

6 More Principles to Discern New Testament Prophets

Note: This is Part 2 of a two-part series. To read the first six signs of true prophets, read Part 1 [here](#).

In this hour where so many are calling themselves prophets, I thought it would be good to do a little teaching on what the Bible teaches about prophets.

This is by no means exhaustive, and I am sure some may disagree. But it is a subject with which we should be familiar. The first six of these 12 principles can be found in this previous article. Here are the final six:

- 7. Prophecy is more than predicting things that come to pass.** I heard a prophecy about a cure or vaccine for coronavirus coming from Israel, but I read articles about that six weeks ago. It is in the news. Prophecy is never for the purpose of simply predicting. That is what psychics do. Just getting it right is not biblical prophecy. The reason Agabus was shown the famine was so the church could collect funds for the saints in Jerusalem. Prophecy has a purpose; it comes to “edif[y] the church” and is “for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3-4).

Prophecy comes to encourage us when everything else says the opposite. David’s prophecy that he would be king was not needed when he killed the giant, but during the decade in which he was running from Saul. It gave him hope and strength. Joseph needed an angel to tell him how Miriam got pregnant. The other Joseph in Egypt didn’t just interpret Pharaoh’s dream, but had supernatural wisdom on how to manage the coming famine. So just saying, “I see such and such happening in the future” is not what we see from prophets in the Bible.

- 8. Independent prophets giving words to the nation is not seen in New Testament.** No *one lone prophet* should be speaking for the Lord to the nation(s) during a pandemic. Prophets should consult with apostles and other prophets, praying and submitting words to each other first, as in Acts 13 and 15. There is no such thing as independent ministries in Acts, and there is no such thing as unaccountable leaders. Even Paul submitted to James and the elders in Acts 21.

Because we have acted independently, one well-known prophet's word is now playing on an atheistic liberal group's website. They are mocking him (and us) because he seemed to say that the coronavirus would have no great effect in the US. Since that prophecy was given, more than 22,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, and more than one-half million are infected, as the U.S. has now overtaken Italy as the country with the most coronavirus deaths. In fact, there are three times as many coronavirus patients in New York State alone (461,601), than any country! So, while it does appear, thank God, that progress is being made, it would be silly to say that America got a reprieve. This brings reproach on the gospel and keeps people from taking us seriously. Another prophesied a heat wave on Easter to burn up the virus; but instead the U.S. got deadly tornadoes. I have some more thoughts on this, but that is for another day.

New Testament prophets *primarily* function in the local church, not on a national stage. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 focus on prophecy *in the congregation*. There is no teaching on giving words to a nation. Clearly God still speaks to nations—now is definitely a time where we need to hear His voice. But something is amiss in regard to *order* when national prophets are prophesying different things.

- 9. There is little accountability when prophets give incorrect prophetic words that alter people's life decisions.** A pastor told how his parents moved from

California because a well-known prophet said an earthquake was coming. The earthquake did not happen, and the prophet has never repented. This is what happens when you have “Lone Ranger” prophets with big platforms. We simply do not see this in the New Testament.

When this is all said and done, leaders in the apostolic/prophetic movement should go through the words given through the media (Facebook/email/news outlets) and check to see that which came to pass and that which did not. While we do not stone those who make mistakes, there should be loving accountability and soul-searching. Prophets who give false words should be willing to sit with other leaders and process, in the fear of the Lord, how that happened.

10. Prophecy from humans is filtered through imperfections of humans. All prophecy is filtered through our emotions, theology, hurts, victories, past and so on. It is very subjective, which is why we must test all prophecy (1 Thess. 5:20-21). The Word of God, on the other hand, is not subjective and has no negative experiences or hurts that can cloud it. It thus becomes the first standard by which we seek to test prophecy, and the second is by the witness of other prophetic people.

This has to do with theology too. If your theology is off, your prophecies may be as well. If you don't believe believers can suffer, then how can you prophesy that someone is going to suffer? If you don't believe in judgment, you cannot prophesy judgment. And for those who think that all New Testament prophecy is rosy, the only two examples we have were warnings: one about a famine and the other that Paul was going to be persecuted in Jerusalem.

This is all the more reason to process national words with a team of trusted leaders.

11. The witness of the Spirit: The Old Testament prophets (and saints) could not test a word by the “witness” of the Holy Spirit in their spirit. This is the primary way that the Spirit speaks to most believers—through an inner witness. The Old Testament prophet had a high level of authority. Again, just imagine Nathan confronting the king of Israel. People were very dependent on the prophet. They didn’t go home and pray about Jeremiah’s word. Look how Moses reacted to the golden calf affair:

“Then he took the calf which they had made and burned it in the fire, ground it to powder, and scattered it on the water, and made the children of Israel drink it” (Ex. 32:20)

Imagine your pastor trying to do that!

The Old Testament saint could not weigh the word against the Bible either. For a long time it was not written and even after it was, it was not accessible to each person. Old Testament saints were very reliant on the prophet.

So the New Testament prophet does not need the same level of authority as Elijah or Moses because.

Each individual believer has the indwelling Spirit. We have the word of God.

12. Warning: After Paul lays out his very clear teaching on prophecy, he makes it clear that if you disobey or reject his teaching you are not a prophet.

“I anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing you is a command of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant” (1 Cor. 14:37-38).

This is a good picture of the fact that prophets were not to minister outside of apostolic oversight. Paul *the apostle*

brings his apostolic authority to bear on this matter of prophecy, prophets and order in a New Testament worship service. There is a reason that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, lists apostles in the congregations above prophets. Prophets must be under authority for their own good and the good of their hearers. The apostle does not possess as flamboyant a gift as the prophet, but he has the wisdom to guide the prophet in a team setting.

Note: John and the two witnesses are exceptions, and for good reason. John was writing end-time Bible prophecy as an apostolic Scripture writer, and the two witnesses of Revelation 11 do not come in the form of Ephesians 4:11 congregational prophets but in the likeness of the Hebrew prophets. There is a reason John said no one could add to his words (see Rev. 22:18)—to stop any would-be prophets from seeking to write Scripture in the future.

Final Thoughts

I love prophecy and prophetic ministry. I believe in it! I also believe that we to sharpen our theology on prophecy and prophets and have deeper accountability so we can serve the body better. We need to hear God in our day. {eoa}

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