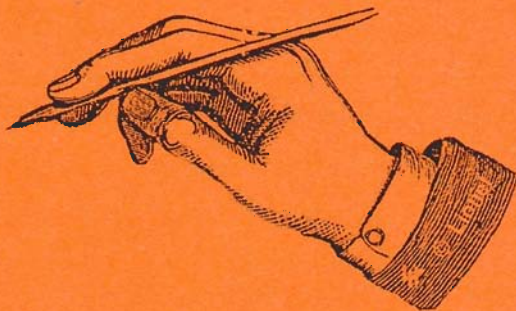


# What is a Prophet?



**R**eading from Numbers 12:6 *And He said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.*

A “prophet” is any human person who has received the gift of prophecy from God. (See Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:2; 2 Peter 1:19-21)

*A prophet is one who knows his times  
and what God is trying  
to say to the people of his times.*

— A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

1 Samuel 9:9 Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.

Teresa Marx in an article entitled *Washington* (Today’s Christian Woman, Vol. 18, no. 4) said, “My mother taught Sunday School in our small rural church. She began one lesson by asking the children if they knew what a prophet was. Little Donny showed his farming background when he offered, “That’s when you buy a lamb for 42 cents a pound and sell it for 69 cents a pound.”

The first person in the Bible to be called a prophet was Abraham, the “Father of the Faithful.” It is important to notice also, that it was God who gave him this title. The story is found in Genesis 20:6-7. A heathen prince had taken Abraham’s wife, and God commanded him to restore her, saying of Abraham, “he is a prophet. . . .” (the Hebrew word is “*nabi*” as it is also in Arabic).

Without doubt there were other men before Abraham who were prophets. Enoch was one, for instance (compare Genesis 5:24 with Jude 14). But Abraham was the first person to be designated a prophet by the clear Word of God. Many God-appointed prophets arose after Abraham.

They were chosen from many walks of life. Moses was adopted in infancy by an Egyptian princess and thus received a prince’s education. (See Exodus 2:5-10; Acts 7:21-22.)

Ezekiel and Jeremiah were priests as well as prophets. David was first a shepherd, then warrior, king and poet and a prophet as well. Amos was a herdsman (Amos 1:1). Elisha was a ploughman (1 Kings 19:15-21). Daniel was a government administrator (Daniel 2:48).

From such diverse backgrounds, God chose His prophets. Their influence and authority did not come from their rank, education, wisdom or wealth, but entirely from the fact that God chose them to be His messengers. So we may define a prophet as one appointed by God Himself to be His messenger.

## How can we tell if someone is fatidical (gifted with prophetic power)?

In South Africa, a ‘primitive’ tribe were troubled by a vision that a member of their tribe, thirteen-year-old Nongqawsue, reported to have seen in the waters of the River Gxara. She told her fellow Xhosa that she had seen the faces of their dead elders staring up at her from the depths of the waters. Furthermore, she prophesied, if the tribe wanted to regain its dead leaders, then they must slaughter all their livestock on or before a certain date. Commentator David Frost tells us that the date was February 18, 1857, and that as a result of following this advice the entire tribe starved to death.

**T**he ancient Etruscans foretold the future by looking at sheep livers. They divided the liver into sixteen parts just as they had divided the heavens into sixteen parts. Certain gods ruled various parts of the heavens and would get into corresponding parts of the liver and give signs that provided guidance for people. How far removed that is from the guidance David wrote about: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

— Robert C. Shannon, *1000 Windows*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997).

## Types of Prophets

**There are only two types of prophets: true or false.**

True prophets – e.g. Jeremiah: Jeremiah 1:5 - Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

The Scriptures abound with stories of false prophets – from the false prophets on Mt Carmel (I Ki 18) to the foolish ‘wise’ men of Babylon (Dan 4:7,18:7 - Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.... all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou [Daniel] art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.) And in New Testament times - Acts 13:6 - And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus. (see also Rev. 19:20)

**The good news about false prophets:** Revelation 20:10 - And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

# Misconceptions

## Misconception 1.

**A prophet is someone  
who gives people new revelation about God.**

Many Old Testament prophets did this, but it is no longer necessary because God has completely revealed Himself in the incarnation of His Son in the fullness of times (Gal. 4:4; compare John 1:1&14, 14:9; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-3; etc.). It is impossible for anyone to reveal more than God Himself, so any “new revelations” are really representations of the Word we have already been given.

## Misconception 2.

**Prophets only existed in Old Testament times**

“Prophets are the beating hearts of the Old Testament.”  
— Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)

Although the New testament calls many Old Testament persons

prophets (Matthew 2:5 - Micah, Matthew 2:15 - Hosea, Matthew 2:17 - Jeremiah, Matthew 3:3 - Isaiah, Matthew 12:39 - Jonah, Matthew 13:35 - Ezekiel, Matthew 24:15 - Daniel, Acts 2:16 - Joel, Acts 2:29,30 - David, Acts 3:22 – Moses, Acts 13:20 – Samuel, etc.), it also mentions recent prophets:

John the Baptist: Matthew 11:9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

Jesus: Matthew 21:11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Agabus: Acts 21:10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Barjesus: Acts 13:6 refers to a false Jewish prophet named Barjesus (Lit. Son of Jesus)

Bishop Timothy: 1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

John the Disciple and Revelator: Revelation 1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10,18-19

### **Misconception 3.**

#### **Prophets are male**

Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men

shall see visions: (Compare Acts 2:17).

Specifically mentioned female prophets (prophetesses) were, for example, Exodus 15:20 - Miriam, the sister of Aaron; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22 - Huldah; Acts 21:8 - Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who were prophets.

#### **Misconception 4.**

##### **Prophets are people who write down prophecy**

The fact that a prophecy is (or is not) written down, is not a test for one being a prophet. The Bible gives examples of both:

Written: 2 Chronicles 12:15. Matthew 13:14, Acts 2:16, Revelation 22:10, etc.

Oral: Acts 11:27, 15:32, 21:9, I Corinthians 14:3, etc.

In prophecies that were written down, some prophets had secretaries to help them write down the messages of God. (See Jeremiah 36:1–4, Romans 16:22, 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:15–18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17.) These prophets and scribes were not God's pens but His penmen. What the prophets saw or heard in visions and dreams they wrote down according to the best of their ability.

#### **Misconception 5.**

##### **Prophets are people who predict the future.**

When WE make predictions, the only safe prediction we can make is that our prediction may be wrong.



Predicting the future is not a prophet's primary role, so...

## What does a prophet do?

There are at least 10 things that a prophet may be called to do:

### **1. To reveal the nature and attributes of God to men.**

Deuteronomy 5:4-10 - The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, 5) (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to show you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying, 6) I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 7) Thou shalt have none other gods before me. 8) Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: 9) Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, 10) And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

Leviticus 19:1-4 - And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2) Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. 3) Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my

sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. 4) Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.

## **2. To make known to men the laws of God**

Exodus 20:1-17 - And God spake all these words, saying, 2) I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6) And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10) But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 11) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. 12) Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth

thee. 13) Thou shalt not kill. 14) Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15) Thou shalt not steal. 16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

### **3. To call the people back to obedience to God's laws.**

2 Chronicles 24:19 - Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.

(The Lord sent prophets among them to lead them back to him. They warned the people, but they would not pay attention.)

### **4. To exhort the people to sincerity in worship.**

Jeremiah 7:1-11 - The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2) Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. 3) Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4) Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. 5) For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye

thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; 6) If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: 7) Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. 8) Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. 9) Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; 10) And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? 11) Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.

**5. To warn them of Divine judgement upon sin, both personal and national.**

Jeremiah 36:30-31 - Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. 31) And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.

### **6. To foretell future events which God had willed.**

Jeremiah 30:1-3 - The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2) Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. 3) For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

### **7. To foretell the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour.**

Isaiah 9:6 - For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

### **8. To record the history of God's dealings with men.**

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 - And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. 10) And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, 11) When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12) Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates,

that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: 13) And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

### **9. To record the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.**

Exodus 17:14 - And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

Exodus 34:27 - And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:22-26 - Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel. 23) And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee. 24) And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, 25) That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26) Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

Jeremiah 36:1-2 - And it came to pass in the fourth year of

Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2) Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.

Jeremiah 36:27-28 - Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, 28) Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.

### **10. To challenge a nation (1 Kings 18:21), or to rebuke evil rulers**

1 Kings 21:17-24 - And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18) Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. 19) And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. 20) And Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. 21) Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will

take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, 22) And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. 23) And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. 24) Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.

Daniel 5:17-28 - Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18) O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: 19) And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. 20) But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: 21) And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. 22) And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine



heart, though thou knewest all this; 23) But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: 24) Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. 25) And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26) This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. 27) TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28) PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Many prophets were given power to perform miracles to support their authority. An example of this is in Exodus 17:5-6 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go over before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand your rod with which you struck the Nile and go. I will be standing before you there on the rock in Horeb, and you will strike the rock, and water will come out of it so that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in plain view of the elders of Israel. In the nation of Israel, prophets were more important than kings, warriors or priests.

## The Four Tests of a Prophet

Malachi 3:18 [You shall] discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

### 1. Lifestyle

Look at the prophet's life. It certainly will not be perfect but, in general, the prophet will be a spiritual, God-fearing person. Moses, for example, had two failures recorded against him, but the majority of his life, the record tells us, he lived in accordance with God's Word. Deuteronomy 34:10 - And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.

**False Prophets:** Isaiah 28:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgement.

### 2. Biblical Harmony

The things the prophet says will harmonise with what the Bible says. Scripture clearly teaches that if the message is contrary to the Bible the speaker is not a true prophet.

Isaiah 8:20 - To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

1 Corinthians 14:37 (NIV) If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (KJV) We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

### **3. Accuracy**

Do the prophecies come true? This question must be answered in regard to what the prophecy says; whether or not it is conditional.

For example Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh (Jonah 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.) was not fulfilled because the people of Nineveh repented and turned to God.

However Moses threatens against Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1, 17:17, etc. - And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may

hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. / Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. Etc.) came true because Pharaoh did not let God's people go.

In general, if the prophecy is not a threat with a promise for leniency (in the actual words (e.g. Moses) or in the context (e.g. Jonah), then the prophet can be identified by the fact that the prophecies come true.

#### **4. Reflectors of Christ**

Finally, the fourth test of a prophet is a check on whether or not their lives glorify & emulate Jesus.

Philippians 2:5-9 - Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9) Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

There is a little chapel in the Italian Alps that has an unusual arrangement of statues. Down the inner walls of the chapel are statues of Old Testament prophets. All of these prophets are pointing toward the centre of the chapel. In the centre is a picture of Christ. Whoever designed the statues in that chapel understood that their lives must point to Jesus Christ.

— Jerry Vines, *Interviews With Jesus*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1981, p109

To have the mind of Jesus is to reflect God's attitude: (Jer 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.)

## **Homework**

Read I Kings 22:6-28

## **What is a Prophet?**

by Lionel Hartley, PhD

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