

Biblical Prophecy

Plus an evaluation of Charismatic prophecy

I was recently asked for my views on the prophetic uttering in a certain Charismatic church by one of my granddaughters. I had to clarify that I thought that they were, in general, unbiblical ramblings. I explained some basic Biblical issues about prophecy which she was very interested in and I later realised that, although I have written on this subject in passing many times, a paper devoted to it would be useful.

The problem is that Charismatics accept all sorts of nonsense as authoritative prophecy from God while conservative believers dismiss the possibility that any sort of prophetic ministry still exists.

Two aspects to prophecy

Traditionally, prophecy has been divided into two types; 'forthtelling' and 'forthtelling-foretelling', but I will add the categories of instruction and admonishment.

Forthtelling or exhortation

This is the distinctive meaning of prophecy – forthtelling from God. That is, a prophet brings the things of God to men (as opposed to a priest who brings the things of men to God).

This is telling forth what God wants man to hear in a specific set of circumstances. The man called to do this is called a prophet (OT *nabiy* or *nabi*'; NT *prophetes*). A prophet is a man under the inspiration of God who communicates what God desires men to hear.

The verb 'to prophesy' (OT *naba*'; NT *propheteuo*) means to speak forth by divine inspiration. The root meaning is 'to bubble forth as from a fountain'.

In the time of Samuel another word, *ro'eh*, 'seer', began to be used (1 Sam 9:9) used of Samuel seven times. After this, *hozeh*, 'seer' was used (2 Sam 24:11). In 1 Chron 29:29 all three words are used: 'Samuel the seer (*ro'eh*), Nathan the prophet (*nabi*), Gad the seer' (*hozeh*). Seer could refer to seeing future things or seeing the will of God.

The word 'diviner' (*kosem*) is only used of a false prophet (e.g. Jos 13:22 Balaam). Divination is an aspect of occultism and is satanic.

Thus a prophet was a spokesman for God; he spoke in God's name and by his authority (Exod 7:1). He is the mouth by which God speaks to men (Jer 1:9; Isa 51:16) and so what the prophet says is not of man but of God (2 Pt 1:20-21).

Under ideal circumstances the people of God do not need prophets at all because they should all listen to God carefully and do his will. Thus prophets only formally appear late in history after the patriarchal period. However, on one accession Abraham is called a prophet in relation to Abimelech king of Gerah (Gen 20:7) because Abraham was the called of God on the Earth representing the elect people. Though called a prophet, his job was to pray for Abimelech to restore order. He was called a prophet because God spoke to him.

When God's elect are walking faithfully, they hear from God in various ways and need no formal prophetic office. However, when God's people stray from his ways and become deaf to him, God sends them prophets. Thus formal prophetic activity is a sign of something wrong that requires divine action to put straight. Thus as Israel strayed from God's law and committed idolatry, God sent prophet after prophet. These brought denunciations of sin and exhortations to righteousness.

The prophetic office is, therefore, to correct moral and religious abuses and to proclaim God's law. The Charismatic zeal to see more and more prophets is misplaced; what they should seek is better doctrinal teaching.

Instruction

Informing people of God's will was important, but the prophet also had a secondary role as teacher and instructor of God's law, just as the priest did. The people needed understanding of God's ways so that they were doctrinally competent. Isa 41:26, 46:9.

This was why Samuel established the school, or band, of the prophets so that trained godly men could go about Israel bringing instruction in divine things.

The best examples of a prophet teaching the people are Moses and Samuel; this is why they are considered as chief among the prophets.

The prophetic teacher not only explains doctrinal matters but interprets the past, the present and shows the future potential.

As part of being instructors, some prophets acted as historians, recording the workings of God in Israel (e.g. Samuel, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah and Gad (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29, 12:15)). The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings were classed by the Jews as 'The Former Prophets'. The writing prophets also covered much of Israel's history, beginning with Amos, Hosea and Isaiah.

Admonishment

This is a normal aspect of teaching. Those who instruct others will always need to bring admonishment to recalcitrant people that will not accept the teaching. We see this in prophets all the time; in severe circumstances the admonishment turns into a denunciation and judgment. Thus forewarning of judgment if an action is not stopped is common in prophecy. This is not prediction but explaining the consequences of sin.

Note the case of Nathan admonishing David; 2 Sam 12:1-14.

Foretelling or prediction

The second aspect of prophecy is the use of prediction as part of the message from God. This was sometimes used to give authenticity to the prophet or to be a warning. Isa 38:5-6, 39:6-7; Jer 20:6, 25:11, 28:16; Amos 1:5, 7:9, 17; Mic 4:10.

In secular history prediction formed the chief part of prophecy. All nations had prophets and oracles that usually spoke in obfuscation, hence multiple ways in which the oracle could be interpreted. The oracle at Delphi was famously hard to fathom.

An oracle was a place consulted for advice or prophecy. There were many oracles in the ancient Greek world, most notably at Delphi, Didyma on the coast of Asia Minor, Dodona in Epirus, and Olympia. The most famous non-Greek oracle was that of the Egyptian Ammon at Siwah oasis in the Sahara, identified by the Greeks with Zeus and consulted by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Apollo was the god most favoured as a

giver of oracles though many other deities presided over oracular shrines. Consultations usually concerned religious matters but were also used by leaders seeking support for political or military actions

Oxford Encyclopaedia.

In classical Greek *mantis* is the ecstatic announcer of oracles but the NT uses *prophetes* for 'prophet' who was the sober-minded interpreter that explained the confusing dreams and utterances of the *mantis*. *Prophetes* is thus one who speaks forth what was given by God, not primarily a predictor. He is one who speaks on behalf of another. The Hebrew *nabi*' also means 'one who announces'.

Foretelling is not the main aspect of prophecy; which is to speak forth from God and tell men what they need to hear.

The operation of the Spirit

The chief characteristic of prophecy was, in fact, the presence of the Holy Spirit upon a man directing him to speak.

Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!
Num 11:29

As the Spirit came upon a man, he would then be able to speak for God with authority. The prophecy was not the gifting of the man (unlike teaching ministry) but was something temporarily imparted by the Spirit for a certain time. Sometimes prophets would prophesy for many years (like Isaiah) while others prophesied for a short time and vanished into obscurity (like Amos).

OT prophecy

The patriarchs communicated with God in various ways (direct voice, visions, and dreams) but are not usually called prophets. This communication was merely the result of a close walk with God.

The formal prophetic office began with Moses. Though it is implied that there were minor prophets before then who heard from God in dreams and visions (Num 12:6), Moses was such a great prophet that God spoke to him 'face to face' as it were (Num 12:7-8). This is part of Moses' high standing amongst men. Another is that he most closely represents Christ in typology having the characteristics of priestly ministry, prophetic ministry and kingly authority. No other OT character had such capability. Even David only represented Christ as a king and a prophet, but not a priest (since he was of the tribe of Judah not Levi).

The chief problem that Moses was sent as a prophet to sort out was the deliverance of God's chosen people from Egypt and establish them as a nation with a functional worship system (Tabernacle, priesthood and offerings).

After Moses we see minor and unknown prophets speak (e.g. Jud 6:8) in time of need; but it is with Samuel that the formal line of prophets begins: 'And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD' (1 Sam 3:20). Some people clearly walked close to God and even met him virtually face to face (such as Job) but they are not termed 'prophets'. Thus the concentration on prophets appears in the historical books and the books of the prophets – chiefly because Israel got into so many problems. Notice that

in the fairly successful invasion of Canaan under Joshua there is no formal mention of Prophets. However, God is stated to have spoken with Joshua who clearly acted prophetically (Jos 7:10, 24:2).

Two distinctions of OT prophets

OT prophets are usually divided into two types.

Writing prophets

The first is the writing prophets. These are the prophets that wrote the books for which we have their names.

There are sixteen Old Testament prophets whose prophecies form part of the inspired canon. These are divided into four groups:

- The prophets of the northern kingdom, Israel or Samaria: Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah.
- The prophets of southern kingdom, Judah: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
- The prophets of The Captivity: Ezekiel and Daniel.
- The prophets of The Restoration: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The number 16 is very interesting. It is formed from 8 x 2. Eight is the number of resurrection. The prophets had the resurrection power, or eternal life, of Christ applied to them to bring life to a dying nation. Two is the number of witness. The prophets were God's witnesses to the OT church. This could be summarised as resurrection testimony.

Non-writing prophets

The second is the non-writing prophets. These are named or unnamed in the text but they left no written works.¹ Named non-writing prophets include: Nathan, Iddo, Micaiah etc. Examples of unnamed prophets include 1 Sam 2:27; 1 Kg 18:4; 2 Kg 2:7-16.

Sometimes people prophesied for a very brief moment and then ceased forever; such as the seventy elders of Israel (Num 11:16-29) while rebellious Saul also briefly prophesied,

When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, 'What *is* this *that* has come upon the son of Kish? *Is* Saul also among the prophets?' Then a man from there answered and said, 'But who *is* their father?' Therefore it became a proverb: '*Is* Saul also among the prophets?' And when he had finished prophesying, he went to the high place. 1 Sam 10:10-13

Such descriptions do not really represent the prophetic office. 'Prophesied' in such cases is a description of being under divine inspiration for a moment.

Jeduthun 'prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD' (1 Chron 25:3). This is not some supernatural Charismatic instrument playing but singing a prophecy while playing a harp. The prophetic gift would often come upon a person while he was in contemplation of God accompanied by soothing sounds, such as harp playing, a gentle wind or the rustling waters of a stream.

¹ Some of these did write histories but they are lost.

Authoritative prophecy

OT prophets carried authority because they were divinely inspired, and sometimes divinely empowered (such as Elisha). Their words carried great authority and their predictions were 100% accurate.

They usually appeared on the scene as a result of great national wickedness, usually based upon the royal court. Thus Amos is sent to Israel from his farm work to castigate the king for national iniquity.

Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: 'I *was* no prophet, Nor *was* I a son of a prophet, but I *was* a sheep-breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to My people Israel". ' Amos 7:14-15

There were two aspects to authoritative prophecy. The first was the denunciation of sin; this could carry severe condemnation. The second was to encourage and exhort the suffering people. The denunciations in the Major Prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are truly awe-inspiring.

The authority of these prophets was so great and so inspired that they could address their hearers with, 'Thus says the Lord' (Exod 4:22; Jud 6:8; 1 Sam 2:27, 10:18; 2 Sam 7:5 etc.).

Denunciations

The denunciations are of two types.

The first is the denunciation of God's people for their sins and rebellion. In Israel this was frequently the sin of spiritual adultery or idolatry, but it also included the oppression of the poor by the wealthy or the royal family. The worst form of idolatry included the sacrifice of children to Molech, which the Jews frequently resorted to in their history. Idolatry began at the very beginning of the nation with the golden calf incident.

The second is the denunciation of the nations surrounding Israel. The heathen nations were warned by God's prophets for their rebellion against God and for their attempts to destroy Israel. Some of these denunciations are awe-inspiring and terrible.

Exhortations

The exhortations and encouragements are to the elect within Israel, who often form the suffering people afflicted by wicked kings and authorities. In some cases the divine encouragements are to the actual prophet who is being persecuted. Jeremiah is the chief example of this.

Qualifications and characteristics of the prophet

- Chosen by God from the elect. There was no human appointment. Exod 3:1-10; 1 Sam 3:1-20; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1:1-3:15; Amos 7:15.
- God put his words in their mouth (Deut 18:18-19). This ensured 100% accuracy.
- God's word came to them in various ways.
- The words are sent to the prophet by the Spirit of God. 2 Chron 15:1, 24:20; Neh 9:30.
- Sometimes signs would accompany the word.
- They would be like Moses (Deut 18:18; Acts 3:22-23).
- They would all speak from the same theological position.
- They had prophetic vision or divine revelation (1 Sam 3:1). This gave them authority. This resulted in being called 'a seer'. NB Samuel, Gad and Iddo.
- They must speak even if they fear the utterance (Jer 20:7-9).

- Predictions all come to pass.
- Listeners were held accountable for hearing the words of the prophet (Deut 18:18-19).
- The ability to resist one's own thoughts. Note Nathan first approved of David's idea to build a temple for God but later forbade this after God spoke to him.

Prophets were variously called: a seer, a man of God, a servant of God, a messenger of the Lord, a shepherd of God's people, a watchman and an interpreter.

Prophets never wore robes of glory and authority, like the High Priest, or even simple robes like the ordinary priests. Their dress is only mentioned as out of the ordinary when they wore hair robes (2 Kg 1:8; Zech 13:4; Matt 3:4) or sackcloth (Isa 20:2), but these cases were in recognition of the humbling sins of the people. There were not worn next to the skin, as in the case of ascetics, but as a mantle over clothes. In one case Isaiah was to be naked (Isa 20:2-4). Sometimes, false prophets used this garb to add weight to their claim to be prophets (Zech 13:4).

Schools of the prophets

The formal prophetic order began with Samuel. Schools of the prophets were instituted for the training of prophets, who were constituted as a distinct order (1 Sam 19:18-24; 2 Kg 2:3, 15, 4:38) which continued to the close of the Old Testament.

Prophetic colleges were established at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho. The 'sons of the prophets' were young men, or disciples, (2 Kg 5:22, 9:1, 4) who lived together at these different schools (2 Kg 4:38-41). They were taught a basic education and trained to exercise the office of prophet: to preach God's law and the worship of God, and to co-ordinate with the priesthood and monarchy to guide the nation.

Occasional prophets

Sometimes God would speak in a dream or a vision to a heathen person for his own purpose. These have included: a Philistine, an Egyptian, a Midianite, a Chaldean, a Roman, and Balaam – a heathen prophet. Gen 20:6, 41:1; Num 22-24; Jud 7:13; Dan 2:1; Matt 27:19. This does not make such people an authoritative prophet, just an instrument God used in his grace.

The question of female prophets

Miriam and Deborah were prophetesses. I will list all the occasions of the word 'prophetess' in the Bible.

Miriam

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. Exod 15:20

This is not indicating that Miriam prophesied to men with authority at all. Sometimes the word prophecy was used to indicate praise like a prophet (e.g. Saul's prophecy). Here Miriam's praise and dancing was described as prophecy.

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it. ... So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. So Aaron said to Moses, 'Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please do not let her be

as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!' So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, 'Please heal her, O God, I pray!' Num 12:1-2, 9-13

When Miriam and Aaron claimed authority as prophets, God judged them immediately. Aaron had only been a prophet (i.e. a spokesman, Exod 7:1, *nabhi*) for Moses, not for God. Miriam had no authority as a prophetess at all.

Deborah

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, "Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun"'. Jud 4:4-6

Deborah is the only case where a woman comes close to having prophetic ministry. But what must be borne in mind is that this was a time where Israel was in rebellion and apostasy, where everyone did what was right in their eyes and where there was much disorder. The times were not normal. In such a time Deborah rose up to try to encourage men to fight for God, chiefly Barak. Note that she is under the authority of her husband.

The fighting was not done by Deborah but by Barak. The leading of the men was not done by Deborah but by Barak. Thus Barak is mentioned as a champion of Israel in Hebrews 11:32 but not Deborah.

Huldah

So Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. Then she said to them, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Tell the man who sent you to Me, Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants -- all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read ..."' 2 Kg 22:14-16

So Hilkiyah and those the king *had appointed* went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke to her to that *effect*. Then she answered them, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Tell the man who sent you to Me ..."' 2 Chron 34:22-23

This was not directive, authoritative prophecy directing men. It was foretelling the calamities which would come upon Israel for its idolatry. In fact, Jeremiah was active in this time but was probably some distance away at Anathoth. Note that she also was under the authority of her husband.

The point is that God used a humble woman, usually ignored by any men let alone those in authority, to discipline those who should have known better. Hilkiyah, as a priest, should have known the law and been able to teach it to others.

The prophetess

My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid. Neh 6:14

This regards a false prophetess, so we can discount this.

Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, 'Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz'. Isa 8:3

The prophetess here merely refers to the wife of Isaiah.

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 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. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Lk 2:36-38

This is not referring to authoritative prophecy or directing men. It refers to the ministry of Anna who served God in the temple day and night. She was full of praise and spoke about the Messiah. It is a case somewhat like Miriam. She is also stated to be under the authority of her father.

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. Rev 2:20

This regards a false prophetess, so we can discount this.

So, we do not have any examples of directive, authoritative prophecy directing men. These give us no reason to allow women today to have authoritative prophetic ministries in the church. In any case, all Old Covenant prophecy is finished. I say this again, no female prophetess had any directive authority over men.

Old covenant prophecy is ended

The authoritative 'thus says the Lord' type of prophecy is finished. It ended with the close of the Old Covenant at the coming of Christ and is finally represented in John the Baptist.

Jesus tells us clearly that John the Baptist was the last of the prophets.

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Matt 11:13

The law and the prophets *were* until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached. Lk 16:16

The authoritative ministry of Old Covenant prophecy ceased when the Gospel of Jesus Christ began to be preached. Authoritative prophecy was subsumed into Christ's ministry and this ministry is not delivered by prophets but by the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of believers. It is the Spirit that brings the things of Christ to the elect, not prophets.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Jn 14:26

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you. Jn 16:13-15

This is why we never see the words ‘Thus says the Lord’ used with a prophecy in the NT. Search for them; they are not there. If your Bible has these words in the NT it’s a false translation of the Greek.²

The reason for this is that all believers have God in their hearts. The whole Trinity is present in the lives of the saints and the Spirit is directed by Jesus to be our teacher and guide. He directs us into all truth. There is no need for the formal office of prophet any longer because the Spirit leads us.

This is the great mistake of Charismatics; they seek to reintroduce Old Covenant ministry, which includes visions, dreams, angelic ministry, authoritative prophecy, miracles etc. These things are said to be elementary³ and have ended with the close of the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, believers have all three Persons of the Godhead in their hearts and such elementary things are no longer required. Only rarely does God use such things in New Covenant history after the cross; usually at some special crisis point in the church.

Tests of a prophet

False prophets

There were many false prophets.

First, there were heathen prophets who issued forth satanic lies or divine truths in a perverted way (e.g. Balaam, the prophets of Baal, 1 Kg 18:19; Jer 2:8, 23:13).

There were also false prophets amongst the Israelites (Jer 23:16-32). These were of two types:

- Impostors tempted by money or wealth or power (1 Kgs 22:5-28; Ezek 13:17-19; Mic 3:11; Zech 13:4).
- Sincere people who were deceived by Satan.

True prophets were recognised by:

- Signs (Exod 4:8; Isa 7:11, 14) but signs alone were not sufficient. The sign could come about accidentally or by plotting (Deut 13:1-2; 2 Thess 2:9).
- Fulfilment of predications (Deut 18:21-22).
- By sound teaching according to God’s word (Deut 13:1-5; Isa 8:20). This reflected God’s law, sound practical doctrine and a true manifestation of the character and attributes of God.

Failed predictive prophecy requires discipline.

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' -- when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.
Deut 18:20-22

² The nearest thing is Acts 21:11, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit’. This was a one off, extreme situation regarding Paul’s imprisonment; but even then the OT format is not used.

³ Heb 6:1.

Deceptive prophecy requires discipline

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. Deut 13:1-5

Failed predictions and words that lead to idolatry were punished by death under the Old Covenant. Now we are not under that covenant today and the death penalty is not appropriate; however, severe discipline must be meted out to false prophets. In modern terms this would mean delivering the person to Satan; that is, expelling them from the church.

It is noteworthy that famous church leaders have produced multiple failed prophecies and retained their honour and salaries. Every single claimed Charismatic prophet that I can think of has produced failed predictions and pushed towards deception. This includes arch-heretic William Branham and every other Pentecostal prophet.

Under Biblical law all those failed prophets should not have simply been removed from ministry but also expelled from the local church. Instead they continue to rule over many churches no matter how many failed prophecies they utter. Every so-called Charismatic prophet that I have ever met, heard, or read about has issued false prophecies.

NT prophecy

Jesus is the chief prophet above all

Jesus is frequently spoken of as a prophet (Lk 13:33, 24:19). He was and is the great Prophet of the Church. We need no other prophet, no other person to bring the words of God to us.

Prophecy as a spiritual gift

There was also in the Church a distinct order of prophets (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20, 3:5) who brought revelations from God. They differed from teachers whose office was to impart truths already revealed.

There were prophets that worked with the apostles on their travels and many apostles also had the gift of prophecy, thus they were able to write Scripture. The writers of Scripture that were not apostles/prophets wrote under the direction of an apostle (such as Luke, directed by Paul and Mark, directed by Peter).

The necessity of the prophetic office at this time was because there was not a widely available Bible to see the words of Christ in one's own language. Copies of the OT would require many scrolls of very expensive hand-written parchments. Very few people would even have had some portions of this.

The NT was also not completed when the apostles were ministering and though papyrus copies of their letters and Gospels were more readily available, they would still be expensive and hand-written. Thus copies would have been shared amongst many people and few would have had many scrolls or codices of their own.

So prophets were used by God to bring encouragement, exhortation and admonition based on Scripture and apply it to a congregation:

He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. 1 Cor 14:3

He who prophesies edifies the church. 1 Cor 14:4

There was some foretelling in order to rescue people in dire straits. But authoritative prophecy has passed. It ended with John the Baptist. NT prophets were not authoritative prophets like the OT prophets. Notice that even when Agabus and many other prophets correctly prophesied about Paul's imprisonment, Paul decided that it was God's will to continue and be imprisoned (Acts 20:23, 21:4, 10-14).

Also Acts regards a temporary developing situation. This principle must be understood when interpreting Acts. It was a time of preparation to establish the church and many things were not yet initiated; note that elders do not appear until chapter 11 and they are the foundation of the local church. It was some years before Paul's ministry began to appear which is the basis of NT theology.

For example, the apostles used Old Covenant lots to discover God's will regarding the apostolate (Acts 1:26).⁴ They were never used again because the Holy Spirit began to indwell them after Pentecost, rendering lots irrelevant. In this developing period, with no finalised apostolic theology and no complete written NT in any language, God allowed prophets to encourage the church with existing truths fashioned for the moment. That is not the situation we are in today. Prophets are not necessary to impart God's word as revelation.

The NT does not tell us to follow the word of NT prophets, but it does tell us to follow apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42). The Bible is the foundation of the faith, and this comprises the prophets of the OT and the apostles' doctrine of the NT (Eph 2:20; 2 Pt 3:2).

Old Covenant Prophecy	New Covenant Prophecy
The age of prophecy.	The age of apostleship and the Holy Spirit.
Inspired, infallible revelation.	Inspired, infallible revelation of Scripture writers. Ordinary prophets in early church: divine encouragement and exhortation.
'Thus says the Lord'	This phrase is never used.
Authoritative words from God.	Only the apostles gave authoritative words.

⁴ There is a debate over whether Matthias is one of the 12. Some claim that he is based on Acts 1:26, and 2:14. However, Matthias is never mentioned again. The apostles were also told to wait until the Spirit had come so choosing a new apostle was disobedient. Furthermore, many commentators insist that Paul is the twelfth apostle since God never told them to choose a replacement for Judas. Paul is certainly the most important apostle in terms of world evangelism and the writing of the NT. If Matthias made up the 12 then Paul is left out of the apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14); which would be inconceivable. Though I was taught as a young convert that the choosing of Matthias was correct, I grew to believe that it was a mistake, like using lots to choose him.

Ended with John the Baptist.	Formal prophecy is now divine unction expressed in teaching, evangelism and pastoring.
The prophet had God's Spirit to utter divine direction to the ignorant people.	Every saint has the Spirit indwelling them and guiding them into all truth. Formal prophets are not necessary.
All prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ, the Prophet to come.	Apostleship is directed by Jesus Christ to the church; apostolic doctrine is the final words of Jesus to the church..

Prophecy in history

From time to time, in almost every generation of church history, there have been apostate groups that have claimed to manifest powerful prophecy. This was usually associated with the normal Charismatic-type of pagan exuberance: ecstasies, gibberish tongue speaking, trances, falling down, claimed miracles etc. In every case they were associated with apostasy, scandal and the movement gradually died away after an initial excitement.

There are so many of these cults that we can mention only a few here.

- The Montanists: Montanism was essentially a prophetic movement in the church of Asia Minor after 170 AD where prophetic utterances were usually delivered in an unconscious ecstasy. When two women became the principal leaders of the movement Scripture became subordinated to the inner voice of the Spirit. This is a key error that undergirds all ecstatic (Pentecostal) movements in history right up to the present time. Ministry resulting from passivity, subjectivity and ecstasy is dangerous. Other evils followed as apostasy abounded. This is typical of what followed in history.
- Thomas Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets / Storchites (1521+).
- The Quakers and the inner light (1640s).
- The French Prophets (Camisards, Cevenols, 1688+).
- The New Light Prophets (1742+).
- The Shakers (1770+).
- The Catholic Apostolic Church (London mid 1800s).
- The Mormons (1830+).
- The Holiness Movement (1867+).
- Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter (1885).
- Frank W. Sandford (1893+).
- Pentecostalism (1901+).
- The Charismatic Movement (1960+).
- The Kansas City Prophets (early 1990s).
- The New Apostolic Reformation (today).
- The Unification Church (today).

All of these have claimed some sort of prophetic revelation and authority. Many formed into cults and aberrations, followed with bad teaching. Some disturbed regions and nations for a time; all of them disturbed the church. Many of the prophets turned out to be charlatans committing serious sins. In recent years we have seen many Charismatic

prophets commit serious sin, such as Paul Cain, Todd Bentley and Bob Jones – continuing the historic example.

Claims of true formal prophecy in history, comparable to OT prophecy, have always been bogus, leading to heresy and authoritarianism. Claiming to be a modern authoritative prophet is sheer hubris and will lead to judgment.

The Charismatic Movement

This comes in two forms.

The prophetic office

This is equivalent to Old Covenant authoritative prophecy – which I have proved is finished and no longer operative. Thus all claimed Charismatic and Pentecostal official prophets are false.

Such Charismatic prophets are usually held in great honour and hold positions of great authority in churches. Some lead entire denominations of hundreds or thousands of people.

Examination of all such claimed prophets reveals not only multiple failed prophecies, not only failed miracles (such as claimed healings then the person died) but also various forms of abuse. Frequently there is psychological, authoritarian abuse, but there are many examples of worse abuse, such as sexual abuse and outright rape.

Pentecostal and Charismatic prophets include:

- William Branham (cited as a fraud and occultist by former colleagues; a known heretic).
- Bob Jones (multiple accusations of sexual abuse, occultism and other sins).
- Paul Cain (outed as a homosexual and alcoholic; Latter Rain heretic).
- Todd Bentley (licentious violent antinomian, caught as an adulterer).
- Kenneth Copeland (Word of Faith heretic, New Thought occultism, fabulously rich from the gifts of gullible people).
- Rick Joyner (mystic, heretic, hubristic claims – e.g. that he is greater than Paul the apostle).

I will say it again; the authoritative formal prophetic office is finished. It ended with John the Baptist and was replaced by the Holy Spirit bringing the words of Jesus to us.

Ordinary prophecy in church meetings

This sort of prophecy is usually treated as non-authoritative to be tested by the congregation. In practice most prophecies are left to stand, however poor.

Very many are introduced by the words ‘Thus says the Lord’, or ‘The Lord says’, which is Old Covenant and now cancelled. So doing this is disobeying God and committing blasphemy (claiming that you are directly speaking formally for God).

In most cases these words are just the excited imaginations of well meaning but poorly taught people who have been led astray. The best are just exhortations based on Scripture, but most are very superficial. Some are total rubbish. All are not prophecy at all.

Visions, dreams and pictures

Again these are Old Covenant.

Since we have God living in our hearts we no longer need more obtuse forms of revelation, such as hard to interpret dreams or visions. Any reliance upon such things offends the Holy Spirit who is our guide into all truth. Why would God give an obscure picture to someone in church to edify the congregation when the meaning is unclear, when he can gift a person to be a teacher and instruct from Scripture in great detail?

Objections

Church ministry

If prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith. Rm 12:6

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Cor 12:7-11

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. ... But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. 1 Cor 14:1, 3-5

Prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 1 Cor 14:22

For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 1 Cor 14:31

Do not despise prophecies. 1 Thess 5:20

These are references to the situation in the early church where the Bible was not yet available. In this time prophets brought revelation based on Scripture (not new revelation). The apostles alone brought revelatory prophetic words with authority that eventually became Scripture. For example, if Paul were visiting a church that had no Scriptures and taught them sound doctrine in the power of the Spirit, this would rightly be seen as prophecy. Apostolic delegates were also gifted with some ability to minister in supernatural power (Heb 2:4). This sort of prophecy is no longer operative because we have Bible which is expounded by teachers, gifted and led by the Holy Spirit.

Women prophesying

Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Acts 21:9

Every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonours her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. 1 Cor 11:5

This is similar to the above. There were various prophets in the early church by God's grace because the Bible was not yet available. The ordinary prophets (simple ministry in the church not apostolic workers) would bring words of encouragement and exhortation based on known Scriptures, such as oral Gospel passages or OT texts. Women did this as well as men.

Such prophets had no authority over men and all words were examined and judged by the others present and the elders (1 Cor 14:29).

Church offices

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:11-13

These are not ordinary church contributions but official gifts of men to the church by the risen Lord Jesus.

In the early church there were significant prophets who had itinerant ministries, often working closely with apostles, such as Apollos. These exercised predictive prophecy as well as prophetic teaching.

Prophets were more necessary in the early church because the Bible was not available in widespread use for decades.

However, this text tells us that all these gifts continue for equipping the saints 'until' the unity of the faith, to perfection in Christ – in other words until the final consummated sanctification at the coming of the Lord. Thus we have these ministries active in the church today:

- Apostles: not apostles of the Lamb, which was restricted to the 12 (Rev 21:14) but the apostles of the churches (2 Cor 8:23; 'messengers' is *apostolos*) such as Andronicus and Junia,⁵ (Rm 16:7). Apostles today would be called 'missionaries'; they establish new churches, being sent from a mother church. There is no NT support for the idea of a claimed 'apostle' having authority over many churches in a denomination like an archbishop.
- Prophets: as I previously explained, these are people with a special gift from God to represent God to the people in whatever ministry they have, i.e. as an apostle, evangelist or pastor-teacher. They exercise great power in their given ministry. The great NT example is Paul, who was prophetic in his ministries of apostle, evangelist, and teacher. In history we see George Whitefield as a prophetic evangelist who brought thousands to Christ. Spurgeon was a prophetic evangelist and pastor-teacher. Luther was a prophetic apostle and pastor-teacher. Alexander Peden was a prophetic apostle, evangelist and teacher.
- Evangelists: those who centre on evangelism, both in their personal ministry and in training the church to witness; e.g. Timothy (2 Tim 4:5) and Philip (Acts 21:8).
- Pastor-teachers (the Greek joins these together as one). In other words 'elders'; those who pastor the church and teach.

Genuine prophecy today

If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 4:11

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Eph 4:29

⁵ Junia is not a woman's name. It is properly 'Junias' a masculine proper name meaning youthful.

Teaching on fire

'Oracles' means 'divine utterances'.

In church we are to pursue mutual edification. This is bringing ministry that seeks to edify, or build up, other people. This is chiefly the ministry of teaching; giving instruction to impart divine knowledge to help believers grow in grace.

Yet Peter here speaks about ministry that is like a divine utterance. This is powerful ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit that gives grace to the hearers and glorifies God. It is dynamic ministry way above normal teaching.

Throughout history we have witnessed special grace given to certain men that were empowered to bring spiritual development and encouragement to the church. They were called various names but these men were prophets. They were a cut above normal preachers and teachers and sometimes they changed nations. They would include Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, George Whitefield and many more.

This is not imparting new revelation but being empowered by God to teach in such a way that people felt God speaking to them. It is prophetic teaching or prophetic witnessing. We need such men today.

Foretelling

Some foretelling prophets have occasionally been evidenced in church history, such as Alexander Peden.

From time to time, and usually in periods of terrible persecution and stress, God gives gifts to men to help stop the church being destroyed by satanic rulers bent on tribulation. This is sometimes dramatic escape from attack, sudden wisdom of speech, or occasionally prescience. Peden's prescience frequently saved lives when he warned, with no prior knowledge, that troops were waiting at meeting places in Scotland's 'killing times'. He even accurately predicted the king's death when he was several hundred miles away from any news. Another example is the man that prophesied over the young Spurgeon telling him that he would be a pastor of thousands.

Foretelling like this is rare.

Conclusion

This small analysis of Biblical prophecy shows that what passes for prophecy in Charismatic churches is a far cry from the truth. Their prophets are an embarrassment. Truly authoritative prophets are restricted to the Old Covenant, which ended with John the Baptist and no longer exist. Why would they be needed when every saint has God dwelling in their hearts? None of the other phenomena associated with prophecy are usually operative today, such as dreams, visions, or premonitions; again because we have the indwelling Spirit of God.

Any recourse to supposed formal prophetic activity is blasphemy. As for supposed female formal prophets, that is even worse. These were not operative in authority even under the Old Covenant. Charismatic prophetesses today are charlatans. They even disobey clear words such as 1 Tim 2:11-15. Mark this well, Charismatic prophetesses are a blasphemy. If you are in a church led by one, run as fast as you can.

Yet there is a form of prophecy in the church. This is when a man speaks as the oracles of God in his ministry, whatever that ministry is. Thus great men have been given by God to the church throughout history that have truly manifested prophetic ministry as an apostle (missionary), evangelist, or pastor-teacher.

Would that God would give us such prophetic ministry today, a time when we sorely need men who will speak for God in humility and spiritual authority. Indeed, we also need men who will speak prophetically to nations warning them of doom unless they repent of their evil ways. Never has there been a time when nations have followed satanic measures to the degree we see today. We need another Amos, Jeremiah or Isaiah.

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