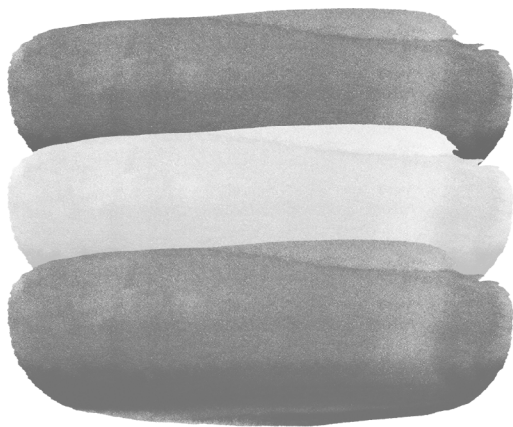


QUICK THEOLOGY

# What is Biblical Prophecy?



PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

Copyright © 2023 by Every Woman a  
Theologian LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. For more information, address:  
[phylicia@phyliciamasonheimer.com](mailto:phylicia@phyliciamasonheimer.com)

Published by Every Woman a Theologian LLC

Cover design by Eric Novak.

Every Woman a Theologian and the Every Woman a Theologian logo are trademarks of Every Woman a Theologian LLC.

Printed in the United States of America.





## Introduction

Modern day prophecy, biblical prophecy, false prophecy—how can we understand these? What does the Bible say about them and how does this translate to today? We can't go far into this book without defining prophecy! Prophecy is the speaking, writing, or communicating of a message from God to another person or to the congregation of a church. It is the inner movement of the Spirit of God in an individual that is then expressed to someone else. Prophecy occurs when the Holy Spirit brings to mind something that a person (or persons) needs to hear and the prophet relays it to those people. In the Church Age (our current era) the prophecy must align fully with Scripture. It is vital to note that modern-day prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but it does not add on to the canon of Scripture. Any revelation that is received from God for other people must align with biblical truth. Prophecy will not

add anything new! Prophecy today in the new covenant of Jesus Christ is not like it was in the days of Isaiah or Ezekiel. It is not equal revelation to Scripture; it is the application of Scripture to life. Prophecy today expresses the truths of God as revealed in Scripture and applies them to specific individuals.



## The Order of Prophecy

I hope this introduction explains what distinguishes biblical prophecy—as in, the kind of prophecy given by major prophets and John the Baptist—and New Testament prophecy as described in 1 Corinthians 14. This passage in Corinthians comes on the heels of the famous “love passage” in 1 Corinthians 13 and goes into more detail on what should be happening in the church in regard to spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was descending into chaos, adopting cultural behaviors in contradiction to what Scripture taught. The letter of 1 Corinthians is long! Paul writes to the Corinthian church to say: “Get it together. The spiritual gifts still apply, but there needs to be some order and reverence.” Here is what he actually says:

*“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak*

*to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.” -1 Corinthians 14:1-5*

Let's pause here. The rest of this section focuses on proper use of tongues and the order of worship. I want to skip ahead to verse 29, which talks about how to communicate prophecy in the church:

*“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all*

*the congregations of the Lord's people."*

-1 Corinthians 14:29-33

Based on this passage alone, we see that Paul wanted the people of the church to prophesy. Why? Because it was a way to communicate the truths of God to individuals (and to the congregation) so they would grow in the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word! *Spirit & Truth* magazine puts it this way:

"To fully understand prophetic action, it is important to realize that messages from God can be very subtle, sometimes relating His love for us or His greatness."

What is communicated prophetically might be subtle or it might be very specific. Regardless, it is Spirit-led, and the audience is supposed to understand and act on whatever truth or conviction is being brought to them by the person with the prophetic gifting.

So what is the difference between hearing the Holy Spirit speak to you and recognizing a prophecy to be shared with somebody else? The distinction: the Spirit might speak and lead you, but His word does not become a prophecy unless you are specifically called to communicate His message to another person. If you are praying to the Lord and He convicts you to communicate a specific verse to a person (whether or



not you know why), and you communicate it, that is a “prophetic word”. If you are in a denomination that believes prophecy has ceased, or no longer applies, there may be a different word for it. But in denominations that are continuationist (believe these gifts still exist today), sharing a verse with somebody after receiving it in prayer would simply be called a prophetic word.



## The Communication of Prophecy

If you shy away from the idea of prophecy, just remember that first, it should not be adding anything to Scripture. It is the specific application of Scripture to someone's life. And second, you might have a different word for what you are doing, but what you are doing is what many people in the Wesleyan, charismatic, or Nazarene world might call a prophetic word! Sometimes our terms differ, but the action is the same.

Let's say prophecy does continue today. What is the point of it? Ultimately, the goal of true prophecy is relationship with God. His communication with His people is the basis of prophecy. The message is not always an urgent thing they must do. Sometimes it is simply a call to worship. Sometimes it is a reminder that God cares. Sometimes it is an expression of His love. And sometimes it is something miraculous and wild.

On my Instagram, I once shared a series of answered prayers my followers sent in. The stories were incredible!

I was in tears just reading the stories. A lot of the accounts involved prayer in the Holy Spirit. For example: someone was praying and felt convicted to pray for a specific person at a specific time, or was led to share a specific encouragement or verse with somebody at a specific hour. Later on they learned that the specific time they shared the verse, prayed for that individual, or encouraged a person was the exact hour in which they needed that courage.

When someone takes conviction and revelation from God and shares it with another person, it is considered a prophetic word even if the person would not call themselves a “prophet.” They are “prophesying” to someone in the Spirit of God! The goal of prophecy is the glorification of God, and He is often glorified through an expression of His love. He could communicate any way He chooses. In fact, He doesn’t have to communicate with us at all. But He chooses to communicate through intimacy and actual connection with Him.

I often hear from people who say, “Why couldn’t God be more specific? Why is the Bible so hard to understand?” First of all, it is hard to understand because we are in a modern era. The people in the early New and Old Testament times did not have as hard a time understanding it! Let’s not forget our chronological

bias. Secondly, remember that God could have given us a list of what to do, but He wanted to invite people into relationship with Him. This is one of the reasons Jesus spoke in parables—He knew the people who cared were going to listen. He is inviting us -- not just to memorize a list of things to do -- but to stay in step with Him.

Galatians 5:25 says, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” God did not give us a map that we could follow without Him on our own strength. Legalism does that! Legalism gives us the map and says, “Just do all these things and you’ll live a pleasing life.” But in biblical Christianity we have to walk with the Holy Spirit every single step of the way. Biblical prophecy connects with this. Prophetic words and prophetic giftings are all meant to express the love of God and His truth and to draw us back to communion with Him and with His church.

I love how John Wesley viewed these gifts. He wasn’t charismatic or Pentecostal. John Wesley was the father of the Methodist movement, but he was an Anglican priest until he died. He saw the gifts of the Spirit as powerful and extraordinary, but he always judged the person with the gift by their holiness. He believed you should never prioritize the spiritual gifts above the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self control—must be evident in the life of someone who is operating in the gifts of the Spirit—teaching, prophecy, tongues, etc. We can evaluate where these gifts are coming from based on their fruit! If somebody says they have the gift of prophecy, but the fruit of their life is not self control, love, or peace, then we can discern and decide not to trust their “prophetic word”. We are able to judge the spiritual gifts by the fruits of the Spirit.

This is important in the conversation about biblical prophecy. If you grew up in an unhealthy charismatic environment, you may have been burned by the term “prophecy.” It could be a trigger point for you because it was used to manipulate, gossip, or slander. The spiritual gifts will match the fruit. Holiness is always first.

Now we turn to the different types of prophecy.

There are two types of prophecy—forthtelling and foretelling. Forthtelling is speaking the word of the Lord boldly to others. This might sound a lot like preaching, but it is different from preaching because it is not preplanned. Usually forthtelling prophecy -- like what I have already described in giving a prophetic word to someone -- is Spirit-inspired for that person or moment. Here is an example. Perhaps someone is brought to mind as you are praying; there is a verse, truth, or image that



## Foretelling Versus Forthtelling

is impressed upon your mind. You feel strongly that you need to share it with a specific person. You spend some time praying about it, and then tell them what you received in prayer. You did not pre-plan it; the message was brought to mind as you were praying. In contrast, a sermon is preplanned; it is worked on, prayed over, and practiced. I believe a sermon can be very prophetic in the sense that it is directed towards a congregation and led by the Holy Spirit, but not all sermons are prophetic.

The second type of prophecy is foretelling prophecy, which is what most people are familiar with. We read the prophets in the Bible, hear about Jesus fulfilling prophecy, and think most biblical prophecy is all foretelling. But that is actually not the case! In Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos, and all the prophetic books, prophets are more often than not telling the truth about a situation. For example, if we look at Isaiah there are passages that are simply “forthtelling”. He is just telling

the facts. Isaiah 50:10 says:

*“Who among you fears the Lord and obeys  
the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in  
darkness and has no light trust in the name of  
the Lord and rely on his God.”*

This is like something we would see in Psalms or Proverbs. It is just the truth! If you are in darkness and you walk in the light of God, then you are going to see the light of God in every area of your life. But if we go elsewhere in Isaiah we will see some prophetic truths that are speaking of the future. You will see passages like Isaiah 61:1:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” Jesus read this passage and said, “Today, this passage has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). There is both forthtelling and foretelling woven into the prophetic books and words of the prophets.

In the New Covenant, when a prophetic gifting is practiced in a church setting it will usually fall under forthtelling. While foretelling prophecy is still possible, it will never add revelation onto Scripture. Because of this foretelling is rare and there is a checklist of qualifications

that someone must meet to be trusted with foretelling  
prophecy.