

# THEISM

## God And His Word

Unlike false gods that are silent, the God of the Bible communicates. He has a message. He reveals himself and his will for humanity. God has presented his word in three different ways.

First, God has spoken orally and audibly. God created the heavens and the earth by speaking them into existence (Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6). After God created Adam, he spoke to him (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16-17; 3:9, 11, 17-19). God also spoke to Eve (3:13, 16), and to others. God spoke directly and orally to the patriarchs, regarding such things as the flood to destroy wickedness in the world (Genesis 6:13-20; 7:1-4; 8:16-17; 9:1-17), the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and the unborn twins of Rebekah (Genesis 25:23). God spoke directly to Moses (Exodus 3:4ff), Joshua (Joshua 1:2-9), and others. Sometimes God spoke in dreams or visions, such as to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15), to Abimelech (Genesis 20:6), to Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-14), to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-23; 2:19-20), to Ananias (Acts 9:10-16), etc. Sometimes God spoke through his prophets (2 Peter 1:19-21), like Samuel (1 Samuel 3:21), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1), Amos (Amos 7:13-15), Jonah (Jonah 1:2), etc. The writer of Hebrews simply says that God spoke in various ways “in time past to the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1). In these and other conversations, God was revealing his will and purposes for humanity.

Second, God has revealed his word in writings designated as Scripture (John 10:35; Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Scriptures of the Old Covenant are variously designated as “the Law” (John 10:34; 1 Corinthians 14:21), “the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12, Luke 16:16; Acts 28:23; Luke 16:29, 31), “the Prophets” (Matthew 2:23; 11:13; 26:56; Luke 1:70; 18:31; 24:25, 27; Acts 3:24; 8:27; Romans 1:2; 16:26), and as “the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). New Testament writings also came to be considered Scripture as they were written. The Apostle Paul cites two Scripture quotations in 1 Timothy 5:8, one is from Deuteronomy 25:4 and the other is from Luke 10:7, indicating that the Gospel according to Luke was considered to be Scripture. Moreover, the Apostle Peter refers to Paul’s epistles in association with “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). Although Scripture was penned by men, Scripture is the word of God, not of men, because “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21, see also 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Many biblical quotations are designated not only as “Scripture says” but also as “God says.” (A couple examples are Galatians 3:18 with Genesis 12:1-3 and Romans 9:17 with Exodus 9:16.) Thus, Scripture and the God’s word are identified as one and the same thing.

Third, God has spoken through his Son (Hebrews 1:2), Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word (John 1:1-14; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13.) Words, whether spoken or written, are signs or images that give meaning or message. Like spoken or written words that give meanings, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s revealed will for humanity. “He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Jesus, the Son of God, reveals the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Whether spoken, written, or incarnate, the word of God bears the characteristics and functions of the God who speaks. As is true of humanity that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34), so also with God. Hence, as God is true (1 John 3:33) so also is his word (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18). As God is good (Psalm 52:1; Romans 2:4) so also is his word (Micah 2:7; Hebrews 6:5). As God is powerful (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; 2 Chronicles 20:6; Romans 1:20) so also is his word (Hebrews 4:12). As God is everlasting (Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 16:26) so also is his

word (Psalm 119:89; 1 Peter 1:23, 25). As God grants wisdom (Proverbs 2:6; James 1:5) so also do the Scriptures (Psalm 119:130; 2 Timothy 3:15). As God gives life (Genesis 2:7; Job 1:21; 10:12; 33:4; Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:25; Romans 4:17), so also does his word (Deuteronomy 32:46-47; Matthew 4:4; John 6:63). As God judges (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:12) so also does his word (Romans 2:16; John 12:48).

The word of God is characterized as laws, testimonies, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, and sayings in various passages, especially Psalm 119. This Psalm poetically describes God's word as "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105; see also Psalm 119:130). The Psalmist also exclaimed, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).

What then does God say, i.e., what is the content of his word? Whatever message is imparted by Scripture is God's word. Paul declared that "all scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (i.e., that all scripture is God-breathed) and able to make the man of God "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." He therefore charged Timothy to preach the word (2 Timothy 3:15-4:2), i.e., to preach Scripture. The primary message of Scripture is centered in the good news (the gospel) message of Jesus Christ, the Word (John 1:1-14). That the word is the gospel message is evident from the fact that "gospel" and "word" are sometimes used interchangeably, as in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2. (Compare also Acts 14:21 with 14:25). This gospel message is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16-17; James 1:21). The "message of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18) is the central feature of the gospel. The gospel "word" preached by Jesus and the early disciples (Acts 8:4; 11:19; 16:6; 1 Corinthians 15:2), is further described as the "word of faith" (Romans 10:8; see also Acts 4:4), the "word of the Lord" (Acts 8:25; 15:35, 35), the "word of God" (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 13:5; 17:13; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 1:23), the "word of truth" (Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; James 1:18), and the "word of life" (Philippians 2:16). In proclaiming the gospel, the "word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19) was also preached along with the "name of Jesus Christ" (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 60; 16:16; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31).

Preaching the "word of God" is like sowing seed. Some hear God's word, but the Devil comes and takes the word away from them. Some receive the word, but only for a while. Some hear the word but give priority to worldly desires. Even so, some hear the word, keep it, and bear much fruit (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23, 37-38; Mark 4:3-20, 26-32; Luke 8:5-15). Those who obey the word are said to be "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23).

The fact that some reject the word of God's cannot be blamed on God's word, because "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Moreover, God said, "My word . . . shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

The word of God is to be believed (John 5:24; 1 Peter 3:1) and obeyed (Acts 6:7; James 1:22). Many blessings come to those who meditate upon and obey God's word (Psalm 1:1-3; 19:7-11; 119:1-2; 9; 50, 92, 93, 97-104; 130:5), but disobedience results in curses and eternal consequences (Deuteronomy 11:27-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). No one is permitted to add to, or take from, the word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19).