

Ministry of the Prophet in the New Testament

SOME SCRIPTURAL NOTES

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles,
some **prophets**...”*

Ephesians 4:11

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An Ascension Gift

The book of Ephesians tells us that after Jesus ascended on high, He “*gave gifts to men*” (v.8).

These gifts were given by Jesus after His ascension: “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers*” v.11. Jesus, Himself, gave some to be apostles and some to be **prophets**.

In this booklet we are looking at the ascension gift ministry of the prophet, which is a New Testament ministry.

There is a distinct difference between the ministry of the prophet in the Old Testament and the gift ministry of the prophet in the New Testament.

- ➔ In the Old Testament the major ministry was that of the prophet.
- ➔ In the New Testament the major ministry is that of the apostle.

It is interesting to note that Jesus spent three years training twelve apostles, not twelve prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers.

Apostles are first

The apostle Peter tells us that we should be “*mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour*” 2Pet.3:2.

Peter is summarising the Bible by saying the word we need to heed of old are the words of the Old Testament Prophets; the words that we need to hear now are the words or commandments of the apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament we see that the responsibility for bringing the word of God to the people, was primarily given to prophets. For

example: Moses brought God's word to the people; Samuel was a prophet, delivering God's word; Elijah and Elisha were both prophets who spoke God's word to kings and even proclaimed God's judgments.

There are also the writing prophets such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah.

In the New Testament, the primary responsibility for bringing the word of God was given to the apostles; for example in **Acts 2:42**, the early church "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.*"

Jesus is the Prophet

In **Deuteronomy 18:15** Moses told the children of Israel, "*The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear*".

In **verse 18** God said "*I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all the words that I command Him*".

Verse 19 "*And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.*"

- God puts His words in the mouth of the prophet
- The prophet must speak the words of God

Jesus as the Prophet only spoke the words of the Father.

GIFT LISTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament prophecy is mentioned in two gift lists, and prophets are mentioned in two other gift lists.

We need to be clear, there are gifts of prophecy and there is the office or ministry of the prophet. Being able to minister in a gift of prophecy does not mean that a person is a prophet.

1) The creational gift of prophecy: Romans 12:6-8

The seven gifts listed in **Romans 12:6-8** can be referred to as motivational or creational gifts. We are born with these gifts. God

invests in us a gift. Unsaved people function in these gifts. For example some have a natural gift of leadership, where others have a natural gift of serving. It is good for us to know which one of those seven gifts is our strength.

However, when we are born again we can receive grace for all the gifts. If you have tended to be a hard-hearted person you can become merciful by the grace of God. If you have been a servant you can become a leader by the grace of God. If you have never been a teacher you can become a teacher by the grace of God.

The gift of prophecy in this list is a natural gift of insight, a sense of ‘knowing’ something; a person with this gift has very good judgment [discernment] of a particular situation, person or problem. In other words, this is someone who is able to speak wisdom and give good advice, not by the gift of the Spirit, nor out of the ministry of a prophet, but through this natural gift.

Some people seem to be naturally prophetic; they have insight because they have this creational gift. Often they are regarded as wise people; they always seem to know what to do.

An example of this gift is in **John 18:14** where Caiaphas, the high priest, who was not a believer in Jesus, *“Advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the nation”*. Caiaphas was not a spiritual man, but he had this gift of prophecy. He prophesied not by the Holy Spirit but through his natural gift of insight.

2) The Holy Spirit gift of prophecy: 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

The nine gifts listed in **1Corinthians 12:8-10** are gifts given by the Holy Spirit. These gifts are only available when you have received the Holy Spirit.

This gift enables a person to speak a prophetic word by the Spirit. Often the person exercising this gift has consciously received only a portion of what the Spirit intends to bring forth. The person needs to speak out what they have received and the gift will flow. The gift of prophecy is to bring edification, exhortation and comfort. *“But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” 1 Cor.14:3.*

An example of this gift is in **Luke 1:67** when Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist prophesied over his new born son. Zacharias had been struck dumb because of his unbelief when the angel foretold the birth of John.

But after the birth when he was obedient to proclaim, *“His name is John”*, Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Zacharias prophesied by the Holy Spirit.

3) God has set prophets in the church: 1Corinthians 12:28

Prophets are mentioned in **1Cor.12:28**, *“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”*

This verse is speaking about God’s order of ministry and leadership in His church. It is God who has set in the church: first apostles, second prophets.

4) The office of the prophet – Ephesians 4:11

Ephesians 4:7-11 tells us that when Jesus ascended on high he *“gave gifts to men”* (v.8). Verse 7 tells us that these gifts release grace to us: *“to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”*

This grace gift given by Jesus after His ascension is a five-fold gift: *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers”* (v11).

The prophet ministry referred to in this verse is the office of the prophet. Not just the gift of prophecy; not just the spiritual gift of prophecy or of receiving a word of knowledge; this is the ministry gift set in the church by God.

The ministry of the prophet is a gift ministry given by Jesus after His ascension.

It is an individual appointment. We learn from **Deuteronomy 18:15&18** that God puts His words in the mouth of the prophet and the word of the prophet is to be heard.

Let us look at two other spiritual gifts from 1Cor.12:8-10

A prophet will often use the gifts of the Spirit, even as Jesus did.

i. The word of wisdom

Wisdom is practical knowledge; wisdom is knowing what to do; wisdom gives understanding in a situation.

An example of Jesus using a word of wisdom is in **John 8:3-11**. This is the story of a woman caught in adultery. The religious leaders brought her to Jesus and said, "*Moses, in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?*" (v.5). Verse 6 says they did this, "*testing him that they might have something with which to accuse him*".

Jesus answered with an awesome word of wisdom. He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger as though He did not hear and when they continued asking Him, He raised himself up and said to them, "*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first*" (v.7). That was a word of wisdom, which convicted those who heard it and they "*went out one by one*" until none was left to accuse the woman.

ii. The word of knowledge

A word of knowledge is a supernatural knowledge about a person or situation that is not naturally known. The word of knowledge can come through a thought, impression, vision, or a voice that tells about a situation. It is the Holy Spirit speaking to us (**Jn.16:13**).

Jesus used a word of knowledge when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman in **John 4:7-19**. Jesus told the Samaritan woman to "*Go, call your husband*" (v.16). She answered and said "*I have no husband*". Jesus said to her, "*You have well said, 'I have no husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you have now is not your husband; in that you spoke truly*" (v.17). Jesus was not prophesying; He was using a word of knowledge. The Spirit showed him something about this woman that only the Spirit knew. The result was that the woman said to Him, "*Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet*" (v.19).

Often a prophetic person will have words of knowledge or words of wisdom. That does not mean the person is a prophet. It just shows that they have a wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit flowing in their life.

PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was a prophet called by God before he was born, to go before the face of the Lord, and to prepare a way for Him.

Key aspects of the ministry of John the Baptist

The angel, speaking to Zacharias before John was born, said *“He will go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” Luke 1:17.*

The spirit and power of Elijah upon John the Baptist was:

- ➔ To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.
- ➔ To turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.
- ➔ To make a people prepared for the Lord.

We learn from **Luke 1:17** that, in general, the spirit and power of Elijah is upon the prophet.

The ministry of the prophet is:

1. to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, releasing the grace of sonship
2. to help raise fathers in the church
3. to speak the truth in such a way that it will bring the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. In other words speak wisdom, that is, truth.
4. to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. Even as John the Baptist was preparing the way for the first coming of Jesus; the prophetic ministry is again preparing the people for the coming of Jesus.

Who was John preparing for?

John was preparing the way for Jesus! Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (**Heb.3:1**).

Even so today the prophetic ministry is meant to prepare and make a way for the apostolic.

The prophetic prepares the way for the apostolic

This is where the prophetic movement of the eighties and nineties in many ways failed us. Few talked about the apostles coming. Instead we saw prophets promoting themselves and setting up their own prophetic ministries. There were a few, including Rick Joyner, who did speak of the coming of the apostle.

Anna the prophetess

In **Luke 2:36-38** we read of the prophetess Anna.

What we learn about the ministry of the prophet through Anna

“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity” v.36.

- 1) The prophet is **called by name and known by God**. The prophet is a clearly identified and anointed ministry. The Bible gives much detail about who Anna is: she is the daughter of Phanuel, which means ‘face of God’, she would have grown up knowing who God was; she is of the tribe of Asher – Asher means happy or contented, Asher was to ‘dip his foot in oil’, this speaks of anointing. She had been married but now she is a widow.
- 2) The second thing we learn is that a **woman can be a prophet**, even in old age.

“And this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” v.37.

- 3) The prophet is one who **stays close to God**. Anna was a widow of eighty four years and she did not depart from the temple. This verse teaches us that a prophet should stay close to God; remain in the presence of God. The prophet is not

out in the wilderness on their own. This woman is in the very house of God, and knows the place of intimacy with God.

4) The prophet **knows the importance of prayer and fasting**

Anna served God with fastings and prayers. She was in constant prayer and fasting. If you are called to be a prophet you should not be shy of prayer and fasting because that is where your empowering comes from.

“And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him, to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” v.38.

5) The prophet **speaks about Jesus**; even as Anna recognised the visitation of God and spoke prophetically of His redemptive purpose. She recognised His coming, even in the Child Jesus.

6) The prophet **needs to know what God is doing** in this present day. This is the present truth that God is speaking to the church, explaining what God is doing now.

Transition Prophets

What sort of prophets were John and Anna? They both lived before Jesus’ death and resurrection yet they both saw Jesus in the flesh. They are called transition prophets. Transitional prophets have one foot in the old and one foot in the new.

Anna only saw Jesus as a baby. John’s purpose was to introduce Jesus as the One to come. They are not Old Testament prophets, but neither are they ascension ministry prophets.

The major role of the Old Testament prophets was to call people back to the Law of Moses.

Both these prophets were prophesying the present truth; they were ushering in the New covenant; they were ushering in the Messiah.

Restoration Prophets

The Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, Jeremiah, and to some extent Ezekiel and even Isaiah are known as restoration prophets. Their prophetic writings were calling people

back to the old covenant, but they were also pointing to something new.

Restoration was always more than returning to obedience to the Law of Moses. Restoration is in the greater context of *“the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began”* (Acts 3:21).

THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHET in the NEW TESTAMENT

1) To help lay foundations

“Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” Eph.2:20. From this verse we learn that the apostle and prophet are foundational ministries in the building of the house of God. The prophet is a foundational ministry, laying the foundation of the church, by bringing the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2) To bring the revelation of the mystery

The revelation of the mystery *“which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” Eph.3:5.* Apostles and prophets are anointed to know the mystery, to have revelation of the mystery by the Spirit.

Grace has been given to the apostles and prophets to make known this mystery. It is a ministry gift of grace to be able to teach the deeper truths of God’s word; the revelation of the mystery (v.7).

The revelation is given to ‘**holy**’ apostles and prophets. That is ones who are set apart or separated unto God’s purpose. Many may be apostles and prophets but they have not set themselves apart to wait upon God and get the message; many do not seem to know the mystery.

3) Appointed in the church by God

“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of

healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” 1Cor12:28. It is God who has appointed this order in His church. The ministry of the apostle, prophet and teacher are key ministries in the New Testament.

Pastors and bishops are included as teachers in the context of this verse as these senior leaders often have the responsibility of more than one church. The primary role of teachers, pastors, bishops in the local churches is to teach the word of God.

There are three key ministries [offices]

The key ministries of the Old Testament were **prophet**, **priest** and **king**.

Linking the old and new:

- prophet links with prophet,
- apostle links with king,
- teacher links with priest.

Under the Old Testament the kings were the anointed rulers. The prophet was the anointed spokesman of God, and one of the major ministries of the priests, was to teach the word of God.

PROPHETS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

1. Prophets are sent

The first mention of the prophet in the book of Acts is in **Acts 11:27**, *“And in those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch”*.

Jerusalem was the mother church and Antioch was a daughter church in the region. Prophets came from the mother church, sent from the mother church, to the church at Antioch. They did not just turn up, they were sent!

➔ Prophets need to be sent from an established base.

2. Agabus, an example of a prophet functioning

“Then one of them named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout the world which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar” v.28.

Agabus is named as a prophet; he is known as a prophet, therefore he has to be accountable. We know who he is; we know who spoke this prophesy; it is spoken among witnesses and he is accountable for the word he has spoken.

Agabus, the prophet was foretelling the future. He was not ministering the Holy Spirit gift of prophecy. The Bible also records that the prophecy was true, and the famine took place in the days of Claudius Caesar. Agabus was a true prophet of God.

- ➔ A true prophet is known by name and is accountable to somebody
- ➔ Part of the ministry role of the prophet is to foretell the future, knowing that their prophesy will be tested.

The Holy Spirit showed Agabus what was going to happen; he had a vision.

- ➔ God may speak to the prophet through visions.

Because Agabus was known as a true prophet, the church believed the word he spoke and acted on that word (v.29).

3. Prophets link with other ministries

The next mention of prophets in the New Testament is **Acts 13:1**: *“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers”*.

- ➔ Prophets can be on the ministry team of a local church.

4. The prophet speaks the word of the Lord

These prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord and fasting and the Holy Spirit spoke saying, *“Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (v.2).

- ➔ Prophets spend time ministering to the Lord with prayers and fastings, knowing that God will speak.
- ➔ One of the prophets prophesied the word that the Holy Spirit gave. The prophet is to speak the word of the Lord. Through prophesy God can make his will known.

Remember God said through Moses in **Deuteronomy 18:18**, He would raise us a Prophet and would *“put My words in His mouth”*. We must heed what the prophet says.

5. The ministry calling can change

It is interesting to note that by **Acts 14:14** Paul and Barnabas are now called apostles. A person’s ministry can change, for here we have a prophet and a teacher now functioning as apostles. This was the will of God by the Holy Spirit.

Each of the five-fold ministry gifts is an appointment by God. Some have been functioning in one particular gift, then they hear about the ministry of the apostle, so suddenly change their title to ‘apostle’. We need to hear from God and obey His voice, not just change our title.

6. Prophets: part of the eldership of the church

The next mention of prophets is in **Acts 15**. At the end of an important discussion by the Jerusalem council, it is decided that a letter be written and sent out into the regional churches.

“It pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas ... and Silas, leading men among the brethren” (v.22). Judas and Silas were among this council of elders in the church at Jerusalem, and they were prophets (v.32).

7. Prophets exhort and strengthen

From **verse 32** we learn that Judas and Silas were prophets: *“Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets..”*; and that as prophets, they *“exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words”*.

➔ The ministry of the prophet is meant to exhort and strengthen the brethren. This is ministering to the corporate body of believers. It does not mean that there was a lot of personal prophecies. It may include that, but the primary work of the prophet is to speak the word of God to make known the mystery so that every one of us can be built up.

8. Prophets bring the revelation of the word

→ The ministry of the prophet is ‘with many words’; that is, teaching the prophetic understanding of the word of God. The primary ministry of the prophet is to make known the revelation of the mystery (**Eph.3:5**).

9. The prophet receives the prophetic word

In **Acts 21:10** we find out more about Agabus the prophet. He has come to the house of Phillip the evangelist. The apostle Paul is already there with the team. Agabus received a prophetic word for Paul, which he illustrated with a prophetic act.

“He took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles’” v.11.

Here Agabus is speaking by the Holy Spirit. The first time we read of Agabus, he was shown something by the Spirit, now he is speaking by the Spirit.

- Prophets can speak out of visions
- Prophets can give a direct utterance by the Holy Spirit
- Prophets can give a personal prophesy or foretell a future event – such as the famine prophesied by Agabus.

10. The prophetic word brings confirmation

We need to note that the prophecy given to Paul by Agabus, was no new revelation. Paul had already heard from God and knew that suffering awaited him in Jerusalem.

“I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulation await me” Acts 20:22-23.

→ **Personal prophesy should not initiate**, it should only confirm what the Lord has already showed the person.

A prophetic minister once said that in her training of young prophets there was to be no prophesies of births, deaths or marriages! Too many prophets wanting to enhance themselves make these

prophecies that don't come to pass, they give people false hopes or false fears.

→ ***Personal prophesy should never be controlling***

Even though this noted prophet Agabus brought this powerful word, Paul did not veer from his purpose. Knowing what the Holy Spirit had said, he still went to Jerusalem.

→ ***The prophet should be known and have a good reputation***

Agabus was a noted and proven prophet. The brethren knew his background and where he was from.

If a person is receiving a personal prophesy they have the right to know who the prophet is. Do they have a good reputation? Have they been sent? Where do they come from? This will add credibility to the prophet.

→ ***All prophesy is given in part, not total.*** It is only part of the picture.

Agabus knew that Paul was going to get persecuted in Jerusalem but he did not know that the persecution was going to be used by God to take Paul to Rome. We only prophesy in part: ***“For we know in part and we prophesy in part” 1Cor 13:9.***

APOSTLES & PROPHETS WILL SEE BABYLON FALL

In **Revelation 18:20** we are told that finally Babylon will fall because of the apostles and prophets. *“Rejoice over her [Babylon], O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”*

Why would Babylon fall because of apostles and prophets? Babylon means confusion. Confusion will depart from the earth as God raises up apostles and prophets to speak the truth of His word.

Babylon only rules the human race because the human race is ignorant of God’s word. As true apostles and prophets are restored to the church, proclaiming the truth of God’s word, and bringing the revelation of the mysteries, confusion will go.

The *“unsearchable riches of Christ”* are to be preached, so that all will come to see *“what is the fellowship of the mystery”* (**Eph.3:8-9**). This mystery *“from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God”*, but it is the responsibility of apostles and prophets to make known this mystery.

Paul confirms this again in **Colossians 1:25-27**, telling us that he was appointed a minister to *“fulfill the word of God, the mystery.”* All the saints are to come to know *“the riches of the glory of this mystery”*, and it is summed up as, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

When the church comes to the mature knowledge and experience of the fellowship of the mystery, God says that this is: *“To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”* **Eph.3:10-11**.

This is how Babylon is overthrown: by the clear preaching and teaching of the deeper wisdom of the word of God (**1Cor.2:7**).

Apostles and prophets have been appointed and anointed by the Holy Spirit to make known to the church the mystery of Christ and His church, and the result will be that the principalities and powers in

the heavenlies will, *“bow the knee ... and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil.2:9-11).

We need prophets

In this booklet we have sought to look at the references to the ministry of the prophet in the New Testament. This is only an introduction and there are many more qualified to teach and make known the ministry of the prophet.

In the course of the restoration of prophets in recent history, there has been much emphasis on personal prophecies, and on foretelling the future; there has been little emphasis given by most prophets on **making known the mystery**, the deeper wisdom of God’s word.

The key role of the prophet

- is to **preach and teach the word of God**
- with prophetic revelation and understanding
- to build up the church,
- bringing all the saints to the knowledge
- of the riches of the glory of God.

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