

## **God's Use Of Prophecy**

### **Introduction**

Last week in verses 1 to 13 the theme was **when God sends His Spirit to indwell each believer, He gives His Spirit fully so that each believer is enabled to overcome the evil of the world, to live holy and to preach the gospel of Christ.** Today we will examine the fulfilment of prophecy. The difference of prophecies in the Old and New Testaments and prophecies of today. I hope to address what the gift of prophecy is, both in the past and now. So, this morning my focus is narrow and I am going to tackle verses 16 to 18 where many preachers fear to tread. Reading at verse 16, **“But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’”** This message is gut-wrenching for me because my goal is to deliver a message that is inspired by the Spirit and true to God’s Word and edifying to you. Come to think of it - that is what I go through every week. I want you to understand, this is a responsibility I do not take lightly. In many churches the pastors preach topically and that allows them to avoid difficult passages. However, at Canyon Bible, we are committed to expository preaching, dealing with all of God’s Word as we work our way through the scriptures. Today we tackle one of the passages pastors like to skip – I thought about skipping it and then was convicted to hold to teaching all of the Word of God, even the tough passages. So, strap into your seats and get ready as we explore God’s Word.

### **The Sufficiency and Finality of Scripture**

As we dive into the subject of prophecies, let me begin by affirming the finality and sufficiency of Scripture, the 66 books of the Bible, the complete Word of God. Nothing I say today about prophecies means that they have authority over our lives like Scripture does. Whatever prophecies are given today, if they are true to God's Word and they do not add to or take away from Scripture and they are consistent with Scripture, then God is using for His glory and the benefit of Christ's Church. Any prophecy is to be tested by Scripture. Scripture is closed and final; it is the foundation, not a building in process. The Word of God is final and cannot be added to by men.

The best way to see this is to see how the teaching of the apostles was the final authority in the early church and how other prophecies did not have this final authority. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, **"If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."** The implication is clear; the teaching of the apostle has final authority. The claims to prophecy in the church, after the writing of the New Testament, then and now, do not have this authority. So, the primary purpose of prophecy is for the glory of God, benefit of Christ's church.

You can see the same thing in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, **"Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup> not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the**

temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup> And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-6) In other words, prophecies must be tested by the word of the apostles, who God, through His Spirit directed the writing of the New Testament.

Now the point is this, today the New Testament stands where the apostles stood in the authority of the early church, as the Apostles of Jesus Christ. Their authority is exercised today through their writings and the writings of their close associates, like Luke and Mark and James (*the Lord's brother*). So, in the same way Paul and the other writers made apostolic teaching the final authority in those days, so we make the apostolic teaching the final authority in our day. That means the New Testament is our authority. Also, since the New Testament endorses the Old Testament as God's inspired Word, we take the whole Bible as our rule and measuring rod of all teachings and all prophecies about what we should believe and how we should live and how the church lives in this world. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say the various gifts given to believers by God's Spirit have ceased. The problem is they are taken out of context and abused to be what men want them to be. Some say, if you do not speak in unknown tongues, you are not saved or you are a second-class Christian. They will also say, if you prophesy you are a special class of Christian. Others, because of the abuse, try and claim these gifts ended at Pentecost, yet scripture does not support either of these stances.

## **Pentecost**

Before we move on, let's go back to Acts chapter 1 to set the stage and give foundation to Acts chapter 2, verses 14 to 21. What does Acts chapter 1 say about prophecy? Here is the situation, it is the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. There are 120 Christian men and women waiting in Jerusalem

in the upper room and they are reminded of Jesus' words, <sup>44</sup> "Then *Jesus* said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures ... <sup>48</sup> 'You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And **behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.**" (Luke 24:44-45, 48-49) This is fulfilled as we read in Acts chapter 2, "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." (vs. 2-4) What are these tongues? Verse 11 clarifies this for us, it says people from other countries, "... hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Note the content of their words very carefully. Understanding what is said here is important for understanding the nature of the gift of prophecy. Everything is centered on God, His glory and His Word. From here they move out and Peter preaches to the thousands gathered.

### **The Fulfillment of Joel's Prophecy**

In verse 16 Peter explains what is happening. He says that this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's words found in Joel chapter 2, <sup>28</sup> "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on **all flesh**; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." This verse is also cited in Hebrews, giving further witness to God's prophecies being fulfilled. The prophet said of God, "I will pour out my Spirit on **all flesh**" this means there would be an outpouring of God's Spirit worldwide. Not on every human but on those throughout the world that believed in Jesus as God's only Son and as their Lord and Savior. The

mark of this outpouring would be widespread and the beginning of Christ's Church being spread throughout the world. The mark would be prophesying by men and women both young and old from all social classes for the purpose of Christ's church being taken to the world. Joel says this will happen "before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. <sup>32</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Joel 2:31-32) In other words, this is what we call the Church Age that will last until Christ returns and "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." So, my beloved, Christ has come and we are living in the "last days" waiting for the return of the Lord.

### **Prophecy In The Last Days**

Living in the time between Christ's ascension and His return puts us in the last days or Church Age. Since Jesus came, we are living "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Hebrew 1:2) God's plan for a Savior was fulfilled when He sent His Son, history is counting down, we are living in the last days.

So, this confirms what we learned last week about prophecy being something we should expect today, it may not be common, but it does happen. Why is not common? Because we have the complete Word of God. Men and women, young and old, upper and lower class will prophesy in the last days, which is our days, and this will be a worldwide phenomenon because, as verse 17 says, God will pour out his Spirit on "all flesh", not just Jews. As Peter's sermon comes to an end, we read, <sup>38</sup> "Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'" (Acts 2:38-39) That includes us Gentiles who are called by God. Let me clear, God gives gifts to those

His calls to be His children, but there is no gift that everyone receives, except the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As we find in verse 38 of Acts chapter 2, **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** One manifestation of the Spirit in the last days will be an amazingly widespread gift of prophecy as we read in verses 17 and 18, the sharing of the Gospel of Good News and God’s Church will continue to spread throughout the world, **“everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”**, **“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”** Prophecy is meant to help people of all nations, tongues and tribes relate to their need for Christ and the salvation He alone offers.

Also, as Paul instructed the church in Rome, <sup>3</sup> **“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”** (Romans 12:3-8) There is no benchmark gift that all believers must possess in order to be considered true believers. Paul makes clear not everyone will speak in tongues or prophecy, <sup>27</sup> **“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts**

of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts.” (1 Corinthians 12:27-31) Seeking “higher gifts” does not mean as most think – to elevate themselves and prove they are Christian, but gifts for the purpose of elevating God before the world. This passage makes clear no one, no one will receive all gifts and there is no gift that should be possessed by everyone. For if this were to be true, as many promote about certain gifts, it would mean a diminished need for the Church to be made up of many members. This is also man’s attempt to elevate themselves over others.

Now ask yourself this question, “Did Joel and Peter and Luke think that all the men and women, both old and young, menservants and maidservants would be prophets in the same sense that Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophets? That is, people who speak with verbal inspiration; do they speak with the same authority of God as the prophets and the writers of infallible Scripture as did? Is this the same type of prophesying we are reading of in Acts 2 verse 17? If not then what sort of prophecy is this? How do these prophecies differ from the Old Testament prophets ending with John the Baptist and the writers of the New Testament? Is there no difference or is there a difference?

I believe there is a difference. I do not think the gift of prophecy today has the authority of the Old Testament prophets or the authority of Jesus and His apostles. Or, to put it more positively, this sort of prophecy is prompted and sustained by the Spirit and yet does not carry the divine authority of God.

One of the reasons that this kind of prophecy is so hard to get a handle on today is that most of us do not have categories in our thinking for a Spirit-prompted statement that does not have divine authority. That sounds like a contradiction. We

stumble over a kind of speech that is prompted and sustained by the Holy Spirit and yet is fallible. But I am going to try to show this morning that this is what the gift of prophecy is today. It is a Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained utterance that does not carry divine authority and may be mixed with error by our human nature. Now if that makes the gift of prophecy seem insignificant and unedifying, consider the analogy of the gift of teaching.

### **Teaching Analogy**

Would you not say that, when the spiritual gift of teaching is being exercised, that the teaching is prompted and sustained by the Spirit and is rooted in an infallible, divine revelation, namely, the Bible? The gift of teaching is the Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained act of explaining biblical truth for the edification of the church. God commands His Word should be preached and all of us would say it is tremendously valuable in the life of the church. But would any of us say that the speech of a teacher or preacher, when he is exercising the gift of teaching, is infallible? No! Would we say it has divine authority? Only in a very secondary sense would we say so, only in its ability to be consistent with the Word of God. Not in itself, not intrinsically, but in its source the Bible.

Why is it that a gift that is Spirit-prompted and Spirit-sustained and rooted in an infallible revelation of God's Word, the Bible is nevertheless fallible, mixed with imperfection, and only has secondary, derivative authority? The answer is this; a teacher's perception of biblical truth is fallible; his analysis of biblical truth is fallible; his explanation of biblical truth is fallible. There is no guarantee that the link between an infallible Bible and the church will be an infallible link. The gift of teaching does not guarantee infallible teaching. Yet, even though the gift of teaching is fallible and even though it lacks intrinsic, divine authority, we know it is of immense value to the church. We are all edified and built up by gifted teachers. God



is in the teaching. The Spirit is in the preaching. God does use it. It is a spiritual gift, but it is not guaranteed to be infallible. I love the Lord and His Word and I believe the Holy Spirit guides me as I study and write. However, you should always hold my teaching or sermon up to the Word of God as the litmus test of its truth.

Now compare this to the gift of prophecy. It is prompted by the Spirit and sustained by the Spirit and based on a revelation from God. God reveals something to the mind of the Prophets of the Old Testament, in ways beyond ordinary sense perception and since God never makes a mistake, we know that His revelation through the Prophets is true. It has no error in it. When the Old Testament prophets say, “**thus says the Lord**” a 156-times, they are saying the words they are speaking are from God and are God’s words. If they are proven to be untrue, they are a false prophet and God instructs, “**the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.**” (Deuteronomy 18:20)

In the New Testament, Jesus warned, <sup>24</sup>“**For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.**” <sup>25</sup>**See, I have told you beforehand.** <sup>26</sup>So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. <sup>27</sup>For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” (Matthew 24:24-28) False prophets, like Benny Henn, want everyone to see them as special, they are self-serving, their prophecies have been proven false, again and again, and yet, they still lead many astray and people still send him their money which enriches him and does little to serve the kingdom of God. In Deuteronomy we just read, “**the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same**

prophet shall die.” (Deuteronomy 18:20) False prophets who lead people astray will experience God’s judgement, for as the scriptures teach, “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:24) At the end of history John observed the angel of God prophesying, <sup>19</sup> “I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. <sup>20</sup> And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image.” (Revelation 19:19-20) When someone says, “thus says the Lord” they better be true and right in every aspect for they say they are speaking the very words of God, which are found in the Bible and there is no wiggle room.

Remember, in the last days the gift of prophecy does not guarantee the infallible transmission of that revelation. The person may perceive the revelation imperfectly, he may understand it imperfectly, and he may deliver it imperfectly. That’s why Paul says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face ...” (1 Corinthians 13:12) what he means by “face to face” is that we will see with crystal clarity when we come “face to face” with God in heaven. Modern prophecy is for God’s glory, for the benefit of Christ’s Church and is not about how special the person is and must be tested by the standard of the Bible.

## **Prophecy Redefined**

The point of what I have been saying is this; we need to create a category in our thinking for a kind of speech that is Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, revelation-rooted, and yet in need of testing and sifting by the standard of God’s Word. We need another category of prophet besides the one of “true prophet”, on the one hand, who spoke with infallible, verbal inspiration; as the Old Testament prophets did, all the prophetic biblical authors and Jesus and the apostles. While on the other hand we find

false prophets, who are condemned in Deuteronomy 18:20, where God said, “the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” Or, as we read in Deuteronomy 13, <sup>1</sup>“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ <sup>3</sup> **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.” The prophet Jeremiah wrote 600 years before the coming of Christ what has been true in every generation from then until today, <sup>16</sup>“**Thus says the LORD of hosts:** (*“Thus says the LORD”, Jeremiah is saying, these words are the very words of God and if they are not then I am a false prophet. The words that follow have been proven true in every generation since they were written, because Jeremiah is a true prophet*) **‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.** <sup>17</sup> They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, “No disaster shall come upon you.””” (Jeremiah 23:16-17) We can easily find these false prophets on TV, radio and in churches when we hold up what they prophesy or teach to the eternal word of God, the Bible. They may get away with this offense against God while here on earth, but there will be a judgement day.

So, we need a third category for the ‘spiritual gift of post-scripture prophecy’—Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, revelation-rooted, but mixed with human imperfection and fallibility and therefore in need of testing. The most common form I can think of is preaching the Word of God, which is the inspired preacher delivering God’s Word in a way true to scripture, explained in order to be

applied to the lives of believers. How did I come to think there is a need for a new category? Though Paul's closing instructions in his first letter to the Thessalonians, <sup>12</sup>“We (*Paul and his team*) ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. <sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. <sup>15</sup> See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> **Do not quench the Spirit.** <sup>20</sup> **Do not despise prophecies,** <sup>21</sup> **but test everything; hold fast what is good.** <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22) When Paul says in verse 21, “hold fast what is **good**”, what is it he means? The answer is found in both Luke and Mark's gospel accounts where Jesus made clear what “good” is when a man asked Him, ““Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> And Jesus said to him, ‘**Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.**’” (Mark 10:17-18) God is the only one truly good and through teaching and the rare time of modern prophecy God's children are brought closer to the Holy God for the purpose of living holy before the world and to empower every believer to share the Gospel of Christ, which is, the only hope for salvation.

I hope this morning I have clarified the differences between Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophet Jesus, God the Son and its inspired writers, and the prophecies of today which are to be 100 percent consistent with God's Word and given for His glory and the benefit of Christ's church.

Let me end with the inspired words of God given by the Spirit to Paul in his closing remarks to the believers in Thessalonica <sup>23</sup>“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be

kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) Amen and amen!