

Introduction to Prophecy

What is “prophecy?” Receiving divine revelation and, typically, declaring it in order to teach, guide, and “strengthen, encourage and comfort” others (1 Cor 14:3). Prophecy reveals fresh application of the Word to a situation, but does not bring new Truths to be added to the Bible. Most prophecies forth-tell the power and will of God into a situation, and can also foretell the future. Prophecy confirms what God is already showing you or prepares you for His next move.

Everyone can prophesy: The indwelling Holy Spirit enables us all to give and receive prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 1Cor. 14:31). He speaks to us (John 16:12-13). Jesus promised His sheep would hear His voice. You were first drawn to Jesus by hearing God’s Word (John 6:44-45).

- We are told to eagerly desire (covet and seek) spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1 Cor 14:1). Prophecy is in all three spiritual gift “lists” (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:3).

Prophetic ability differs: 1) Because the Spirit has been poured into us (Acts 2:17), we can all receive some prophetic insights to be “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14); 2) We may receive (at the Holy Spirit’s discretion) a stronger “gift” of prophecy—a supernatural boost in prophetic ability (1 Cor 12:9); and 3) A few are called to the Office of Prophet (Ephesians 4:11), a position created as a gift of people anointed by Jesus to establish and mature His church.

Prophetic words vary in clarity: Revelation is strongest when less subjective (less interference from your mood and thoughts). God wants us to cling to Him and search out His heart in a matter, so every word is not going to be handed to us on a silver platter of clarity! “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings to search out a matter” (Prov. 25:2).

- a. Less common/less subjective include: 1) Visitation from Jesus or angels (or you are transported to heaven to hear the word); 2) Hearing an audible voice; 3) Seeing an open vision (eyes open and clear message even if you are distracted by the world); or 4) “spontaneous utterance” – God spontaneously speaking through a person, yet the person is under control and able to share the word at the appropriate time. (1 Cor. 14:32)
- b. More common/more subjective-but interpreted well with practice include: 1) Closed visions (a movie in your mind); 2) Picture(s) in your mind; 3) Sudden body/emotion change revealing listener’s condition (word of knowledge); 4) internal impression/ “still small voice;” or 5) Unsolicited or unbidden thought/scripture pops into your mind

New Testament vs. Old Testament Prophets:

- God occasionally put His Spirit “upon” an OT prophet to give a Word, but today we have Him in us by the Holy Spirit 24/7 and must learn to discern His thoughts from ours.
- OT prophets advised Kings and priests, and had to be 100% accurate. Today “we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). We are enabled by the Spirit to be dependent on each other in the “body” (Rom 12:4-8) so that we often may not get the entire revelation.
- OT prophets judged sin and sinners to show their need for redemption, but NT prophets are supposed to encourage and strengthen and are rarely called to judge others (Luke 9:55-56).

Three aspects of prophetic ministry: 1) revelation; 2) interpretation; and 3) application.

- Revelation- the method of hearing God's Word can be from the Bible (our most trustworthy source of His Word-2 Peter 1:19) or from the types of revelation listed above. We often start small when we are actively listening and asking to hear Him. When we step out in faith, and without fear of what other people think, He often gives us more revelation. Revelation comes from a closer relationship with the Lord through quiet time, prayer, and speaking/worshipping in the Spirit (tongues).
- Interpretation- Most mistakes are made here, but God wants you to err on the side of releasing prophetic words when your heart is to advance the ministry of Jesus. Try to give the word exactly as received. You may not get the interpretation until you start declaring it. Discern the source (you, God or devil), but do not judge the prophecy so much that you think it too silly or unclear and you hold it back- the listener likely will have the interpretation! If you are unclear, ask God to help you (John 14:26).
- Application- Ask Holy Spirit if the prophetic word applies to the person you are talking to, or to the church, or to someone else, or if you are supposed to release it now, later, or not at all. A listener judges if it applies to them and will understand it if it is from God.

Declaring prophesy- God often confirms His word only after you have executed on it in faith (Exodus 3:11-12). Speak with the heart of Jesus (motivated by love). Give honor to the listener. Be honest about the level of revelation you received and the level of confidence you have that it was from the Lord (Romans 12:6). Don't guess from a human perspective, it's o.k. to say you don't know what it all means. Avoid the temptation to speak in anger or judgment, as this usually reflects your attitude and not God's heart (Num 20:12).

- Consider saying something like this to start, "excuse me, but I sometimes get insights *(from God)* about people that I could not possibly know, and I feel like I have one for you-would you like to hear it? You will need to judge if it applies to you." [* You don't have to say "from God" up front if it might prevent you from talking to a non-believer- but always end by giving all credit to Him!]

Impact of receiving prophesy: Prophetic words often reveal a person's heavenly identity and a greater destiny if they choose to walk with God in revealed areas. If you "receive (honor/respect) a prophet because he is a prophet you receive a prophet's reward" (Matt 10:41). Paul said acting on prophetic words would enable Timothy to "fight the good fight," because true prophetic words come with God's power (1 Tim. 1:18-19), and His Word is living, active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Ezek. 37:7-10).

Evaluate the prophesy and the profit: Look for positive fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) from a righteous prophet (Mat. 7:15). The fruit of a false prophet are division, strife and discord, as they seek profit, glory and authority. Judge a prophetic word (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:21) like this:

1. It must be consistent with scripture and not violate God's character (Ps 103:2-7)
2. The peace of God should rule on it (like an umpire) in your heart (Col 3:15)
3. It should contain strengthening, encouraging and comforting words
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to "know these things" (1 John 2:20; 26-27)
5. Judge yourself first that you are seeking in a pure heart, submitted to God
6. Ask for confirmation from other prophets/leaders-especially on "life changing" words