dying of cancer, and I had to help care for her while my father worked to try to make a living. To pay a debt, I worked with no hope of getting paid. My wife took a night job at a nursing home as a nurse’s aid. Then one of my daughters came down with kidney problems. No amount of prayer made any difference. I had no money for other health remedies, even if had known what to do. I finally had to get her a social security number and a “green card” so she could go to the University of Minnesota hospital for treatment.

Finally, on Oct. 23, 1982 I entered into “*the thick darkness where God was*” (Ex. 20:21). I died that day. My understanding of God failed completely. I lost all hope. I had no more faith left that He would fulfill His promises to me. What crushed me most was knowing that God had indeed spoken to me, but that somehow He had forsaken me. As I walked home that night after walking my wife to work across town, I asked God to just leave me alone and let me live

a normal life like everyone else. “I wouldn’t treat my dog this way!” I said in total despair. In my personal notes for that day, I wrote this:

“I think I’m just about at the end of my rope. I may as well admit that I’m ruined, and I’ll have to start over again in a new kind of life. Faith is too impractical. I might as well admit it doesn’t work, at least not for me. The more I try to take problems with the proper attitude, the more God beats me over the head. It’s as though He is trying to make me admit ruin and throw in the towel. So far, I’ve taken everything on the chin and have come up fighting. Maybe if I give up and quit, he’ll stop beating me into the ground. It’s not fair, nor is He just in promising one thing and doing another. If he’d give me some encouragement once in a while, I could keep on. But I know people who can manage employees better than God does. I just give up trying to please Him. I quit.”

As despair engulfed me, I was as one dead for the next 42 days. During that time, my wife could not take the pressure and said that if things did not change by the first of the year, she would have to take the children and return to Wisconsin to live with her parents. I knew she was right, but there was nothing I could do to change the situation.

By this time my mother was nearly bedridden and needed me more than ever. So I prayed—or rather, informed God—that if we were not out of there by the first of the year, I would pack one suitcase and hitchhike south with the family. And if no one would give us a ride, we would walk. Even so, I knew God could easily prevent me from doing this, if He chose to do so. There was nothing to do but wait for God to do something.

Then on Dec. 4, 1982 God began to move. It was *one year to the day* after my resignation from pastoring the church in New Mexico. I received a bundle of newsletters from the Net of Prayer. Reading these newsletters marked the beginning of the end of my trial, for now I began to understand the purpose of God in putting me through such an ordeal. Again, *one year to the day* after we physically left New Mexico, I received a telephone call from Arkansas offering me a job as typesetter for a new company.

It was Dec. 30, 1982. God had met my deadline, and I did not have to hitchhike south. Someone was sent in a van to move us to

Arkansas. We left Minnesota January 22 and arrived in Batesville, Arkansas the 23rd.

It was precisely 414 days after my resignation Dec. 4/5, 1981 to January 22/23, 1983. My “Cursed Time” had finally ended. It would have been helpful to me in those days if I had known about timing. But I knew nothing of Cursed Time until 1991. When nations are on Cursed Time, it is applied in 414-*year* cycles. When applied to personal situations, it is only 414-*day* cycles. But that is the subject for another book.

The night before I left Minnesota I had a long talk with my mother, knowing it would be the last time I would see her alive. She told me that she had prayed and knew that it was God’s will that we should move to Arkansas. She was at peace and had already entered into God’s rest when she died February 15. My mother was a remarkable woman. More than any other person, her prayers and her faith shaped my life.

The Time of Restoration

In my book, Secrets of Time, I demonstrated how God always seems to add 76 years at the end of a 414-year period in order to bring about Blessed Time (490). The number 76 indicates a time of cleansing and restoration to bring us fully into the perfect will of God. I was no exception. Having completed my 414-day time of discipline and testing, I now entered into a final 76-day period into Blessed Time. The 76 days were from January 23 to April 9, 1983. Although I was totally ignorant of these precise time cycles, I did keep careful records, which allowed me to piece this together ten years later.

I took a plane to New Mexico on January 27 in order to move our household furniture to Arkansas that had been in storage for the past year. Then on February 1st I received notice from the Net of Prayer (which I had formally joined on Jan. 16, 1983) that we were being called into spiritual warfare on Feb. 7. I decided to begin a 7-day fast. During this fast it occurred to me that God’s word of July 10, 1982 had been fulfilled when He said I was to be as Joseph in the dungeon. Joseph was in the dungeon for *twelve years*; I began coming out after *twelve months* to the very day.

On Feb. 9 while in prayer, the feeling came over me that I was to make a trip to New Mexico and Arizona to make reconciliation with

the past, and that I was to return and arrive at home on April 8. I also heard Him quote the verse from the book of Jonah, “*Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” I interpreted this to mean that it was to be a 40-day trip. If the trip were to end April 8, then I would have to depart Feb. 28.

I really did not want to make such a long trip, nor did I relish facing up to the past. After all, they had forced me out of the ministry and asked for my resignation. It appeared to me that I had been the one who was wronged and who had literally lost everything. And now God was requiring me to spend the money on a lengthy trip to reconcile the past, make apologies and require none in return. So I wrote letters asking to talk with the church leaders in Arizona and New Mexico, and then drove to the Post Office to mail them quickly, lest I lose my nerve.

That same evening we received notice from our new landlord that he had just sold the house, and that we would have to move in 30 days (by March 10). It seemed as though the trip had just been made an impossibility. There were four “mountains” that had to be removed to make this trip possible. First, my mother was dying, and I could hardly be making a long trip, only to cut it short to attend her funeral.

Second, I had just moved to Batesville not only to work, but also I had been asked to lead a Bible study group there, organized under the name of God’s Kingdom Church. How could I go on a trip after having just arrived there? No, they would have to be in agreement and commission me to go by the laying on of hands.

Third, I was skeptical that the people in Arizona and New Mexico would even agree to see me. I needed an invitation from them, agreeing to see me.

Fourth, we needed a house in order to move before I left.

Well, my mother died Feb. 15, and I drove back to Minnesota for a week (in a car given to me by a friend). I received an invitation from Arizona on Feb. 28, which began the 40-day countdown toward April 8. This corrected my understanding of the 40-day period. Feb. 28 was not the day I would leave, but the day I received the required invitation.

The local group in Batesville commissioned me to go on the trip on March 6, the same day that we found another house in which to

live. We moved March 7, 8, and 9. I began the trip March 10. So it became a 30-day trip within a 76-day reconciliation time. (Many years later I discovered that all 76-day periods naturally divide into 46 and 30.)

From my perspective, the trip was a success in that I did everything that God instructed me to do. I made no accusations, but offered only apologies. When I left them, I was satisfied and joyous in my heart. Unfortunately, the reconciliation seemed to benefit me more than it did them, but I knew that I had been obedient and had done all that I could. Now I could move on into the new world that God had opened up to me.

I arrived home around midnight of April 8/9, 1983 precisely 76 days after moving to Arkansas and precisely 490 days after I had resigned the church in New Mexico. I was now in Blessed Time and could begin a new life.

Lessons Learned

When God tested my faith, I did not pass the test—I just passed away. All of my own faith was burned up in the fiery trial, and all that remained was His Word and the faith of Jesus. The brutal truth was that my faith was insignificant to the plan of God. My faith established nothing. He brought me down to the place of total despair, where I did not have the strength to “name it and claim it.” All His promises to me were established purely on the strength of His word, regardless of what I did, regardless of my faith, and regardless of my claims. All He required of me was to die and get out of the way. He did all things by the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). I have no boast of faith. I can only boast of the greatness and love of God.

I became a new person, a new creature in Christ experientially, not just doctrinally. I came to realize that I am not here to manifest my faith, but simply to bear witness to the works of God, which I see and hear. More than anything else, I now know by hard experience that Rom. 8:28 is true.

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

I had believed and taught this Scripture for many years before God put it to the test to see if I really could believe His word in the midst of the fiery trial. In the heat of trial (Oct. 23, 1982) I made an interesting discovery: In my mind I could no longer believe this word, and for this reason I wrote: “I quit.” Yet deep in the recesses of my spirit, I always knew that God would indeed work all things together for my good. There was faith in my spirit when all faith had been wrenched from my carnal mind and soul.

I learned a very valuable lesson through this. Faith is not a state of mind; it is a state of spirit. The mind deals only with persuasions; the spirit is the home of faith. I know that the apostle Paul experienced many trials of his faith also, and for this reason he was able to write in Rom. 7:17, “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.*”

Perhaps the most remarkable lesson I learned in this was that the trial of our faith is given, NOT to prove us righteous and faithful, but to prove that in our flesh dwelleth no good thing. It is to show us the limitations of the flesh, not its strength toward God. My flesh with its carnal persuasions was quite strong, and so it took close to a year for it to die. But when I finally quit struggling and died, then God raised me up as a new creation in Him.

This resurrection was only the beginning, however. There were many more crucial lessons that I would yet have to learn. The Joseph revelation about being in the dungeon for twelve months was applicable only to that first year. It would yet have a long-term fulfillment of twelve years (1981-1993) that would not cease until the end of the Church Age. During that time, I would have to die two more times (thus far) in order to learn the consequences of disobedience to the voice of God.

I never cease to thank God for His disciplines, for I have learned that He disciplines His sons (Heb. 12:5-7). Thereby am I comforted even in the pangs of death. When I make my bed in *sheol*, behold, God is there (Ps. 139:8).

Hearing the voice of God has been the most wonderful, awesome, experience of my life. But it has also been a fiery trial. So when God showed me from Ex. 20:18-21 how Israel stood afar off, afraid to go up the mount into the fire with Moses to hear God’s voice, I can certainly understand the feeling. If, when I started down this path, I

had had any inkling of what lay ahead, I probably would have joined the crowd of Israelites afar off.

But God deceived me by focusing my attention on the promises that would come in the end, rather than in the trials along the way. At first I was quite upset and angry with Him for this divine deception, even as Jeremiah said when he was put in the stocks in Jer. 20:1-9,

² Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. ⁷ O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; Thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed. I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. ⁹ Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Jeremiah was no different from any of us today in that he too had to go through the fiery trial of his faith because of the word that he had dared to hear. Our God is a consuming fire. Hearing His voice is not a call to glorious victory, but a call to die. This is not meant to discourage people from hearing His voice, but rather a voice of comfort to those who are dying in the midst of His fire.

God does not hate those He disciplines; He disciplines because He loves His children and intends to refine them as gold and silver to replace their dross with the divine nature. He intends to bring forth a people in His image, that they might rule and reign with Him, and that they might in turn teach others how to die, following Jesus to the Cross.

Loving our Heavenly Father

In bringing up children properly, the world tends to believe that discipline is harmful to a child's development. Some parents even refuse to discipline their children on the grounds that they want their children to love them. They do not realize that discipline is not the problem, so long as it is done without abuse. Both discipline and abuse must be defined by Scripture. This is outside the scope of our present study, of course, but we do want to make the point that children who love their parents most are those who were properly disciplined by them in their early life.

It is the same in our relationship with our heavenly Father. Though God's disciplines can often be quite severe, making us want to run away from Him, we will love Him in the end, for He disciplines us to bring us into maturity, capable of knowing His own agape love. The greatest commandment, Jesus said, is found in Deut. 6:4 and 5.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; ⁵ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

So often we focus so much on the part that commands us to love Him that we forget how this is done. The key is in the first phrase: "*Hear, O Israel.*" Hearing Him is the first step toward loving Him. First we hear, and this produces faith. Second, that faith is tested by fire, so that the faith is pure and depends upon no human flesh or understanding. This testing produces patience, or endurance. Only then do we receive the promises. Heb. 6 tells us,

¹² That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. ¹³ For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. ¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.