

To prophesy is simply to speak prophecy. *Prophecy* is the noun, and *prophesy* is the verb. *Prophecy* at its most basic definition is “a message from God.” So, to prophesy is to proclaim a message from God. The one who does this is, therefore, a prophet. Although foretelling is often associated with prophecy, revealing the future is not a necessary element of prophecy; however, since only God knows the future, any authoritative word about the future must of necessity be a prophecy, that is, a message from God.

In the Old Testament, there were prophets who simply spoke their divine messages to a king or to the people (e.g., Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha). Later, there came a series of “writing prophets” whose messages are preserved in Scripture (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, and Malachi). Quite often the prophets would preface their utterances with words such as “thus saith the Lord” (KJV) or “this is what the Lord says” (NIV). The point is that God had communicated something to the prophets, and they were speaking directly for Him. “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” ([2 Peter 1:21](#)).

According to [Deuteronomy 13](#), there are two signs of a true prophet. First, he must not direct people to follow other gods. Second, whenever the prophet says something about future events, those events must come to pass. If the prophet promotes the worship of false gods, or if his predictions fail to come to pass, then he is a false prophet.

God would often give the prophet a message about something that would happen in the short term, to give him credibility on the more long-term message. For instance, [Jeremiah](#) told the leaders of Judah that the nation would be conquered by Babylon. But another “prophet,” a charlatan named Hananiah, stood up and said the Lord had given him a different message, and claimed that Jeremiah was not a true prophet. Jeremiah told Hananiah that within a year he, Hananiah, would be dead, and within the year he died ([Jeremiah 28](#)). The fact that Jeremiah could so accurately predict the future should have given his other words more credibility.

In the New Testament, [John the Baptist](#) proclaims that the Kingdom of God and the Messiah are on the scene, and he identifies Jesus as that Messiah. John is often called the last of the Old Testament prophets. In the rest of the New Testament, prophets are not mentioned very much. It seems that apostles fulfilled the prophetic role, as they spoke directly and authoritatively for God, and their words are preserved today in Scripture. [Ephesians 2:20](#) lists the apostles and prophets as being the foundation of the church, with Jesus Christ being the [cornerstone](#). Obviously, before the canon of Scripture was complete, God may have communicated directly to people on a more regular basis. Prophecy is listed as one of the gifts of the Spirit (see [Romans 12:6–8](#)).

Of great interest today is whether or not the gift of prophecy continues or if it ceased when the foundational period of the church was complete. [First Corinthians 12–14](#) is the longest New Testament passage relating to prophecy. The church at Corinth was misusing this gift as well as the gift of tongues. One problem they had was that, when the believers gathered, too many prophets were speaking, and they were interrupting each other to boot. Paul says that at most two or three prophets should speak, and they should do so one at a time. Others should carefully consider or evaluate what the prophet says ([1 Corinthians 14:29–31](#)). Perhaps the best understanding is that some people in Corinth thought they were getting a word directly from God, but they could have been wrong; therefore, they needed to submit their prophecies to the judgment of the church. As in the Old Testament, if a New Testament prophecy was contrary to sound

doctrine, then the prophecy was to be rejected.

The instruction in [1 Corinthians 14](#) also suggests that a person should be cautious in speaking for God if the revelation is extra-biblical. Bearing a “message from God” does not automatically place one in a position of authority. The potential prophet should humbly submit his or her message to the leaders of the church for confirmation. Paul’s directive suggests that the gift of prophecy was already beginning to wane as an authoritative gift at the time 1 Corinthians was written.

A preacher or pastor today fulfills a prophetic role to the extent that he proclaims and explains the written Word of God. However, pastors are never called “prophets” in the New Testament. The pastor can confidently say, “Thus saith the Lord,” if he follows it up with chapter and verse. Unfortunately, some pastors assume a prophetic mantle and make pronouncements that are not from God but from their own imaginations.

In another sense, prophecy can fall into the realm speaking/giving of godly counsel. Meaning the Holy Spirit speaks through another believer a word of encourage, correction, wisdom, counsel to another believer at just the right time for a specific purpose. Many believers have testimonies of times where they have encountered such special timely godly counsel moment and may have even attributed it as *prophetic* or as being *directly from God* or *only from God*. No doubt the Lord uses His children, guided by the Spirit to encourage, counsel and correct and partner with the work He is already doing in the lives of others in salvation, discerning, correction, and sanctification and more. The danger however comes when well-meaning or spiritual immature or self-seeking believers claim to be speaking “a word from God” when in fact they do not know for certain that God has given them a word to share. They frivolously or carelessly or recklessly speak words masked under the phrase “*God told me*” or “*I have a word from the Lord for you*” to make it sound more spiritual – when in fact they do not know this for certain, or worse have not labored in prayer for this person in advance of this conversation. Obviously, it is quite dangerous to both the person giving and receiving the advice. Sadly this happens a lot. **WARNING:** Just as there were penalties for false prophets in the OT – we should fear “falsifying prophetic words” to others when not directed by God today.

To all those who give counsel –

- pray, study His Word, be slow to speak, align what you say with God’s word.
- Speak as directed by the Holy Spirit only when it is made clear to you to do so.
- Offer human advice freely.

To all those who hear- Test & Prove Everything!

The hearer typically knows when the word they received was from the Lord. (trust your spiritual gut) but ALSO make sure....

- “it aligns with the Holy Spirit’s voice in their prayers”
- It aligns with God’s Word.
- It resonates in your heart/spirit.
- Discuss with other godly counselors.

Adapted by GotQuestions.org
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