

# MINISTRY OF PROPHETS

## INTRODUCTION

(All scripture quotations in NIV unless otherwise stated)

The first prophecy ever recorded in the Bible is found in **Genesis 3:15**: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* Here God predicts the first coming of the Saviour who will undo the effects of the Fall and break Satan’s stolen authority in the earth.

The earliest recorded human prophecy in the Bible is found in **Jude 14, 15**: (quoting from the Book of Enoch): *“Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone...’”* Enoch predicted the second coming of the Saviour-King who will consummate the work that was accomplished in the first coming.

The principle of first mention says that the initial mention of a topic in the Bible encapsulates the heart of that topic. Thus we see that the core of prophecy points to the Messiah whose coming would restore all that was lost in the Garden of Eden. This accords with **Revelation 19:10(NKJV)**: *“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit (essence) of prophecy.”* This is the grand thrust of prophecy and thus also the ministry of prophets – to point to Jesus and the restoration of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. This is the ultimate HOPE of the gospel. The **Heart Of Prophecy Equals hope**.

Prophets work with apostles to bring about restoration now in the nations. Apostolic-Prophetic partnership is seen in the prophets Haggai and Zechariah working with Zerubbabel to restore the Temple, and also the prophet Malachi with Nehemiah to bring spiritual reformation to Israel.

The first mention of the word ‘prophet’ in the Bible occurs in **Genesis 20:7**: *“Now return the man’s wife, for he [Abraham] is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live.”* Note the key words: PRAY – PROPHET – LIVE. The prophet’s ministry is all about bringing restoration life and cannot be separated from prayer.

The final prophecy recorded in the Bible is found in **Revelation 22:20**: *“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’”*

## ORIGIN OF PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets and spanned the gap between them and Jesus, who was the prototype and perfect apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. When he ascended into heaven, he distributed these five office-gifts to his church, not to be embodied in one, but many.

**Ephesians 4:11 (NLT)**: *“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.”* Greek: ‘domata’ – gifts, presents.

These ministries are not grace gifts (charismata) – they are not open to everyone. They are Christ’s appointment to an office, although those so gifted are called by his grace not their own effort. After Pentecost Day these leadership ministries began to emerge, commencing with apostles.

## THE EARLY CHURCH

A few years after Pentecost **Acts 11:27-28** records: *“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.”* Agabus brought a clear prediction of a global event. Prophets will, from time to time, bring predictions concerning national and international events, both in the church and the world.

Some 8-10 years after Pentecost we read in **Acts 13:1-2**: *“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers...while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”*

Prophets and teachers governed the church, no doubt with elders, and Barnabas and Saul emerge as apostles (sent or commissioned ones), after one or more of the prophets brought strategic revelation from the Holy Spirit. Prophets, whilst bringing personal prophecies, more importantly bring strategic revelation to leadership groups, churches, and movements. Thus the church in Antioch is now governed by apostles, prophets, and teachers which aligns with **1 Corinthians 12:28**: *“And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers...”*

Eighteen or so years after Pentecost Day, Acts 15 describes a council of church leaders who faced a Magna Carta decision for the early church: the admission and acceptance of Gentiles to the faith, apart from the Jewish law. Prophets were active as part of a multi-faceted leadership group that included apostles and elders (**v4**: *“When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders.”*) and James who carried a unique apostolic authority (**v13**: *“When they had finished, James stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me.”*).

That prophets were active is recorded in **Acts 15: 22, 32 (NLT)**: *“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers... Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith.”*

By the close of the New Testament, we see John, an apostle and prophet accessing the most profound prophetic revelation that stretched beyond the current age and into the new world to come.

## FUNCTION OF PROPHETS

Note the three levels of the prophetic in the church today:

1. **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY** – a grace gift to edify, exhort and comfort. All may prophesy (**1 Corinthians 14: 31**)
2. **THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY** - those who have moved into a deeper level of faith and maturity, believing for more specific and revelatory words rather than the general inspirational type. They will regularly receive prophetic messages, dreams, visions etc.

- 3. THE OFFICE OF PROPHET** – a prophetic minister who is called to a leadership office of prophet in the body of Christ. Prophets are commissioned by the Lord. **Ephesians 4:11** They have a local/national/international ministry.

Prophets are specially endowed with insights into the counsels of the Lord and serve as his spokespersons. Not all, even those in prophetic ministry, are prophets (**1 Corinthians 12:28, 29**). According to Jack Hayford, characteristics of the ministry of a prophet include:

- Preaching – especially at a national or international level.
- Teaching – especially when unusual insight is present and broad impact made in serving God’s people.
- Miracles – as signs to accompany a prophet’s preaching.
- Renewal – expose the body of Christ to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

Prophets also:

- Lay foundations with apostles (Ephesians 2:20) to build the church and, together with the latter, access heavenly strategies to bring Kingdom restoration on earth.
- Open up the spiritual realm and the realm of the Holy Spirit.
- Bring revelation of current and future happenings.
- Along with other offices, equip God’s people for ministry and service.
- Encourage and strengthen the church especially in times of hardship. **1 Thessalonians 3:2, 3(NLT)**: *“We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through.”*

Not all prophets are alike. They will differ depending on the secondary motivational and office gifts that accompany the primary gift of prophet. Different gift mixes will give a different expression of the office. Examples: prophet/teacher, prophet/exhortation, prophet/apostle etc. While there can be prophetic apostles their can also be apostolic prophets.

PROPHET “prophetes” Strongs #4396

- a spokesman for another; spokesman or interpreter for a deity cf. **2Peter 1:20,21** “Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- a divinely commissioned and inspired person
- a person gifted for the exposition of divine truth (forthtelling)
- a predictor of the future (foretelling)

#### **FORTHTELLING VERSUS FORETELLING**

Prophecy is both forthtelling (explain, uncover, reveal existing truth) and foretelling (predict future things). Examples:

1. **Acts 11:27, 28** — foretelling. Agabus predicts a great famine.
2. **Acts 15: 30-32** — forthtelling. Prophets Judas and Silas explain to the church at Antioch the apostolic decree that Gentile converts do not need to keep Jewish law, and encourage them to embrace this revelation from God.

Thus prophets will not only bring prediction, but will also explain or forthtell, through exhortation and/or teaching, existing or current revelation, in order to inspire the church to move into it.

#### **NOTE ADVANCED ASPECTS OF PROPHECY**

While the simple gift of prophecy is to exhort, edify, and comfort, a prophet will also operate in advanced aspects of prophecy:

1. **CORRECTION** – Corrective prophecy should not condemn but inspire to repentance. E.g. Prophecy to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus commended the good, exposed the bad, warned of the consequences if they did not repent, and promised reward if they did. Even a corrective word should bring hope.
2. **IMPARTATION** – **1 Timothy 4:14**: *“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”* Prophetic impartation is powerful and can release people into their giftings and destinies.
3. **DIRECTION** - prophecy that directs or guides us is a vital aspect of the prophetic. It can warn us of danger, lead us into God’s purposes, help us find God’s will etc.

#### **PROPHETS AND PAIN**

Prophets need to identify with the heart of God. And that happens in one main way: pain. Every situation of pain is an invitation into the heart of Jesus. **James 5:10**: *“Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”* While this likely speaks of OT prophets, it applies equally to NT prophets.

*“Pain and passion are inseparably linked. If there’s no pain, there’ll be minimal passion for God and minimal compassion for others.”* ...Mike Bickle

God will call prophets to live the message he gives them to speak. They become a picture for all to see. The joy of revelation of his heart outweighs the pain, and produces incredible HOPE. Pain will make prophets better ministers of the prophetic – they will carry more hope and more compassion and sense the heartbeat of God more clearly. Both apostles and prophets will suffer at the hands of the world system they are trying to transform, but God promises vindication. **Revelation 18:20 (NKJV)**: *“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her [Babylon]!”*

#### **PROPHETS IN LEADERSHIP TEAMS**

Each of the five -fold ministry gifts is inherently out of balance. Alone, each is an extremist in a good sense. The church needs all five in mutual dependence. It is my observation that prophets do not make the best senior leaders of a local church, unless they have other gifts around them to whom they listen.

Prophets stir things up. Pastors settle things down. Prophet led churches are always on the move, always embracing a new season (when the people haven’t got over the last one), slaying a new devil, seeing a new vision, and are so ‘out there’, when the people are just trying to live everyday life fruitfully. That’s good for a time, but it tires the people after a while. It’s fine if the prophet-leader has pastoral and other gifts that can balance the prophet’s tendency to live on the edge.

Most churches are pastor-led, and a number are apostle-led. These gifts settle things, move the church at a pace people can cope with, and bring security. Pastors not open to the prophetic however, will see the church stagnate and settle too much. Pastors need prophets and prophets need pastors. There will always be pastor-prophet tension. Love covers a multitude of sins. We need not view other gifts as opposing us, but rather as enriching us.

The most important gift for a prophet to be linked to is the apostle. The two are like the two parts of a pair of scissors – as the handles are moved towards one another, the scissors cut. Scissors are ineffective if the two parts are separated. Restoration of apostolic- prophetic teams will bring a sharp cutting edge to the church.

## **CONCLUSION**

Terry Virgo, when he visited NZ in 1989, made the following comments about leadership in the church:

"The church needs a correct foundation. If we do not build on an apostolic- prophetic foundation, we will build it on something else. Examples: institutionalism (rigid and formal), democracy (consensus and mediocrity), tradition (we've never done it like this before), sentiment (we might hurt and lose some people). The local church is not built on the pastor-teacher or the evangelist. Evangelists are reapers more than builders - rarely can they build the people together. Neither can the church be built on the pastor-teacher- he is there for the good of the flock (feeds and helps the people). Because his ministry is a needs-oriented ministry, we can build churches that are needs-oriented and pastoral-care oriented. These will then be resistant to change, as it is brought through apostolic-prophetic vision. There is always a tension between the pastoral and the prophetic in leadership. If the apostolic- prophetic foundation is laid, then the pastoral gift will find a way to solve the problems of need associated with moving on."