

# DOES GOD HEAR ME?

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Today, I propose to answer two of the questions you have given me. The first has to do with our uncertainties about God hearing our prayers. The second has to do with a perceived dearth of prophetic teaching.

## **1. When things don't turn out right, is it because God isn't answering our prayer? When things turn out the way we want, is it because God did it, or is it just how it would have turned out anyway?**

These questions are not, as they may first appear, a matter for logical reasoning; they are a matter for faith.

### **He Answers Prayer**

Do you believe in the God of the Bible? Then you believe in the God who has said that He hears our prayers. How and when He answers them remains squarely in His hands.

Sometimes He says, "Yes, now," and sometimes, "Yes, later." Sometimes He says, "No." Many times, He says nothing at all, "As if to ask, 'Will you just trust Me, regardless?'"

### **Faith's Source**

We will not come to faith in God by examining our circumstance; trust is not a natural outcome. Although, sometimes, circumstances may press you toward God, at best, scientific investigation (or, any rational investigation) can only point you toward God's existence. The next step, the critical one, you must take by faith.

*Romans 10:17* *So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.*

The word "hearing" is much more than hearing a sound; it is "receiving, or embracing, a message" with the intent to obey it.

As the Apostle James wrote: *"Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves"* (James 1:22).

Who God is, what He is like, and what He intends to do will remain a mystery to the unbeliever. Even the Bible does not attempt to "prove" God's existence to the skeptic; it simply declares His reality and purpose, in order to stimulate faith.

The material world can never prove that God is, nor can it unlock and, thereby, remove all mystery from life. Let's recognize two things about Biblical faith: Faith accepts God's revelation of Himself and is at rest with the remaining mystery.

If you wait for the outcome of circumstances before putting your trust in God, you never will truly trust Him, because there will always be one more thing to wait for.

### **Faith's Direction**

Trust either looks backward or forward. The difference is huge! Which way does your trust look? Let me explain...

Trust that looks backward at circumstances for confirmation is a natural and immature faith (anyone *can* do that, and everyone *does*). Trust that looks forward, based on God's promises, is a supernatural and mature faith (no one can do that apart from the help of the Holy Spirit).

### **Bottom Line**

Here is the bottom line: We cannot always tell, based on how things "turn out," whether or to what degree God's hand was in it. We must rely on the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to inform us, and then exercise our faith (in other words, trust what God has said).

When things turn out, and also when they don't, a good Scripture to lean on is this: *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them"* (Romans 8:28).

Patience is still a virtue. It is a fruit of the Spirit's work in us. And it is an expression of faith.

One Bible writer said (Hebrews 6:11-12): *"We want each of you to show this same diligence (caring for other believers) to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but (we want you) to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."*

Faith + Patience = Divine Inheritance

Neither "faith alone" nor "patience alone" will win the day. You need both. As long as the last chapter has not yet been written, God is not finished with you yet.

What do you think about faith and life's outcomes?

## **2. Why is there not more teaching on Biblical prophecy, since it is 30% of the Bible?**

Biblical prophecy may be viewed in at least three ways. We may view prophecy as (1) a genre of writing, (2) a declaration of mysteries, or (3) an inspired message from God (either written or spoken).

In this latter sense of an inspired message, the entire Bible may be considered a prophetic work, for it is the inspired record of the words and acts of God.

The Bible's content is generally categorized as four genres of writing: history, poetry, prophecy, and instruction, though there is much overlap among them.

### **Specialization**

Some people, by temperament, will emphasize one category or area of knowledge over others. These are called "specialists." Such specialization shouldn't connote a devaluation of other areas of knowledge. Rather, it is simply one person's focus of study.

For instance, one doctor may specialize in orthopedics (the study of bones), but that doesn't mean he thinks your heart is unimportant.

### **Theory of Proportionate Value**

Nor can the relative value of Biblical prophecy be determined simply by its proportionate quantity, in terms of the number of pages or verses. Two thirds of the Bible is Old Testament. Is the New Testament, therefore, less important?

Paul lists nine supernatural gifts of the Spirit in his letter to the church in Corinth. Which gift is most important? The correct answer is: the one that is needed most at the moment. While a prophetic word is always good, if my leg is broken, what I need is a gift of healing.

If I speak to you today for two hours, will that necessarily be better than a twenty-minute talk?

### **Law of Applicability**

The value of prophecy, then, should be determined, not by its sheer quantity, but by its applicability in your life. What is it that you *need* to know?

Much of the Bible's prophetic writings have to do with events already past and pertinent primarily to ancient Israel. Another large portion has to do with identifying Messiah

(for whom they then hoped, and who now has already come). That which has to do with our future is the much smaller body of writings, and offers detail that is largely un-specific or perhaps figurative.

Since this leaves so much room for mere speculation, we should first answer this: What is the general purpose of prophetic writing?

Perhaps we have forgotten that Moses said, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law”* (Deuteronomy 29:29). Or, at least, we have forgotten why he said it. His point was that we are accountable to God for what He has revealed to us – to do it.

God is not so concerned about what we know or don't know, but about what we *do* with what we know.

This is why God warned teachers (those to whom He reveals such things) of their stricter judgment (James 3:1). You are accountable for what you know.

### **Missing the Point**

I am concerned that our fascination with the mysteries of Bible prophecy – figures, types, and symbols – may distract us from practicing our faith.

Human pride may push us to try to “discover” secret meanings before others do, in order to “unlock” knowledge and make a name for ourselves. (It has happened more than once. Some of you may remember a published booklet, titled “88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return In 1988.” It was followed the next year by another, titled “89 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return In 1989.”)

Obedience is the point. God reveals some mysteries to us in order that we might obey Him. Beyond that, He keeps them to Himself.

(Remember the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Their eyes were “prevented from recognizing” Jesus as they walked and talked together; then, their eyes were “opened” as He broke bread with them.)

Biblical truth is revealed on a “need to know” basis, not a “want to know” basis.

People tend to think that “knowledge is power” (control), so we always want more of it. Again, that is pride-driven, for knowledge only seems like power when it is measured against other people's knowledge.

Have you ever noticed how frequently conversations amount to a jockeying for position as “the one who knows”? Sometimes, instead of listening to what another person has to say, I will interject, “I know that,” as if to say, “You don’t need to tell me that, I know it already (I knew it before you told me!).” Or I will echo what they said with a cursory summation, as if to say, “I already have a full understanding of the matter. You don’t need to explain any more; I get it.” Those are not *real* conversations, they are games of mental one-upmanship.

From another perspective (God’s vantage point), knowledge of truth is an awful responsibility, for which we are held accountable to God. You may know how to frame a house, but that doesn’t mean that you must do so. However, if you know that “loving others as Christ has loved you” is the sum of all the commandments and prophecies in the Bible, then you are responsible to live accordingly.

### **Law of Contextuality**

The New Testament does not exist in a vacuum. The history of the Hebrew people informs the pages of the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus.

The context of most of the Bible’s prophecies was God’s desire to preserve the Israelites as the People of God, through whom Messiah would come.

To that end, Old Testament prophetic writing was designed to stimulate hope and repentance and obedience through warnings and predictions. That objective was successfully completed, for Israel survived to produce the Messiah.

Beyond their historicity, such writings continue to serve us today through the general spiritual principles they express, which we may now apply in our own responses to God.

### **The Gospel**

In the New Testament, such warnings are not dominant, but are limited to just a few books. Preaching the Gospel is the dominant genre, which corresponds to the general purpose and work of the Lord *in this age*. And the objectives of New Testament prophecy and the Gospel message are generally the same.

Christ’s apostle, Paul, wrote, “*One who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.*” (1 Corinthians 14:3) Prophecy is a common gift of the Spirit in this age. However, it is not a badge of super-spirituality, but a tool for building up the church.

Prophecy is expressed in a wide variety of ways, including preaching, teaching, writing, and counseling. Its general purpose is still to encourage our obedience to Christ, but,

as a genre, it is now subservient to proclaiming the Gospel (as are also the historical and poetic content of the Bible).

Do you need most to understand the Book of Revelation, or Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

People are saved by the Gospel message, not by prophetic words. Christians thrive by the Gospel message, not by prophetic words.

Whenever we preach, teach, or counsel repentance toward God and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ, we fulfill God's prophetic agenda, which is: preach the Gospel and make disciples.

What do you think about that?