

Born to Win

Why Is God Silent?

by Ronald L. Dart

Why is God silent to us? Oh, I know there are would-be prophets who claim they speak for God or they had a vision from God or a dream, but I've kind of learned those people are mostly frauds. And I certainly know if they don't speak in agreement with the Bible, God has not sent them. I've even had some of them try to tell me things about myself, but they always miss and therefore, I know they're not talking for God.

Now, I don't think that God is coy. I don't think he is shy. But I think he doesn't care to repeat himself. That said, there are times I know we wish we could get a more direct answer...at least we *think* we would like to have that. David seems to have felt that way more than once. In the 28th Psalm, he cries out and says:

Psalm 28

KJV

- ¹ Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, *if* thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.
- ² Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.
- ³ Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief *is* in their hearts.

Boy, I can understand the cry. And, I sort of thought about this thing about “the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but mischief is in their hearts.” You know, Christian folk tend to be naive and trusting. And we trust people without giving an awful lot of thought to whether we ought to trust them or not. Now, the Israelis (perhaps identifying more with David) realize that people who speak, “Peace”, often as not *don't mean what they say*. So what should you do? Well that's simple: Pay more attention to what they *do* than what they *say*. David went on in his prayer:

Psalm 28

AKJV

- ⁴ Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert.

In other words, what they deserve. Why?

Psalm 28

AKJV

- ⁵ Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.

Always hopeful, David ended his psalm on an upbeat note. He said:

Psalm 28

AKJV

⁶ Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.

⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoices; and with my song will I praise him.

⁸ The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed.

⁹ Save your people, and bless your inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

What a great way he has of putting things like this. You know, we seem to be living in the long period of God's silence. Why do you think that might be? And what might he say to us if he decided *not* to keep silent? Actually, it's that second question that might give us pause. When we ask for God not to be silent, we ought to think, "Whoops. Wait, wait, wait. Do I really want to hear what God has to say?"

The thing about David, and other kings of Israel: they had recognized and reputable prophets to speak for God. The Bible was being *written* in their day, and so they *needed* that kind of thing. It seemed odd to me when I thought about it, that David—who was a man after God's own heart [**1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22**—God never spoke to him personally. He spoke to him through a prophet at all times. And when he did speak, David might have wished he hadn't, because God doesn't see any need to speak to us when we are doing well. I've often said this: If you see a prophet walking down the road to your house, it's bad news. Because God doesn't send a prophet out to pat you on the head and say, "Oh, what a good boy you are. You're doing so well." When we're doing well, he just looks at us and says, "You're doing what you're *supposed to do*." So, our task is just to keep on keeping on.

Now, another thing they did not have... they did not have the comprehensive Bible that we all have in hand today. If we call out to God, "Why are you silent to us?", like David did, he is apt to reply, "Well, I already did. Read the Bible!" It calls to mind one of Jesus' parables—the one of *Lazarus and the Rich Man*. You may remember it. He said:

Luke 16

AKJV

¹⁹ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

²⁰ And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

²¹ And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

²³ And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

This was something that the Pharisees believed was out there, so Jesus uses it to make his point. Well, they sit there and they can see each other across this gulf, and the Rich Man calls out to Abraham and says:

Luke 16

AKJV

²⁷ [...] I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house:

²⁸ For I have five brothers; that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

²⁹ Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

What an incredible statement he just made. The Rich Man says, “Oh, send them to my brothers. Send somebody back from the dead to talk to them!” Abraham says, “They have Moses and the prophets. They’ve got the Written Law. Let them hear that.”

Luke 16

AKJV

³⁰ And he said, No, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent.

And Abraham’s reply in this parable is just *devastating*. He said:

Luke 16

AKJV

³¹ [...] If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

I suppose we should take away from this parable a simple truth: God has *already* spoken to us, and if we won’t listen to the written testimony, speaking to us—walking into our bedroom, appearing in an apparition above our bed or in our closet or wherever it may be—is *pointless*. If you don’t listen, you don’t listen.

We also, living in our generation, have an even more sure testimony than anything that they had until Jesus came on the scene. The writer of Hebrews says this—starts out his book this way:

Hebrews 1

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¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

So we not only have Moses and the prophets, we have got the words of *Jesus* recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And, frankly, if a person won’t listen to these, why would we think that God should speak to us and we’d listen to him if he spoke? Actually, the testimony of the Bible is, we wouldn’t. Peter wrote in his second letter, chapter one, verse 16:

2 Peter 1

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¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Now, this is testimony. And the people to whom Peter was writing had not heard the voice that Peter heard. There were supposed to take his word for it. He was testifying to them. And if they believed it, well. If they wouldn't believe Peter's testimony, there was no point in Jesus appearing to them.

Amos, looking down through time (one of the Old Testament prophets) warned us about one aspect of this. He said—chapter eight, verse 11:

Amos 8

AKJV

¹¹ Behold, the days come, said 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.

Funny thing about this: In our country, how far do you have to look for a Bible? Chances are you've got one right there in your house—right there on your coffee table, or over there on the bookshelf. You don't have to go very far to find a Bible. What people are looking for is a more current message from God, something that's really up to date, something that's right up in our world today. And God isn't talking. *Why should he?*

We're doing an online Bible study—right now we're going through the Book of Ezekiel. You can check us out on our website at borntown.net and join us if you'd wish. But just this last week, we were looking at Ezekiel 14. And it's kind of interesting in the light of what we're talking about here, and that is: Why is God silent? Ezekiel said:

Ezekiel 14

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¹ Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.

² Then the word of the LORD came to me:

³ "Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?"

Now, think about that. We've people who are setting up idols in front of your face. Back in those days, the idols would have been Moloch and Dagon. I think today we're a little more sophisticated than that. Our idols are probably BMWs, Mercedes, new houses, and so forth. But we still tend to have our idols. And the stumbling blocks they're talking about here...frankly, they are the *sins* that they do. He said, "These people—who are elders and supposed to be leaders—their hearts are not right. Should I let them inquire of me?" God says:

Ezekiel 14

NIV '84

⁴ Therefore speak to them and tell them, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry.

⁵ I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols."

⁶ Therefore say to the house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!"

You want a word from God, folks? There it is: Repent and turn away from your detestable practices. So God isn't silent to us, after all, is he? He's spoken a long time ago and told us what we should be doing.

Ezekiel 14

NIV '84

⁷ “When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from me and sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet to inquire of me, I the LORD will answer him myself.

⁸ I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people. [...]”

Do you realize what he is actually saying here? He’s actually almost saying that you’re better off, if you’re going to live this way—if you’re going to pursue your idols, if you’re going to pursue your sins—*just go do it*. Don’t go do it and then come back and pretend to be inquiring of God. He says this:

Ezekiel 14

NIV '84

⁹ “And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the LORD have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel.

¹⁰ They will bear their guilt—the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults him.

¹¹ Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Now, this reads like a very strange idea. Because in the King James version, it says:

Ezekiel 14

KJV

⁹ And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet[.....]

The NIV boys changed it to “enticed”, but is God allowing a prophet to *deceive* us? Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. Because the assumption is, if you go to him with these things in your heart, you *want* a certain kind of answer. So God says, “Okay, give them the answer they want.” But then he says, “I’m going to punish the prophet and people the same way.”

Now, here’s another one of those occasions that make us wonder about God a little bit. It is 1 Kings, chapter 22.

1 Kings 22

KJ2000

¹⁹ And he [*Micaiah*] said, Hear you 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? [...]

Now, what’s going on here is that the king of Judah has come up and joined the king of Israel, and they’re talking about going out into battle. And they want to inquire: “Should we go or should we not?” All of the false prophets said, “Oh, yes. Go.” And they had all these little ways of showing it and demonstrating it with their little shows. And then finally, the King of Judah [*Jehoshaphat*] says, “No, no. I’m not comfortable with this. Don’t you have a prophet of God *somewhere* around here?” And the King of Israel [*Ahab*] said, “Well, yeah, I’ve got one. But he hates me.” “Well, bring him in.” And this is what he told him. “I saw God standing up there...”

1 Kings 22

KJ2000

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 [*That's all it says. It's all we know.*], and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

²² And the LORD said unto him, By what means? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, You shall persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

²³ Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets, and the LORD has spoken evil concerning you.

What a conundrum this man faces. He's been hearing nothing but good from prophet after prophet, and along comes this one guy that he hates anyway. And who says, "Well, yeah, I know what they're telling you." And I don't really know whether this is intended to be merely ironic, or satire, or just what he intends here. But the picture he presents is that a spirit comes before God and says, "I'll go be a lying spirit in the mouth of all of these prophets, and he'll go up and die." And they did. And that's what he did; he believed them. The prophet of God came in and says, "Oh, no. You're going to go up there and you are going to die."

Now, here's what I think the message is here: If you don't play straight with God, why should you expect *him* to play straight with you? Maybe there's another answer but, you know, there's a danger of apologizing for God which is really kind of pointless. We're better off to read the Bible, take it as it is, and go forward from it with the main lesson. *And the main lesson here is clear*: Don't go to God unless you go with your *whole heart*. You can't go that way and maintain all the sins of your life.

So, back to my original question: Why is God silent to us? Well, I can hear God saying, "Do you have any idea what price has been made to put this Bible on your coffee table? To make Bibles available so cheap? To find them in hotel rooms all over the country? Do you know? Do you have any idea how many people have suffered? How *much* they have suffered? Do you realize that people have *died* in order to preserve this book down through time for you. And I honor these people and I set them up on a pedestal."

How should you approach this book we call the Bible? First, understand what it is: it is the written testimony of men who have had a close encounter with God. God didn't stand over there and dictate the Bible, and have them slowly write it all down, and repeat things for them so they got it word-for-word correct. He *spoke* to them—he moved them to write, *in their own words*, what they heard and what they saw. The Bible is, when it's talking for God, using what we call "indirect quotation". (You can ask your English teacher what that means as opposed to a "direct quotation". The Bible is not *one* book; it is a collection of books by a *whole host* of witnesses. You're like a person sitting on a jury—and they bring in witness after witness after witness, for you to listen to them and hear what they say.

Now, the second thing is: You should read the whole Bible, cover to cover. Not once, but repeatedly. Not to regulate every moment of your life according to the letter of the law, but to *inform your conscience* and to equip you to *make decisions* in life. Some people take every word of the Bible literally, and they wander off into absurdity. Anytime you wonder whether you should take the Bible literally, consider that Jesus *taught in parables*. Parables are allegories, not history. The events Jesus describes in his parables are not real; they are symbolic. And if you are willing to be misled, you will be. That's why some got the parables and others did not. Another caution about literalism in the Bible comes in a *shocking* statement that Jesus made. Matthew 5:29, in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5

AKJV

²⁹ And if your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell.

³⁰ And if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell.

I have heard of two real incidents where a man *literally* cut off his hand because of this statement. Now, they may have been drunk when they did it. (They were certainly stupid when they did it.) Jesus assumed that you would know, if you stole something, it is not your *hand* that is to blame; *it is your mind*. The purpose of the Bible is not to tell you what to do at every step; it is to acquaint you with the actions and statements of God in history when he was *not* silent, and thus to educate your conscience about right and wrong. One of the primary ways this is done is to acquaint yourself with the various applications of divine law.

I once said that the Law of God is not a *regulatory* device, but a *revelatory* device. Now, what does that mean? Simply, this: The purpose of divine law is not to *control*, but to *instruct*. Because God has no interest in taking our freedom away from us. He just wants us to *know* what we're doing—whether it is going to be good for us or bad. Some of the Law, I'll agree, is designed to direct the affairs of a community. In other words, it's administrative: the instructions that Moses was given regarding penalties for lawbreakers—like murderers—for example. Most law, though, is a statement of principle. Let me give you a *classic* example. Deuteronomy 25, verse 4—one verse:

Deuteronomy 25

KJ2000

⁴ You shall not muzzle the ox when it treads out the grain.

Now, here's my question: Is this an animal rights statement? What difference does it make if you feed the ox *before* you put it to work? And what if you don't have an ox? Does it have no application to you at all? Now, this is easy for the preacher who says that the Law is abolished. Paul didn't think so. Writing to the Corinthians—a group of mainly Gentile Christians—Paul said this (1 Corinthians 9, verse 9):

1 Corinthians 9

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⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?

¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

Now, that's a *jar* to anyone who thinks the Law of Moses was abolished or nailed to the cross or is irrelevant today, because here's the apostle Paul citing it and saying it is written for us. The *stunning* thing about this is the Law is presented to man in the form of aphorisms. What's an aphorism? Well, it's "a concise, memorable statement that contains a truth." What is the *truth* about the law of the ox? The best way to see it is to consider the context of what Paul wrote. In chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, verse 1:

1 Corinthians 9

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¹ Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.

Now, mind you, this chapter is about *Paul* and not about oxen.

1 Corinthians 9

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- ³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.
⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink?
⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?
⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

Do you see what he's driving at here? Basically he is saying, "Is it wrong for me to have food and drink from you people, as a result of the work I'm doing for you? Or Barnabas and I...are we the only ones who have to hold down a job somewhere so we can serve God?"

1 Corinthians 9

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- ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?
⁸ Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?
⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?
¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.
¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

What Paul is here saying to us is, "Look, the law was given to us as a *principle*. And you're supposed to read it and you're supposed to sit there and think about it and look *beyond* the literal statement into what God is driving at."

Now, I have said all that to make a point: God has not been silent *at all*. He has spoken *again and again* in history, and he then said to his servants, "Write that down"—which they did, from memory, because they were rarely in a position to write while God was talking. When David asked, "Why are you silent to me?", he had a legitimate question. *We don't*. We have the record of what God had to say when he was a *long way from silent*, and he still speaks to us in the pages of the Bible.

What do you do about it? Well, make it a point to read the Bible *every day of your life*. If you don't get that kind of a habit, you won't do it. Every day, spend some time thinking about what you have read. The best way to do it is the first little hour (maybe half-hour, whatever you decide to do) of every day.

I once heard a psychologist say that the human mind is like a closet you can never clean out. "Everything that goes into your mind", he said "from whatever source, stays there forever. It's a closet you can never clean out." And by a process not well understood, events in our life can trigger memories of those things we've put in the closet, *right at the time we need them most*.

Why is God silent? He's not silent at all.

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