6.BIBLICAL PROPHECY

THE MINISTRY OF PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH (Biblical Prophecy)

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1WHAT IS PROPHECY :

The Bible’s answer

I.A prophecy is a message inspired by God, a divine revelation. The Bible says that prophets “spoke from God as they were moved by holy spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20, 21) So a prophet is one who receives God’s message and transmits it to others.—Acts 3:18.

II.: "What is the spiritual gift of prophecy?"

The spiritual gift of prophecy is listed among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Romans 12:6.

The Greek word translated “prophesying” or “prophecy” in both passages properly means to “speak forth” or declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people.

Many people misunderstand the gift of prophecy to be the ability to predict the future. While knowing something about the future may sometimes have been an aspect of the gift of prophecy, it was primarily a gift of proclamation (“forth-telling”), not prediction (“fore-telling”).

A pastor/preacher who declares the Bible can be considered a “prophesier” in that he is speaking forth the counsel of God. With the completion of the New Testament canon, prophesying changed from declaring new revelation to declaring the completed revelation God has already given.

Jude 3 speaks of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (emphasis added). In other words, the faith to which we hold has been settled forever, and it does not need the addition or refinement that comes from extra-biblical revelations.

Also, note the transition from prophet to teacher in 2 Peter 2:1: “There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you” (emphasis added). 📍Peter indicates that the Old Testament age had prophets, whereas the church will have teachers. The spiritual gift of prophecy, in the sense of receiving new revelations from God to be proclaimed to others, ceased with the completion of the Bible. 📍During the time that prophecy was a revelatory gift, it was to be used for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of men (1 Corinthians 14:3). The modern gift of prophecy, which is really more akin to teaching, still declares the truth of God. What has changed is that the truth of God today has already been fully revealed in His Word, while, in the early church, it had not yet been fully revealed.

How did prophets receive information from God?

God used several methods to transmit his thoughts to his prophets:

\* Writing. God used this method in at least one case by directly supplying to Moses the Ten Commandments in written form.—Exodus 31:18.

\* Oral communication through angels. For example, God used an angel to instruct Moses about the message he was to deliver to Pharaoh of Egypt. (Exodus 3:2-4, 10) When precise wording was crucial, God directed angels to dictate his message, as he did when he told Moses: “Write down these words, because in accordance with these words, I am making a covenant with you and with Israel.”—Exodus 34:27.  \*

\* Visions. These were sometimes given while the prophet was awake and fully conscious. (Isaiah 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1) Some were so vivid that the recipient participated in them. (Luke 9:28-36; Revelation 1:10-17) At other times, visions were conveyed while the recipient was in a trance. (Acts 10:10, 11; 22:17-21) God also transmitted his message by dreams while the prophet slept.—Daniel 7:1; Acts 16:9, 10.

\* Mental guidance. God guided the thoughts of his prophets to convey his message. This is the sense of the Bible’s statement: “All Scripture is inspired of God.” The phrase “inspired of God” can also be rendered “God-breathed.” (2 Timothy 3:16; The Emphasised Bible) God used his holy spirit, or active force, to “breathe” his ideas into the minds of his servants. The message was God’s, but the prophet selected the wording.—2 Samuel 23:1, 2.

Does prophecy always involve foretelling the future?

No, Bible prophecy is not limited to foretelling the future. However, most messages from God relate to the future, even if only indirectly. For example, God’s prophets repeatedly warned the ancient Israelites about their evil ways. Those warnings described the future blessings if the people would heed the warning, as well as the future calamity if they refused. (Jeremiah 25:4-6) The actual outcome depended on the course that the Israelites chose to follow.—Deuteronomy 30:19, 20.

Examples of Bible prophecies not involving predictions

\* On one occasion when the Israelites asked God for help, he sent a prophet to explain that because they had refused to obey God’s commands, He had not helped them.—Judges 6:6-10.

\* When Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman, he revealed things about her past that he could have known only by divine revelation. She recognized him as a prophet even though he had made no predictions about the future.—John 4:17-19.

\* At Jesus’ trial, his enemies covered his face, hit him, and then said: “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” They were not calling for Jesus to foretell the future but for him to identify by divine power who had hit him.—Luke 22:63, 64.

2THE OFFICE OF THE PROPHET:

(The ministry office of the prophet)

We live in a time where the prophetic office is under the spotlight because of many abuses that have been witnessed in the handling of this office.

The New Testament prophet is God’s spokesperson. He or she is the human medium through which God speaks to his church. John Bevere, in his book Thus Saith the Lord? (1990), suggests that the prophet’s obligation is “to speak by divine inspiration. It is the presentation of God’s message for an individual, group, nation, or generation.”

📍Although any believer can operate in the simple gift of prophecy (that is, forth-telling under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), not all are called to the office. A prophet operating in the ministry can tell the hidden things in a person’s life and what will likely happen in future if certain things are done or not done. One cannot desire to operate in the office of the prophet. You can only be placed in the office by the Holy Spirit.

✔️The prophet is able to supernaturally identify the ministries and gifts in others. It’s also the role of the prophet to act as a watchman, giving spiritual direction and alerting the church to any kind of danger. 📍Prophets are generally bold and outspoken but a true prophet also shows humility and is amenable to counsel: “If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”(1 Corinthians 14:37).

📍It is part of the prophet’s ministry to confirm, exhort and comfort the believers, but it also extends to warn and rebuke where there’s error. A prophet foresees the future.

📍Agabus forewarned the church at Antioch that a great dearth was coming upon the world. The church at Antioch then sent relief to the brethren in Judea acting on that prophetic instruction. The dearth came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27, 30).

📍According to Gordon Lindsay in the book, apostles, prophets and governments (1991), “true prophecy ever points to Christ, His deity, His ministry, His purpose in coming into the world, and to His return to earth”. It is, therefore, worrisome when one observes the manner in which many young prophets being raised in Ghana and Africa conduct themselves and the manner in which they often carry out their ministry work.📍 Many of them appear as if they’re more interested in drawing attention to themselves rather than using their gift to point men to Christ.

📍I’ve also realised that a lot of them aren’t amenable to correction. They delude themselves that since they’re prophets, they can hear directly from God and you cannot tell them anything.

Some go to the extent of getting congregants to publicly remove their genitals, stumping on the belly of pregnant women, asking them to eat grass and flowers, and jumping up and down on their stomachs while they are in deep sleep or spraying them with doom (insecticide) under the guise of healing point men to Christ? Anything done in the church that does not bring glory to God and point men to Christ cannot be of God.

📍Bevere wrote that “we have been so afraid of despising prophecy that we have neglected judging it.

It is important we learn to recognise or discern the true from the false… We cannot accept the false as true because we are afraid of rejecting the true as false; we must learn to separate the good from the bad.”

3.WHO IS THE FOCUS ON?

These are some of the things that make outsiders look at Christianity with suspicion.

📍At the end of the day, focus is centred on the prophets rather than Christ whom they’re supposed to represent. Scripture encourages us to lead a life “bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everybody involved in the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11, MSG).

4.BENEFITS OF THE PROPHETIC GIFTS:

The prophetic gift, when used rightly, can bring

1. blessing,

2. deliverance,

3. healing,

4. restoration and breakthrough. But when the gift is polluted, it wreaks destruction, confusion and manipulation. Abuse, however, happens when there’s widespread tendency for self–glorification. Mature prophets rarely tell of their supernatural experiences unless if it’s absolutely necessary.

5.THE LIMITATION OF THE PROPHETS GIFTS:

Operating in the prophetic office, however, doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll “see” or “know” everything. You can only know and see that which God shows you. Even if you’re prophetic, you’re still a human being and therefore not omniscient. This is scriptural.

Prophets can’t know everything because they’re not God! And it is God who decides what He reveals and what He conceals: “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” (1 Corinthians 13:19).

Deut 29:29 the secret things belongs to God, but the revealed things are for us ...

Some prophets, however, abuse their office and end up prophesying to people even when God has not revealed anything to them. A prophet can prophesy out of their own spirit and even do it accurately because they’ve become so used to flowing in the prophetic. But they’ll not be speaking the mind of God. According to Kim Clement in the book, Secrets of the Prophetic (1993), “a prophet is not a diviner of future events. God uses him or her to express what He wants to say, not what someone wants to hear… You don’t need a prophet for every decision of your life… God communicates directly with His people. But He may send a prophet to confirm what He has already spoken to you in your secret place of prayer” (pp64).

6.IS THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY STILL RELEVANT

Question: "Are there prophets in the church today?"

Answer: The gift of prophet (Ephesians 4:11) seems to have been a temporary gift given by Christ for the laying of the foundation of the church. Prophets were foundational to the church (Ephesians 2:20). The prophet proclaimed a message from the Lord to the early believers. Sometimes a prophet’s message was revelatory (new revelation and truth from God) and sometimes a prophet’s message was predictive (see Acts 11:28 and 21:10). The early Christians did not have the complete Bible. Some early Christians did not have access to any of the books of the New Testament. The New Testament prophets “filled the gap” by proclaiming God’s message to the people who would not have access to it otherwise. The last book of the New Testament (Revelation) was not completed until late in the first century. So, the Lord sent prophets to proclaim God’s Word to His people.

📍Are there true prophets today? If the purpose of a prophet was to reveal truth from God, why would we need prophets if we have the completed revelation from God in the Bible? If prophets were the “foundation” of the early church, are we still building the “foundation” today? Can God give someone a message to deliver to someone else? Absolutely! Does God reveal truth to someone in a supernatural way and enable that person to deliver that message to others? Absolutely! But is this the biblical gift of prophecy? No.

📍Whatever the case, whenever a person claims to be speaking for God (the essence of prophecy) the key is to compare what is said with what the Bible says. If God were to speak through a person today, it would be in 100% complete agreement with what God has already said in the Bible. God does not contradict Himself. 1 John 4:1 instructs us, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 declares, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.” So, whether is it a “word from the Lord” or a supposed prophecy, our response should be the same.

📍Compare what is said to what the Word of God says. If it contradicts the Bible, throw it out. If it agrees with the Bible, pray for wisdom and discernment as to how to apply the message (2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:5).