

Prophecy in the church

A. WHAT IS PROPHECY?

1. It is not the same as teaching

Prophets and teachers are distinguished in Acts 13:1 & Eph 4:11).

It is the gift of conveying a specific vision of God's will for the present and plans for the future, so that people are challenged, encouraged or comforted.

It is God speaking through a human channel *to a particular situation*

2. It is not on a level with Scripture

The message is *temporary* and therefore not on a par with Scripture which has *general and permanent* relevance.

3. It is to build up the church

It may include a call to repentance but will not be depressing

4. It is to encourage the church

It may reveal what is wrong but also how to put it right.

5. It is to comfort the church

There is no evidence of the gift of prophecy being used for guidance in the New Testament. Rather it confirms guidance received in other ways.

6. The timing and nature of the prophecy is under the speaker's control

The thoughts and words are given by God, the timing and nature of the delivery are decided by the speaker.

7. It may happen "incidentally"

i.e. in a sermon, talk, testimony, article or prayer or even in a contribution to discussion

B. WHO MAY PROPHECY?

Someone said God spoke through Balaam's ass so there's hope for all of us! The New Testament teaches that anyone may prophesy (Acts 2:16-18; 1 Cor. 14:5:31; Num 11:27-28).

However, not everyone has the Ministry of a Prophet (a regular leading ministry recognised by the church).

Paul envisages two or three prophesying then the rest weigh what has been said.

C. HOW DO WE RECEIVE PROPHECY?

1. Lay our own preconceived ideas before God.
2. Resist Satan's deception (James 4:7).
3. Be ready to act in faith.
4. A prophecy may come in words, dominant thoughts or in a mental picture.
5. Check it is biblical.
6. Ask God to purify or remove it.
7. Be sensitive as to the moment to share it.
8. Speak only in love.
9. Speak in normal English.
10. There is no need to say "Thus saith the Lord" but one could say: "I believe the Lord is saying."
11. Use the first person singular.

D. HOW DO WE TEST PROPHECY?

1. Is it Scriptural?
2. Does it produce an "inner assent" in the spirits of the leadership (or do they have an "inner hesitation" about it?
3. Is the person giving the message:
 - Christlike?
 - In a right relationship with the congregation?
 - Showing a right attitude to the leadership?
 - Loving (even if it is a correction) or harsh and judgmental?
4. Is the content a hobby horse of the speaker?
5. If the message is predictive does it come true?

© Tony Higton: see conditions for copying on the [Home Page](#)