

Prophets and Prophecy: True or False

(Characteristics of a True Prophet and True gifts of Prophecy)

Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28,29; 14:1-6 Matthew 24:24, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1, Deuteronomy 18:20-22

Introduction

First, let's understand both prophecy and prophets as it is defined in the Bible. Prophecy is "a message from God." To prophesy is to proclaim a message from God. The one who proclaims this message is called a prophet. Sounds very basic, but...

Prophets in the Bible were more than those who received messages from God about future events. They were also spokesmen for God. Think of Samuel and Moses. They were both responsible for relaying God's word to the people of Israel. They were God's representatives and shared messages from God to the people. We don't think of either of them as predicting future events. Their main role was to spiritually lead God's people in their day. Yes, they both did predict future events, but are called prophets in the Bible and not necessarily for their foretelling the future, but for their forthtelling of God's word.

Prophetic foretelling is predicting future events through revelations from God. This is what we commonly think of when we speak of prophets. Forthtelling is also prophecy and is declaring truth as written in Scripture. The preaching and teaching of the word of God is forthtelling.

Signs often validated that the words that prophets of the Bible were speaking were from God. Samuel received a message from God about judgement on Eli and his family. That was an example of one of these signs where God gave him a message foretelling the future. That sign was later fulfilled, demonstrating that Samuel was a true prophet of God. Another sign demonstrating a true prophet was miracles. Examples of prophets that showed they were of God through miracles were both Elijah and Elisha.

The Bible also names pagan religious figures as prophets. For example, in Elijah's day, Ahab's prophets of Baal were called prophets. They were false prophets because they did not worship the LORD but worshiped a false god. They were found to be charlatans when they could not call down fire from their god to light the fire on their altar to Baal.

Hananiah is another example of a false prophet found in Jeremiah 28. He claimed to worship Yahweh, but falsely proclaimed peace for Judah when Jeremiah was proclaiming that judgement was coming. He and other false prophets of Israel and Judah often gave messages that people wanted to hear, rather than God's will. They were people pleasers; giving messages for their own personal benefit. These are examples of false prophets and give us warnings today against similar men and women who make predictions that are pleasant to our ears.

The source of true prophecy

2 Peter 1:21 clearly describes the source of true prophecy when it says, "21for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Hebrews 1:1,2 says that in former times, God spoke to us by his prophets and now speaks to us by His Son, Jesus Christ. 1God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the [b]worlds

These two Scriptures speak to the light that comes into the world through God's true prophets. All true prophecy comes from God. It is not from man's mind, but from God's mind. This is the difference between prophets of the LORD and

false prophets. These verses are speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures here and says that the holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit was the source. The men were God's instruments inspired by God to act and speak and write what he put in their mouths.

It is important to state this. True prophecies do not come from the minds of men. Keep this in mind as we evaluate prophets and prophecies.

John the Baptist

Now, think of the Old Testament prophets. As you survey the Prophetic writings of these prophets. They each fulfilled the purpose for which God sent them. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Micah, Malachi, etc. were all prophets. These were sent to the people of Israel to give the people of Israel AND you and me direction and specific messages from God.

According to Jesus in Matthew 11:9-11, John the Baptist was a prophet. There Jesus describes him as "More than a prophet." *9But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 10For this is he of whom it is written:*

*'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

11"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

And then in verse 13 it says, "*13For all **the prophets** and the law prophesied until John."*

This is very similar language to Luke 16:16 where it says, "*16"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. 17And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one [g]tittle of the law to fail."*

Here's the point I think Jesus was making. John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament era, the last prophet of the Covenant of Moses. He prepared the way for Jesus and proclaimed his coming. This does not say that there would be no one who would prophesy after John the Baptist, but that "the prophets and the law" only prophesied until John." For us today, the implication is that there will be no more Jeremiahs or Ezekiels.

But think of the implication to the non-believing Jews; those who did not believe in Jesus. The Israelite nation had many prophets sent to them. With John the Baptist, that all ended! Those Jews who did not believe that Jesus was Messiah will no longer have prophets. The veil was rent in the temple at the death of Jesus. Since that time, there have been no prophets among the Jews.

We are under the new covenant. What is the difference? There is a gift of prophecy (as described in the New Testament), but the time of public prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) is at an end because God sent someone greater than a prophet (Jesus Christ).

Jesus as prophet

Jesus was also called a prophet. We read in Deuteronomy 18:15, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen.*" Peter in Acts 3:22 and Stephen in Acts 7:37 named Jesus as that prophet from Deuteronomy 18. When Jesus entered Jerusalem in his Triumphant entry in Matthew 21:11, people called him "the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." The disciples on the road to Emmaus called Jesus "*a prophet, powerful in speech and action before God and all the people*" (Luke 24:19).

In what sense was Jesus a prophet? Jesus spoke the words of God under divine inspiration. Jesus calls himself a prophet in Mark 6:4 when he said that a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives. The people of Israel called Jesus a prophet (Matthew 21:11 - "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." and Luke 7:16 "16Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people.").

Jesus spoke in a way that people recognized that God was speaking through him. He predicted his own death and resurrection (Mark 8:31) and the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:43-44). He proved he was a prophet by signs and wonders; by miracles, by raising people from the dead, by controlling the storm.

New Testament prophets

God's Spirit comes to dwell in each of us, as we accept the free gift offered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We then become part of the body of Christ and bear gifts to benefit the church (1 Corinthians 12)

We see in Acts and in the epistles of Paul, prophecy did not cease with John the Baptist. Under the new covenant, the prophecy of Joel 2:28 becomes reality. 28"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."

We see the gift of prophecy active in Acts 11:27-28 when Agabus is mentioned as a New Testament prophet. There we see he prophesied of a drought that was to take place in Judea. We also see the reference to Philip's four daughters who prophesied in Acts 21:8,9. Agabus is again mentioned as a prophet in that chapter when he takes Paul's belt and binds his own hands and feet and predicts that Paul will be imprisoned by the Jews during his trip to Jerusalem, which prophecy is later fulfilled.

Prophecy as a gift of the Spirit

Paul confirms that there were prophets in the church in 1 Corinthians 12:28, "*And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.*"

There is much discussion about the role of prophets in the church. However, they are intended to have a very different ministry from the prophets in the Old Testament.

The gift of prophecy, as described in the Bible, is a spiritual ability given by God to certain believers for the purpose of edifying, exhorting, and comforting the church (1 Corinthians 14:3). Unlike fortune-telling or mere prediction, biblical prophecy involves speaking forth God's message under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, often providing direction, encouragement, and correction to God's people.

Scripture highlights that prophecy should align with God's revealed truth and never contradict His Word (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 2 Peter 1:20-21). True prophetic gifts are marked by humility, accuracy, and a Christ-centered focus, helping believers grow in faith and obedience. The Apostle Paul encourages Christians to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1), emphasizing its importance for building up the community of faith.

Ultimately, the gift of prophecy serves to make God's will known, to strengthen and guide the church, and to glorify Jesus Christ in all things (Revelation 19:10). Believers are called to discern and test prophetic messages, ensuring they reflect God's love and truth.

Discerning false prophets

Jesus in Matthew 24:24, 25 says, “24For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25See, I have told you beforehand.”

Jesus teaches us that there will be false prophets that will seem to show great signs and wonders to deceive “even the elect.” We need to be on our guard and be able to evaluate those who claim today to be prophets. The Bible provides several guidelines to help distinguish the true gift of prophecy from false.

1 John 4:1 instructs believers to “*test the spirits to see whether they are from God,*” because many false prophets have gone out into the world. The teachings and messages of a true prophet will always align with biblical truth and uphold the character and teachings of Jesus (Matthew 7:15-20). A true prophet’s life will also reflect godly character and the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

According to Deuteronomy 13, there are two signs of a true prophet. First, what the prophet predicts must come to pass. Secondly, what he teaches must not direct people to follow other gods. Both of these must be true in order for a prophet to be a True Prophet. This tells us that even if someone predicts an event that comes to pass, there is still another measure and that is whether that person teaches us to follow our Heavenly Father or another god.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 teaches us about the sin of presumption: “20But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’— 22when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” This means that accuracy in foretelling is a critical test. Complete accuracy. We see many many false prophets on social media (YouTube) making prophecies. Many prophecies. For the purpose of making money. They make claims that their prophecies are true, but often they are “newspaper prophecies.” They read the newspapers and make predictions that anyone of us might have predicted. An example is a person who predicted that there would be an attempted assassination of President Trump. He then used his vague prediction and invented details to his prediction after the fact. These men and women are false prophets! Don’t trust them. I would say that there are NO legitimate voices of prophets on YouTube.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul tells us to “pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts and especially prophecy. However, remember that true prophets will be a member of a local body of believers, there to edify that body of believers. This is the context we see in Scripture with Agabus and the daughters of Philip. Among the spiritual gifts, Paul puts much importance on prophecy. Any prophecy must be clearly in line with Scripture or it is to be rejected. The purpose of prophecy is to edify, exhort and comfort believers. The community of believers is to test and determine whether it is valid. The person who shares the prophecy must demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, such as humility and love.

Summary: Recognizing the Gift of Prophecy According to the Bible

In summary, recognizing the gift of prophecy involves evaluating whether the person’s messages are accurate, consistent with Scripture, and supported by a godly life. Testing these elements prayerfully and carefully, as the Bible instructs, can help discern true prophetic gifts from deception.