

Prophets And Prophecy

'It was of these people (wicked sinners), that Enoch in the seventh (generation) from Adam, prophesied saying: "Behold, the Lord came with ten thousand of His holy ones to execute judgement on all, and to convict the unholy of their ungodly works which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the severe things which the ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 1:14 & 15).

A prophet speaks on behalf of God and he does so by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:25; 2 Peter 1:21). Any utterance given on behalf of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is prophetic. A prophecy can be about the past, the present or the future. In the verse above, Jude is speaking about the distant past. Enoch was a prophet who said the Lord came (past tense) to execute judgement. The first person to be described as a prophet in the scriptures was Abraham (Genesis 20:7) but Enoch lived fourteen generations before Abraham. Peter said the Lord has had prophets since the most ancient time in the memory of Man (Acts 3:21). In the Old Testament the Lord said Jeremiah was His minister and his mouthpiece (Jeremiah 15:19). In the New Testament prophecy is called a ministry or a gift.

This study will look at the different uses the Lord has for prophecy, the role of the prophet, the character of a true Biblical prophet, how that ministry differs from the gift of prophecy, and what the Lord thinks about false prophets. Many people think that prophecy only contains predictions about the future but that is not correct. One use of prophecy is to tell us through a prophet about the distant past. Prophecy can be used to encourage us, exhort us, rebuke us, warn us, to show us what to expect in the future; both good and bad, to explain God's judgements, to make His will clear to us, to tell us all about His creative power and to explain the way all mankind were created; things we would never have known about, if the Lord had not spoken through the prophets.

In prophecies that relate to the past, for example in Genesis, Moses was able to describe the events of ancient times such as Creation and the fall of mankind, which could not have been known by natural understanding and could only have been given by divine revelation, and therefore Moses speaks as a prophet in relation to the past. When we read the book of Job, we see that through divine prophetic inspiration, Job was able to tell us multiple things about the earth, creation, God Himself, how God controls the weather, the sea and the universe and a host of other pieces of information about the ancient past, the ongoing operation of the earth which is the present tense for every generation, plus prophecies for the future. Job shows us the magnificence, all powerful sovereignty of our Creator. These are things Job could not have known anything about unless the Lord gave him divine revelations and understanding.

The prophecies given to mankind are of immense importance and great interest. Elijah appears very suddenly in a dramatic and powerful way, with no given background. 'Elijah the Tishbite of Gilead said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). That must have taken an enormous amount of boldness, courage and faith. Elijah was in effect saying to the king, from now on the rain and dew will not fall unless I say so. They are under my control and I will decide whether or not there will be rain or dew.

A prophet is one who stands before God, attentive, waiting to hear God's message and ready to go and deliver it when he hears it. This is the essential requirement of the true Biblical prophet. When He receives the message, it is delivered with complete authority. It

is not the message of the prophet; it is God's message delivered via the prophet. The responsibility for the consequences or the impact lies with God, not the prophet. It is not just a message, but a person with a message. God said to Elijah, "Go and show yourself to Ahab" (1 Kings 18:1). Elijah's character was unique in that he had tremendous boldness; he refused to compromise and he refused to show any respect for Ahab the king. He refused to bow. Many times, when people receive a message from God, they usually first think about what other people will say, think or do. The Biblical prophet couldn't care less about what people might say or how they might react. They are not concerned with the attitude of people, they are concerned with being obedient to God, without adding or subtracting from the message.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, there were problems with false prophets. In Jeremiah's day they far exceeded the true prophets. There is a distinct difference between the message of the true and of the false prophet. We need to understand the phrase, "Stood in the council of the Lord." It means the same as when Elijah said, "I stand before the Lord." Both phrases mean they stand waiting to hear from the Lord and they will not speak until the message from God is clear; plus their relationship with God is strong. Literally, they stand in the presence of God. The Lord used Jeremiah the Prophet in Jeremiah 23:15 to 32, to rebuke all the 'latter day' false prophets and tell them He is against them and their prophecies, because they perverted the words of the Living God. As we study this rather long text, we will see the mantle of the true prophet as opposed to the lies of the false prophet.

Jeremiah 23:15; 'Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: "Behold, I will feed them with wormwood and make them drink the water of gall, for from the false prophets of Jerusalem, profaneness and ungodliness have gone forth into all the land.'" If the prophecies are pure, they bring purity, healing and cleanness; if they are false, they bring profanity and ungodliness to the whole land. If we look at the modern world, we can see that just this has happened. The false prophets, people who misrepresent God and His standards, and those who claim to have 'other sources' of authority than the One True God, have brought increased ungodliness, violence and lawlessness into the world.

Verse 16; 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the false prophet who prophesy to you. They teach you falsity and fill you with vain hopes; they speak a vision of their own minds and not from the mouth of the Lord.'" The 'rapture' teaching is a terrible false hope that has come from a string of false prophets, that speak from one to another. The Lord says we are not to listen to false prophets because they do not speak the words of God.

Verse 17; "They are continually saying to those who despise Me and My Word: 'The Lord has said you shall have peace' and they say to everyone who walks after the stubbornness of his own mind and heart, 'No evil shall come upon you.'" The false prophets claim we will have peace and no evil will come upon us. Try telling that to the millions of persecuted Christians around the world, some of whom are close to starving, some are homeless and some have been murdered for their faith! Just have a look at the three major false teachings in the Western world today; the false 'rapture' teaching, the false 'prosperity' teaching and the false 'replacement theory'. All three are false, all are rampant in the modern church and all are misleading and diminish the walk and the spiritual growth of the hearers. The false prophets teach that no evil will come upon the church because it will be 'raptured off'; they teach that every Christian should be wealthy and that the Christian church has replaced Israel. That is all false teaching from false prophets who are teaching lies. Those false teachings are just compromising with evil.

They suggest God condones and tolerates their sin of greed (which they say is 'prosperity') and it will all be okay because they will all be 'raptured' off no matter how sinful or carnal they are. That is false prophecy. For more on these subjects, see the sermons on this website titled, 'Rapture Theory; Prophecy or Heresy?' and 'Prosperity Teaching; Right or Wrong?' and 'The Church will never replace Israel; God's Purpose for the Church'.

Verse 18: 'Who among them has stood in the council of the Lord and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His Word (giving attention to it) and who has actually heard (and listened) to it?' The true prophet stands in the council of God – he stands in the presence of God, hears and perceives His will. The true prophet listens to and obeys the Word of God; he lives by it, walks in it and knows deep in his spirit what is the truth.

Verses 19 & 20; 'Behold, the tempest of the Lord has gone forth in fury, a whirling tempest; it shall whirl and burst upon the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord shall not turn back until He has accomplished the intents of His heart. In the latter days you shall understand it perfectly'. Notice that this prophetic message says the latter days – the days in which we live. Modern day false prophets should take notice of this; God hears what they are saying.

Verse 21; "I have not sent these false prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied." If God did not send these prophets then who did? Where did these modern false prophecies come from? From an evil spirit, that's where.

Verse 22; "If they had stood in My council, then they would have caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned My people from their evil way and from the evil of their doings." Notice that the mark of a true prophet is that he stands in the council of the Lord, and had these false prophets stood in God's council and heard His word and caused His people to hear His word, there would have been repentance. We can see in this verse that the false prophets are responsible for the weakened condition of the people within their churches. Many pastors are still teaching the false doctrine about the rapture, even though they know it is a lie. If these people had stood in the council of the Lord, they would know that the 'replacement theory' is completely wrong. These false prophets are leading Godly people away from the truth – and one day they will have to give an account to God for that.

Verses 25 to 28; "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name saying, I have dreamed; I have dreamed. How long shall it be in the minds of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart who think that they can cause My people to forget My name by their dreams. The prophet who has a dream, let him tell his dream; but he who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What has chaff (the false prophet) in common with wheat (the true prophet)?" Again we see that the true prophet speaks God's word faithfully. Jesus gave us another illustration of what will happen to the false wheat called darnel or tares in Matthew 13:24 to 30.

Verses 29 to 32; "Is not My Word like fire that consumes all that cannot endure the test, and like a hammer that breaks in pieces the rock of stubborn resistance? Therefore, behold, I am against the false prophets," says the Lord, "who steal My Words from one another. Behold I am against the prophet who uses their own tongues and say, 'Thus says the Lord.' Behold I am against those who prophesy lying dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them and cause My people to err and go astray by their lies and by their vain boasting – when I did not send them, nor do they profit these people at all," Says the Lord'. So we see

that a string of 'latter day' false prophets have caused many of God's people to go astray by speaking lies – and God is against those false prophets.

There are the false prophets who are hidden within the church like dandelion. Those false prophets 'prophecy' about the 'rapture' and other erroneous teachings. They are the ones who are growing up with the wheat and will be rooted up and burned, just like Jesus said in Matthew 13:24 to 30. Then there are the more obvious false prophets like the men who started evil cults like Armstrongism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islamism, Buddhism, Hinduism and other cults that lead people astray with their false 'prophecies' and 'dreams'. If we study the prophecies throughout the Old Testament we will see that prophets are more responsible for the condition of the churches and the nations than we realise. The true prophet who stands in the council of God and hears the words of God will bring people to God, but where there is no such prophet, then the whole nation is deceived and led astray by false prophets. People who claim to represent God but do not actually do so, speak a deception of their own heart. We must remember one very important fact; we are to judge the prophecies; God judges the prophets. We are not to judge the person giving the false prophecies – that is in the hands of our Judge. When we judge the prophecy, we are to see if it lines up with the scriptures. We cannot disagree with the prophecy just because it may differ from the church doctrine or our own thoughts. Our role is to see if the prophecies line up with scripture and that is all, and it is on this basis alone, that we have the right to disagree with the prophet. None of the six cults mentioned above that were started by false prophets, line up with the true Word of God. In fact some of them have written their own 'holy books' and follow them instead of following the only Holy Book – the Bible, the book of truth.

'Shall I hide from Abraham, My friend and servant what I am going to do?' (Genesis 18:17). 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing unless He reveals His secrets to His servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7). It is a principle with God, that whatever He wants to do amongst men, He has prophets who stand in His council and He shares His secrets with His prophets. Again, the prophet is the one who hears God's secrets, who shares His council, who knows God's inner motives and purposes. The prophet has a particular relationship with the Lord. If we turn back to Jeremiah, we can see what kind of man God's prophet must be. "O Lord, You understand; remember me and visit me and avenge me on my persecutors. Do not take me away from your joy in Your long-suffering; know that for Your sake I suffer and bear reproach. Your words were found and I ate them; and Your words were to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of those who make merry, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because Your hand was upon me for You had filled me with indignation." Therefore, thus says the Lord, "If you return then I will give you again a settled place of quiet and safety and you will be My minister; and if you separate the precious from the vile, you shall be My mouthpiece" (Jeremiah 15:15 to 19).

There have been very few true prophets that have not suffered rebuke from fellow Christians and even worse, their pastors, for speaking the truth. In verse 17 we can see that being a prophet causes us to isolate ourselves from sin and makes us indignant when we see sin, especially in God's people. Unsaved and unrepentant people do not know any better – but Christians do know better and when that sin becomes apparent, either through it being obvious or by a spirit of discernment, a true prophet of God becomes deeply indignant at the person who continues to live with sin while they continue to profess their Christian beliefs. A person who takes a stand for God, will at times, have to sit alone. Some are persecuted by other Christians for no other reason than they refuse to compromise. Those who are not willing to stand alone for God, cannot pass the test of

being a true prophet. A true prophet will stand before God. It takes real personal purity, integrity and strength of character to be God's mouthpiece, but to do so, we have to meet God's strict conditions.

The true prophet almost literally 'digests' God's message before speaking it out just like Ezekiel and the Apostle John did (Ezekiel 3:1 to 3; Revelation 10:9 to 11). The message goes down deep into the spirit of the prophet and becomes part of him, before he can deliver it. Talking 'off the top of one's head' is not valid in this very important ministry. The word has to be received and digested then identified with the message before the prophet can deliver that message. This was true of almost all the Old Testament prophets. Those who do not live and feed on the Lord's Word cannot be qualified to take His message. Many people think prophecy just drops out of heaven and is unconnected with the Bible. That thought is totally wrong. Every prophet in the Old Testament was intimately acquainted with God's Word and His revelation. Any person who is not interested in the Word of God, and who does not spend many hours searching out God's will and purposes, who does not identify himself with the Word, who does not devour and live upon the Word of God is not eligible to have a prophetic ministry. If the prophet hears a message from God, he cannot lower his standard to please the people, he must deliver the full uncorrupted message.

'So shall My Word that goes forth out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void (this is without producing God's desired effect) but it shall accomplish that which I please and purpose and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' (Isaiah 55:11). Many people misquote this verse. They say that God's word will never return to Him void. They preach an uninspired message to a spiritually dead congregation who don't respond and they say, "O well. God's word will not return void." That is not what the scripture says. This verse says God's Word out of God's mouth, will not return to Him void. It depends on who the mouthpiece is. It has to be – not just the Word – but also the mouth from where it comes. When a prophet speaks, His breath goes out with his words. When God speaks, His breath – His Spirit goes with it. Words without the Spirit do not bring forth life. When God speaks, His words never fail.

'During these days, prophets (the inspired interpreters and teachers of the divine will and purpose of God) came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus, stood up and prophesied through the Holy Spirit, that a severe famine would come upon the whole world, and this did occur during the reign of the Emperor Claudius' (Acts 11:27 to 30). This divine revelation was accepted by the church in Antioch as a basis for action – they acted upon this prophecy. We see that Agabus and others were called prophets. Agabus was again called a prophet in Acts 21:10. More prophets are named in Acts 13:1. They were obviously accepted in that church as being prophets. Judas and Silas were named as prophets in Acts 15:32.

A prophet receives a specific revelation from God, given to bring repentance. We see the prophet Jonah gave a specific word from God about the overthrow of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). The city had exactly forty days to repent or face the judgement of God. If Jonah had been an evangelist he would have preached in general terms about sin and judgement. If he had been a teacher, he would have taught them about God and His judgement. People are impressed when a prophet speaks directly to them about their own specific situation. It has an impact. John the Baptist was more than just a preacher; he had a specific revelation about the Messiah, with a time factor. He said, "Immediately after me there comes Another" (Mark 1:6 to 8). John could not have known that without a divine revelation. In Acts 21:2 we see a divine revelation given to Agabus regarding Paul in a dramatic way, by

binding his own hands and feet. We often see prophets are told to do more than just speak God's word. They sometimes had to actively demonstrate God's will. Ezekiel had to lie on his left side for 390 days, then on his right side for 40 days to bear the iniquity of the Jews. Then he had to prophesy against Jerusalem. The Lord put bands on Ezekiel so he could not even turn over until the time had passed. He only got up to eat and drink what the Lord told him (Ezekiel 4:1 to 17).

To avoid confusion, we need to see the distinction between the ministry of the prophet like Agabus and the gift of prophecy. In Ephesians 4:11 and in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the Lord says some people will be prophets, but in 1 Corinthians 14:1 & 5, Paul says every Christian should aspire to prophesy and his instructions are found in 1 Corinthians 14:29 to 33. In this context, the ministry of the prophet is someone who is inspired to speak the will and purposes of God, and they have an impact. He is not someone with the gift of prophecy who speaks out encouragement in a church service as we know the gift of prophecy. Paul asks, are all prophets? The answer is obviously "No". Not everyone will have the ministry of a prophet, but the gift of prophesying is open to all believers. Philip the evangelist had four daughters who all had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:8 & 9). A person with the gift of prophecy speaks to their church within the service. A prophet is his message – the ministry of a prophet encompasses the whole person and the ministry is a whole way of life and is not given to all believers. Whereas someone with the gift of prophecy may perhaps only prophesy occasionally as the Spirit gives the utterance, and it is a brief, momentary, supernatural word that comes to an end within seconds. So we see the difference between the ministry of a prophet and the spiritual gift of prophecy.

The divine word spoken by a prophet is intended to bring repentance to sinners and unbelievers, but the gift of prophecy is usually intended for believers within the church. '...While prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers' (1 Corinthians 14:22). Prophecy in the New Testament was for believers and the prophecy had to be judged. The person delivering the prophecy was not judged – the prophecy itself was judged to make sure it lined up with God's Word. Prophecies given in churches today should also be judged to see if they are from God or not. There should never be just one person in a church who prophesies because that person can become too domineering and the church can fall into error. There should be several people with the gift of prophecy and the congregation who are members of the body of Christ need to judge what has been said. The judging of prophecy is God's safeguard to make very sure that one person does not become a dominant force for evil in the church, 'prophesying' falsely and causing people to act against God's will. All prophecy needs to be subject to judgement by other believers.

There are two extremes regarding prophecy; one is to quench the Holy Spirit and spurn other spiritual gifts, and the other extreme is to never test the prophecy. We are told not to quench the Holy Spirit and we are told to test all things and hold tightly to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:19 to 21). There are churches who do not want tongues, interpretations, prophecies or any other gift. Other churches accept everything. We must have a balance between the two extremes.

In the Old Testament, God sent prophets to people who were not believers. Several of the messages given to Jeremiah were for the Gentile nations round about Israel. Jonah was sent to Gentile Nineveh to bring repentance. Moses was sent to Gentile Egypt, but they did not repent. When the people had the gift of prophecy in both the Old and the New Testaments, they always prophesied to believers (Numbers 11:25; 1 Samuel 10:10; Ezra 5:1; plus many other verses throughout the Bible). We all need direct, fresh revelations from God to encourage us to keep walking on our path towards eternity. Sometimes we

need a word that cannot come from scripture, such as what Agabus gave to Paul, and that is where the true prophet is needed. Just as Noah needed a divine revelation of what was coming to earth in his day, so we also need a revelation of what will happen in our day. We need particular precise instruction from God to know what steps we should take. Sometimes the Bible does not give us an exact instruction so we need to have our hearts open to receive a revelation from God. However, the person speaking the prophecy must still be very sure his message does not contradict the scriptures, and we need to judge his accuracy.

Amen and God bless you.

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