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“Hearing God”

Acts 21:1-15

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Does God still speak today? Yes and no. He does not supersede or contradict His Word (the Bible) with “new” revelation, but He does still speak tenderly to people. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice ([John 10:27](#)). How can we discern the voice of the Lord from all the other voices and noise in our world? We will answer that question in this study on Acts 21.

1. [Acts 21:1-15](#) - *“Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”’ Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ So when he would not*

*be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem."*

2. A seeming contradiction regarding Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem
  - a. Paul believed the Holy Spirit told him to go to Jerusalem
    - i. **Acts 20:22-23** - *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."*
      1. The ESV uses the phrase *"constrained by the Spirit"*
      2. The NIV uses the phrase *"compelled by the Spirit"*
  - b. Others believed the Holy Spirit did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem
    - i. Sometimes different perspectives can lead us to different conclusions
      1. Paul may have clearly heard from the Lord, but his friends focused on the hardship that awaited him in Jerusalem
        - a. Paul was compelled to go regardless of the hardship
        - b. Paul's friends wanted to prevent the hardship
3. Does God still speak today?
  - a. There's nothing in the Bible to imply that God has stopped speaking
    - i. There is no new revelation in terms of addition to Scripture, but God speaks in inaudible ways to our spirits
  - b. **Psalms 86:7** - *"In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me."*
  - c. **Isaiah 58:9a** - *"Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'"*
  - d. **Jeremiah 33:3** - *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."*
  - e. **John 10:27** - *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."*
  - f. The question should not be "Does God still speak today?" but rather:
    - i. How does God speak today?
    - ii. In what ways does God speak?
    - iii. How can we discern the voice of God from all other voices?
4. How do we hear from the Lord?
  - a. The Word of God
    - i. The Bible is the primary way we hear from God
    - ii. God will never supersede or contradict His Word
    - iii. He uses His Word to counsel and guide us
    - iv. **Psalms 119:105** - *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
      1. *"Lamp to my feet"* represents God's direction in the immediate; *"light to my path"* represents God's direction for the long-term

- v. **Psalm 32:8a** - *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go."*
- vi. **Joshua 1:8** - *"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* (1984 NIV)
- vii. The more you are in God's Word, the more it forms you and transforms you
  - 1. Sometimes the Bible will speak to you directly through a passage
  - 2. Sometimes the Bible will speak to you indirectly through a principle
    - a. You will get neither if you are not reading your Bible
- viii. **Psalm 119:133a** - *"Direct my steps by Your word."*
- b. The wisdom of others
  - i. God will often speak through other people to confirm what He is doing in your life
  - ii. **Proverbs 11:14b** - *"But in the multitude of counselors there is safety."*
  - iii. **2 Corinthians 13:1a** - *"Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."* (1984 NIV)
  - iv. The voice of other people can be confirmation but should never be direction
    - 1. If you have a relationship with Jesus, you should not be receiving first-hand information from second-hand sources
    - 2. Paul received His direction from the Holy Spirit
      - a. His friends confirmed that he would face hardship
      - b. He did not allow his friends' desire that he not go to Jerusalem deter him from obeying what the Lord had told him to do
  - v. God is not obligated to bring a confirming word from other people
    - 1. If you sincerely believe the Lord has spoken to you about something, and it aligns with Scripture, but you have not received a confirming word, simply proceed with caution
      - a. Sometimes we can misinterpret what God is telling us, but He is gracious and will redirect us when needed
- c. The witness of peace
  - i. **Colossians 3:15a** - *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."* (1984 NIV)
    - 1. *Rule* in the original Greek is **brabeuō**, meaning "to act as an umpire; arbitrate"
    - 2. The peace of God helps us to know and discern what God is saying to us
  - ii. **Philippians 4:6-7** - *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known*

*to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

- iii. Christians know what it is to have God’s peace and they know what it is to not have God’s peace
  1. Never go against your peace
  2. If you do not have a peace about a particular decision, do not proceed
- d. The whisper of God
  - i. Following a major move of God, the prophet Elijah spiraled into depression
  - ii. God came to Elijah to speak to him and help him
    1. **1 Kings 19:11-13** - *“Then He said, ‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.”*
  - iii. We often want God to show up in powerful ways—which He sometimes does—but most of the time He speaks in a gentle whisper
    1. We have to quiet ourselves before the Lord and incline our ears to hear the whisper of God
  - iv. **Psalm 78:1** - *“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”*
    1. *To incline* in the original Hebrew is **nāṭâ**, meaning “to stretch or to bend”
  - v. May we incline our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us

#### Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 21:1-15** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What was the “contradiction” regarding Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem? How did Paul determine his decision? (See #2 above)
3. Read **Psalm 86:7**, **Isaiah 58:9a**, **Jeremiah 33:3**, and **John 10:27**. Does God still speak to people today? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Psalm 119:105**, **Psalm 32:8a**, and **Joshua 1:8**. What is the primary way God speaks to us? (See #4a above)

5. Discuss a time where you heard God speak to you directly or indirectly through His Word.
6. Read [Proverbs 11:14b](#) and [2 Corinthians 13:1a](#). How does God use the wisdom of others to confirm His will? Has God ever used others to confirm His will in your life? (See #4b above)
7. Read [Colossians 3:15a](#) and [Philippians 4:6-7](#). What is it like to experience God's peace? What is it like when you do not have God's peace? Have you ever "gone against your peace" and later regretted it? (See #4c above)
8. Read [1 Kings 19:11-13](#). What is the "whisper of God?" Why does God often choose to speak in a gentle whisper rather than seemingly more "powerful" ways? (See #4d-ii and #4d-iii above)
9. Read [Psalm 78:1](#). How can we "incline" our ears to hear what God wants to say to us? (See #4d-iv above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)