

New Testament Prophets Part II

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In New Testament Prophets Part II, we will go into greater detail about the ministry of the prophet and how the Body of Christ can benefit from this God-given ministry gift today. (Ephesians 4:11) The last thing we spoke about in Part I of this series was that the Apostles and Prophets are foundation laying ministries in the Church. We expounded a little on Ephesians 3:2-6 and about how the Spirit of God gives revelation knowledge to these two ministries for the benefit of the Church. Paul tells the Ephesians that the insight was given to him by *divine origin*. This is important to know. If we come to believe and accept the fact that the ministry of the prophet has been placed in the Church by the Lord himself, we will also embrace and receive the ministry of the prophet today. Notice that these ministry gifts are given by the grace of Christ.

“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” (Ephesians 4:7)

Grace is one of the great hallmarks of the New Testament. We learn through the scriptures that God's grace is more than the undeserved, unmerited pardon of our sins but also a divine empowerment given to us by God to serve him in the power of the Spirit. The ministries listed in Ephesians 4 have been given grace or a divine empowerment by the Lord to help the Church. Notice also who gave these gifts- it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In this passage of scripture Paul is speaking more specifically of the ministry gifts that the Lord has given *the Church* to help bring the saints into maturity and equip them for works of service towards God. The prophet is listed among the other leaders of the Church as part of a 5-fold team to help accomplish this divine task that has been given to them by the Lord.

The Lord is still Lord over his Church and speaks to us today both personally and through prophets. He has already admonished us to listen to the Spirit and follow him. It is the Lord himself that has said: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29 3:6, 13)** Because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God not only speaks to and teaches the saints of God personally but also to our leadership so that we might grow into spiritual maturity and to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-15) The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals and speaks the deep things of God to man but we can only understand them by spiritual discernment. (John chapters 14 & 16 and I Corinthians 2:9-14)

The ministry of the prophet is received and given by the Spirit. In other words, the prophet is given an unction from the Spirit and speaks by the Spirit but we are also to spiritually discern what he is saying by the Spirit as well. Of course when it comes to any

prophetic word or revelation given through prophets, we must properly judge all prophecy to see whether it is truly from God. (I Corinthians 14:29-32) There will be more about this later in this series. But first, it's helpful to know that although there are some similarities in the ministry of both the Old and New Testament prophets, there are also some notable differences that make their ministry very different.

Similarities and Differences in the Old and New Testament Prophets

To begin with we will teach on some similarities. Prophets today still stand in the counsel of God, personally hear from Him and speak forth His divine will, plans and purposes to people in the earth just as they did in the Old Testament. God also still uses prophets in the New Testament to stand before peoples of different nations and languages, kings and leaders of nations to deliver the prophetic word of the Lord. (Acts 27:23-24, Matthew 10:17-18, Luke 21:10-15, Revelation 10:11)

Under the New Covenant, God continues to give prophets dreams, visions, warnings and prophecies. Just as in the Old Testament, God still speaks through prophets to warn of danger, expose the evil intents and plans of men and prepare people for the future. Although there are many scriptural references in the Bible concerning this subject, only a few will be given for the sake of time and space. (Genesis 15:12-16, 37:5-7, 45:5-8, Acts 2:16-18, 11:27-30, Acts 27:22-26) In both Testaments we will find God working through prophets in these same ways.

Prophesying the First and Second Comings of Christ

A very notable difference between Old and New Testament prophets is that Old Testament prophets prophesied the *First Coming* of Christ and New Testament prophets prophesy the *Second Coming* of Christ. Many Old Testament prophets such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel prophesied of the first coming of the Christ and spoke concerning his suffering on the Cross. John the Baptist is another good example of an Old Testament prophet. He was the greatest prophet among men according to Jesus. Not only was he the last of the *Old Testament prophets*, but also his prophetic ministry prepared the way for the first coming of the Lord as the Lamb of God. The apostles Peter, John and Paul are good examples of New Testament ministers who also operated in the prophetic office at times in the New Testament. (Apostles can operate in the other ministry offices as the Lord wills, i.e., prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher.) They received divine revelation of future, end-time events and prophesied the Second Coming of the Lord. (II Peter 3, Revelation 22:7-20, I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Today, many in the Church teach and believe that the Lord has done away with the ministry of the Prophet or that it is no longer necessary. New Testament scripture does not support this however. God did not "do away" with the ministry of the prophet, he simply modified it. What does this mean? It means that he brought some changes to this office to make it less extreme than it was in the Old Testament. The ministry of the prophet in the Old Testament was rather extreme in the fact that the prophets tended to be loners, many times staying aloof from the people of God, disappearing into isolation for a time and then reappearing when God chose to send them to speak to His own people, the nation of Israel or to leaders

of Gentile nations. Many times God went to great extremes through the ministry of the prophet in order to get the attention of carnal people.

For instance, God had Moses release plagues on the land of Egypt in order for Pharaoh to let His people go. The prophet Elijah prayed for fire to come down from heaven to prove to worshippers of Baal that God was the one and only true God. (I Kings 18) The prophet Isaiah walked around naked for three years! (Isaiah 20) The prophet Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck. (Jeremiah 27) and the prophet Hosea married a prostitute out of obedience to the Lord. (Hosea 1) Under the New Covenant we do not find the Lord using prophets in such extreme measures and there is a reason for this.

There is a vast difference between the Old and New Covenants. The Cross of Christ has changed everything, including the way that prophets minister. The Old Covenant was a ministry of *condemnation* whereas the New Covenant is a ministry of *grace*. The Old Testament prophet most often ministered the condemnation that came with the curses of the law. (Deuteronomy 28) Although there were times that Israel received the blessings of God, often they were in disobedience. During times of disobedience the Lord would usually send a prophet to bring a word of judgment and punishment.

We also know that the Israelites did not have the indwelling of the Spirit as those do in the Church today. Because they did not have the Spirit, they were a carnal people who strived to obey God in their flesh. In fact, the works of the law were carnal or fleshly ordinances that the Israelites tried to keep through their own fleshly works. (Hebrews 9:9-10, Galatians 3:10-12) This is one of the reasons that God had to deal with them in such extreme ways at times.

After the sacrificial atonement of Christ and the institution of the New Covenant however, those that received the Lord received a new Spirit. Because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's people went from carnal to spiritual and could be ministered to in a new and living way. (Romans 7:6). In the New Testament Church we find that prophets have become an integral part of the people of God and minister to them by the Spirit of grace, mercy and forgiveness instead of the condemnation (judgment) that so often came with breaking the law.

Things changed dramatically for God's people after the cross. Under the Old Covenant, God spoke to the nation of Israel through prophets and priests. Only a small number were chosen by God among the nation of Israel to serve as priests, prophets and kings. Only these few chosen individuals had the anointing of the Holy Spirit to serve God's purposes. For the most part even when a priest or king wanted to hear a word from the Lord, they had to go to a prophet.

The common people did not have the indwelling of the Spirit; therefore they had no personal relationship with God and could not hear directly from God. They too, had to receive a word from the Lord through a prophet. We find then that God provided Israel with the ministry of prophets so that they could hear the word of the Lord. When God wanted to *speak*, He would speak through a prophet. If one wanted to receive the word of the Lord in the Old Testament, they had to go to a prophet.

In the New Testament, however, because of the sacrificial atonement of Christ, we find all who accept Jesus Christ as Savior receiving the gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and therefore the ability to also hear from God and to be taught personally. (Acts 2:38, John 14, John 2:27) Jesus said, “**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me...**” (John 10:27) Also the Lord declared in advance that all those who were *part of the New Covenant would know him from the least to the greatest because they would be able to personally approach and relate to God due to the blood atonement of Christ. (Hebrews 8:11, 4:14-16, 10:19-23) Just because all believers have the ability to hear the voice of God due to personal relationship however, does not do away with the necessity of the New Testament Prophet in the Church today.

The Necessity of the Prophet Today

By now you may be asking, “If we can all hear from God ourselves, then why do we need prophets?” Good question! There are times in our lives when we all need to hear a current or “now” word that brings encouragement, edification, confirmation, godly direction, correction or words of warning. Sometimes these things will have greater impact on us when they come through someone else *supernaturally*. God can also confirm a word that he has put in your spirit personally by speaking through a prophet. When the Spirit moves in such a supernatural way that confirms that a word or act is from God, it can bring great joy, peace and hope into our lives or help to prepare us for the unknown.

Realize friend that we not only receive these things by the prophet prophesying, but also through the prophet’s preaching and teaching also. Prophets do not only prophesy but may also have the gift of preaching and/or teaching. Some even have the anointing to minister music and prophetic song to the saints. The body of Christ is one unit but is made up of many members and each of us has our own God-given gifting and purpose. Of course, not all have the same calling or purpose but every gift that has been given to us by God is intended to be a blessing to others. We all should be building each other up in the Lord with these gifts in order to bring edification, exhortation and encouragement to one another. (I Corinthians 12:27-31)

Although we know that God’s people under the New Covenant do not have to rely *solely* on the prophet to hear from the Lord now, it’s obvious that he considered the ministry of the prophet necessary for the Church. Prophets have been given divine gifting and authority from the Lord to speak into the lives of his people, help equip them for works of service by training them in those things of a prophetic nature and help them to mature in Christ and prepare them for his eminent return. Let’s continue on to learn some specifics of the prophetic ministry and how you can benefit personally as a child of God.

The Ministry of the Prophet in the New Testament

Learning about the role of prophets in the Church can help us to better receive their ministries. When we accept the truth that the Lord has divinely placed the ministry gift of the prophet into his body to bless us, we can then begin to receive the benefits that he intended us to have.

- Prophets can minister in their own local churches or be itinerant, going where the Lord sends them. (Acts 11:27, 13:1, 15:30-35, I Corinthians 14:29-32, Luke 11:49)
- They can be among the leaders of a local church. (Acts 13:1)
- They can prophesy by revelation, give instruction, exhort, edify, exhort and confirm the brethren. (Acts 15:32, I Corinthians 14:29-32, Ephesians 3:2-5)
- They receive revelation knowledge from the Spirit to impart to the Church. (Ephesians 3:2-5)
- They can give personal and predictive prophecies. Acts 21:10-11
- They can prophesy in Church services. 1 Corinthians 14:29
- They are part of the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2:20
- They help to equip the saints for works of service towards God and help bring the saints into maturity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- They can also prophesy before many peoples, nations, languages and kings. (Revelation 10:11 KJV)
- Prophets foretell future events to help prepare the Church in advance. (*Acts 11:27-30, I Timothy 4:1, II Peter 2:1-3, Book of Revelation)

Prophets have the supernatural ability given by the Holy Spirit to see and predict future events and even warn of things to come. There are many scriptures in both old and new testaments that teach us these truths. Many Old Testament prophets warned the nation of Israel, kings and leaders of nations of things to come. In doing this God has graciously given mankind the opportunity to not only be forewarned, but also to cooperate with his overall plans and purposes in the earth. This wonderful and beneficial gift did not cease however under the New Covenant. We find that those who had the prophetic gift of God in the early Church spoke and warned of things to come as well. Paul, Peter, John and Agabus all warned the Church of things to come to help prepare the people of God. (Scriptural references are listed above with an asterisk)

The New Testament prophet can give the word of the Lord to specific nations or Churches and their leaders or also give personal prophecies to individuals as well. (Acts 13:1-3, 21:10, Acts 27:23-24, I Timothy 1:18, Matthew 10:17-18, Luke 21:10-15, Revelation 10:11) The prophet Agabus prophesied through the Spirit *to the Church* of a severe famine that would spread all over the entire Roman world. This prophetic word helped the Church to begin moving to provide help for their brothers living in Judea. (Acts 11:27-30)

The prophet Agabus also gave a personal prophecy through the Spirit to the apostle Paul and warned him of those things that would befall him when he went into Jerusalem. The word given was a true word from God and came to pass just a few days after Paul was in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:10-36) We learn from Acts chapter 21 though that the Spirit does not

just warn through apostles or prophets alone, He can also warn through the saints of God as well. Before Agabus ever spoke his **“thus saith the Holy Spirit”**, some disciples had already warned Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. The scripture reads:

“Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” (Acts 21:4)

Whatever and whomever God chooses to speak to and through can be very valuable to us as believers. It can prepare us for the unknown, bring divine protection, reveal to us God’s plans and purposes for our lives and prepare us for what’s coming in the future. As we learn more about the ministry of the prophet, we can come to realize how important this gifting can be to the body of Christ and the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God in the earth today.

As we can see, the ministry of the prophet is a very valuable gift from God to the body of Christ. We can benefit both individually and collectively as a body when we receive what the prophet has to impart to us.

New Testament Prophets Minister by the Spirit and not the Law

A true prophet of the Lord today will minister out of the Spirit of grace and not the condemnation of the law. This is an extremely important fact for all Christians to know today, especially in light of so many that have been reverting to the works of Judaism these days. The Law has been fulfilled by Christ and is no longer in effect. Believers are not under law but grace. The true measuring stick of judging prophecy is whether or not it lines up with *the gospel of Christ and his grace*. (Galatians 1:6-10, 2:14) According the gospel, the law of Christ is superior and more authoritative than the Law of Moses. (Hebrews 1:1-2, 3:1-6, 7:11-28, Galatians 3:1-5, 19-25) Under the New Covenant, men are not justified by their own works but by faith in Christ. (Romans 4)

It is the Lord who qualifies and makes his ministers competent, including his prophets. The Apostle Paul wrote concerning this in II Corinthians 3:4-6. The way that we can know if a prophet is competent *is that they will minister by the Spirit* and not the letter of the law. (II Corinthians 3:16-18) We must know that the Holy Spirit will not take us back under an Old Covenant that has been removed out of the way by Christ and his blood atonement. (Galatians 3:1-5, Hebrews 9:8-10) This is one way that we can know that a prophet is ministering by the Spirit of God.

As was said earlier, the ministry of the Prophet has not ceased, but it has had some modifications. There are some differences between Old and New Testament prophets and it is due to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ brought an end to the Old Covenant Law and ratified a New Covenant. (Hebrews 8:6-8) The Church is not under law (as was OT Israel) but grace. God is no longer sending words of punishment and death as he did through the prophets of old but he is now releasing words of forgiveness and grace. Dear brethren please know that a New Testament Prophet is to be minister life and not death, grace not law and forgiveness instead of judgment. Knowing these things will help us to discern the difference between true and false prophetic ministry today.

It is the Lord who has qualified us by his great sacrifice and made us competent to minister by the Spirit. When we receive and follow the same Holy Spirit, this will also help us to be able to discern truth from error.

To help us to understand the difference between prophetic ministry from the Old and New Testaments further, we can learn from the Master himself. During the time that he walked in his earthly ministry, his disciples still had an Old Testament mindset. Jesus however was preparing them to transition to a New and better Covenant of *grace*. In Luke's account of this story, we learn a very valuable lesson.

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” (Luke 9:51-56 KJV)

Elijah was a prophet and minister of the Old Covenant and because of this the Lord used him to minister judgment instead of grace, death instead of life. The Apostle Paul taught in his epistle to the Corinthians that the law was a *ministration of death*. (II Corinthians 3:6-9) The Law of Moses promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Although these prophets did speak forth the blessings of the Lord, they also at times spoke forth the curses, punishment and death sentences of the Lord as well. Many times prophets prophesied to the Israelites that they would go into bondage or be taken captive by other nations due to their disobedience. (Deuteronomy 27 and 28, I Kings 17:14, 18:22-40, II Kings 5:26-27)

In the New Covenant however, the Lord Jesus came to save men and forgive them of their sins by administering grace and forgiveness, healing and not sickness, deliverance and not bondage, life and not death. Now God's people are no longer under the condemnation of the law of sin and death and because of this, we should no longer receive ministry that is based upon the law. Instead we should receive God's grace and the ministry of his Spirit and the blessings of Abraham. (Galatians 3:10-14) God is a good God. He gave his only Son that we might now have life and life more abundantly. (John 10:10)

Unfortunately today there are some who claim to be prophets in the Church that have an Old Testament mindset and ministry. Instead of operating in the fruit of the Spirit and grace, they operate in a spirit of condemnation (judgment). It's important for brethren to understand the difference between the two in order to be able to obtain a true prophetic word of the Lord that is based upon the gospel of Christ and his grace. Also beware of any prophet (or any other minister) that is *mixing* law and grace as well. Law and grace do not mix because one (the law) condemns us and the other (grace) forgives us. The Lord wants us to be live in the liberty of his Spirit however and not be burdened with the yoke of bondage of the law. (Galatians 5:1)

Those that do not understand that Christ brought an end to the law most often succumb to legalism in its various forms. If someone is prophesying or teaching out of the law (legalism) you and I will not get a true word of the Lord. Prophets that minister the letter of the law prophesy in essence through a “dirty filter”. Their spirits have become clogged with legalism and this taints the prophecies that they give to others. Words tainted by legalism however misrepresents God’s heart and mind towards his people because he is no longer condemning and punishing us of our sins but is now freely forgiving them by his grace and pardoning them. Christ took our punishment for sin on the Cross so that we could be blessed instead of cursed. He redeemed men from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. (Galatians 3:14)

Be on guard against those in the Church today who claim to be prophets but have a mindset and teaching that comes from the law. You will recognize them by their *message*. They will advocate works of the flesh instead of following the Spirit. They will minister judgment and condemnation instead of mercy and forgiveness; they will minister the letter of the law instead of grace. *They will speak of Moses more than Christ*. Ministers such as these will bring you into the bondage of legalism if you heed their message. We are not to walk in the flesh however but in the Spirit. (Galatians 3:1-5, 5:1, 16-18)

Jesus also said: **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (John 6:63)**

The flesh will profit nothing, it is only when we follow and obey God in the power of the Spirit that we can live powerful lives as Christians. Jesus ministered by the Spirit and his ministers should as well. (John 6:63, II Corinthians 3:6) We should always *test or try* the spirits to know whether someone is truly ministering by the Holy Spirit. (I John 4:1) If you as a believer understand that you are no longer under law but grace, study the word of God and rely on the help of the Holy Spirit, this will help you to rightly judge New Testament prophecies and the preaching and teaching of others.

Receive His Prophets

When we receive a prophet of the Lord that ministers in the power of the Spirit, we will be greatly blessed. The Lord has given prophets the divine ability to see and hear what others may not and this is his gift to us, his body. When the Spirit wills, prophets are given the ability to see what God sees about our lives and they speak God’s personal word to us. Through this divine ministry we can be encouraged, edified and exhorted at key moments in our lives. The prophet brings a word of hope because the Lord is a God of hope. The prophet brings a word of correction because the Lord chastens every son he loves. (Hebrews 12: 5-6) The prophet brings a word of victory because we always have the victory in Christ. (I Corinthians 15:57) The prophet also brings a word of destiny and purpose because God has one for each and every one of his children. When we receive a prophet, we are also receiving the One who sent him.