

**PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, NEW TESTAMENT, AND TODAY**  
**2010 Prophecy Class, Session 1**  
April 11, 2010

*1 Corinthians 14:1 "Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."*

What is prophecy, in the Bible and today? How does it work? How do we use the gift in our church? In this class, we will seek a biblical basis for our understanding the gift of prophecy and the use of the gift in the Bible and in the church. Through teaching, we will equip folks to use the gift, to encourage those with the gift to use it, and to pray for the gift in our church.

*So what is prophecy?* Broadly speaking, "Prophecy is the most common means God used to communicate with people throughout biblical history."<sup>1</sup>

We're going to consider prophecy in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and today.

## **I. PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

- a. In the Old Testament, a prophet is an individual tasked with communicating God's words to God's people or God's enemies.

*Exodus 7:1 "And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."*

"Through the prophets the invisible God becomes audible."<sup>2</sup>

- b. OT prophets prophesied according to the power of the Holy Spirit

*Numbers 11:25 "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it."*

*Numbers 12:6 "And he said, 'Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.'"*

- c. Prophecy in the Old Testament was a weighty responsibility with significant authority.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem. "Prophecy, Prophets." *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. p. 701.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Waltke. *An Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. p. 805.

“The prophets’ words [in the OT] are the words of God; therefore the people have an obligation to believe and obey them. To believe God is to believe his prophets (2 Chr. 20:20; 29:25; Hag. 1:12), for the words of the prophets are the very words of God (2 Chr. 36:15-16). Therefore, to disbelieve or disobey a true prophet is to disbelieve or disobey God...”<sup>3</sup>

d. Themes of OT prophecy<sup>4</sup>

- i. The prophets declare that God has spoken through them

*“Thus says the Lord...”; “The word of the Lord came to me...”*

- ii. The prophets affirm that God chose Israel for covenant relationship

- iii. The prophets often report that the majority of Israel has sinned against their God and his standards for their relationship

- iv. The prophets warn that judgment will eradicate sin

1. Both within Israel... (see Jeremiah 5-7)

2. ...and among Israel’s enemies (see Isaiah 12-24)

- v. The prophets promise that renewal lies beyond the day of punishment

e. While OT prophecy followed a set pattern, two major changes were predicted:

- i. A Prophet yet to come: Deuteronomy 18

*Deuteronomy 18:15-19 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’”*

- ii. Prophecy distributed widely among God’s people

*Joel 2:28-29 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Grudem, p. 704.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the ESV Study Bible article, “Introduction to the Prophetic Books”

*Even on the male and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” (See Acts 2:14-26)*

The last writing prophet was Malachi, writing in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, B.C. But that is not the end of prophecy in the Bible.

## II. PROPHECY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: The fulfillment of OT Promises

### a. Jesus is the promised Prophet

*Matthew 5:21-22 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...”*

*John 14:23-24 “Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.”*

*Hebrews 1:1-2 “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

### b. The gift of prophecy was distributed at Pentecost

See Acts 2. Note that Peter explains how Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled in Acts 2:16ff.

*1 Corinthians 12:4-8, 10 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom... to another, prophecy...”*

### c. Prophecy is assumed to continue in the NT and today, but in a different role and form than in the OT. Whereas OT prophets were God's covenant enforcers, that role is fulfilled in the NT by Jesus (Heb 1:1-3) and by his word contained in the Bible (2 Peter 1:16-21). Thus, prophecy in the NT takes on a very different role and tone:

*1 Corinthians 14:1-5 “Pursue **love**, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, **the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.** The one who*

*speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but **the one who prophesies builds up the church**. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.”*

- d. The work of the Holy Spirit — including through gifts — is always to exalt Jesus Christ.

*John 16:13-14 “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **He will glorify me**, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”*

*1 Corinthians 12:3 “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”*

Thus, the accuracy of prophecy can be measured by asking...

*...to what extent does this prophecy exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ by upbuilding and encouraging and consoling with the gospel?*

This is how prophecy functioned in the NT and continues to function today.

### III. PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH TODAY

- a. Prophecy is encouraged throughout the NT (1 Corinthians 12, 14; also Romans 12; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; etc.)
- b. Nowhere does the NT give us reason to think that the gift of prophecy (or other spiritual gifts) will cease. In other words, we believe that all spiritual gifts named in the NT are to be expected and encouraged today.
- c. At Sovereign Grace Church, our hope is that we will experience the full range of the Spirit’s activity, including prophecy, every time we gather, whether that be in families, in small groups, or together on Sundays.

#### IV. A DEFINITION

“Although several definitions have been given of the gift of prophecy, the NT indicates that it should be defined not as ‘predicting the future’, nor as ‘proclaiming a word from the Lord’, nor as ‘powerful preaching’, but rather as **‘telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind’**.”<sup>5</sup>

#### V. APPLICATION (Principles to consider)

- a. Prophecy in the NT is different than prophecy in the OT.
- b. Prophecy today is meant to function the same as prophecy in the NT.
- c. Prophecy is an available gift today.
- d. If you have the gift of prophecy, fan it into flame (2 Timothy 1:6)! Note the tension between God’s sovereignty and our responsibility.
- e. If you don’t have the gift of prophecy, that’s fine! Be faithful with the gifts the Lord has given you.
- f. Pray for all the gifts to be present and powerful in our church.

#### VI. HOW TO SEEK THE GIFT OF PROPHECY<sup>6</sup>

- a. Pray
- b.
- c. Be content with present gifts
- d. Grow toward Christian maturity
- e. Have right motives
- f. Use present gifts
- g. Try to prophecy

“The way to determine our spiritual gifts is not to ask, “What is my ‘thing’ spiritually, my spiritual specialty, that sets me apart from other believers and gives me a distinguishing niche in the church?” Rather the New Testament on the whole takes a much more *functional* or *situational* approach. The question is, “What in the situation in which God has placed me are the particular opportunities I see for serving other believers in word and deed (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10f.)?” “What are the specific needs confronting me that need to be ministered to?”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Grudem, p. 707.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000. pp. 176-179.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Gaffin, in Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000. p. 178.

## **VII. HOW TO PRAY**

- a. Thank God that we have Scripture. God has spoken clearly, authoritatively, and sufficiently for us through this word.
- b. Thank God for spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy.
- c. Ask God for greater measure of gifts in our church.
- d. Ask God to give the gift of prophecy to you and those in your group.