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An Introduction to the Prophetic Ministry and Office, Part 2

Our study of the Old Testament prophets will take us through each prophet's work chronologically. However before we enter formally into the study, there is much that must be understood as about the ministry and office of the prophet. We need to discern the characteristics of the true gift of prophecy. Many today don't think we need the prophet because they see the Old Testament Prophets as passé, archaic, irrelevant and unneeded.

Yet, many in the church don't know what constituted a prophet and why God ordained the office. Some churches teach that God is still speaking today outside of the Scriptures and that the prophetic office and gift still operative. However as we saw last time from Deuteronomy 13 and 18 the Scripture does not bear this out.

There are four characteristics of the true gift of prophecy. Its origin is found in Deuteronomy 18:16-17. Far from being a gift limited to the Apostolic Age, we learned that the gift/office of Prophecy reached its point of highest glory with Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 34:10). Now with the coming of the New Testament, the identifying marks of the genuine prophet remained unchanged with the obvious implication that if we are going to understand the nature of this gift or office, we

must understand it as it was originally established and begun at the time of Moses.

Secondly we discovered the nature of prophecy. We saw that the prophetic word is equivalent with Scripture, it is revelation or the speaking forth of the Word of God. This cannot be too strongly emphasized. Prophecy is NOT reading Scripture, teaching Scripture, proclaiming Scripture, or exhorting Scripture. Prophecy is the *CREATION* of Scripture! When a genuine prophet exercised his gift, the conclusion was that “God has spoken” (cf. Exodus 24)! Thus, to affirm that Biblical Prophecy continues is to express belief that the Word of God is not complete but still being added to today.

By this alone we conclude that the Gift of Prophecy is not operative today, if it were the Canon would not be closed! And yet, the Bible says much more about Prophecy and so we continued with Prophecy’s Standard.

Prophecy’s Standard

Here we saw that one of the characteristics of a genuine prophet in Scripture is that of perfect accuracy. To exercise the gift and be wrong on just one occasion is to testify that you are a false prophet.

Jeremiah 28:9, “The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent.”

1 Samuel 3:19-20, “Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.”

The Biblical gift of prophecy includes the standard of complete accuracy!

Prophecy’s Deterrence

From Deuteronomy we saw that to protect this *vehicle of revelation* from abuse and error, God fenced in the office with the threat of death! Thus, to prophesy falsely was to forfeit your life!

Jeremiah 28:15-17, “Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet [who had just falsely prophesied], ‘Listen now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die...”’”

Now having discussed this last time, today we pick up our study in Numbers 12:6-7 where we see another important characteristic of the true gift/office of prophecy: Prophecy’s mode of reception.

Prophecy’s Mode of Reception...

Numbers 12:6-8 is the account when Miriam and Aaron began complaining against Moses. You

will recall that Moses' wife was not an Israelite which led Miriam and Aaron to think that Moses must not be that good of a servant of God (cf. Numbers 12:2). In fact, "God spoke through them." And they said, "Why should Moses be the one to lead the people of God?"

It was at this point, God invited all three to come to the "tent of meeting." Realize that as the office of prophet was new, there was a lot of misunderstanding even amongst Miriam and Aaron. Accordingly, God clarified some of the misunderstanding by indicating the manner by which a genuine prophet received revelation from God, where He spoke as follows:

Numbers 12:6-8a, "Hear now My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream [that is the way the prophetic office worked when it came to all prophets. Yet in this regard, Moses was unique...]. Not so with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth..."

The rebuke goes on. However notice what this passage says about the true gift/office of prophecy; when it comes to the reception of revelation from God, the genuine prophet would receive it "in a vision...in a dream." (Numbers 12:6)

This is the normative means by which God communicated revelation! In fact, the normative means is emphasized in the original:

- "In a vision... unto him... I shall make myself known..."
- "In a dream... to him... I shall speak."

Visions and dreams are the means by which God deigned to communicate when it came to the prophetic office.¹ Accordingly we read this:

Isaiah 2:1, "The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem..."

Daniel 7:1, "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions..."

Amos 1:1, "The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel..."

Micah 1:1, "The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem."

Habakkuk 1:1, "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw."

Revelation 1:1-2, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His

¹ The prophetic calling and writing by inspiration are to be distinguished. The former was through dreams and visions. The latter took place as men were "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21). The former is objective; the latter is organic. Neither are by "impressions in the heart."

bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”

Throughout the Bible, when the gift of prophecy is exercised, the mode of reception is always through SEEING VISIONS and DREAMS! Now there was one exception to this among men born naturally of women, and that was Moses. Because of the special relationship he enjoyed with the Lord, God spoke to him “mouth to mouth.” That is, person to person. And so, unlike every other prophet in the Old Testament and New Testament with Moses God spoke to him in the form of a Theophany.

When we think of Moses before the burning bush and in the tent of meeting, there we behold the theophanic presence of God communicating to Moses person to person/face to face!

Now it must be emphasized that this form of communication between God and man was unique to Moses’ relationship with God. That is the point of Numbers 12! With Moses, God spoke “person to person.” But with every other prophet, God spoke in “visions and dreams!” In contrast to the way the genuine prophet of God received revelation from God, in visions and dreams, the false prophets in Scripture are said to speak out of their own hearts...

Jeremiah 23:16, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own (literally “heart”), not from the mouth of the Lord.”

The contrast couldn’t be more obvious. The true prophet of God receives the Word of God as he SEES it communicated to him in VISIONS and DREAMS, it therefore is objective and so external to him! The false prophet receives his message as it rises out of his heart and so it is subjective and internal!

In other words, the false prophet has an “impression” and so a “message” that arises from the compulsion of his heart. In fact, this characterizes ALL ancient literature when it came to the work of the seer, magician, witch, or sorcerer. In contrast, the genuine prophet received a message that was communicated to him from God through objective, external forms of revelation! O. Palmer Robertson commenting on Numbers 12 wrote this:

Although the context indicates that distinctive favour will be shown to Moses in that God will speak to him ‘face to face,’ there can be no discounting of the fact that all the prophets will receive their message by a revelatory experience. That is the meaning of the Word’s coming through ‘dream’ and ‘vision.’ (Robertson, 1993, p. 7)

Now based upon this, let me read to you some of the words of self-professed, modern day “prophets.” You tell me, do they resembled the Biblical gift or the mode of reception typically seen in the false prophets, witches, and seers of old? In 1989 when Oral Roberts closed down his Tulsa-based City of Faith medical center, this is what he said:

As clearly in my spirit as I've ever heard Him, the Lord gave me an impression. 'You and your partners have merged prayer and medicine for the entire world, for the church world and for all generations,' He said. 'It is done.' (MacArthur, 1993, p. 47)

Larry Lea, a popular charismatic author and pastor, wrote this:

Recently, when I was in Chicago preparing to preach, the Lord's Spirit came upon me. He spoke in my heart: 'I'm going to tell you now the name of the strongman over this nation.' (MacArthur, 1993, p. 49)

Jack Deere, "Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today Through Prophecies," wrote this:

I believe God speaks to us through impression all the time, but that many Christians have trained themselves to ignore their impressions. We associate them with feelings, and we've been taught that feelings are bad, or at best unreliable... The rationalism of Western tradition has long been offended by knowledge that bypasses the mind. Our proud minds tell us that everything worth knowing must pass through our intellects. Sometimes God has to remove our confidence in our intelligence before he can talk with us. (Deere, 1998, p. 154)

Ellen G. White, cofounder of the Seventh Day Adventist church and believed by many to have been a modern day prophetess, wrote this:

...those whose hearts are in harmony with truth and duty will search the Scriptures with a heart prepared to receive divine impressions. The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole, but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread. (White, 2000, pp. 19-21)²

It should be obvious that if the true gift of prophecy were operative in our day, these men and women could not have the gift NOT ONLY do they not meet the tests of a prophet which we discussed last time BUT they also testify to receiving a "prophetic word" in a way that is inconsistent with the Biblical mode of reception! From this we conclude that there are no prophets today. Accordingly it behooves us to be familiar with and so feed upon the prophetic witness that God has given in the Bible!

Now having looked at its mode of reception, once received what is its mode of expression? For this we go to two verses: Exodus 4:14-16 and Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

Prophecy's Mode of Expression: Forthtelling

Exodus 4 finds Moses standing in the presence of God before the burning bush where God

² This source can be accessed at <http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/rev-egw.html> Ellen G. White's Understanding of How God Speaks

instructs him as to the prophet's upcoming ministry in Egypt. Because of his speech problem, Moses shrinks back and so requests that God send someone else (Exodus 4 :10-13). Our passage picks up at this point:

Exodus 4:14-16, "Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, 'Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. And you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him.'"

This text captures the essence of the work of the prophet: Forthtelling the Word of God. As Aaron was to be Moses' mouth, his prophet, he was to speak Moses' words! And it is this requirement that we see throughout the Bible when it comes to the prophet: The office/gift of prophecy is primarily concerned with authoritatively speaking forth the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you [Moses], and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

This is why we reject the notion today that the gift of prophecy remains only in the form of forthtelling. The forthtelling of the prophetic gift is revelation! If forthtelling remains today, the canon is not closed! Thus we read of the commissioning of Isaiah:

Isaiah 6:8-9a, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' And He said, 'Go, and tell this people...'"

Thus as we have seen, the prophet would be measured by his faithfulness to communicate accurately God's word.

Jeremiah 23:28, "'The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth...'"

O. Palmer Robertson wrote concerning Exodus 4:14-16:

"Mouth to mouth" the descriptive phrase underscores the immediacy of the relationship that exists between God's Word and the prophetic word. The divine revelation goes directly from the mouth of God to the mouth of the prophet. The word of the prophet is the very Word of God. God does not communicate his revelation to the prophet 'thought to thought' or 'mind to mind', but 'mouth to mouth.' Prophetism, by definition, is concerned not merely with the reception of the Word of God, but with its communication as well. (Robertson, 1993, p. 6)

And so, the primary mode of expression when it comes to the gift of prophecy is forthtelling God's Word. Once again, we can't put too much emphasis on this a prophet is NOT one who has "A" word from the Lord RATHER, a prophet is one who has "THE" word from the Lord. As he speaks, he speaks forth Scripture.

And from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we learn that this “speaking forth of Scripture” is given for the fourfold purpose

- Teaching, instructing God’s people on account of their ignorance or immature thinking.
- Reproving that is, stopping God’s people from going down the path of error.
- Correcting, which is restoring God’s people to the proper path.
- Training in righteousness, that is, the service of wisdom, enabling God’s people to live in light of the truth of God’s word.

Now forthtelling is the primary significance of the office/gift of prophecy. Yet, this is not to say that the gift of prophecy doesn’t include foretelling. That is, the prediction of future events which as we’ve seen was given as a means to test the genuineness of the prophet.

Prophecy’s Mode of Expression: Foretelling

Deuteronomy 18:22, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

Indeed, the prediction of future events was a necessary part of the true gift of prophecy. In contexts of national sin, the prophet often times would foretell future events to bring about repentance and faith (cf. Jonah 1, 3). In contexts of difficulty and despair, the prophet often would foretell future events to strengthen and encourage God’s people (cf. Isaiah 9). Yet in and through it all it is important to note that it too was nothing less than a revelation of God on level with the rest of Scripture.

Once again we must compare what is occurring today with the true gift. And when we do this, we discover that what is occurring today in the name of prophecy is a sham. Rather than receiving the word of God and using foretelling as a means to verify the validity of the prophetic word or to encourage, warn, and/or rebuke, as Isaiah did (cf. the entire book). Rather than proclaiming the Word of God to clarify questions of doctrinal error, to prevent God’s people from going astray, or to train God’s people in the life of righteousness; as did James (Acts 2) or Paul (read anyone of his epistles), and many others (general epistles). The “Gift of Prophecy” as exercised in our day not only lacks authority and direction, but it is so vague and broad that it is impossible to judge its validity!

Think about it! If what is occurring today is a Biblical expression of the true gift of prophecy God is still speaking as He did in Bible times. The Gift of Prophecy primarily is a forthtelling of the Word of God. Then in light of the mess the church is in today; theologically, morally, socially, we would expect some clarifying statements as in the Bible when prophets spoke to teach, rebuke, or correct! And yet, the prophecy movement today has produced no such clarity, just confusion!³

³ There could be no better illustration of this than an article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal. In 1993, God

Thomas Edgar's criticism of the modern "Prophecy Movement" is well taken, he writes this:

Apparently the Holy Spirit is not concerned with communicating any information to correct all [the theological differences plaguing the church today], many of which are crucial and some of which are incorrect. All this direct communication with the Spirit has apparently done nothing to correct even basic errors. It has not produced unity among charismatics regarding the nature and purpose of many of the gifts. This movement has solved no theological issue [and has] produced no advance in biblical knowledge. Would such an effusion of the genuine Spirit of God produce so little?⁴

Gary North wrote of the modern prophecy movement:

It's more like safe entertainment, like snake handling with non-poisonous snakes. We hear... pseudo-King James English, but devoid of any specific content: 'I the Lord telleth thee that I want my people to be holy. My people hath departed from me, etc. etc.' It is non-authoritative and non-specific. It is never, 'Pastor Jones has been committing adultery with Mrs. Smith for the last three months. If this is not dealt with soon by the elders, I will bring a plague on all of you.' *That* would be prophetic.⁵

If the true Gift of Prophecy were operative today, we would expect, by way of Forthtelling, authoritative proclamations designed to clarify, rebuke, unite, and/or build up the kingdom of God- just as the gift was exercised in the Bible. Yet this manifestation of the Spirit is amazingly absent from a movement that claims to be a Biblical expression of prophecy.

From all of this I hope you can see how much we need the sixteen books of the Old Testament Prophetic witness today! Again, as New Covenant Christians we live in the Messianic Kingdom of God. Yet so little instruction is given in the New Testament as to what this means because such instruction is assumed and/or presumed.

Why is that? Because by the time you arrive at the era of the New Testament God had already given sixteen books of instruction to His people on what it means to live as citizens of a divine Kingdom. Now all of this brings us to one more important characteristic of the true gift of prophecy which we touched on briefly last time, prophecy's verification.

supposedly told Pastor Chuck Bell of the San Jose Vineyard Church to lead his congregation to Eastern Orthodoxy (Bell was a recognized prophet in the Prophecy Movement). The folly of this claim is seen when you understand that Eastern Orthodoxy has anathematized the Gospel. Let me quote from a publication of an **Eastern Orthodox Church**-speaking of protestant Christianity of which we would be included, it says, "Turning to Protestants, listening to their 'missionaries', getting so-called baptism from them is a shame for a person; it is blasphemy, crime against faith, excommunication from the Church and Salvation, rejection of Christ our Lord!" (Quoted from a statement by Svyato-Upensky of the Men's Monastery of Odessa) This is on level with the warning which was sounded forth in Deut. 13 which speaks of false prophets counseling God's people to disobey God! Yet this happens all the time in the prophetic movement of our day!

⁴ "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* [Oct-Dec 1988], pg. 385.

⁵ Position Paper, May 1996.

Prophecy's verification, 1 Kings 18:36-39.

On account of Elijah's ministry, King Ahab of Israel was moved to anger (1 Kings 18:17). Thus when he saw Elijah, he rebuked him for the trouble that had come upon Israel (Israel was in the three year drought that Elijah had previously predicted; cf. 1 Kings 17:1). Elijah responded to the rebuke of the king saying that the drought was the result of Ahab's apostasy in following Baal (1 Kings 18:18).

Now to prove the authenticity of the worship/religion of Yahweh, Elijah proposed a competition between himself and 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19ff). They were to prepare a sacrifice and pray to their God. Whichever deity sent fire to consume the sacrifice would be declared the only true God. As you know, the Baal prophets failed, no miraculous sign would accompany them. That brings us to our text.

1 Kings 18:36-39, "Then it came about at the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. [This is what is behind almost every power/miracle in the Bible: the verification of a prophet or an apostle! Elijah continued...] Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and *that* Thou hast turned their heart back again.' Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.'"

While this text is a testimony of the genuineness of Yahweh, nevertheless, it also gives us insight as to that which would VERIFY the validity of Elijah as a prophet of God, the miraculous. Elijah could have chosen any number of tests to VERIFY his prophetic claim, but he didn't. Instead he chose a test that required miraculous intervention on the part of God. Why? Because the ability to do the miraculous, "Miraculous Intervention" is the hallmark of all true prophets.

The validity of Moses as a Prophet partially rested on the SIGNS that he performed.

Exodus 4:1-2a, "Then Moses answered and said, 'What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, "The Lord has not appeared to you.'" And the Lord said to him, 'What is in your hand?'"

And the validity of Christ as THE PROPHET- the ultimate fulfillment of the promise in Deuteronomy 18:18, partially rested on the SIGNS that He performed.

Acts 10:38, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him."

Thus, when John question Christ as to His validity, Christ said this:

Matthew 11:4, "...Go and report to John what you hear and see..."

Now all of this together testifies as to that which VERIFIED the true prophet. The true prophet of God is one who is able to do incredible things, miraculous things. Now once and again we note that no such miracles are going on in the prophecy movements of today. Oh, people indeed are claiming healings. But none are of the sort seen in Scripture where:

- There was no hand, and now there is a hand.
- There was an untreatable hemorrhage, but now it is stopped.
- There was no life, but now the dead is living.

In light of this, we are right to suspect any today who might claim to be a prophet. First perform the miracle, and then we will listen to you! And listen we will!

I realize that the moment you say that no real miracles are taking place at the hands of prophets today someone immediately says, "But I know of one! And it was verified!" O.K. For the sake of discussion let's grant that a genuine miracle was performed at the hands of a supposed prophet today. But in this context let me give you two warnings; how about the other test we've discussed concerning foretelling the future? Have they met this test? Are they 100 percent accurate? And what about the final test of fidelity to the word of God? Is their teaching in accordance with Scripture?

Recall that God has said that in the last days there will be false prophets who will rise up and perform miracles (Mark 13:22)! In fact, these miracles will be so amazing that, if it were possible, some of God's children could be deceived (Mark 13:22).

In light of this, how then are we ultimately to discern between the true and false prophet? The false prophet- regardless of what he does- is one who either contradicts Scripture or leads people away from Scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5)! Let us take seriously the warning of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 23:31-32, "'Behold I am against the prophets,' declares the Lord, 'who use their tongues and declare, "The Lord declares." Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,' declares the Lord, 'and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,' declares the Lord."

In light of this I hope you can say with me this morning: we need the witness, warning, and teaching of the sixteen Old Testament prophets. They truly are the epistles on Kingdom Living.

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About the Preacher

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