

The Prophet and the Minister

In order to understand the role of God's ministry today, we need to understand the difference between a prophet in the Old Testament and the minister as a shepherd, teacher and watchman in the New.

The true prophets of the O.T. were specially called by God, for example, Jeremiah 1:4, 'Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."'

The word prophet in Hebrew is 'Nabi', meaning, "one who is called to speak for God." So, we often see, "Thus saith the Lord..." at the start of the prophet's message. The prophet is simply passing on the words given to him by God, and he did not necessarily always understand them, Daniel 12:8-9. "Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

The purpose of prophecy was largely to call God's people to obedience, maybe not even those when the prophecy was given, but for some time in the future. Sometimes, the prophet simply had to relay a corrective warning, perhaps even to a *neighbouring* nation, Jonah 3:4, 'Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"'

At other times the prophet had to carry out symbolic acts which portrayed a living parable, Ezekiel 4:6, 'And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year.' It could be tough to be a prophet!

Prophets were often known for their miracles, so there were compensations! These miracles confirmed their authority to speak for God, and could include healing, even raising from the dead! I Kings 17:21-22, 'Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.' Their role, depending on the message, could leave them respected, hated or despised. Poor Jeremiah had to deliver so many corrective warnings that he was lowered into a cess pit, and Daniel was cast into a lion's den for his loyalty to God!

God communicated with His prophets directly, using direct declaration, (“Thus says the Lord...”), dreams, (Daniel 2:19, ‘Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night...’), in visions, (1Samuel 3:11, ‘And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears”’) or even by appearance, (Exodus 3:6 And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God’.)

While the need for repentance is quite commonly reflected in prophecy, many messages of the prophets were inspirational and predictive, such as Isaiah’s many prophetic details about the coming Millennium, Isaiah 35:1-2,6-7, ‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.’

And Micah’s 5:2, ‘But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.’

A prophet’s words were God’s words, and so could never contradict scripture, but they themselves, *by acting as a watchman* for moral compromise among God’s people, provided an ongoing test or evaluation of Israel’s conduct. “I have made you a tester of metals among my people, that you may know and test their ways,’ Jeremiah 6:27.

Although the prophet’s message was often for the people of their time, prophecy often has more than one fulfilment. Joel 2:28-31,

“And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will **prophesy**,

your old men will **dream dreams**,

your young men will **see visions**.

Even on My menservants and maidservants,

I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth,

blood and fire and columns of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and awesome Day of the LORD”.

There was the first and partial fulfilment of this after Christ’s ascension, on the day of Pentecost when God poured out His Holy Spirit upon His Church, but not all details were fulfilled then. The greater fulfilment will be when all mankind will dream or see in vision the message of the First Angel of Revelation 14, which preaches repentance and will warn of the coming Seals of the Tribulation. Revelation 14:6-7,

‘Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”’

And Revelation 6:12-17, ‘And when I saw the Lamb open the **sixth seal**, there was a great earthquake, and **the sun became black like sackcloth of goat hair**, and the whole **moon turned blood red**, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth like unripe figs dropping from a tree shaken by a great wind. The sky receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the commanders, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and free man hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they said to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For **the great day of Their wrath has come**, and who is able to withstand it?”’

Then, will Joel 2:32 also be fulfilled, at the First Resurrection, as some flee from Jerusalem.

‘And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;

for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem

there will be deliverance, as the LORD has promised,

among the *remnant* called by the LORD.’

Another example is found throughout the book of Hosea, which is about Israel’s idolatry, her wickedness, her coming captivity, and restoration at Christ’s final return. Ephraim was the leading tribe in Northern Israel after her split from Judah. Due to her repeated errors, the book is dual in prophecy and much of it applies to her

descendants, Britain, and her ex-colonies today. This is recognisably so as we read about ourselves there.

Sometimes, such prophecy is only understood *after* it has occurred, John 12:16, 'His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him'.

Overall, O.T. prophecy is designed to evoke faith by lifting us into a closer relationship with God, that we may share in a glorious future in His Kingdom.

The New Testament brought about a change.

Hebrews 1:1-2, 'Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but 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.'

Prophecy, *as we saw it in the Old Testament*, would be replaced by the exposition of God's word by His servants, for with the completion of the canon of scripture, the need for such Divine expression was diminished. Every word of God we need is now to be found in the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 13 8-9, 'Love never fails; but if there are prophecies, **they will be done away**; if there are tongues, they will be ceased; if there is knowledge it will pass away'. Berean Literal Bible. "Done away" in the Greek, Strong's 2673, and Word Studies, means: "Rendered inoperative, abolished."

Jesus Christ Himself provided all the extra prophecy still required before the close of the New Testament Canon, for He is the supreme Prophet! Luke 13:33, 'Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a **prophet** should perish outside of Jerusalem.' Mark 1:22, 'And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one **who had authority**, and not as the scribes.' Revelation 1:1, 'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him **to show to his servants the things that must soon take place**. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.'

Christ's words, **through both the Old and New Testaments**, together with the gift of the Holy Spirit, provide us with the whole mind and counsel of God. All that is required is for His ministers to remain faithful to their commission, Matthew 28:19-20, *and* Matthew 24:42, '**Watch therefore**, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.'

Acts 20:28-31, '**Keep watch over yourselves** and the entire flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will

come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will rise up and **distort the truth** to draw away disciples after them. Therefore be alert and remember that for three years I never stopped **warning** each of you night and day with tears.’ NIV, NLT, Berean Study Bible, Amplified Bible, all use ‘distort’ the truth!

We are to be **shepherds**, not rulers, and *lead* our flocks into the pasture they need, preparing them for the arrival of their Lord by feeding them with the appropriate spiritual diet which can qualify them to attain the required character of His Bride. We are to be **guards** of God’s Flock against the **wolves in sheep’s clothing** who will distort God’s truth. Understand this. You don’t need to teach evil to distort the truth. It can be distorted simply by **omitting part of the Truth!**

The ESV translates ‘watch’, as ‘stay awake’, other translations use ‘be alert’, *for the moral and physical circumstances God’s flock will encounter*. A faithful minister is a faithful minister **to Jesus Christ** and His word, not his church! A faithful minister needs to keep watch over himself *and* the teaching of his church, that it is teaching **the whole counsel of God**.

That is why God’s ministers should be so deeply grounded in God’s word, not looking to any man or men to determine doctrine! That is why God tells us to **‘grow in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’**, 2 Peter 3:18, because God is even now revealing vital and appropriate instructions for us as we near the time of the end, which have gone unnoticed in his word: **‘He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end”**’. So, if you are relying on church *traditions*, you have a problem. That was revealed to me long ago when I found that following the *traditions* of the Jews was wrong. When I broached the case with my superior at that time, He said, “Well, I won’t be changing until all the churches [who still follow the same tradition] change.” Remember, if it is not in the Bible, it is tradition!

So, a minister is a shepherd, teacher and watchman, watching himself, his church, and his flock for spiritual and physical fault and danger, Ezekiel 33:4, 6,8, **‘then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand’**. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.’ This principle applies to spiritual danger too!

So we see that in some ways the minister, as a teacher and watchman, has taken the place of the prophet, because God's revelation is complete. W. E. Vine, in his respected 'Expository dictionary of New Testament Words' puts it very well when he says: "the difference is that, whereas the message of the prophet was a direct revelation of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the teacher is gathered from the completed revelation contained in the scriptures." This is why you will so often see the use of Isaiah 28:10, 'For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little,' in order to gather the **whole counsel of God**.

However, of the very few churches which retain most of the truth by looking to God's word, most have **failed to keep watch over themselves**. They have allowed leaders to *claim* to speak for God like an O.T. prophet, and introduce into the church unbiblical false concepts of the coming End-Time, *which do not match scripture*, while at the same time **omitting some of the direct written commands** of God regarding the End-Time, preceded by the words, "Thus saith the lord...!" So, because most people rely on the teaching of their church, without checking like the Bereans, the truth has become **confounded** and **distorted**, for we have seen that after the canon of the New Testament was closed, God's ministers should relay the *whole* written word of God. It is their only authority. *Each* of us has the responsibility to WATCH what we are taught, or risk deception!

Although truth has been damaged, not all the responsibility lies upon the ministry. The people share in the blame. Isaiah 30:9, 'For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions.' While this speaks of 'seers' and 'prophets', it is true of God's people and their ministers today. It is that Laodicean attitude which allows a self-satisfied *willing blindness* to God's commands which would place us in a less than comfortable position. We desire the reward of the faithful, but without the faith!

Jesus Christ said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Matthew 7:15-16. The fruits of this can be seen in the unpreparedness of the Church to fulfil those omitted End-Time commands. (Matthew 25:1-10)

So where does that leave us? It leaves us with a ministry currently hiding from the whole truth and brethren who have until now not been warned about this sin of omission. Luke 12:47, "And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn't

prepared and doesn't carry out those instructions, will be **severely punished**. But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly”.

But there is one more thing that must be covered if *I* am to watch and warn faithfully. Why do we still find ministers claiming to be prophets?

We see that proclaiming God's word can be called 'prophesying', especially if it is about the future, as described in God's written word. Such teaching is to encourage people to be ready for Christ's coming; 1 Corinthians 14:3, 'On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.'

That is quite different from actually claiming to be a prophet, in Old Testament terms. Those who claim to be, use 1 Corinthians 12:10, which includes prophecy as a gift of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul had that gift, 1 Corinthians 13:2, 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' Paul did indeed elucidate details about the 1st Resurrection, in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, and about the End-Time, in 2 Thessalonians 2, where his words are, according to W.E. Vine, "the declaration of that which cannot be known by natural means." But this was *before* the N. T. Canon was closed by the Apostle John and his colleagues in AD 90, 20 years or so *after* Paul's death.

Why then do some claim to be prophets? - Human nature's lust for power, position, wealth or control! Most often they need to provide some authority for their false claims that the Church needs hierarchical government, with themselves of course, at the top! In Matthew 24:11 Christ says about the close of this Age, 'And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.' In Luke 6:42, Christ says "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? And Matthew 20:25-27, 'But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles have absolute power and lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them [tyrannising them]. **It is not this way among you**, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever **wishes to be first** among you shall be your [willing and humble] slave;' Amplified Bible.

Did we not learn that lesson from the bitter fruits of H. W. Armstrong's venture into hierarchy in his extreme old age, which resulted in the total destruction of the Church he built? Ezekiel 8:5-6, 'Then the LORD said to me, "Son of man, look toward the north." So I looked, and there to the north, beside the entrance to the gate near the *altar*, [in God's temple] **stood the idol that had made the LORD so jealous**. And he

said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to **drive me far from my sanctuary?**” NLT.

We only have to read Revelation 17:1-6, or Revelation 2:15 to see what God thinks of that system *at this time!* **For men and women**, the only authority in God’s Church is the *written word of God*. In the kingdom of God it will be different, with God’s family present!

So, today, at this point, **there are no prophets**, and the essential difference between the prophet’s and the minister’s role is that the minister’s authority is based upon our much broader understanding of *the whole written counsel of God*. So, of the Philadelphia Church, Jesus Christ reveals, Revelation 3:8,10, ‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet **you have kept my word** and have not denied my name... **Because you have kept my word** about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.’

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