

God Spoke Through a Man

For 50 years Bill Hamon has taught Christians how to use the gift of prophecy. But those who speak for God, he says, must learn to submit to His dealings.

Bill Hamon was rough around the edges and wet behind the ears when he arrived in Sacramento, California, in January 1973. He had only \$5 in his pocket. No one had paid his way for this missionary venture, and he didn't come expecting a big offering. In fact he had spent \$149 of his own money for a six-week Greyhound bus ticket to get there.

Eager to preach to anybody, the Oklahoma-born Hamon was pleased to find a crowd of 85 people gathered in the small church. He gave them his best sermon, but as the congregation lingered at the altar that evening Hamon sensed God wanted to say more. Something unusual was stirring inside him.

"Lord, do you want me to prophesy over everyone here?" he prayed silently.

"Yeah, boy, let 'er rip," Hamon says God told him.

Suddenly a spiritual eruption occurred. Hamon lined everyone up near the front of the church and began laying hands on them one by one. He prophesied over each individual in forceful, rapid-fire fashion.

At 2 a.m. he was still laying hands on people at the altar. When the service ended half an hour later he had delivered personal messages from the Lord to everyone in the room.

It was not so much that Hamon's ministry was born at that moment. It was uncorked.

"It was like God opened up an artesian well inside of me," Hamon says of that night, which became a defining moment for his ministry. "A strong prophetic anointing just bubbled up. When I looked at a person, I could see their calling, their anointing and what they were going through."

Hamon might as well have stuck his finger in an electric socket. Although he was familiar with the gift of prophecy and had taught on the subject in Bible college, the marathon prophecy session in Sacramento jolted him to the core and opened a spiritual floodgate.

From that moment, prophecy came quick and easy, rushing through him like a river. Today, at age 70, Hamon is celebrating 50 years of ministry marked by such prophecies. He has delivered prophetic messages to more than 50,000 people and has written eight books about prophecy. One of them is available in 12 languages.

More active in ministry than ever, Hamon now oversees a growing network of churches from his base in the Florida panhandle town of Santa Rosa Beach. And his dream is to equip an army of Christians to hear God's voice and speak His prophetic word with the same confidence he discovered 31 years ago during that unusual meeting in California.

Flowing in the Anointing

Hamon didn't understand the phenomenon he experienced that night in Sacramento, but he labeled it "the prophetic flow."

When the invisible current begins to rush through him, he typically addresses total strangers, often giving them startling details about their past struggles, current concerns or future ministries. Information pours into his brain and out of his mouth faster than he can contain it. He knows the words come from the Holy Spirit.

At first Hamon assumed the California experience was a sovereign act of God that might never be repeated. But a few weeks later it happened again in Susquehanna Valley, Pennsylvania, where he prophesied to 150 people until 3 a.m.

“We just got people in a row and I went one by one,” Hamon remembers. “The people were so hungry. It was like in the days of [the Old Testament prophet] Amos, when there was a famine for the word of the Lord.”

There has been no famine for the prophetic word in Hamon’s life since that time. One time he spoke personal messages from the Lord to 700 people individually over a five-hour period. He has prophesied to all types of people, from housewives and blue-collar laborers to pastors and government officials.

His prophecies have triggered unusual, miraculous results. Once he accurately prophesied to a politician in Louisiana, predicting his re-election, and to former Filipino President Fidel Ramos. When Hamon rebuked the spirit of death over a terminally ill man in Panama City, Florida, the man was healed and became eligible to buy a life insurance policy a few months later.

Hamon also has prophesied accurately to more than 100

infertile couples, declaring that they would have children. One infertile woman he prayed for in West Palm Beach, Florida, soon conceived and gave birth to a girl. Hamon still keeps in touch with the family today.

And Hamon doesn't just give prophecies—he receives them too. In fact when he receives a prophecy from someone else, he records it, transcribes it and keeps the document in a notebook. He currently has 2,500 pages of such messages.

Once a woman Hamon didn't know prayed for him and offered a most unusual utterance: "The book. The book. The book. The book. The book. The book. The book. The book. The book. The book." Hamon said it was her peculiar declaration that prompted him to write his first book, *The Eternal Church*, which was published in 1981.

Although the gift of prophecy comes naturally for Hamon and is widely embraced among charismatic and Pentecostal Christians worldwide, the phenomenon is still viewed with caution in some church circles and has sparked plenty of controversy. Some believers who aren't comfortable with the supernatural dimension regard prophecy as occultic or New Age. Even some charismatics avoid prophecy because it has been abused and misused.

Popular charismatic author John Beveré, for example, argues in his book *Thus Saith the Lord?* that personal prophecy shouldn't be practiced because too many prophets who claim to hear God deliver faulty messages and aren't held accountable for their mistakes. Charismatic prophet Rick Joyner publicly denounced Beveré's book after it was published in 1999, and Hamon sided with Joyner—arguing that the misuse of a spiritual gift doesn't give Christians the right to throw it out.

Hamon claims that “99.9 percent” of the prophecies he has delivered have been accurate. But when he has “missed it” he blames his error on the fact that he knew the person and may have held preconceived notions about their situation. That’s why he avoids giving prophetic directives to his own family.

In his book *Prophets and Personal Prophecy*, which has sold 200,000 copies, Hamon offers guidelines to help people steer clear of the many weird, wacky and destructive ways people have misused the gift—often because they maintain no connection to a church or disregard spiritual authority.

Hamon does not endorse such freelance prophesying. “I tell anyone in prophetic ministry today: Prophets should be ladies and gentlemen. And they should be submitted to a local pastor,” he says.

But Hamon also seeks to demystify prophecy so that average Christians can experience the joy of hearing God and speaking what He tells them. Always eager to empower others, Hamon doesn’t want anyone to think that prophecy is only for the super-spiritual or the elite few. After all, he points out, the Bible predicts in Joel 2:28 that all kinds of people—men, women and those in the lowest socioeconomic classes—will be prophetic in the last days.

The Making of a Mouthpiece

Prophets in the Bible rarely came from glamorous places, even if they ended up speaking in kings’ palaces. Hamon’s humble Oklahoma upbringing made him a perfect candidate for this unusual profession.

Raised on a cotton and peanut farm near Boswell, he gave his life to Jesus in 1950 on his 16th birthday during an old-fashioned Pentecostal meeting. A female evangelist affiliated with the Assemblies of God led the service, which was held in a crude structure made of leafy tree limbs. The venue had a sawdust floor and an altar made of boards, and a kerosene lantern gave just enough light for Hamon to make his way to the front where he knelt and repented.

"I felt clean and pure," he remembers. "I got so happy I started laughing, but then I was so thankful I started crying. I worshiped the Lord that night until 2 a.m."

Hamon did not have to wait months or years to experience Pentecostal manifestations. He spoke in tongues for 45 minutes on the night of his conversion, even though he had never heard of the practice and no one had prompted him to do it.

Coming from an unchurched family, Hamon had never read about glossolalia (supernaturally speaking in unknown tongues), the gift of prophecy or any other spiritual gift mentioned in the New Testament. The only Bible in his house didn't have a cover, and the book of Genesis had been torn out of it. After Hamon gave his life to Christ he had to ride his horse five miles to attend church.

"I was just a farm boy who was called by God," Hamon says with an Oklahoma twang that is just as thick today as it was in his teen years. "But from that moment I felt God wanted me to be His man."

This deep sense of calling propelled Hamon to leave home and

attend a Pentecostal Bible college in Oregon. He sold encyclopedias and worked in a hardware store to pay his bills, and he rarely ate supper the whole time he was in school.

“Every month I started a 40-day fast. I got so skinny,” he says with a laugh. His longest fast lasted 10 days. During that period he cut his spiritual teeth by reading the Bible along with books such as Franklin Hall’s *Atomic Power With God Through Prayer and Fasting*.

Hamon’s early years in ministry, beginning with a pastorate in Toppenish, Washington, coincided with the Latter Rain movement—a significant period in American Pentecostal history in which spiritual gifts such as prophecy and healing were emphasized. Though some Latter Rain churches moved into excess (and the movement was branded heretical by the Assemblies of God), Hamon sought to recover the genuine truths stressed by Latter Rain ministers while holding tightly to biblical integrity.

When Hamon first began his preaching ministry, Pentecostals treated prophecy like an exotic gift, and they invented bizarre rules to administer it. For example, those who had the gift were expected to speak in King James English. Prophets seemed all the more peculiar when they delivered a message to a congregation that said, “Yea, thus saith the Lord, incline thine heart to Me.”

Says Hamon: “Back in those days, they had the idea that prophets were supposed to be wild-eyed and fanatical.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, some Pentecostals would invite prophets to give messages to people individually. But they

practiced a strict form of protocol, requiring that anyone who was to receive one of the prophecies had to fast for three days before the church service. They also limited the number of people who could receive these words from the Lord to five or 10 per service, and no one under 18 was allowed to receive such ministry.

After Hamon's experience in Sacramento, however, he could no longer go along with the man-made rules. He had been uncorked. His gift flowed too fast and too furiously to be controlled in such arbitrary fashion. He was eager to minister to anyone, of any age, for as long as the supernatural river inside him would flow.

Besides that, he prophesied in modern vernacular, avoiding the thees and thous of his King James language colleagues. To Hamon, the gift of prophecy was not an antiquated tool from the past but a contemporary weapon that God wanted to use in the here and now.

"It has taken us from the 1960s until today to make the gift of prophecy acceptable in the church," he adds. Hamon says nothing thrills him more than to know that God is raising up an army of prophets who will hear a relevant message from the Lord and declare it not only in churches but also in the secular marketplace.

Tested by God

Though Hamon still has the demeanor of an Oklahoma country boy, even at age 70, he now has a worldwide vision and is viewed as a spiritual father by many, both inside and outside his network. His passion for spreading the gospel—shared by

his wife of 49 years, Evelyn—is most obvious in his office at Christian International Family Church, where he keeps a collection of lions made of pewter, clay, malachite, crystal, wood and stone. He even has stuffed lion heads from India and South Africa.

The lion, he says, is symbolic of Jesus as the Lion of Judah who is aggressively claiming the nations for God's glory. Hamon's passion is to instill in today's prophets that same zeal.

He certainly has passed it on to his family. All three of the Hamon children are in ministry: Tim, 47, with wife Karen, runs the Christian International (CI) office; Tom, 44, pastors the 600-member Christian International Family Church with his wife, Jane; and Sherilyn, 43, and husband Glenn Miller are traveling prophets.

Hamon is thrilled, on one hand, that prophetic ministry has become so common today. CI has ordained 700 people, many of whom function primarily as prophets. He also hosts conferences on prophetic ministry, preaching alongside well-known younger prophets including Chuck Pierce, Cindy Jacobs and Kim Clement.

"I thank God that Bishop Bill Hamon has been a father to prophets throughout the world," Pierce told Charisma. "He has endured and persevered past criticism, unbelief and religiosity to encourage and activate the prophetic gift in the church."

Hamon appreciates such affirmation. But he also is concerned that today's prophets might go off track if they don't heed the guidelines he has emphasized for years.

He constantly stresses that those who are called by God must pass through a series of fiery tests.

"All Christian must go through the fire," Hamon told Charisma. "We are destined for processing. And the greater the calling, the greater the process."

For Hamon that process involved a series of crushing disappointments that he says "killed" his ego. The first one occurred in the early 1960s when he had to lay down ministry and take a secular job—at the same time that Evelyn was almost permanently disabled in a serious car accident. The second blow came in 1979 when he lost some property he had planned to use to build a church.

Hamon went into a six-month depression after that financial setback. "It was hell for a while," he says. "I was in an Elijah cave. I just crawled into a pit of despair in my own house."

The third trial came in 1981 when Hamon's niece was killed in a car wreck while he and Evelyn were traveling with her. Evelyn told Hamon that day: "I feel like I've been skinned alive."

Hamon believes that all men and women called to speak for God must pass through such ordeals in order to develop the character needed to handle the responsibility of carrying God's message. Those who don't want to be tested, he says, shouldn't consider the job.

"God spoke to me after I walked through these things," Hamon says. "God said: 'You didn't lose anything. [These trials] are

the tuition I paid for your maturity and wisdom. I had to bring you to this place of death. You would never have been able to be a father to the prophetic if you had not passed this test. You didn't come out with bitterness, resentment or the smell of smoke.'"

That is perhaps the richest legacy that Bill Hamon leaves us. Though his writings and tapes are used today to train thousands of Christians to hear God's voice, his forceful challenge to embrace surrender and sacrifice will echo through the church long after he is gone.

J. Lee Grady is editor of Charisma. He interviewed Bill Hamon in April. For more information about Bill Hamon's ministry, call 800-388-5308 or log on to the Web at .