

Examining the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35...
Part 3: A Look at What Prophecy Means

1. What is a prophecy, how is it received, and how is it expressed? How is it different from soothsaying or divination? Use a Bible dictionary.

A prophecy is a special message from God that may be the past, present, or future disclosures of God's will for His people. The Greek word for prophecy, "propheta," is derived from "pro" which means "forth" and "phemi" which means "to speak." Because "forthtelling" may include "foretelling", prophecy is much more than predicting future events or revealing hidden things.

Moses is an example of one who prophesied – one who "forthtold" the past, present, and future.

Through Moses, God revealed the past when he wrote the book of Genesis.

Through Moses, God taught the Hebrews the present when he introduced the Law.

Through Moses, God foretold the future when he warned Pharaoh the consequences of refusing to free the Hebrews.

The Bible is a unified compilation of prophetic teachings.

The Bible has shown people receiving prophetic messages from God by: a) hearing His voice in a dream (Dan 2:1-49) or vision (Ezek 40:2), b) being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8-13), and c) hearing the voice of an angel (Gen 22:15-19).

The Bible has also shown the different ways prophetic messages have been expressed. Most often the prophecies were expressed verbally but the literary record reveals how the message was spoken – they were historical or biographical narratives, poetic songs or verses, parables, or apocalyptic. Some prophecies were expressed symbolically such as Isaiah's nakedness (Isa 20:1-6) and Ahijah's division of his garments (1 Ki 11:29-39), all of which communicated God's message to His people.

Divination is a form of witchcraft intent on seeking guidance from a pagan god or disembodied spirit. While the exact nature of this practice is unknown, the Bible describes some forms as interpreting images or patterns and is reminiscent to today's palm reading (Gen 44:5, Ezek 21:21-23). Divination was the term used to describe the prophetic practices of Balaam the professional prophet (Num 22:7). Divination is a practice condemned by God (Isa 44:25, Jer 27:9-10, 29:8-9, Ezek 13:9).

Soothsaying, also condemned by God (Isa 2:6, 57:3, Jer 27:9, Mic 5:12), is understood as being similar to astrology as a means to predict the future. King Manasseh was guilty of this practice (2 Ki 21:6, 2 Chron 33:6).

2. What is the purpose of prophecy? Examine 1 Corinthians 14:3-4 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

The purpose of prophecy is to use God's Word for the purpose of 1) edification, 2) exhortation, and 3) consolation of the church (1 Cor 14:3-4).

Edification is to enlighten or instruct for the purpose of moral and spiritual growth or, in other words, the teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in biblical righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).

Exhortation is to passionately or intensively encourage by strong argument or urgent appeal so that others may be strengthened, supported, and admonished.

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Consolation is to comfort in time of grief or loss and offer hope from the Word of God.

3. What were some of the qualifications of a prophet? How did the authors know that the prophets in the Bible were genuine? What other titles were prophets known by?

Most of the biblical references to prophets are in the context of foretelling the future. Because of the existence of many pagan religions, there were many varieties of occult practices. Both Moses and Isaiah provided means to distinguish true prophets of God from those representing false gods: true prophecy is 100% accurate in both detail and fulfillment (Deut 18:22, Isa 41:23).

There weren't any human characteristics that qualified one as a prophet; it was by God's appointment or call. Whether called by God (Jer 1:5, Ez 7:1, Luke 1:13-16, 2 Pet 1:20-21) or given Authority of the Holy Spirit (Num 11:29, 24:4), no genuine prophet fabricated or adulterated a prophecy. The prophet's ability to prophesy could be limited in duration (Num 11:25-26) or span a multiple of years.

For their ability of bringing God's message to the people, prophets were known as *seers* (1 Sam 9:9), *holy man of God* (2 Ki 4:9), *His servant* (Is 44:26, Ezek 38:17, Amos 3:7), *messenger of the Lord* (Hag 1:13, Mal 3:1), *shepherds* (Jer 17:16), and *Watchmen* (Is 62:6).

4. Do you recall any prophets who were appointed before birth, children, women, or enemies of God? What details can you recall?

Appointed before birth

Jeremiah (Jer 1:1-10) – God chose Jeremiah, before he was born, to be His prophet. Because his ministry proclaimed so much judgment: the end of Jerusalem and the exile God's Covenant People, Jeremiah was known as a prophet of doom. He preached publicly during the reigns of the last 5 kings of Judah, in an attempt to call his people back to God. His laments and anguish for his people and God caused him to weep openly which earned him the nickname "the weeping prophet."

John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-16) – God chose John the Baptist, before he was born, to preach of the coming Messiah and to call the Jews back to God. Baptism symbolized not only personal moral regeneration, but prepared the nation of Israel to meet their God.

Children

Samuel (1 Sam 3:19) – Dedicated to the Lord's service by his mother Hannah in gratitude of the Lord's blessing her with a son, Samuel was called by God when he was a youth while training for the priesthood. Considered one of Israel's greatest leaders, Samuel would serve as judge, prophet, and priest. Through Samuel, God would allow Israel to chose their king, reject Saul as king, anoint David as the rightful king of Israel, and predict the eternal kingship of the coming Messiah through the lineage of David.

Women

Miriam (Ex 15:20, Num 12:1-15, Mic 6:4) – With her brothers Moses and Aaron, "Miriam the prophetess" was part of the leadership chosen to lead Israel out of Egypt. However, together with Aaron, she challenged Moses' authority. This earned them God's rebuke, and God disciplined only Miriam with leprosy. So serious was the

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offense that she was publicly shut out of the camp for 7 days until she recovered despite Moses' appeal for an immediate healing (Num 12:1-15). After that incident, the Bible does not mention Miriam's name again until her death.

Huldah (2 Ki 22:14-20, 2 Chron 34:22-28) – When the lost Book of the Law was rediscovered, King Josiah instructed the high priest Hilkiah to consult with the prophetess Huldah to ask God to confirm the contents of the Book.

Deborah (Judg 4:4-22) - Deborah served Israel as its leader, a judicial judge, and prophetess. The Bible records that Deborah was found under a certain tree that became a landmark known as the "palm tree of Deborah," which served as her "court of law." Through Deborah, God summoned Barak to lead the battle at Mount Tabor for God had given the Israelites victory over the Canaanites and their fearsome commander Sisera and 900 iron chariots.

Enemies of God

Balaam (Num 22:5-24:25, Josh 13:22, 2 Pet 2:15-16, Jude 1:11, Rev 2:14) – Called upon by the Moabite king Balak for his reputation of divination and soothsaying, Balaam was hired to curse the nation of Israel before they entered Canaan. While he did not follow God, Balaam heard His voice and obeyed Him by: a) refusing to initially see Balak, b) going to Balak, and c) instead of fulfilling Balak's request of cursing the Israelites, he blessed them. Despite his prophetic role, the Bible records Balaam as an example of what Believers should not to do: a) succumbing to greed and the lure of money (2 Pet 2:15-16, Jude 11) and b) teaching how to cause others to sin through seduction and immorality (Rev 2:14).

5. Are there any differences between prophets and prophetesses of the Old Testament?

The prophetess Miriam appears to have a public ministry that was focused only on women; there is no record of her using her gift in the manner of her brother Moses (Ex 15:20-21).

In contrast to prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the prophetess Deborah appears to have never exercised her gift publicly. She never went out to publicly proclaim God's word and limited her prophetic gift to private and individual consultation.

She was the only judge with no military function, and the Bible does not explicitly state that she was raised up by God to be Israel's deliverer (Jud 4:4, Othniel: Judg 3:9, Ehud: Judg 3:15, Gideon: Judg 6:12-14, Jephthah: Judg 11:29, Sampson: Judg 13:24-25, 14:6).

Deborah's role as judge was different from other judges; she did not exercise leadership over men as others had done.

The "Song of Deborah," celebrating the victory over Sisera, highlighted Israel's lack of men faithful to God. Barak's cowardice, displayed by his insistence on Deborah's presence during the battle, demonstrated his lack of faith in God. By dishonoring God's given right to lead, Barak was not given the honor of winning the battle; God gave the victory to a Bedouin woman. The song revealed the lack of faithful and courageous men to provide safety and protection, and scorned the leadership of the other tribes of Israel who had excuses for their failure to assist in the campaign against the Canaanites. Because of the spiritual feebleness of men, God delivered through the women who cooperated with Him (including Gentile women!) (Judg 5:1-31).

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Like Deborah, the prophetess Huldah did not exercise her prophetic gift publicly, and instead limited her ministry to private and individual consultation.

6. Are there any differences between prophets / prophetesses of the Old Testament and the New Testament?

When Old Testament prophets and prophetesses spoke the word of God, their words were accepted as God's absolute and authoritative word. There was no challenge or question about it being from God.

In contrast, New Testament prophecies are not absolutely authoritative. Paul explicitly states that the church must critically judge and evaluate if the prophecies are, in whole or part, sound. Prophecies today, spontaneous impressions or insights, in whole or part, may or may not be from God.

References:

1. Piper, J, Grudem, W, eds, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books (1991), p.215-217.

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