

A Few Notes on Prophets

By William Mark Bristow

It seems in nearly every meeting, whether with one of our congregations, or when I am ministering as a guest in someone else's pulpit – someone walks up to me and introduces themselves to me as “Prophet Somebody-or-other.” If you really want to frighten me, introduce yourself to me as Prophet So-and-So!

Sure, I believe in the real thing. Some years ago a person called me and began railing against something I preached. They began prophesying the literal destruction of the building and my destruction along with it. When I stopped them in mid sentence to tell them I didn't receive their “word” in any form, they were shocked! (In fact, several well known men and women of God had just been in our congregations and everyone of them had just expressed their feeling of the wonderful work God was doing.) Anyway, the individual said, “You don't receive the word of a Prophet??!!” My answer was a little stern, “I would accept the word of a Prophet if one were here!!” Well, that's been years and years ago and we're still here and nobody knows where the “prophet” is.

Recently, someone called and asked my advice. They had taken friends to hear a proclaimed, “prophet” in a certain meeting. Evidently several things prophesied were just plain wrong – the individual missed the mark entirely in trying to tell the caller details of their life. Several things ministered out left the friends in confusion. Then the “prophet” set up private meetings – for fees of \$50 and \$100. The thing that amazed me – the caller - an acquaintance of mine – went back for more meetings – after seeing things ministered that were just plain wrong!

On one side, I suppose that tells me how hungry people are to hear a Word from the Living God – Divine direction in their lives. (And there are really relatively few ministering an accurate and true Word – as least in my realm and scope of friends in ministry.)

If you want to know what I think defines a real “PROPHET” in the church today - read the notes on the Five Fold Ministry. Here are a few thoughts. When I look at Agabus, The Apostle Paul, Barnabas, and the few others who are named “Prophets.” I cannot find ONE scripture where a New Testament Prophet tells any believer - “YOU MUST DO THIS!” Or “YOU MUST NOT DO THAT.” (Of course, Paul, Peter and others acting as Apostles give advice and instruction to others in leadership – but in the Office of Prophet - such as Agabus ministering about the famine - or to Paul about going to Jerusalem...) Agabus tells Paul - WHAT WILL HAPPEN in Jerusalem. He never tells him – GO – or – DON'T GO! Simply – what will happen.

I don't think any man or woman (me included) has the right to tell you – or anyone, “WHAT TO DO!” Why? Because I didn't die for you. Only Jesus! In over 34 years of ministry - people have given me all sorts of prophecies. In my teens, many prophesied about the one I should marry – and *what a mess that would have been!!!* I shudder to think of it!! Some of those people got mad at me when I married Lisa (26 years ago, now). But you know something, none of those people pay my bills. Sure, they wanted to run my life – but none of them have ever offered to pay my bills.

“Words of the Lord” are a fine thing. I believe in Prophetic Words. But in the final analysis, I must hear from God – YOU MUST HEAR FROM GOD! It’s easy to follow something prophesied to you so long as everything is going well. However, when trouble comes, and somewhere difficulty will arise – then to go forward solely on another’s “word: is a very difficult thing to do. But, If you heard from God! Then let the trouble come – God is on your side and you know it.

Why would any Christian “lower” their “rights” and be satisfied with some “man’s” word? Jesus died for me so that I could go boldly into the throne room of God (Heb 4) and walk right up to “Daddy God” and ask whatever I have need of. I think we cheapen what Jesus provided for us when we run after “prophets” rather than seeking God for oneself. I know there are those who think, “But, I don’t hear the Lord.” Stay on your knees and in the Word of God until you can – if that is a true “Prophet” you’re listening to - I can swear to you - that’s how they got that Word of the Lord!! *Remember things were somewhat different with Old Testament Prophets – the Holy Spirit had not been poured out to indwell the believer – and under the Old Covenant – YES – Prophets did TELL people WHAT TO DO! I trust you can see a vast difference with Jesus as Great High Priest and the indwelling Holy Spirit guiding every believer into truth (John 15).*

I’m going to tell you something – I don’t normally share this. In over 34 years of ministry, I can count on one hand the individuals I have seen operate in the real scriptural Office of Prophet or Prophetess. Probably there are more out there than my scope of acquaintances – but I’ve been around a long time and I’ve had the privilege of working with many men and women of God. I’ve certainly attended thousands of meetings of various individuals in all these years. You want to know some I’ve seen operate in that Office? I’ll tell you.

Paul Crouch makes public mention of this on his telecasts - or I would not tell it. He tells this story – Aquilla Nash saw an individual in their ministry who was “up to no good.” When Paul and Jan were made aware of this - they couldn’t believe it - knowing the individual. Aquilla had told them exactly what the individual would do – trying to destroy their ministry. Two weeks later - it all happened exactly as Aquilla had ministered. Paul brought her in and asked for wisdom. He tells that by that Word of the Lord the ministry was saved from devastation. When I worked with Aquilla, the phone rang on “black Monday” when the stock market crashed some years back. It was Paul Crouch. He said, “Mark’ we’ve just lost most of our ministry resources which were invested - I need to speak to Aquilla, I want her to pray!.” (The FCC requires broadcasters to keep huge reserves - and most invest those reserves prudently.) Aquilla went and sought the Lord for several days. She came back with a Word of the Lord that was something along this line, if memory serves, “In so many days (a literal number) your stocks will rally – such that there would be no loss – then those stocks will drop and be down for several years.” The wisdom of selling when the market reached the point of no loss is obvious – and Paul did – and he tells of this Word of the Lord literally saving the ministry.

Some of you remember when Jim Bakker and PTL were ministries in scandal in the 1980's. A well known evangelist came publicly against Jim (it was all in the papers of the day) and called him a “cancer that needed to be excised from the Body of Christ.” The hurling of stones in judgement from one minister to another added fuel to the scandal. The press came to Oral

Robert and asked his opinion. He was in the Prayer Tower praying about the medical missionaries ORU was trying to finance. Suddenly - Oral's countenance changed visibly, "The one who has said these things will be judged with the same judgment wherewith you have judged!" (Quote from memory - perhaps not word for word.) Four days later, the judgment hurling evangelist was caught with a prostitute in a cheap motel – now people were hurling those stones at him. ***(It should be of interest that these men and women of God operating in the Prophetic Office did not tell people WHAT TO DO – rather WHAT WILL BE!)***

In the same way, I have personally seen Gordon Lindsay (founder of Christ for the Nations Institute), Kenneth E. Hagin, Morris Curello, Bud and Betty Miller, and Juan Papaleo operate in that Office.

Perhaps if I put my memory to work - I might come up with a handful more.

Rather than titles - true ministry gifts or offices present themselves as "facts" in lives as God works.

Mike Bickle, senior pastor of Metro Christian Fellowship of Kansas City, offers a very helpful model to understand the continuum from simple (ordinary) prophecy to the office of prophet:

- I Simple prophecy
- II prophetic giftedness
- III prophetic ministry
- IV Prophetic Office

I) **Simple prophecy** - any believer speaking something God has brought to mind.

1 Corinthians 14:31

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

II) **Prophetic giftedness** - believers who receive dreams, visions, impressions and share such revelation without necessarily having sharp clarity in understanding it all. There are potentially a lot of people in this category.

Acts 20:22-23

22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. ⁸², Acts 21:4

4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. ⁸³ (As we have already seen, it was indeed the will of God for Paul to go to Jerusalem. Most likely, these were sensing the danger, and did the obvious – recommended he not make the trip.)

III) **Prophetic ministry** - believers who have been recognized and commissioned for regular ministry in the local church setting. Revelation is discerned, interpreted and applied. There are much fewer in this position.

Acts 8:26

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

IV) **Prophetic Office** - Believers whose ministry is followed by signs and wonders, are judged to speak accurate words from God and whose credibility has been clearly established by their track record. There are very few people in this category.

Acts 11:28

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. ⁸⁵

Acts 21:10-14

10 And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. 12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Acts 13:6-12

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name *was* Barjesus: 7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. 9 Then Saul, (who also *is called* Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Other Scriptures regarding Prophets in the New Testament:

Acts 13:1-2

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Acts 15:32

32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

Please don't misunderstand me. Remember I consider Aquilla Nash to minister in the Office of Prophetess – I have seen that Gift operate to the Body of Christ on numerous occasions – I believe in Prophets and Prophetesses.

Everyday I see hungry (and gullible) souls drawn toward unproven ministries with little or no track record – to receive a WORD. Please remember there are such things as familiar spirits –

the devil and demons know of places, people, and events. The devil probably knows about your heartaches and difficulties (he may have been much of the cause) – and it is possible for good people – pressing into the spiritual realm – to “pick up” knowledge from familiar spirits. Over and over the scriptures admonish us to DISCERN, PROVE ALL THINGS, *try the spirits and see whether they be of God*. Some are simply unskilled in discerning – so all sorts of things are ministered – by good people.

Many receiving “words” are equally unskilled with the Word of God and discerning spiritual things – and so they are gullible in spiritual matters.

Add unskilled ministers and unskilled hearers together and this is a formula for disaster!

My Father-in-law is always taking “the effectual working of His power” (Eph 3:7) adding a dash of *Don Quixote* and turning it into a verse in his imaginary book of Hezekiah 4:37, “The proof is in the pudding!” Miguel de Cervantes may have been the author in this case – but his statement is true. The WORD of God is effective – it works, it changes lives. The final test, as Cervantes (and my Father-in-law) says, is to “eat the pudding.” The scriptures tell us that when a true prophet speaks, His words come to pass. That’s one test. In scripture - the Witch of Endor conjured a spirit that spoke a true prophecy to King Saul – so remember the devil can do a few things, too.

There is a very troubling passage in 1 Kings 13. I’m wondering if I’m trying to frighten you? – I was playing the organ for the famous radio and tent evangelist, R. W. Schambach and I remember him saying, “You think I’m trying to scare you!! Yeah! Better let me do it - and not God!!” This begins in 1 King 13:11:

¹¹ As it happened, there was an old prophet living in Bethel, and his sons came home and told him what the man of God had done in Bethel that day. They also told him what he had said to the king. ¹² The old prophet asked them, “Which way did he go?” So they told their father which road the man of God had taken. ¹³ “Quick, saddle the donkey,” the old man said. And when they had saddled the donkey for him, ¹⁴ he rode after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak tree.

The old prophet asked him, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?”

“Yes,” he replied, “I am.”

¹⁵ Then he said to the man of God, “Come home with me and eat some food.”

¹⁶ “No, I cannot,” he replied. “I am not allowed to eat any food or drink any water here in this place. ¹⁷ For the LORD gave me this command: ‘You must not eat any food or drink any water while you are there, and do not return to Judah by the same way you came.’”

¹⁸ *But the old prophet answered, “I am a prophet, too, just as you are. And an angel gave me this message from the LORD: ‘Bring him home with you, and give him food to eat and water to drink.’” But the old man was lying to him.* ¹⁹ So they went back together, and the man of God ate some food and drank some water at the prophet’s home.

²⁰ Then while they were sitting at the table, a message from the LORD came to the old prophet.

²¹ He cried out to the man of God from Judah, “This is what the LORD says: You have defied the LORD’s message and have disobeyed the command the LORD your God gave you. ²² You came

back to this place and ate food and drank water where he told you not to eat or drink. Because of this, your body will not be buried in the grave of your ancestors.”

²³ Now after the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet saddled his own donkey for him, ²⁴ and the man of God started off again. But as he was traveling along, a lion came out and killed him. His body lay there on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. ²⁵ People came by and saw the body lying in the road and the lion standing beside it, and they went and reported it in Bethel, where the old prophet lived.

²⁶ When the old prophet heard the report, he said, “It is the man of God who disobeyed the LORD’s command. The LORD has fulfilled his word by causing the lion to attack and kill him.”

²⁷ Then the prophet said to his sons, “Saddle a donkey for me.” So they saddled a donkey, ²⁸ and he went out and found the body lying in the road. The donkey and lion were still standing there beside it, for the lion had not eaten the body nor attacked the donkey. ²⁹ So the prophet laid the body of the man of God on the donkey and took it back to the city to mourn over him and bury him. ³⁰ He laid the body in his own grave, crying out in grief, “Oh, my brother!” NLT

Yeah – it still scares me, too! The moral is this – better hear God for yourself.

How do I discern?

- 1) Is the “word” scriptural? (i.e., since God hates divorce, as a rule, He would not tell you to divorce someone to marry someone else.)
- 2) Can it pass this test? James 3:17, But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. ¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness. NLT
- 3) What is the track record or “fruit” or that “prophet?” (Have people and churches been blessed and helped by them – or is there confusion and turmoil in their wake?)

How can I bring the Word to Pass? Can I Prevent or stop the Word?

- 1) If you keep walking with God, – you will simply “walk into” the promise. It will come to pass - only by turning from God and refusing His will and promises can you cause a “conditional” Word (If you do this, I will do that) to fail. Some Words of God are not conditional – Death and Judgment are coming to all just as the scripture says – there is no “if.”
- 2) Abraham obtained the promise thru faith and patience. It takes both. (Heb 6:12)

Here are two typical questions which have actually been asked? Someone has prophesied that I should sell my house and buy another. Someone has prophesied that I should leave my job and go to Africa to the Mission Field. ***What should I do?***

I cannot tell you what to do – but I can tell you what I as William Mark Bristow would do – God would have to speak to me directly on something of this importance. I would consider what a “prophet” said – and I might make inquiries regarding a house or the mission field or such (go with a valid mission ministry to that field for two weeks or so – just to see), but I would make no life changing or permanent decisions until I heard from God directly, period! (And no you won’t be in trouble – the scripture commands us to “PROVE ALL THINGS and hold fast that which is good.” (I Thess 5:21).