

## Prophecy 2-23-03

Luke 16:16; 1 Corinthians 14:3,24-33

(I encourage you to read this in Word format so that the more than 20 supporting passages will appear when you place your cursor on the highlighted reference. If you do not have Word, please take the time to look up the verses listed.)

Over the years I have really struggled with the topic of prophecy. I have seen outrageous abuses of it. I have also seen it bless others, confirming to them the will of God. There is a wide divergence of opinion on what prophecy means in the practical sense. I'm not alone. The church struggles with this in nearly every denomination. One extreme is the man who stands up and predicts future events shrouded in vague terms, unspecific generalities, and announces God's call on your life, (but can't share all the secret details) pronounces which two people should get married, or sets a date for some future spiritual movement of God. Woe to the man who does not accept his word or walks out on him. He will receive a prophecy regarding his unbelief and pride.

Then there is the other extreme called ceasationists. They believe all gifts of the Spirit, at least the supernatural ones, all died out once the Bible was completed. Their sole supporting verse is 1 Corinthians 13:8 (NIV). *\* Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.* Another faction claims, it was not the completion of the written word that ended the age of prophecy, but the rejection of Jesus by Israel.

What I believe is at the heart of the problem is a lack understanding of the difference between the Old Testament office of a prophet and the New Testament gift of prophecy. Please allow me to explain from Scripture, and before you disregard what I am going to share, search the Scriptures yourself and see if these things are true. This is not a core element of our faith and you are welcome to have a differing opinion. Be sure and base it on the whole word of God.

The Old Testament office of prophet was the voice of God to man. The Law required that someone who spoke in the name of the LORD a prophecy that did not come to pass, be stoned. But if his words did come to pass he was authenticated as a genuine mediator between God and man. (Deuteronomy 13:17-22) Their words were Scripture. Man was obliged to listen to the true prophets and receive the words or face the consequences. They came from all walks of life and were used of God to convey messages to nations, kings, and their subjects.

The last person to hold the Office of Prophet was John the Baptist. Luke 16:16 (KJV)  
<sup>16</sup> *The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.*

I used the KJV because other translations add the word 'proclaimed' to help our understanding. It may confuse the issue in this case. Jesus was telling us that

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<sup>17</sup> The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup> If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. <sup>20</sup> But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

<sup>21</sup> You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?"

<sup>22</sup> If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.  
Deut. 18:17-22 (NIV)

there was a fundamental change taking place. Up to John the Baptist, the words of the Law and those of the prophets were the way man sought after God. Now the Kingdom of God is preached. The good news of the Gospel of grace is preached. Now all who want to come by faith are welcome, without the rules of the Law and its demands. The great difference is that the King has come to reign in the hearts and minds of those who will subject themselves to Him. Before, the Law and prophets were God's mediator to show them the will of God. Now, God has come to sit on the throne of our hearts and guide us uniquely in each situation. Before, the Spirit came upon the prophets. Now, the Spirit indwells the people of God. **Jeremiah prophesied this change in 31:32-33. Pentecost was the day that separated those two different ways in which God worked.**

John was the last human to hold the office of Prophet before the Kingdom of God began to be proclaimed. He prepared the way for the King. Jesus is the King. The prophets all spoke of a day when the King would make things right. Jesus was the fulfillment of their prophecies. Nearly every prophet looked forward to Christ: Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Zechariah, and Malachi. Everyone and every thing pointed to Him.

It is easy to understand the Kingdom. The Kingdom is anywhere the King reigns. Does He reign in your heart? Then you're in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is within you. **(Luke 17:21)** Mankind is still making decisions in the world. The world systems have not come under the Kingdom of God. That is why they are a mess. Man is reigning over the world, not the King, not yet.

Jesus is a prophet also; in fact, He is the ultimate prophet. **(Deuteronomy 18:15)** But He is also the mediator of the New Covenant. Now there is but one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. **(1 Timothy 2:5)** He is the final and ultimate prophet, priest and king. He doesn't fall under that old system of the Law and the prophets because He ushered in the New Covenant. He is the embodiment of the New Covenant. Before, we had the words of the Law and the prophets under the covenant received by Moses on Mount Sinai. Now we have Christ, the Living Word, who speaks to us through the Word and in our spirit where we commune with Him. What He speaks to me is not a new passage of Scripture; it is a timely revelation of what He has already said through the Law and prophets and His life. **(2 Corinthians 3:6)** He makes the word come alive and applies it to my situations.

So what does that mean to us today? What is the gift of prophecy today? **Ephesians 4:11-14** tells us that the person that has this gift is given it so that they can equip the saints and edify the body. It should help people press into the kingdom of God, the rule of Christ in their heart. That is exactly how it is described in 1 Corinthians 14:1-4 (NIV). *1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. 3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening,*

**Commented [notes2]:** 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.  
33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.  
Jer. 31:32-33 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."  
Luke 17:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.  
Deut. 18:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,  
1 Tim. 2:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor. 3:5-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.  
Eph. 4:11-14 (NIV)

*encouragement and comfort. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.*

There seemed to be the excessive use of the gift of tongues in the early church. The Apostle points out that the priority is to live in the way of love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophecy. In verse 3 he points out the good guidelines that the prophecy should have as its fruit. When someone exercises the prophetic gift, it should strengthen, encourage, and comfort. Verse 4 tells us it edifies the whole church. Unlike the Old Testament office, this gift is the stirring of the Spirit of God in a person to speak what God would say to us in a specific time. Perhaps today our need is to hear John 3. Perhaps it is Psalm 91. How do we know? The gift of prophecy is given so that we should know.

It is often expressed as what we call 'preaching' today. In the New Testament, nearly every reference to the word we translate as 'preaching' is used in relation to evangelizing the lost. Notice in the [Ephesians 4:11](#) passage and the [1 Corinthians 12:28](#), there is no preaching gift. That is because prophecy was what we call the preaching part of the service. It was sharing what God had spoken to your heart. It was expounding the Word in a timely God directed manner. Exhortation or teaching, however, is the instruction of the eternal truth of the Word, though it is not necessarily especially applicable to that specific time. Surely you've experienced the difference. You may be listening to a sermon and realize it is an answer to prayer. God is speaking specifically to you through the message. On the other hand, you may be excited about a Scripture or idea presented and the understanding of it, but the application of it in your life is some time off in the future. You store it away for now as a lesson to be applied later. The prophetic word rings true to the present need or direction. It confirms what we suspected in our heart was the direction God was leading. Sometimes you get the "ah-ha" effect. The pieces of the puzzle were before you but the prophetic word placed them in a way that made it all make sense.

The one big difference between the early church service and a service today is that there were two or three or more people that prophesied. [1 Corinthians 14:29-33](#) (NIV) *29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,*

How about that! Two or three should speak. When did we narrow it down to one man? I'll tell you when that happened historically. In the middle of the second century the church began to make a profession out of the role of elder and began to insert a hierarchy over congregations. In the first century the title 'bishop' was interchangeable with elder, and there was more than one elder in a church. But in the second century, the term Bishop began to be applied to an overseer of several churches.

**Commented [notes8]:** 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, Eph. 4:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 1 Cor. 12:28 (NIV)

Now you might say that if we had two or three speak we'd be here all day. It was definitely a different culture and a different time. They came to worship and left their sundials outside. I'm not suggesting we have four-hour services unless the Spirit of God is leading us to, and then you wouldn't want to leave anyway. Perhaps we can take the fundamental truth here, and give opportunity to those who are inspired – and remember that word means 'breathed into' – to share a few words of what the LORD has been showing them. You'll notice that at the Bible study I encourage you to do just that. Last Sunday brother Will shared a devotional. Maybe someone else has a testimony or a lesson that God has shown him or her. Look back at verse 31 – for you can all prophesy in turn. The fruit of that is 'so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged'. Is this not what the word of God instructs us? Maybe one reason the church of America has become so much like the world is because people are not exercising the gifts God has given us. We expect one man to be the prophetic voice that everyone listens to. Then others do not have a chance to grow in their gifts by exercising them.

But let us return to the difference between the old office of prophet and the new gift of prophecy. In the Old Testament, the test of a true prophet was to see if His word was fulfilled. A miraculous sign was not good enough. (Deut. 13:1-3) The New Testament gives a very different standard, which we see in verse 29. Others should weigh carefully what is said. Is it according to the Word? (Acts 17:11) Does my spirit bear witness with it? Are the elders in unity on its value? (2 Corinthians 13:1)

From considering all that the Old Testament has to say about prophets and the way the New Testament describes prophecy in the church, we can draw some conclusions about the differences and similarities. They are different in that the true Old Testament prophet was the mediator between God and man. The Spirit of God came upon him and he spoke the word of God to the people. The New Testament prophet reminds people that the Lord has spoken in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2) and confirms what God is speaking to your heart in a timely way at the direction of the indwelling Spirit. The Old Testament prophet more often than not, warned of impending calamity. (Jeremiah 28:8-9) They often ended a warning of judgment with words of future promise. The New Testament prophet encourages, strengthens and comforts other believers. (1 Corinthians 14:3) His words do convict unbelievers in a worship service that God is real and present. (1 Corinthians 14:24-25) People of God discerned the validity of the Old Testament prophet by the fulfillment of his word. Today, we discern the validity of a word by comparing it to the Word and seeing if our spirit agrees with it. We have the same indwelling Spirit as the one who spoke the message.

They are similar in the sense that both before and after Christ the prophet receives the inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Both could prophesy, from their own spirit, a false prophecy. (Deuteronomy 18:20; 2 Peter 2) It is interesting that 2 Peter 2:1 compares false prophets of the Old Testament with false teachers in the New. Peter didn't say that there are false prophets in the Old Testament just like there are false prophets today. He said, "Just as there are false teachers among you". Both in the

**Commented [notes10]:** 1 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.  
Deut. 13:1-3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>11</sup> Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Acts 17:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.  
2 Cor. 13:1 (KJV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Heb. 1:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true."  
Jer. 28:8-9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.  
1 Cor. 14:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"  
1 Cor. 14:24-25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves.  
2 Peter 2:1 (NIV)

Old and New Testaments the problem of false prophecy is linked to greed and in many historical cases with greed and promiscuity. (2 Peter 2:13-15)

Why is our society so ready to receive someone today that claims to have a gift of prophesy? When we are not living in the Word of God, in vital relationship with the Living Christ, we look to man to become that mediator that Jesus is meant to be for us. 1 Peter 2:5,9 calls us a holy priesthood. Each of us is to live in communion with God. We are to be the ones that introduce The Mediator, Jesus, to the world as we walk in fellowship with Him. Once we introduce them to Him, they don't need us telling them anything. (1 John 2:27) We can share but the Holy Spirit is the Teacher. We can't mediate between them and God, nor can anyone do so for us. To do that is to deny the reason that Christ came, that we might have access to God.

If someone else meets with God for me, it doesn't cost me as much. If you can be my mediator, I'll pay you. Then I won't have to look into the 'holy wild' as some saints have called it. That is how some look at the Pastor's role, a paid mediator. I'm not your mediator. I'm not your Old Testament style prophet. At times I bring you a New Testament style prophetic word and you weigh carefully what is said to decide if the Spirit is speaking to you. Each of you must have your own relationship with Christ. Each of you must enter into His presence in prayer as you read His Word, and let Him speak personally to you.

Somewhere in the last 80 years, God speaking to us individually became a thing to mock. When someone says the Lord told him or her some message. We roll our eyes and think the man is dreaming of being some Old Testament style prophet. Perhaps, but more than likely the person is living in communion with His living Savior. You don't have to take his word for Divine revelation but you may want to weigh carefully what is said and see if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you too. We can sum up the whole difference between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament gift in the fact that now the Spirit indwells all believers. The Prophet is no longer our mediator. We all have access to God.

Are you living in His presence? Are you hearing from Him? Do you take what others speak as a prophetic word to the word of God and discern by the Spirit of God what is true? Then you are living in the role of the New Testament priest God has called us all to be. If not, then you will fall into one of two categories. The first is accepting the teachings of men. Some decide which man or organization made of men they will believe, just like the people listened to Old Testament prophets. The other type is believing every word that comes along from anyone claiming to be a prophet. Either way, you are trying to live in the Old Testament era and not entering into all that God has called you to in a personal relationship with Him. The Law and the prophets were until John, since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every man presses into it. Press into a relationship with the Word. Hear from God in prayer. God wants to be personal with you. Press into the Kingdom!

**Commented [notes18]:** 13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.

14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood!

15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness  
2 Peter 2:13-15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2: 5,9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. 1 John 2:27 (KJV)