

# It's Time To Upgrade The Prophetic

**Why the prophetic movement has become hit-and-miss—and what we can do about it**

When I came to Christ in 1970, America was already prewired with end-of-the-world forebodings. Nuclear war seemed inevitable, as Barry McGuire's dire hit "Eve of Destruction" warned. Revolution and lawlessness were spreading everywhere. Yes, the "times" were certainly "a-changin,'" as Bob Dylan sang, and indeed so were we. From the rapture-ready hippie revival of the Jesus Movement to Hal Lindsey's culture-shaping book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the charismatic movement emerged upon the world scene overstocked with prophetic anticipations.

Thus, our preoccupation with all things prophetic has been a kind of spiritual birthmark. It is a prominent characteristic of who we are as charismatic Christians. Indeed, the '70s produced at least eight major end-of-the-world warnings from prominent authors and various church groups. Other warnings came in the 1980s, punctuated by the book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. In the 1990s, especially with the approach of the year 2000 and the widespread computer failures expected from the Y2K "Millennium Bug," still more warnings came.

I do not doubt the sincerity of anyone who sounded the alarm prematurely. To me there is a difference between a false prophet and a wrong prophet. Yet when will we honestly look at this issue? False alarms have repeatedly misrepresented the Lord's coming over the last 40 years.

On the front end of these apocalyptic warnings, evangelists report significant benefits: increased participation in altar

calls and certainly more prayer and repentance among Christians who respond. Yet when the preannounced date passes uneventfully, the effect of being wrongly warned leaves many hearts hardened.

Meanwhile, the nonbelieving world observes the self-induced anxieties spilling from the evangelical world. In response, they fortify themselves against a religion that, to them, has symptoms of mental illness.

## **We Can Do Better**

Certainly God has an upgrade for our current version of prophetic ministry. I am not talking about diminishing our fear of God or losing sight of the very prophetic times we currently are in. But there are biblical procedures that need to be followed—guidelines that would increase prophetic accuracy and thus bring more glory to God.

First, let's remember that it was God who placed prophets in the church (see 1 Cor. 14). The power released by a humble, accurate prophet can be a revelation of the Lord Himself, one that causes people to fall on their faces in worship (see v. 25).

I often have been encouraged and guided by a prophetic word. Confirmed prophetic words, as Paul wrote Timothy, are spiritual weapons. They help us “fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18).

Yet there are boundaries. Writing as “a wise master builder,” Paul counseled, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge” (1 Cor. 14:29). The admonition to minister as “two or three” instead of as one person is an important safeguard. It tells us that no matter how spiritual we consider ourselves, we do not see the whole picture; we need others.

Jesus sent His disciples out in twos. He also spoke of the

power that is released when two or three disciples gathered in His name. Revelation also tells us that the last great prophetic move will be heralded by two prophets (not one) speaking and ministering together (Rev. 11).

Paul again repeats the principle of two or three in his second letter to the Corinthians: "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word [*rhema*] shall be established" (2 Cor. 13:1). It is important to note that when it comes to discerning an actual word from the Lord the best indicator a prophet has, typically, is a witness of an unseen reality; he does not have a completed "word from the Lord."

If we are honest, we'll admit there are times when prophets just miss it. By downgrading the weightiness of our communication to a "witness" instead of a "word," we save future problems for ourselves and those we minister to. We give God time.

Are you a prophet? Instead of saying, "Thus saith the Lord," it would be wiser and probably more true to say: "I have a witness for you. Let the Lord confirm it."

If you are being ministered to by a prophet and have any question about what is being said, give the Holy Spirit time to confirm His word through one or two more people (unless you have an immediate confirmation in your spirit that the word is God's).

What if you have a national ministry and believe you have a warning to issue? There may be exceptions to this, but I'd suggest you speak it first privately to your peers, as well as to the church leaders in the region where the warning applies. Let someone outside your local ministry team confirm it independently. Give God time to arrange a supernatural presentation of His will. The witness of two or three different national ministries, spoken independently yet confirmed supernaturally, is a powerful catalyst for faith.

The restraints I suggest are not to hamper the prophetic but to place prophets as background players on a stage where the Word of God is the featured star. One prophet may have a genuine warning yet miss completely the timing of his insight. Another ministry knows something will happen on a certain date but isn't sure of the details. Remember, when Paul urges us to "let the prophets speak," he also counseled, "and let the others judge" (1 Cor. 14:29, KJV). Do not be afraid to let your witness be judged.

Additionally, the witness of the prophetic should be measured against the truth of Scripture and the voice and motive of the Holy Spirit. The prophetic ministry is not a law unto itself but is presented as a humble, yet powerful revelation of Christ—one that is accountable to church authority.

If you have felt manipulated or wounded by false prophetic words, whether they concern the Lord's return or an imminent disaster or a personal word given to you, I pray you will not lose faith or become cynical. I urge you to heed Paul's word in 1 Thess. 5:20-21: "Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (NASB).

Remember also that just as we have had certain problems administering prophecy, so there were also problems in the first century. We are not unique.

Thus, I ask you to forgive those in the prophetic movement who, in their attempt to serve the Lord, may have misrepresented the will and timing of God.

Yes, there is a prophetic mess at times, but there are also blessings, as God's Word affirms:

"Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox" (Prov. 14:4, NKJV). Let's pray for a new prophetic anointing to fall.

## **Who Is the Antichrist?**

Finally, let me offer my view to understanding end-time events and the coming of the Lord. There was a time in the first century when the church in Thessalonica was being disturbed by a lie that Christians there had missed the rapture. In response, Paul gave us an important sequence of world-changing events that would precede the Lord's return.

He wrote: "Brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

Paul stated plainly that the day of the Lord won't come unless "the man of sin is revealed" first. The Antichrist will actually take his seat in "the temple of God." He will display himself as being God. These events will be open, irrefutable realities, not types and shadows, that will precede the Lord's return. They will not be cryptic; they will be open. One can still be pretribulation in his view of the rapture, but Paul says the Antichrist must be revealed first and that the revelation of the Antichrist will be unmistakable.

So, until the temple is restored in Israel and the Antichrist is revealed, we should be about the Father's business of winning the lost and building the church.

As for knowing when the end of the world is, for me the end of the world occurred the day I became a Christian. Of this date I am sure.

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