

# What is Prophecy According to the Bible?

In this blog post, I will discuss what prophecy is according to the Bible. What is the heart of biblical prophecy? When we hear the word “prophecy,” the first thing that comes to mind is foretelling or predicting future events. In part, this is true. But if we examine the core of biblical prophecy, we will see that it is not only about that. Many of the prophets we see in the Old Testament, where we mostly see prophets in action, were mainly conveying warning messages to the kings to whom they were sent. They were also predicting the future in some cases, but mostly concerning what would happen if people obeyed or disobeyed God’s command. In many cases, they were not even prophesying about a definite future, but about the consequences that could occur when people disobeyed God’s command and instruction. What made them prophets was not their ability to predict the future, but the fact that God was speaking through them.

We also have examples of prophecy in the New Testament. Besides the fact that Jesus prophesied about future end-time events, most of the examples we see in action are found in the book of Acts. In the Epistles, prophecy is presented as one of the gifts of the Spirit, and it is particularly described in [1 Corinthians 14](#), where Paul exhorts the group of believers in the church at that time to desire and practice it earnestly.

<sup>1</sup> Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. <sup>3</sup> But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. <sup>4</sup> He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ([1 Corinthians 14:1-4](#))

In this passage, Paul’s desire, as it could at times be misunderstood, is not to dismiss the gift of tongues, but to emphasize prophecy. It is important because through it God’s people receive vision and guidance. Through it, they are edified. The Word of God says that where there is no vision, the people perish ([Proverbs 29:18](#)). That kind of vision is often brought to the church through the prophets. The prophets, as we have said, are not only those who predict the future, but those who guide through God’s Word. They edify the church through the Word of God. We can all edify someone’s life through God’s counsel. The Holy Spirit’s anointing is needed for that. This is what this passage says—that he who prophesies

speaks edification, exhortation, and comfort to men. The gift of tongues is also important, but that is a different topic. Paul was urging them to prophesy when they were together so that they could receive guidance and edify one another. That is why, among the spiritual gifts, he urged them to desire prophecy. **So, we can conclude that the heart of biblical prophecy is the Word of God.**

Another reason why Paul urged them to prophesy is that prophecy is good for the church because it also edifies those who are unbelievers or new in the church. **Prophecy is among the most needed gifts because the church needs to be edified.**

<sup>23</sup> Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are <sup>[f]</sup>out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. <sup>25</sup> **And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed;** and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. (1 Corinthians 14:23-25, emphasis added)

Here again, the function of prophecy is underlined, which is to edify and to reveal the secrets of a person's heart. What this reminds me of is **Hebrews 4:12**, where it says that the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. This further points to the fact that prophesying has to do with the Word of God. Prophesying needs to point toward God's glory and should guide people in how to glorify God. It is not only about predicting what will happen in someone's life, especially if it does not bring glory to God. There were fortune-tellers back then, and there are still fortune-tellers today—people who can predict someone's future, but not for God's glory. They do it through other sources and spirits. We have the example of Paul in the book of Acts, when he cast out a spirit of divination from a slave girl (**Acts 16:16–18**). So, the core of prophecy is not just about revealing or predicting personal details about someone's life, but about knowing what God has for their life according to His will, and all this is to bring glory to Him. The Word of God is the foundation of it, but the message needs to be guided and inspired by His Holy Spirit.

Many times, when we share the Word of God and minister through it, we should not be worried about how we can reach people's hearts or whether we know well their personal situations. That is not our concern. Our concern is to obey God and follow His anointing.

The Spirit of God is already a discerner, and He works together with His Word. He pierces the deepest parts of men's hearts. Most of the time, when the Word that was shared touches a person, it is not because the preacher knows that person personally. When we know someone's personal issues and problems and we minister to them, that is something different, and I am not saying that it is not important. That is called counselling, and it is mostly done one-on-one, when we personally minister to a person. Also in that work, we must not rely on our own capability if we want the advice we give to guide people toward God. We always need to rely on the Spirit of God. This is how God will work in their lives. When we counsel, we must not rely only on our own personal experiences, but on the Holy Spirit. Of course, those experiences could work, but only when the advice we give is guided by the Holy Spirit. He operates through God's knowledge, and He is able, more than anyone else, to reveal the secrets of people's hearts and to correct and exhort them. That is God's work. I remember when I started reading the Bible, and at times I found myself literally in some of the stories and words written there. At first, I thought that could not be possible, but then it happened again and again. God was revealing the secrets of my heart and working in my life. I think this is how God was reaching out to me for the first time, and I began perceiving Him.

Most of the examples of prophecy in the Bible are found in the Old Testament. There, the prophets were an indispensable part of guiding and overseeing God's nation. Even though they were not directly involved in ruling the nation, they were passing on God's voice to the rulers and kings. It then depended on the kings whether they were God-fearing people who wanted to follow His ways or not. Another function of prophecy is that, in most cases, it was meant to reveal God's opinion on a certain matter and to correct and denounce the ways of His nation. Why is correction good and needed? Because we are human, and we go astray at times. That is why God sends His Word, which shines upon our path and brings us back onto the right track. I don't think the essential purpose of prophecy and the way it works have changed much since then. Of course, the way the prophets operate and the system from the Old Testament have changed, but one of the functions of prophecy is still to correct and guide God's people. With this said, I am not exalting correction, because there are cases when people can misuse correction by doing it in the flesh. We have to know that when correction is inspired by God's Spirit, it can convict and reprove in God's way. Only in this way can it truly bring fruit into a person's life. Of course, there is also a word of encouragement from God to us, and I believe there are some people who are gifted in that and can truly encourage others. I personally have met such people who have encouraged me in the Lord, and I believe that is a gift. Still, I don't think all people have that gift, and if all the prophets we hear only prophesy good things, I believe we should examine the situation carefully and test whether it comes from God.

There is an example in the Old Testament, in the book of Kings, where we see the king of Israel and the king of Judah about to go to war ([1 Kings 22:1–28](#)). They summoned the prophets, and all of them prophesied only good things. In contrast, only one prophet—Micaiah—prophesied the truth to them, saying that they were about to lose and suffer great damage. That was a warning for them not to go to that war. It was not because Micaiah was being negative or did not want what was good for them, as it may seem today when someone prophesies the truth or warns people. On the contrary, he warned them for their good. See, then, that it is not the flattering tongue that is truly good for us or that will lead us in the right direction ([Proverbs 28:23](#)). Most of the time, the people doing that really believe that what they are saying has a good purpose, and they wish us well. But the One who can make that good happen is God, and He knows our situation best, as He searches and knows the very depths of our hearts. He knows best what we need at the moment, and the prophets need to hear His voice so that they can minister to others in the right way. When I speak of prophets, I speak of people who handle the Word of God correctly, as [2 Timothy 2:15](#) tells us. At times, that could be any believer who is full of the Holy Spirit. What I mean by this is that we cannot bless or rebuke if God has not commanded us to do so. If a believer has any authority, it is because God is behind it. That is why those who deliver God’s voice to others need to follow His guidance and be submitted to Him. They need to deliver God’s truth, which at times will encourage us and at times will rebuke us. It may hurt us, but it will do so for our good.

<sup>1</sup>Now three years passed without war between Syria and Israel. <sup>2</sup>Then it came to pass, in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went down to *visit* the king of Israel.

<sup>3</sup>And the king of Israel said to his servants, “Do you know that Ramoth in Gilead *is* ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?” <sup>4</sup>So he said to Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth Gilead?”

Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “I *am* as you *are*, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.” <sup>5</sup>Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Please inquire for the word of the Lord today.”

<sup>6</sup>Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, “Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?”

So they said, “Go up, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the hand of the king.”

<sup>7</sup>And Jehoshaphat said, “*Is there* not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?”

<sup>8</sup> So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “*There is* still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.”

And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say such things!”

<sup>9</sup> Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, “Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly!”

<sup>10</sup> The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, having put on *their* robes, sat each on his throne, at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. <sup>11</sup> Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, “Thus says the Lord: ‘With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.’ ” <sup>12</sup> And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, “Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the king’s hand.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, “Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement.”

<sup>14</sup> And Micaiah said, “As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak.”

<sup>15</sup> Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?”

And he answered him, “Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the hand of the king!”

<sup>16</sup> So the king said to him, “How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?”

<sup>17</sup> Then he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, ‘These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.’ ”

<sup>18</sup> And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?”

<sup>19</sup> Then *Micaiah* said, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. <sup>20</sup> And the Lord said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. <sup>21</sup> Then a

spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' <sup>22</sup>The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade *him*, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' <sup>23</sup>Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you."

<sup>24</sup>Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you?"

<sup>25</sup>And Micaiah said, "Indeed, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide!"

<sup>26</sup>So the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son;<sup>27</sup>and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this *fellow* in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I come in peace.' "

<sup>28</sup>But Micaiah said, "If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Take heed, all you people!" (1 Kings 22:1-28)

As in this passage, there are many other similar situations in which God's prophets were a minority and the false prophets were a majority. To the people hearing the false prophecy, it looked like those false prophets were their friends and people who wanted their good, because they were speaking positively and prophesying only good things. But that was not really for their good, because it was deceiving them. Indeed, God says in His Word that He has good plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11), but that is often the outcome, and at times we go through difficulties until we get to that place. God will also correct us along the way.

Notice verse 18, where it says: "And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?'" The same thing happened then, as it may happen today. People think that prophesying has to do with wishing someone good or evil. They think that prophets are those who declare things into existence, while it is God who does that, and the prophets listen to His voice. They are supposed to be His voice. That is why, even if we want someone's good, we cannot just prophesy something good, wishing that it will happen. We can pray for that person so that good may happen in their life and so that they may follow God's will, but we are supposed to prophesy what God tells us. That will actually help that person more, as it will warn them and help them know where the danger is. This is what prophets are—they are like eyes that see what may happen and warn through the Word of God.

The king of Israel was upset because Micaiah prophesied the failure of their plan, but that was meant to warn him. Since ancient times, there has been the idea that people have the ultimate authority to curse or bless, as in the case of Balak, who hired Balaam. Balaam was hired by Balak to curse the nation of Israel, but he could not say anything more or less than what God had commanded him.

“If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that I must speak?”

(Numbers 24:13)

People were getting upset with the prophet Jeremiah and blaming him for prophesying the truth, but it was not his intention or fault. He was simply prophesying God’s truth, and that was actually for their good. It is just that God’s ways are not always like ours or as we expect them to be, and it is hard for us to understand them at first. He was prophesying and saying that because of their sins, the nation of Judah was about to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and they had to submit instead of rebelling. That was hard for them to accept, but it was the truth. Jeremiah was not prophesying that because of a personal issue with them, but because the Lord had commanded him! This is what we need to understand today—if a person corrects us through the Word of God, it is not necessarily because they have anything personal against us. Of course, we need to examine the word, but we also need to consider that God may want to communicate something to us, and it is not always going to be the way we expected it to be. It is much easier to accept encouragement and when someone speaks about good things, and I repeat, I am not rejecting that. We just need to examine the situation well if we only hear those things without anything else. Still, correction is harder to accept.

There is a time when God blesses us, and we also need to bless other people. But there is also a time when He blesses us by warning us of danger and rebuking us. There are numerous verses in the Bible that speak about this.

What is often considered in Jewish tradition as a time of silence was the period when God’s voice was silent through the prophets. That was the 400 years of silence between the prophet Malachi and the New Testament. We see again that the voice of the prophets was considered essential as a voice of guidance and reproof, so that the nation could live in a godly way, and, of course, as a voice of encouragement through the promises God has for us. That voice was silent until the New Testament era, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, and that gift was again given to the church for the same purpose. When I speak of the church, I speak of the body of believers. God’s voice was represented through the prophets in the Old Testament era, but the Spirit, and the purpose behind it are the same today—to guide, to reprove, and to encourage. Some of the ways have changed since then because

we live in different times, but God's purpose is the same, for He does not change. We know that the Word of God we find in the Bible has the same qualities—to reprove, to correct, and to instruct in righteousness ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)). This is the Word through which prophecy is spoken into our lives when it is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

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