

Week 2
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

When God Speaks

Century after century, one nation in the Old Testament pushed its luck with God. Like a thorn in Israel's side, this kingdom made life miserable for God's chosen people on numerous occasions—and did so arrogantly. One day, a voice was heard which stopped their party. You'll read in Obadiah 1:1 (p. xxx) why this voice was the one they didn't want to hear.

Day 3

My Identity

Remembering Who's In Charge

Planet earth and its occupants have been compared to a colony of ants clinging to a log rushing down a raging river—all shouting instructions. While it may not be that bad, there are certainly plenty of presumptuous voices to be heard (including, at times, our own). Reading Lamentations 3:37-38 (p. xxx) will convince you that none of those voices speak without permission.

Day 4

Impact

Glory!

Many voices heard in our world reflect agendas of power and strength. Military voices, political voices, self-centered voices, voices crying for significance. So loud are these voices, and the actions which flow from them, that we might think God has been shouted down. But the psalmist assures us in Psalm 29:3-9 (p. xxx) whose voice is the strongest of all.

Day 5

Implication

When the Captain Speaks

When a voice of authority is heard but not obeyed, serious consequences can result. Nations have fallen and individuals have failed as a result of not carrying out instructions. This happened to Israel, even though they heard from the voice of God himself what they were to do. Mt. Sinai was a watershed moment for Israel as you will discover from Exodus 20:1-17 (p. xxx).

Week 2, Day 1
Hebrews 1:1-2
349 words

The Promise God Has Spoken

Hebrews 1:1-2 Have you ever been in a relationship in which you talk but the other person doesn't? You ask questions, and get blank stares for answers? You *plead* for the person's participation, and they just don't get the message?

Granted, that scenario is a bit overstated. Few people could maintain such a silent silhouette and have any friends at all. But think of the "religious" world. How many millions of people today are bowing before silent idols of wood or stone—idols which have never uttered one word in response? Worshippers pour out their hearts to these idols, asking for help, for blessings, for favors, for forgiveness, for salvation. And the idols remain stone cold silent.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, apologist and theologian, wrote a book about the God of the Bible called *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. This title beautifully reflects the fact that Christians worship a God who speaks, a God who communicates willingly and openly with his creation. The God of Scripture is not that of the deist who believes God created the universe and then abandoned it to run on its own. This would be the equivalent of a watchmaker creating a clock, winding it up, then setting it on a mantel to run down.

No, God has spoken—intervened in national and personal affairs—in many ways, the writer to the Hebrews tells us. In the Old Testament period, God spoke primarily through His prophets. He did this "at many times and in various ways." He also had his words written down in a book so that all could know His thoughts. And then, in the most profound gesture of communication in history, God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth. For more than three years, thousands of people spoke directly, face to face, with God! And for those of us who weren't alive then, we are still invited to speak with God anytime we need to (Hebrews 4:15-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

God is waiting to communicate with you—right now. Remember, he is there, and he is not silent.

God's Promise to You: "There is never a time that I am unavailable to talk with you."

Week 2, Day 2
Obadiah 1:1
353 words

God's Identity When God Speaks

Obadiah 1:1 Was there a student in your high school class who lived on the edge of conflict with the school authorities? He tested every rule, talked his way out of every scrape, and seemed to have more lives than the proverbial cat—until the day that the principal's voice came over the intercom, calling him to the office. Everybody knew that the game was over; the ultimate authority had spoken.

In the Old Testament era, the kingdom of Edom was that student. Edom had been on God's bad side for hundreds of years for its arrogance and mistreatment of the nation of Israel. Edom developed from the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Perhaps Edom was still angry over God choosing Jacob instead of Esau as the line of blessing (see Gen 25:23; 27:41). Whatever the reason for their misbehavior, God used Obadiah as his intercom and called Edom to his office.

What was significant for Edom, and is significant for us today, is to recognize how God spoke: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom . . ." This phraseology brings to mind the famous television commercial that sponsored a leading investment and brokerage firm. The punch line was, "When E.F. Hutton speaks . . . people listen." Substitute Obadiah's text, and you get the sense of what it means when God speaks as Sovereign Lord: "When the Sovereign Lord speaks . . . people (and nations) listen." When the Sovereign Lord speaks, the discussion is over.

This perspective on God's speaking comes from his being a Sovereign, which means "ruler" or "master." The "Lord" part of his name means that he has been patient; a loving and personal authority. God spoke to Edom as Sovereign Lord, and he will one day speak as Sovereign Lord to the nations of the world. Those who know him rest in the fact that his words have authority, but are balanced with love in the heart of a tender father.

Do you ever wonder if God always means what he says? Remember: "When the Sovereign Lord speaks . . . (wise) ones listen."

God's Promise to You: "All of my authority is present in all of my words."

Week 2, Day 3
Lamentations 3:37-38
357 words

My Identity Remembering Who's In Charge

Lamentations 3:37-38 Complete honesty on our part compels us to admit that we sometimes miss the big picture when it comes to our relationship with God. We begin to believe that what we think or do—and especially what we say—has more profound consequences than it truly does. We lose sight of the fact that God is the creator, and we are the creation.

If there is any consolation in our condition of presumptuousness, it is perhaps that we are not the first people to have acted this way. The Bible is filled with reminders that God is God and we are not. For example, Isaiah asked how much sense it makes to think that an axe can raise itself higher than the one who swings it (Isaiah 10:15); or whether the clay should be voicing objections against the potter who shapes it (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9). And leave it to the Apostle James to hit us right where we live. When we announce that we are going to do this or that, he reminds us that we are but a mist that can vanish in a moment. We would be wiser to precede all of our “I will’s” with “If God wills” (James 4:13-17), thereby aligning ourselves with what is the truth—that God really is in charge of all things.

Now while these Scriptures offer gentle warnings to us about our own presumption, they have a reassuring and comforting effect from the opposite direction. Everyone has presumptuous, hurtful, or fearful things spoken against them at some time in life. The words may come directly from a friend or relation, or indirectly from a politician or person in authority. Whatever their source, there are many words filling the air that give cause for alarm. But Jeremiah’s words in the Book of Lamentations remind us of the true truth: No one can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not “spoken it” first.

The next time you hear presumptuous or hurtful words, remind yourself that those words have a purpose in the plan of God. Then ask him, in his time, to reveal what that purpose is.

God’s Promise to You: “You hear nothing that I have not heard first.”

Week 2, Day 4
Psalm 29:3-9
348 words

Impact
Glory!

Psalm 29:3-9 After a week's worth of reading your newspaper, watching the television news, and discussing current events with your friends, you could be discouraged. And at one level, who wouldn't be? From across the oceans roll the mournful sounds of those suffering from military conflicts in their homeland. From other directions come the strident voices of political and ideological opponents as they batter one another with insult and innuendo. Then appear the results of powerful regimes—governmental, corporate, personal—that have wielded power and influence behind the scenes in ways that have hurt the innocent. It takes conviction not to lose heart.

But the psalmist David had come to gain God's perspective on the troubling voices of his day. David had witnessed every abuse of power possible in the human realm. As an innocent courtier in Saul's kingdom, he came to be hounded and haunted by the bedeviled king (1 Samuel 18-26). But then as a king himself, he found himself the abuser of the innocent. He destroyed the love life of Bathsheba and the physical life of Uriah her husband (2 Samuel 11), and brought upon himself the greatest shame of his life. Recovering, he learned to be faithful as king to God's covenant, only to be "rewarded" at the end of his reign with the moral failures and rebellion of his own sons (2 Samuel 13-20).

Through it all, however, David learned that only one voice in space and time really matters: the voice of God. He speaks truth, righteousness, justice, and quiets the raging of men. His voice spans the oceans and thunders louder than the waters can roar. His voice is powerful and majestic, and breaks the cedars of Lebanon (symbols of strength in the Old Testament). His voice is like lightning, and shakes the desert while stripping bare the oak forests. And in his temple, when his voice is heard, all cry out, "Glory!"

When the voices of men fill your ears, look and listen. You will see and hear the voice of the Lord over all others. And you, too, can cry, "Glory!"

God's Promise to You: "No voice will ever be heard more clearly than mine."

Week 2, Day 5
Exodus 20:1-17
356 words

Implication When the Captain Speaks

Exodus 20:1-17 It always occurs at the height of tension in submarine warfare movies. A decision must be made upon which the fate of the Western world may hang. The only sound in the conning tower louder than the sonar's ping is the pounding of the sailors' hearts. After decrypting the encoded messages, analyzing the navigation charts, and breathing a prayer, the commander makes his decision. Reaching for the microphone, he utters the phrase that brings everything to attention in a submarine: "This is the captain speaking."

Once he says, "Battle stations," what would happen if all the sailors went back to shining their shoes, listening to their tape players, finishing their card games, and completing their maintenance tasks? In that particular movie, the Western world would be lost, obviously. But we know that doesn't happen. The sailors hop to and the sub saves the day. But the scenario illustrates a Biblical point: there are implications to hearing the voice of authority.

God spoke to the nation of Israel (and ultimately to spiritual Israel, the church) in much the same authoritative way. From high atop Mt. Sinai, Moses says, "God spoke" And in a sense, what he said after that in Exodus 20 was the equivalent of, "Battle stations!" He gave the fledgling nation the basic set of laws which would insure their purity and their success as they entered into spiritual and military conflict with the nations who would oppose their heritage in Canaan: Don't take other gods, Don't worship idols, Don't use my name frivolously, Keep the Sabbath, Honor your parents, Don't murder, Don't commit adultery, Don't steal, Don't lie, and Don't covet. Did he mean what he said? Yes. Israel failed to keep these laws over the course of their history, and suffered serious consequences. They heard the voice, but they didn't hear the message. They received the instructions, but failed to understand the implications.

An important thing for us to know about God's voice is that when it is heard, it is always for our good, and must always be obeyed. The future of our personal world depends on it.

God's Promise to You: "I will never tell you anything that I don't expect you to obey."