

# MOVING IN THE PROPHETIC

A Biblical Guide to  
Effective Prophetic Ministry Today

GREG HASLAM

MONARCH  
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## DEDICATION

With respect and grateful thanks to God  
for a dear friend whom I greatly admire,

Terry Virgo,

leader of the UK-based apostolic church-planting movement  
Newfrontiers.

Throughout our long friendship and association, I have valued  
enormously your passion for God, fatherly wisdom,  
depth of biblical insight, prophetic vision, prayerfulness and  
integrity.

I know of no other person who has done so much to foster  
and encourage authentic prophetic ministry, especially among  
the pastors and churches that you lead –  
a truly apostolic and prophetic movement that continues to bless  
the nations.

Genesis 12:1–3

# Contents

Foreword		9
Preface		12
Chapter One	Does God Speak Today?	15
Chapter Two	Be Eager to Prophecy	34
Chapter Three	Prophetic Watchmen in the Church	76
Chapter Four	Pursuing the “Real Deal”	98
Chapter Five	Hearing the Voice of God	116
Chapter Six	Learning to Prophecy	134
Chapter Seven	Delivering a Prophetic Word	160
Chapter Eight	Testing a Prophetic Word	186
Chapter Nine	Finding Prophetic Vision and Direction for Your Life (Part 1)	212
Chapter Ten	Finding Prophetic Vision and Direction for Your Life (Part 2)	243
Chapter Eleven	Paul on the Prophetic – Healthy Relationships	277
Chapter Twelve	Paul on the Prophetic – Men and Women Together	293
Chapter Thirteen	Paul on the Prophetic – Love Changes Everything	314
Chapter Fourteen	Growing in the Prophetic (Part 1)	328
Chapter Fifteen	Growing in the Prophetic (Part 2)	354
Recommended Reading		379
Notes		382

# Foreword

One thing I have learned over many years in leadership is this: no church can fulfil its assignment properly without the gift of prophecy. It is simply impossible for us to work out our God-given mission without hearing clearly the Father's voice expressed through dreams, visions, pictures, messages, impressions, Scripture passages and the like. Without the prophetic we will always be restricted to reacting to past crises, rather than proactively building towards future happenings. Much of church life is reactive. But we are also called to be proactive - to access and prepare for the Father's dream for us. If we spend all our time in reactive mode, we end up managing decline. But if we give ourselves to cultivating the prophetic then we find ourselves living on the edge of mission, which is of course where the life of God is to be found. This is the place where we all of God's children are called to live. We were called to be risk takers, not undertakers. The gift of prophecy keeps us planting our feet in the footsteps of the Great Risk Taker, Jesus of Nazareth.

My own life has been dominated by the prophetic. Every major transition I have ever embraced has been the result of receiving prophetic words. Every graduation has been the direct consequence of revelation. My calling to take up the senior leadership role of St Andrew's Church Chorleywood was the result of nearly thirty prophetic words. My current move to lead the Father's House has been the outworking of eighteen months of receiving and weighing prophetic revelation. Everything between these pivotal moments has been governed by prophecy. My life has been and continues to be prophecy-saturated. I simply cannot do without it. No Christian can.

It is for that reason that we are in the debt of my friend Greg Haslam, whose book *Moving in the Prophetic* is all set to become a seminal introduction to the spiritual gift of prophecy. Of course, many books have already been published on this subject. What is unique about Greg's book is the fact that it comes from a courageous leader in God's church – a man who has practiced and encouraged the prophetic for three decades. His personal experience, as well as his excellent understanding and exposition of the Scriptures, make him unusually qualified to speak with credibility on this subject, and he does so with humour, integrity, and great clarity. Greg is a man of the Word and the Spirit, leading a church committed to the marriage of the Word and the Spirit. His is a voice we can consequently welcome and trust. We would do well to listen to what he teaches and to apply it both individually and corporately.

In the days that lie ahead, we are going to need to see a full restoration of the gift and ministry of prophecy in the Body of Christ. These are critical times for the church, especially in the West. While some are speaking about revival, my own hunch is that there is there is a bigger dream on Abba Father's heart, and this has more to do with Reformation than just revival. I believe that we are living in a season when the Holy Spirit is wooing and urging us to think outside the box and to establish brand new wineskins – new structures and strategies that draw the people of God to break out of current restrictions and infiltrate neighbourhoods and market places with a pioneering and missional creativity. These are not days for “same old, same old” church. These are days for putting the adventure back into the Christian venture. For this to happen we are going to need to see what one Pentecostal Bible scholar (Roger Stronstad) calls, “The Prophet-hood of All Believers”. We are going to need to see everyone in the church developing a God-given prophetic imagination.

If we are to see this Reformation, we must first see a restoration of the prophetic to the church. Conferences are great, and so are training courses and books. But in the final analysis there is no substitute for knowing and hearing the Father's voice, both as we hear it in the timeless pages of God's

Written Word, as well as in the heart-to-heart whispers of prophetic revelation. As the Holy Spirit once impressed upon me, “There isn’t a Manual but there is Immanuel”.

It’s time to lean on the heart of Jesus, like the Beloved Disciple of John 13, and to hear the Shepherd’s voice. This is a great book for encouraging both novices and veterans to pursue the “real deal”.

**Dr Mark Stibbe**

Formerly senior leader of St Andrews Church Chorleywood

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# Preface

I have been gripped by a growing fascination with prophetic ministry for over twenty-five years now, ever since I first encountered evidently genuine examples of its use and became aware of the beginnings and benefits of it as I personally experienced surprising but undeniable incidences of it.

I am fortunate to have seen many quality and consistently accurate expressions of prophetic gifts in operation in numerous contexts ever since then, as well as being exposed over a long period of time to some of the best practice in relationship to this often controversial ministry due to my involvement with churches and leaders who have sought to be wise and faithful in honouring and deploying this gift as Christ directs in his Word. This has stimulated me to read widely on the subject of prophecy, in the works of many biblically astute and insightful practitioners and writers, as well as to examine carefully the scriptures that deal with this subject. I have also taught numerous seminars on prophecy to many churches and Christian conferences. Some of this material reappears in this book. Increasingly, I came to honour the gift as one of the most edifying and helpful charismata in the Holy Spirit's armoury designed to thoroughly equip God's saints.

My long connection with the UK church movement Newfrontiers has exposed me to some of the most godly prophets and Ephesians 4 ministries in the world. Within this successful and influential mission, I have observed first hand, and on countless occasions, just how powerful authentic prophecy can be when it is anchored to Scripture and submitted to godly authority. I can truly say that my life has been changed, redirected and blessed beyond measure through

personal prophecies that have been spoken over me within this association of friends and spiritual comrades.

My pastoral experience of nearly three decades has also underlined not only the enormous blessings that prophecy can convey to our lives at every level but, more importantly, its vital importance in building vibrant and healthy churches. And when it also becomes a regular feature of the preaching ministry of church leaders, then, in my judgement, prophecy truly comes into a new and powerful dimension of its own, as a formidable force for good and for God in many people's lives. In this book I attempt to explain how and why this is the case.

Throughout this work, I have carried an enormous burden to encourage the recovery, practice and developing maturity of the use of the gift of prophecy in the church today. My concern was that the Bible's rich teachings on this matter become better known, understood and implemented – and no longer regularly dismissed, distorted and disregarded. In writing, I bore in mind the whole body of Christ, for I am convinced that prophetic ministry will play a major role in bringing the church to the full unity that Christ prayed for (John 17) and which the Scriptures predict will be the final glorious outcome for the church of the end times (Ephesians 4).

It is my express intention to encourage sceptical Christians to revisit and carefully reconsider this issue, in the hope that they will lay down some of their unjustified prejudices against it. I have also kept in mind the way in which this gift has become sadly neglected, even among Spirit-filled believers who once valued it highly but seem to do so no longer. And I have not been unaware of what is sometimes referred to by critics as the more super-spiritual “lunatic fringe” in charismatic circles (bless them!), who have often unwittingly succeeded in distorting the use of this gift and brought it into widespread disdain and disrepute.

Above all, I desire to help inexperienced and cautious church leaders, and ordinary Christians who are uninformed or nervous about the gift of prophecy, to adopt a more positive outlook. A happy result would be that they are then encouraged to take seriously the apostle Paul's timely exhortation in

1 Corinthians 14:1: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” For I am convinced that, if we do this, the result will be a revived church and a wider world that will be awakened once again to take notice of Christ and some of the great things he can accomplish among his people.

**Greg Haslam**

Westminster Chapel

London

## Chapter One

# Does God Speak Today?

Prophecy is God's gift to the world and to the church, given to challenge and refine contemporary culture and build up the household of faith.

Yet, whether it is exercised in the church or the world, the gift of prophecy always invites some degree of opposition and controversy. It is one of the most vivid displays of God's presence and power among his people, and since the presence of God can prove to be disturbing and even frightening, many have concluded that prophecy is best forgotten, consigned to the dustbin of history.

Yet we can't avoid the gift of prophecy if we continue to read the Bible. Especially in the New Testament, we read so much about this activity of God in our midst: its importance, how it works, and the honour due to it. Typical of this positive emphasis would be a passage like this:

...eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy...everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort... he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5

In this epistle Paul has already been focusing on the internal life of the church at Corinth, responding to questions his readers

had asked about matters of misconduct and malpractice in their corporate life together and about the way the gifts of the Spirit operated. We need to read straight through 1 Corinthians 12–14 to gain a proper understanding of Paul’s teaching on this issue. Taking selected verses, or looking only at chapter 13, is not enough. That great chapter on love is the “meat in the sandwich” of all that Paul says here and it indicates that Paul saw charismatic manifestations not in terms of “either love or gifts” but rather “gifts with love” or “gifts without love”.

We may be surprised and challenged by the suggestion that it is possible to operate the gifts of the Holy Spirit without the seal of the Spirit’s presence – love – upon what we do. Paul warns us that such use of the charismatic gifts is vain and empty.

Yet this does not mean we do better when we aim for love alone, suppressing the activity of the Spirit in the operation of the gifts; for Paul exhorts us to “eagerly desire” the gifts, especially prophecy. We must take Paul seriously as he goes on to discuss how the gift of prophecy is to be used.

A.W. Tozer has been frequently referred to as “that great twentieth-century prophet” and is widely regarded as having been a true prophet to the church, yet during his lifetime he was not esteemed in that way by many. The human tendency is to honour prophets when they are dead and safely in their graves, no longer posing a threat to the way we customarily want things done. Like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who opposed the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 23:29–32), we build tombs to pay honour to dead prophets even if we were prepared to stone them while they were alive. Tozer is one such prophet, almost universally respected for his words and profound insights now that he has gone.

Tozer once asserted that, “We need to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit restored again to the church, and it is my belief that the one gift we need most now is the gift of Prophecy.” Many would agree, seeing prophecy as a desirable gift and one that we most need as a church living in troubled times when, if we are completely honest, our reputation as the church of Jesus Christ has more often been *pathetic* than *prophetic*. Yet the

Spirit of God is faithful and longs to work with us to build a truly effective Christian community in every part of the world. This is why we stand in such need of the authentic gift of prophecy, for it has a crucial role to play in building up the people of God.

### **Danger – Saints at Work!**

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Even in churches where prophetic gifts are encouraged and fostered, they are robbed of power if the church leadership lacks confidence and experience to pastor, weigh and discern them appropriately. Much slips by in our churches without accurate weighing, correction, affirmation or admonition; and this is a sign that we are not living the mindful, reflective and discerning lives of true disciples. Sometimes even the plainly ridiculous or dangerous is accepted without question. There is often a high “cringe factor” in many churches, and it is one of the major stumbling blocks that frequently keep both sensible believers and unbelievers away from our meetings. The bizarre things we do and say inevitably turn them off. When this happens, people cease to take us seriously or listen to what we say – and so we dishonour our call to be God’s prophetic people in the world. Carelessness makes our words appear ridiculous. From time to time I have come across announcements in church bulletins or notice boards that have made me laugh out loud at their unintentional oddity.

A Baptist church built on a street corner used the windowless wall at the side of the chapel to display “wayside pulpit” posters, but did not take the trouble to reread them. As a result, passersby were treated to such gems as, “Don’t let worry kill you – let the church help!”. Another read, “Sermon for Sunday: What is hell like?”, then, just below that, the apparent answer: “Come in and hear our choir sing”!

An Anglican church, wishing to chivvy the congregation in the direction of more responsible giving, headed a paragraph on stewardship in their newsletter with a phrase

from 2 Corinthians 9:7. Careless proofreading sent it to press saying: “God Loves A Cheerful Fiver!” Everyone laughed at the heading, and nobody read the rest!

A notice posted outside an Assemblies of God Pentecostal church in a small town in the south of England boldly advertised their weekly Sunday morning meeting. It read: “Healing service here every Sunday at 10.30 am”, then added the alarming words, “You won’t get better!” It’s a wonder anyone turned up!

Occasionally our errors take us nearer the bone than we intended – as when a Methodist church advertised their forthcoming choir event as a “Sarkey and Moody Evening”. Crowds stayed away in their thousands! And one of my favourites was the priceless announcement: “On Wednesday night the Ladies’ Liturgy Society will meet, when Mrs Jones will sing ‘Put Me in My Little Bed’ accompanied by the pastor”! It amused me, but somebody should have spotted that and informed them.

We laugh at these silly mistakes because they are harmless and unimportant, but they are symptomatic of a carelessness that disastrously blunts our prophetic edge. Our message can be effective only when it is supported by a faithful, discerning, honest critique; an ongoing, clear-sighted appraisal. God knows this, and that is why he raises up prophetic voices in his church even to this day, showing us how we can realign ourselves with his revealed will in the Holy Scriptures.

We are all aware that many people, especially prominent Christian leaders, struggle with the very concept of the validity of prophecy today. They have difficulties because God has spoken in his Word, the written Scriptures, and therefore they are troubled by the possibility that God may have direct access to the minds of his children in more immediate and personal ways than reading the Bible alone, through such means as hunches and divine intuitions, intimations or directions, pictures or even words that come directly from the Spirit of God. Such “words” are designed to build up and positively strengthen his church and not to harm it.

## Our Speaking God

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I myself had serious doubts about the validity of prophetic ministry at one time. What changed my thinking was the reflection that the devil often operates as a speaking agent in the supernatural realm, all too often gaining access to our minds in this way.

Satan is quite capable of putting alien ideas into our heads – unwanted thoughts, unwelcome imagery, dangerous suggestions, accusations, ideas and directions. Some of us see pictures in our imagination; others have had dreams that seem to be demonic in origin. We have sometimes woken up in a cold sweat, trembling with fear because of what has been screened in our imagination and seen by our mind’s eye. At other times we hear voices, sometimes even audible voices, suggesting the most horrendous things: “You would be better off dead”, “Your life is going nowhere”, “You’re useless”, “Your ministry is over, your influence is finished. You may as well end it all.”

It is important to recognize that the devil is a supernatural, speaking agent with access to our minds. But is it really credible to believe that the devil has a total monopoly of airtime on the radio waves of our souls, while God himself – who created all things by his Word, who expressed himself in Jesus as the living Word, who gave us the Bible as his Word of power – is silent when it comes to dealing directly with his people?

Does God have no access to the minds or spirits of his children? Has he no way of conveying pictures or images, words or suggestions, clear directions or specific intimations to them? Is all of this activity the devil’s province alone, because God is now decidedly “hands off” when it comes to such activities, having given us a completed canon of Scripture in the Holy Bible? Has God retired from the fray in which the devil is still actively engaged? The logic of this reasoning is totally flawed.

I believe in the full inspiration of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and its final authority and total sufficiency for faith and practice, according to the claim of the Scriptures themselves. But I do not believe that when God inspired the last chapter of the book of Revelation, that acted as a kind of

suicide note or at least the announcement of his retirement, after which we would never hear from God directly again. This is unthinkable. God has not signed off. He is Immanuel, “God with us”, still speaking to us, conveying thoughts, images, promptings and directions to men and women who will listen to him and act as his messengers; and that can include you and me!

In this study, I hope to impart the necessary confidence to every reader to reach out to God for more of the Spirit’s encouragement than ever before, coming to terms with our capacity to hear from him concerning people and situations where our words and insights are desperately needed and can become an untold blessing to many. God took Balaam, that mercenary and probably self-appointed prophet, and turned him around. Balaam was a man highly motivated by social status, personal prestige and hefty cash offers – he was actually paid to curse the children of Israel. God supernaturally redirected Balaam, using him to pronounce blessings over God’s people rather than curses. If God can use Balaam, surely he can use you and me! Balaam was a man whose character was flawed and whose motives were questionable; but God picked him up and turned his curses into blessings even as they emerged from his lips (see Numbers 22–24).

God also seized hold of the insecure and wayward first monarch of Israel, King Saul. Though a man of decidedly mixed motives and flawed character, Saul was also counted amongst the prophets, at least for a time during the earliest phase of his career, as the Spirit of God came upon him in power (1 Samuel 10:6–7).

It is also worth noting that the pragmatic, politically conniving and power-hungry high priest, Caiaphas, was supernaturally led by God to say on one occasion, “It is better ...that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (as justification for the Sanhedrin’s planned murder of Jesus). John the apostle comments: “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the... nation...” (John 11:50–51).

From these examples you can see that God is able to

distribute authentic gifts of a prophetic nature to whomever he wishes, and whenever he likes. And if God frequently did this with such imperfect individuals as the men we have mentioned, how can we fail to have confidence that he is still prepared to bestow the gift of prophecy upon his children in our own day, children who love him, believe him, and want to serve both him and his church with integrity?

## **The Connection Between the Holy Spirit and Prophecy**

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The life of the church has seen long periods when prophetic ministry has been hidden and neglected in the mainstream expressions of Christianity. This has usually coincided with times when there has been a drought of the Holy Spirit's presence among the people of God. Prophecy lay unrecognized even in those moments when it has stirred and in those lives who seemed to speak with special power.

It is impossible to institutionalize the charismata of God – the Spirit blows where he wills – and perhaps we should not be surprised that wherever worship is highly ritualized and the faith community becomes the establishment, talk of prophecy fades away.

Yet as we look more closely at the paths in which the faithful have walked, if we look for the byways and field-tracks instead of the high roads of the Christian map books, we discover that God has always spoken among his people. If the synods and the councils and the elders' meetings would not hear him, still his voice was known in out-of-the-way chapels and in prayer meetings held before the main service began, or among ordinary people gathered around the kitchen tables of their homes.

Wherever the Holy Spirit has been welcomed and powerfully operative there has always been a resurgence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and particularly the gift of prophecy. In recent times, the wave of Holy Spirit renewal and blessing that has come to the body of Christ all around the world from the

mid-1990s onwards was marked by a resurgence and flood of remarkable prophetic activity. This was also true of the birth of the Pentecostal movement in 1904–05, and the charismatic movement that began in the mid-1960s as well.

As these waves of Holy Spirit blessing and activity swept through thousands of churches all around the world, the quality and quantity of prophetic words increased. This is congruent with the prediction of the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28–3:3), affirmed by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, the first day the Spirit was outpoured in fullness upon Christ’s new covenant people. Peter cites this ancient prophecy in his address to the potentially hostile Jewish audience before him: “...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy’” (Acts 2:16–18).

The time-note struck here is important. This is the promise of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the “Last Days”. Most reputable Bible scholars, though not all, believe that this phrase, the “Last Days”, connotes the era between Christ’s ascension and his second coming from heaven, his *parousia*. The “Last Days” were not fully played out in the first few decades of the first century AD as the preterist (“past-ist”) school of eschatology maintains, declaring that they came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of the Romans in AD 70.

That event did not complete history, for we are all still here – and not yet fully redeemed residents in the new heaven and earth. Though the Roman invasion and destruction of the temple was important in sealing God’s “planned obsolescence” of the priesthood and sacrificial temple worship, it also revealed patterns of God’s reaction to the religious autonomy and spiritual deception of wicked men that repeatedly unfold throughout all subsequent history, just as our Lord predicted (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13).

Nor is this phrase the “Last Days” a reference to a short period of time immediately before the end of the world, as futurists would see it, and therefore to be postponed in its fulfilment and significance until the final decades of world history, as though the intervening 2,000 years of church history experienced thus far have been but a parenthesis between two short but significant periods when the “real action” supposedly occurs. A further problem with the futurist understanding of the “Last Days” is that they can only be confidently identified by hindsight – since “no-one knows about that day or hour” when the Son of Man will return (Matthew 24:36). Certainly the predictions, descriptions and criteria for the “end times” in Mark 13 and Matthew 24–25 apply to the times in which we are now living, as they have for the most part to past generations. They seem to describe the whole inter-adventual period from beginning to end.

The “Last Days” have already arrived, according to the New Testament, and we are presently still living within them. Hebrews 1:1–2, for example, tells us that God has spoken to us “...in these last days... by his Son”, referring to an era that commenced with the public appearance of Jesus Christ and that has shown no signs of coming to an end even yet. There seems to be a unanimous testimony among the apostles writing in the New Testament that the “Last Days” suddenly erupted in the middle of history, and not at the end of it, as contemporary first-century Jewish eschatology had expected. We now live in the overlap of the “old evil age” dominated by sin and Satan, and the “age to come” that commenced with the first coming of Christ and particularly the great epoch-making, saving events of his cross and resurrection/ascension. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed God’s promise (through the prophet Joel) to be fulfilled, so indicating that the Last Days had thus begun. As we are still living in the “Last Days”, waiting for the return of the Lord, the promise has surely continued in force for all of the running centuries since then. We have no reason to believe that the promise has in any way been rescinded – “I will pour out my Spirit on all people... and they will prophesy.”

Notice also the close connection, in Peter's understanding, between an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of prophetic gifts among God's people. The Spirit inaugurates a new age of revelation, lavish and indiscriminate in its effects upon the people of God. The Holy Spirit is declared to have been poured out on every nation and ethnic group ("all people"), all ages ("young" and "old"), both sexes ("men and women") and regardless of economic status or class (on "servants"). The Holy Spirit is not ageist, sexist, racist or class conscious. Instead, he is an "equal opportunity" empowerer of his people. He breaks down all of the artificial barriers that we might erect in order to limit or monopolize his generosity. There is no elitism in the kingdom of God for, at the moment of Christ's death when the temple veil was torn in two, a way was made open for all people into the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God. At that moment, the prophetic calling to come into God's presence, and receive his Word for this generation, passed from being the spasmodic ministry of a select few to being the regular privilege of all: an every-believer ministry. It follows from this that we should expect to see manifestations of the Spirit's coming in this new way among the whole community of believers everywhere, including the gift of prophecy displayed in diverse forms – such as God-directed speech, dreams, visions, signs and actions, as well as prophetic lifestyles that model God's justice, integrity and love.

In the era of the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit temporarily anointed select individuals – judges, prophets, priests and kings – to operate in some of these ways. Specific individuals, like Moses and Elijah, were called into God's presence and then sent out to the people with the message of his word and will, but the world was still waiting for the atoning death of Christ to open the way of access to God's mind for all people through intimacy with the presence of God, and the revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:16 – "But we have the mind of Christ"), so that all could hear for themselves God's Word for today's world. The Holy Spirit is now available to all as an empowering and permanent presence in the whole body of Christ – equipping men and women, Jew

and Gentile, young and old, rich and poor – in such a way that there is now no exclusivity but a fully functioning family to which all may belong.

## **God's Ultimate Intention**

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The Old Testament carries hints that this was always God's ultimate plan for the future of his dealings with his chosen people. When the Holy Spirit's powerful presence and anointing was conveyed to certain individuals in the Old Testament, one of the frequent manifestations was prophetic speech. For example, in Numbers 11:16–30 God instructed Moses to bring together the “seventy elders” of Israel, the leaders and officials among the people, in order to assemble them at the Tent of Meeting, which was the God-ordained location for the manifestation of the visible presence of God upon the earth. We might call it his palace or earthly residence, “ground zero”, where his glory was especially visible between the golden cherubim on the cover or “mercy seat” of the Ark of the Covenant that was placed in the most holy place of the tabernacle. God then said (verse 17): “I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”

This immense privilege, an extension of the franchise of operating under God's divinely bestowed power, was once the sole prerogative of Moses. God made clear his intention that the anointing, previously at work exclusively in the primary leader among the people, would now be shared out generously among the seventy elders as well – a much wider representation of the people. As a consequence, we're told (verse 24): “So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.”

This, of course, was only a temporary anointing; but the thing to notice in our present study is that it was an anointing explicitly connected with the gift of prophecy.

In Numbers 11:29, two latecomers, Eldad and Medad, who had missed the earlier meeting with Moses and the blessing that accompanied it, were nevertheless also privileged to share in the franchise of God's supernatural empowerment, though Joshua had strongly objected to this. It is recorded that Moses received complaints from Joshua because two belated arrivals had received this gift out of time. He thought they should have forfeited their chance since they were "out of sync" with the remaining number in the seventy. Joshua complained that the gift of prophecy should not have been given to these two individuals – presumably because he thought they didn't deserve it. Moses' reply is intriguing. He says, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (verse 29). In this way a prophetic leader voiced a prophetic wish concerning a future coming era when all the Lord's people would be able to prophesy.

There is an ancient rabbinical commentary on this passage that notes, "In this world, some men have prophesied, but in the world to come all Israelites will prophesy" (Numbers, Rabba 15:5). This was a clear Jewish eschatological expectation for the Last Days that was finally fulfilled rather earlier than this learned rabbi had anticipated – in the middle, and not at the end, of history. The "world to come" arrived sooner than he and his contemporaries thought. It arrived in the middle of history with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth and his glorious ascension to the right hand of God, after he had made abundant provision for all the Lord's people to become spiritual Israelites, with the result that all the Lord's people would potentially be able to prophesy – Jewish and Gentile believers alike. The kingdom of God, the reign of Christ, though not yet climaxed and consummated, has truly begun.

## Is Saul Also Among the Prophets?

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Furthermore, as we noted earlier, this surprise extension of privileged access to God's Word was also true of King Saul. After informing Saul that he had been chosen by God to become king (1 Samuel 10:6–7), Samuel told him of an imminent encounter with a procession of unknown prophets that would result in a special encounter with the Spirit of God (verse 6): “The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.”

And the result? “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day” (verse 9).

Perhaps that's a reference to God's work of spiritual regeneration in human nature; or maybe it simply refers to some temporary reorientation of his life, given Saul's later chequered and wayward personal history. But at the very least, this is the account of a powerful work of the Spirit in Saul's life, for the narrative continues (verses 10–11): “When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, ‘What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?’” They not only saw the strange phenomena that affected Saul's body in a display of unusual physical behaviour, like the dancing of this troop of prophets, they also heard unusually weighty words from his lips. These amounted to an extraordinary change in his life: Saul was doing and saying things he'd never been able to do and say before. He became a prophetic figure, at least for a short time. The Holy Spirit's outpouring had led to the manifestation of the gift of prophecy.

This happened also to the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:1–15). We recall the story of Elisha's dogged determination to

tail Elijah during the last hours of Elijah’s earthly ministry, just before his supernatural transfer to heaven, when Elijah completely bypassed dying and death to be taken physically to heaven in a fiery chariot. We read that Elisha picked up the newly discarded cloak that had fallen from Elijah’s shoulders (verse 13), and returned to the banks of the river Jordan they had recently crossed after a miraculous parting of the waters by Elijah. Then Elisha exactly reproduced the miracle Elijah had performed earlier with that very same cloak. He parted the Jordan, enabling a dry crossing to occur. We’re told: “The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, ‘The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.’ And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him” (verse 15).

This was the launch of an extraordinary, Christ-like, prophetic teaching and miracle ministry that was full of mercy, supernatural signs and straight talk, designed to minister indiscriminately to needy people, irrespective of their dignity or status. Elisha was a bold “type” or forerunner of Christ, with an outstanding prophetic preaching ministry, launched as a direct result of the outpoured Spirit that had moved from Elijah to Elisha upon Elijah’s permanent airlift and bodily transfer to heaven. In all of these instances there is clearly a regular connection between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a person, and that person’s subsequent ability to prophesy.

### **New Testament Connections Between the Spirit and Prophecy**

We find that this connection between the outpoured Spirit and the gift of prophecy is also the consistent picture throughout the New Testament. At Thessalonica and Corinth, Paul clearly implies the cause and effect relationship between the outpoured Holy Spirit and the manifestation of prophetic gifts in the life of God’s people.

We noted 1 Corinthians 14 earlier, but the context of that passage is the discussion of the charismata commencing in 1

Corinthians 12, where Paul speaks of the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit's activity, listing some of the speaking gifts God empowers: words of knowledge, words of wisdom, the ability to speak in unknown tongues, and prophecy. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 Paul makes a terse statement, all the more important because it assumes a situation that was quite normative in the church: “Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil”.

The Spirit's fire burns within the hearts of believers who have been filled with his presence, so our mutual obligation to one another means that we dare not put out that fire by acting as a kind of spiritual asbestos blanket to smother and extinguish the Spirit's prophetic gifts. Instead, we are to act faithfully in the operation of them in accord with his promptings. The church has for many centuries been adept at putting out the Spirit's fire. We are good at stamping out sparks of revelatory activity on the Spirit's part. There are some who will, without a second thought, throw cold water over even very young Christians hungering for more of God, in the attempt to extinguish any unusual happenings in the church, aiming to quench them at source. Paul's advice to us is pertinent, and we can paraphrase this as: Do not put out the Spirit's fire, because the Spirit's fire brings with it, among many other things, the gift of prophecy, and we dare not despise such prophetic utterances.

Wherever there is a genuine desire to begin operating in the gift of prophecy, we often also find a growing and painful awareness of negative attitudes towards this special gift, to the point where it is denounced as a demonic counterfeit. Sometimes this is argued on theological grounds and, when it is, the critic may need to specifically repent of that sin before he or she will ever be able to move in this gift personally. Christ severely warned his hostile hearers against attributing the Holy Spirit's work to the devil, and spoke of this as blasphemy (Mark 3:22–30). In this connection, to repent is to change one's mind, to admit wrong and line up with reality, to form an alternative opinion that is more accurately realigned with Scripture. It is to come to the place where we gladly recognize prophecy as an invaluable gift

from the Lord, and this is vital if you and I are ever going to be free to move in it. I hope that the following chapters will help blow away the cobwebs of any such negative mindsets.

## **The Acts of the Holy Spirit**

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The narrative of the book of Acts bristles with prophetic phenomena. Acts is the only inspired church history that we possess, and describes the first three decades or so of the early church's life emanating from the extraordinary events that occurred on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. It is important to realize that Acts is not only *descriptive* of remote happenings that occurred 2,000 years ago and 2,000 miles away, at the birth and early infancy of the Christian church; it is also *prescriptive* of what God wants to see happening in contemporary Christian communities around the world today. It is prescriptive of what normative New Testament Christianity should look like, even in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the phenomena and activities that believers engaged in, recorded in these narrative histories, are not in conflict with anything that we read of in the epistles of Paul and the other apostles in the rest of the New Testament as they expound God's will for his people everywhere. It is misleading to set the epistles of the apostles at odds with the Acts of the Apostles, and then assert that only the former are valid guidebooks for the teaching of normative Christian doctrine and practice, as though Paul's teaching in his letters could somehow be in contradiction with the practice of the churches recorded in Acts.

Instead, the narrative of Acts "fleshes out" all that the apostles taught. Doctrine can indeed be derived from Acts, contrary to the denials often voiced by some teachers, who imagine there must have been some kind of peculiar "goings-on" in Acts that are not endorsed in the body of the New Testament epistles. How could there be a discrepancy between the practice described in the Acts of the Apostles and the instructions given in the epistles by those same apostles? It is a big mistake to fail to see in the book of Acts principles and

practices that are still normative for us today, in terms of the operation of apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and didactic ministry – the fivefold anointing of Christ upon his chosen servants spoken of in Ephesians 4:11–13 – as well as in the disclosure of timeless strategies and methods for engaging in mission, church planting, discipleship, church growth and kingdom impact in the secular world.

In twenty-seven out of the twenty-eight chapters in the book of Acts, there are references to, and descriptions of, the revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit, not only through the working of the apostles, but also through evangelists, ordinary believers and unnamed individuals. If this is so, including fairly low-key instances of prophecy of merely local and temporary significance to specific individuals and communities of the time and not duplicated exactly elsewhere, then we can infer from this fact that, at the very least, prophecy was a normative experience of the life of the first-century church, and ought to be the normative experience of the twenty-first century church as well – “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy...” (1 Corinthians 14:39).

This is the norm. It is subnormal or abnormal to neglect prophetic gifts, for their neglect impoverishes us. We should eagerly covet them. That’s why we’re told that we bear some responsibility to stir up this gift (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6–7). If you have been baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit, then there is an authentic prophetic ability already latent within you that waits to be stoked up and spoken out. So we are compelled to ask about the ethos or climate of every church today: Are you tragically *pathetic* or truly *prophetic* in your corporate willingness to regard highly this gift and cheerfully embrace its operation and power? We really cannot prosper without it. We were never meant to.

### **The Spirit’s Power, Love and Self-Control**

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In 2 Timothy 1:6–7, Timothy was feeling overwhelmed, intimidated and somewhat demoralized in his difficult ministry,

and so the apostle Paul writes to remedy this situation in the life of his apostolic delegate in the very tough situation he was called to lead in the church at Ephesus: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

There are all kinds of spirits that can be operative in the lives of Christians, ranging from the divine, through the soulish, to the demonic. Note how all three sources are operative in the disciples on the notable occasion in Christ’s ministry when he asked them a question concerning opinions about his own identity: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”, a question immediately followed by the more demanding inquiry, “Who do *you* say that I am?” This question was particularly provocative to Peter. Human opinions were reported, but Peter made a bold confession of the truth by revelation of the Spirit of God. Yet, when Christ detailed the sufferings of the cross as an inevitable part of his messianic mission, Peter rebuked him. Christ saw behind this the deceit of Satan. Here was a movement of spiritual activity ranging from the fleshly, soulish opinions voiced by the disciples, through divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to demonic deception in Peter’s mind, all within the space of a few short minutes (see Matthew 16:13–23). Demons can (and will) torment and harass us, seeking to render us ineffective for a while, and all too often through the agency of genuine Christians around us (see 2 Timothy 2:24–26). No wonder Timothy had been harassed and affected by a “spirit of fear” (2 Timothy 1:7). This is a commonplace contagion, one of the many activities of alien demonic spirits who regularly attack us. Timothy was vulnerable to this, since he was prey to natural timidity, which invited a spirit of fear to rob him of effectiveness in his ministry. He needed to perceive that this was an enemy attack, and that God had not given that spirit to him. It was an alien entity and a debilitating presence in his life. Only the Holy Spirit could evict this from him, filling him with new levels of moral authority, fearless love, and immovable level-headedness in every testing situation (2 Timothy 1:7b).

Timothy was, therefore, personally responsible for cultivating the Spirit's work in his life. Because we cannot see the Spirit, he is described in Scripture by a number of powerful images that help us to picture him at work: fire, water, wind, oil and wine. Every one of these images depicts some aspect of the Spirit's powerful operations, but they also imply the responsibility on our part to cooperate with him and receive all that he wishes to do in and through us. We have to fan the flame, or hoist the sails, to experience his activity as fire or wind. We must, at times, deliberately soak in some aspects of the Spirit's work that are like water or oil, so that we "drink" the life-giving draught of his grace and allow him to smear or outpour on us the oil of his authoritative ministry. Sometimes we simply wait and linger around him as serious drinkers and "tipplers" do at a wine bar, and drink of his refreshing presence until we are filled and overflowing – drunk in the Spirit, yet with none of the unhealthy side-effects of an alcohol-induced hangover (Ephesians 5:18–20)! All of these imperatives imply clear personal choices and responsibilities. If we don't respond positively to them, then it will not be surprising if we see little or none of the Holy Spirit's gifts operating among us. The reason is simple: we are quenching and resisting God's Spirit – the very thing we are commanded not to do.

Does God speak today? The answer is surely a resounding "Yes". He addresses us through both his *written* Word and his *proceeding* Word, through both the Scriptures read and preached, and also through the operation of prophecy. The question is: Are we listening?