

6 Principles to Discern New Testament Prophets

Note: This is the first of two articles. Six more principles will be revealed Monday.

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.

1. Difference between Old and New Testament prophets: Team.

We do not see national and international prophets *that function apart from apostolic teams* in the New Testament. Acts 13 was a gathering of leaders in which God spoke prophetically. Same with Acts 15. Acts 11 speaks of Agabus prophesying about a famine, but they were a *team* sent from Jerusalem to Antioch. The word was processed with other apostolic leaders, and a fund was created.

But what if he had been wrong? What if people made plans based on an erroneous word? That is why prophecy given on a national level is so dangerous, *if it is out of order*. If Agabus were wrong on some level, the other leaders would have picked it up and corrected him in a loving way with the same authority.

In the Old Testament, the prophet had tremendous authority as the voice of God. In the New Testament, Yeshua gives five leadership gifts that work *together* to equip the people of God.

Not as Significant

The word “prophet” occurs 30 times in Acts: 25 times it refers

to the Hebrew prophets and their writings, and only four times does it refer to New Testament prophets. This leads me to believe that New Testament prophets are different from the Old Testament prophets and do not function exactly in the same way. Here are some examples.

–The prophetic bar is not set at 100% accuracy, as it was in Deuteronomy. There is no stoning for a wrong prophecy (If there were, we would have a lot of dead prophets on our hands!). Paul was not encouraging the Corinthians to risk their lives by saying “For you can all prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:31).

–New Testament prophets do not write Scripture.

–They are not isolated like Elijah and others.

–All prophecy is submitted to the written Word.

–Prophecy from modern prophets must not contradict end-time prophecy in the Word of God.

–And modern prophecy should be judged by other leaders before being released to a wide audience.

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others *should weigh carefully* what is said. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets (1 Cor. 14:29, 32).

Paul was not advocating for the *Wild Wild West* of prophecy that we often see today—where prophets release words over nations with little counsel and often no accountability, but rather prophetic utterances were subject to being checked by other prophets and apostles for both accuracy and orthodoxy. Again, *accuracy* and *orthodoxy*.

I think it is safe to say that the average New Testament saint has a massive upgrade in his or her ability to hear from God through the Spirit, and therefore is not so dependent on the prophet.

2. Prophets need even more humility. Moses was a prophet, but he told God, “Send someone else.” Jeremiah didn’t want to prophesy either. *Eager prophets* open themselves up to deception. Moses was qualified only after 40 years of hardship and was the meekest, most humble man on earth. I saw a young prophet who uses the hashtag #propheticmafia. That may be cool and trendy, but for me, it makes a mockery of the prophetic—especially considering there are few things more evil and corrupt than the Mafia—(I know from experience!). It lacks the sacredness that God’s prophetic word deserves.

Because the prophetic gift is so spectacular, it requires more humility than the other ascension gifts (Eph. 4:11). You have been entrusted with something powerful and attractive. It comes with many temptations. We have all heard of prophets falling into sexual sin, sometimes even using the gift to open that door. This gift can take someone from obscurity to stardom overnight. Not many should want to be a prophet, but if you are, make sure you maintain the heart of God and are under authority.

A true prophet carries God’s heart. Jeremiah was broken in tears. Tears, not proving that they are right or merely using their gift to *build their platform*, are a mark of a genuine prophet. A mentor of mine shared of being up all night praying for his congregation not to fall apart during a crisis as if he were praying for the life of his daughter. At times he didn’t know if he was praying for his actual daughter not to die or the congregation.

3. Prophecy is not like a horoscope.

1. Where do we see words in the New Testament that say a certain year is the year of “fill in the blank”? The year 2020 is based on the Gregorian Calendar, not the Biblical one and even the Jewish New Year that people like to use is *actually the half year*. Rosh Hashana is the first day of the

seventh month, not the first. The actual Jewish or Hebrew New Year was a few weeks ago on the first of Nissan, 14 days before Passover. We do not see prophets in the Old or New Testament giving words connected to new years or months. *I am not saying it cannot happen*; I am simply saying that is not the norm in Scripture. Should we expect new year's prophecies three times a year to correlate with these three new years? On the other hand, I could see God using man-made signposts, if you will, in order to speak to us. They spoke of cubits in the Bible, but if God spoke to me about measurements, I would imagine He would use feet, or even meters (after 17 years in Israel), not cubits.

One of the reasons I don't believe in horoscopes is because there are more than 12 types of people on earth. They live in different regions and go through different life struggles. What God may be saying to those in Papua, New Guinea, could be different than what He may be saying to those in Nigeria. Each person in any given area is unique. The same year that might be someone's year of breakthrough could be another one's year of sorrow.

4. **Issachar—Signs of the Times:** A big part of prophecy is being an *Issacharian*. The sons of Issachar were able to read the signs of the times. A student of Scripture would immediately go to Matthew 24 and Luke 21 in the midst of this plague, where He speaks about end-time plagues. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for not being able to *read the signs of the times*. So many are prophesying about America returning quickly to prosperity, but not turning to the Scriptures to see what God might have already said prophetically through COVID-19. Maybe God is preparing us for something?
5. **New Prophets expose sin and wrong motives.** There is no question that Paul was a prophet, as was Peter. While

Agabus and Silas were the only named prophets, we can see the apostles acting as prophets. Before Paul was an apostle, he was with a gathering of “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1b). Indeed he was one of those prophets.

When Paul encountered Elymas the sorcerer, he exposed his sin and his evil motives.

“Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, stared at him and said, ‘You son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and of all fraud, will you not cease perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now, look! The hand of the Lord is against you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.’ Immediately mist and darkness fell on him, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand” (Acts 13:9-11).

We see a similar thing with Simon the sorcerer. However, there is one big difference. *He was a believer, having been baptized by Philip.* He would not be the first believer who wanted to use the Holy Spirit to make money. See how the Lord deals with him, as Peter exposes his sin and his motives.

“Peter said to him, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could purchase the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor share in this matter, *for your heart is not right before God.* Therefore repent of your wickedness, and ask God if perhaps the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. *For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity* (Acts 8:20-23, emphasis added).

As a prophet he was able to see in his heart. Now, let’s be clear—sinful judgmental attitudes can often be mistaken for the Holy Spirit. Jesus forbade us to judge other’s motives. The only exception is when God reveals someone sin or motives prophetically.

Paul shows how prophecy can expose sin, and be redemptive in

the process.

“But if all prophesy and there comes in one who does not believe or one unlearned, he is convinced by all and judged by all. Thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Notice they are convicted as the *secrets of their hearts* of revealed.

6. What does it mean to prophesy from your soul? What is so interesting about Jeremiah’s words concerning those prophets, who spoke of peace only, is that he never calls them *false prophets*. These were real prophets, prophesying what they wanted to be true. I believe that this is a problem in our day. I have heard so many words about revival coming and 99.9% of them never materialize because they come from desire, not the mouth of God. (I am super pro-revival, having come out of the Brownsville Revival.)

In Scripture, when there are two sets of prophets prophesying contradicting messages, it is normally the ones with bad news that are right. Why? Because it is easy to prophesy good news. It takes little courage to say, “God loves you, and everything is going to be OK.” It takes courage to point your finger at King David and call him a murdering adulterer, as Nathan did.

In the case of Micaiah (1 Kings 22), the text says that Jehoshaphat asked for *a prophet of Yahweh*, seeming to say that the other prophets represented another god. But in Hebrew, it says, “Isn’t there here *another* prophet of the Lord.” That is the Hebrew word אַחֵר or “another.”

In other words, the prophets who were wrong were also prophets of Yahweh. Also, in verse 8, it does not say, “There is *still* one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord.” It says in Hebrew, “there is *one more* prophet through whom we can

inquire of Yahweh” meaning Micaiah was an additional prophet of Yahweh. These were true prophets who had been corrupted.

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