

# The Gift of Prophecy

Ekkehardt Mueller

We would not know about God, if He had not revealed himself to us. But God in his mercy chose to make Himself known. He did this to some extent through nature (general revelation) but specifically through the Bible, Jesus Christ, appearances of angels, prophets, etc. and also through personal experiences. God's adversary tries to imitate and distort these forms of divine revelation.

We will focus on one way in which God decided to reveal Himself through the gift of prophecy. However, even within Christianity there are questions about this gift. While today some Christians think that this gift has disappeared at the close of the first century A.D., others see it in many phenomena today, while still others redefine prophecy to such an extent that it describes basically any Christian ministry.

## I. The Prophet

### 1. *What Is a Genuine Prophet?*

Eze 33:7                   The prophet Ezekiel was speaking for God. Prophets were called in a supernatural way (Isa 6:1-8) and had to communicate the message and will of God faithfully, without adding their own ideas or deleting what they did not like (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19). God then acknowledged the message of the prophets as his own message.

### 2. *Since when Did God Use Prophets?*

Acts 3:21                God spoke through holy prophets from ancient time onward, after the earth was created.

Jude 1:14                Already Enoch, who belonged to the seventh generation after Adam, spoke prophetically.

### 3. *How Did God Communicate with the Prophets?*

1 Sam 3:4, 10           He let them hear His voice or the voice of heavenly beings (Rev 5:5). This is called an "audition."

Eze 1:1                   He revealed Himself, revealing supernatural realities, and messages in visions (Rev 6:1).

Num 12:6                He spoke to them through visions and dreams. In the case of visions, it could happen that astonishing phenomena occurred such as the following:

Num 24:3-4, 16        Seeing another reality

Dan 9:21                Appearance of an angel (Rev 10:8-9)

Dan 10:8, 9             Loss of strength

Dan 10:17              No breath

Dan 10:18-19         Divine strengthening

### 4. *What Did Prophets See?*

Prophets saw and recognized:

- Events of the past (Eze 16—the origin of God's people; Rev 12:1-5—the birth of the Messiah)
- Events of the present (Isa 36-39—the Assyrian threat and Hezekiah's illness; Rev 2:1-7—the condition of the church)
- Events of the future (Isa 9 and 11—the coming Messiah; Rev 21-22—the new earth)

Sometimes prophets did not understand their own prophecy, however, they passed it on faithfully (Dan 8:27; 12:4). The main task of prophets was spiritual instruction, teaching, bringing about reformation, being advisors, and among other tasks also predicting the future. In case the people of God did not obey the voice of God through the prophets, they faced God's judgment.

### 5. *How Did Prophets Communicate their Messages?*

The prophets communicated the messages entrusted to them orally (2 Sam 12:1-7), in written form (Jer 36:2, 4), and through actions (Eze 24). Expressions such as “Thus says the Lord,” or “I saw” show that they were convinced they were talking in the name of God. Their messages were true and trustworthy (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16). God recognized their words as His own—Jer 25:1-4, 7-8.

### 6. *Genuine or Not?*

There were not only genuine prophets throughout history but also false prophets. So God provided criteria for us to be able to distinguish between true and false prophets. In case, one of the following points is not met, the respective prophet is a false prophet. Here are the distinguishing marks:

- Full agreement with the Holy Scriptures—Isa 8:19-20; Deut 13, 1-4
- Recognition of Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior who had become fully human—1 John 4:1-3
- Good fruit, that is, an exemplary conduct of life and an effective ministry—Matt 7:15-21
- Fulfillment of predictions—Deut 18:22
- No materialistic attitude—Micah 3:9-12
- Proclamation of God’s messages, not what people like to hear—1 Kings 22:4-8

## II. Prophets in the New Testament und Today

### 1. *Prophets in the New Testament*

The first prophet to appear in the New Testament was John the Baptist (Luke 1:76) and the greatest was Jesus (Deut 18:15; Matt 21:11). The gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts in the early church and played a special role—1 Cor 12:28; 14:1; 12:11; Eph 4:11; 1 Thess 5:19-21.

### 2. *How Long Should the Gift of Prophecy Remain in the Church?*

- Joel 2:28-31      Joel’s prediction was partially fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:14-21, 32-33). However, the great day of the Lord, mentioned in Joel, is in a special way connected to Christ’s Second Coming. So there should be another fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy prior to Christ’s return.
- Matt 24:11, 24      Jesus predicted the coming of false prophets prior to His Second Coming, indicating there would also be true prophets, otherwise he would have warned of prophets in general. Obviously the problem would be to distinguish false from true prophets.

### 3. *What Would Be the Relation between a True Prophet in Our Days and the Bible?*

Holy Scripture surpasses the ministry of true prophets in so far that it is the yardstick by which prophecy is being evaluated. However, both the message of Scripture as well as the message of genuine prophets come from the same source, the Holy Spirit, and call for obedience—2 Chron 20:20.

## III. Categories of Prophets in Scripture

True prophets of biblical times can be classified in four groups. This classification has nothing to do with their authority or scope of ministry. However, it shows that God has different tasks for different prophets, that prophets can be male or female, and that all of them spoke in the name of God to humans. Here is the list:

1. There are prophets who have written down their messages, and these were incorporated into Scripture, for instance, Isaiah, Daniel, John, and Paul. These prophets are also called canonical prophets.

2. There are prophets who left no written records either to their generation or to us, but whose ministry is extensively described in Scripture. For instance, Elijah (1 Kings 17-19, 21; 2 Kings 1-2; Mal 4:5; John 1:21; Jam 5:17) and Elisha (2 Kings 2-9, 13; Luke 4:27). They are not less important than the first category of prophets.
3. There are true prophets who wrote down their messages, but these documents were not incorporated into Scripture. About ten such persons are known (for instance, Nathan und Gad—1 Chron 29:29). There are also letters of Paul that were not added to the New Testament canon, for instance, a letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16).
4. There were genuine prophets, mentioned briefly, that had oral messages only. About thirty such people are know from Scripture, for instance the prophetess Deborah (Judg 4:4), Agabus (Acts 11:27-28), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-9), and others.

## **Conclusion**

God is interested in us and loves us. He wants us to enjoy eternal life in His presence. Therefore, He reveals Himself and His plan of salvation among other things through the gift of prophecy. All Scripture came about through the gift of prophecy. We are extremely grateful and follow God's revelation through Scripture as well as through genuine prophecy that is given to us in addition to Scripture, but reflects what Scripture teaches.

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