

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Most Mentioned Spiritual Gift -- Prophecy

by Dan Trygg

“Then Yahweh came down in the cloud and spoke to [Moses]; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed it upon the seventy elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.” Numbers 11:25

“Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets, that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!” Numbers 11:29

“He said: ‘...If there is a prophet among you from Yahweh, I make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with My servant Moses... ⁸ I speak with him directly, openly, and not in riddles.’” Numbers 12:6-8

“Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and above all that you may prophesy.” 1 Corinthians 14:1

The gift of prophecy is mentioned far more than any other spiritual gift. The noun “prophet” occurs over 480 times in the Bible, and the verbal form, “prophesy” occurs approximately another 140 times. This frequency includes both genuine prophets of Yahweh, and the false prophets of other religions, but it indicates the recognition of the significance and wide awareness of such a gift among the people of Bible times.

The Hebrew word stem (nabi') for “prophesy” basically means an “authorized spokesperson”, one who “speaks for” someone else. The notion of “authorization” implies *being chosen* by the one who is commissioning the prophet. **A related Akkadian root word is *nabu*, which in the passive form means to “be called”.** These two meanings are clearly illustrated in Exodus 6:28-7:2. There, God *commissioned* Moses to “...tell Pharaoh all that I am telling you.” When Moses made objections, on the basis being such a poor speaker, God did not excuse him, He said, “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron will be your prophet. You say whatever I command you; then Aaron shall declare it to Pharaoh...” God spoke to Moses, ...who relayed the message to Aaron, ...who then proclaimed the message to Pharaoh. **The key idea is to be an authorized messenger, a spokesperson who communicates faithfully the message given to him to the person he is to proclaim it to.** The nature of the communication word-picture is that of a “speaker” or “spokesperson”, emphasizing *speech*, ...but *prophets were not limited to using speech in their communication*. The main thrust of the idea of a prophet is to be a “representative communicator”, one who accurately communicates what was revealed or spoken to him or her. **A related stem may mean to “boil over” implying that, at least sometimes, the words come flowing out, as the Spirit enables the person to speak.** This may be partly why Peter referred to Joel 2 in his explanation of the people speaking in tongues “as the Spirit was giving them utterance”. **The Greek word, *prophētēs*, means one who “speaks before” or “speaks forth”, ...again emphasizing the function of being a mouthpiece for God.** It was the word used to translate the Hebrew word in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation, and was used throughout the NT in reference to prophets, prophesying and prophecy.

The first time the word is used is in Genesis 20:7, where God tells Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham. **God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet** (a “called-one”, a representative-spokesman for God), **and he will pray for Abimelech and he will live**, ...otherwise he would surely die. **It is clear that God had a special relationship of friendship and intimacy with Abraham, and therefore He listened to his intercession.** But, if you go back in the story, it is clear that **God took the initiative to “call” Abram to that special relationship, and to his prophetic role** (Gen. 12).

The second time the word occurs, in Exodus 7:1,2, as we saw above, **it is this relationship of intimacy that is emphasized once again.** God would communicate *directly* with Moses, ...and he would tell Aaron, ...who would then pass along to Pharaoh what God had said. **The ability to receive and accurately perceive the communication from God was the foundation for being a representative spokesperson for Him.**

The third time the word is used is Numbers 11, where Yahweh took from the Spirit that was upon Moses, and placed it upon the 70 elders in the camp, and they prophesied. So, by the third time the word “prophet” occurred in the Bible, we see the strong connection with the Spirit of God. **It is the Spirit of God who enables a person to prophesy for Yahweh.** We also hear Moses wish that all God’s people could be prophets, and would have the Spirit of Yahweh.

The fourth time the word occurs, it describes the typical ways in which prophets receive communication from God, i.e., through a vision, or a dream, or through enigmatic or indirect messages, ...and then contrasts that with the open, direct communication Moses received from God (Num. 12:6-8). **A prophet was only as effective as the information he or she received. The clearer the information, the more plain and direct the prophetic expression could be.**

The fifth context where the word “prophet” occurs warns against a false or misleading prophet (Deut. 13:1-5. Actually, the fifth, sixth and seventh occurrences of “prophet” occur in these verses – vss. 1,3,5). Anyone claiming to be a prophet, or one who claims to get prophetic revelation through dreams, ...even a person who predicts things that come

true or performs some kind of supernatural sign or wonder..., **if he counsels or instructs the people to worship other gods, he is not to be listened to.** In the theocracy of Israel of that time, such a person was to be put to death.

The next context where the word is used is in Deuteronomy 18. In the passage, Moses is telling the people that they are not to be involved in any occult practices. They are not to practice divination, soothsaying, reading of omens, making of potions, casting spells, or to be mediums, spiritists, or try to communicate with the dead. These practices are forbidden. God has not permitted these practices for them. **Yahweh promised that He will raise up a prophet like Moses for them from among their own people. They shall listen to him. God Himself will raise up that prophet, and He will put His words into his mouth, and that person shall speak all that Yahweh commands him.** Anyone who disregards that prophet who speaks in God's name will be answerable to Him. But a prophet who presumes to speak something in Yahweh's name which He did *not* command, ...or who speaks in the name of other gods..., was to be put to death in the theocracy of that time. A word spoken in Yahweh's name that did *not* come to pass, was not something God had spoken. It was spoken presumptuously by that prophet. (There are actually six occurrences of the word "prophet" in this context – 15,18,20 [2x] and 22 [2x].) **Although this promise became the basis for all prophetic ministry after Moses, the book of Deuteronomy ends with a teaser: In 34:10, it states, "No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face."** A prophet like Moses will be someone who knows God with the intimacy that Moses did. **In Acts 3:22,23, however, Peter applied this promise to Jesus. He is the "Prophet like Moses" because He knows the Father with unhindered intimacy, ...even beyond "face to face."**

It is amazing what God laid out for us to learn about prophecy in just the first 14 occurrences of the word!

(1.) A person is "called" by God to be a prophet. He or she cannot "make that happen" on their own. **(2.) Being a prophet is based upon having an ability to receive communication from God.** Usually there is a relationship of intimacy established between God and the person. **(3.) It is the Spirit of God that enables a person to prophesy.** **(4.) Prophets can receive communication from God in a wide variety of ways.** This can come from visions, dreams, inner thoughts, riddles, word pictures, enigmatic sayings or indirect methods of communication. It can, however, also come from an established relationship of intimacy with God. **(5.) There are false, misleading and presumptuous "prophets" to beware of.** We must be prepared to test and scrutinize those who claim to be prophets, and examine what they teach for consistency with what God has already said. When they predict something in the Lord's name, it should come to pass, or they have spoken presumptuously, and we should not listen to them. If they would direct us *away from* God, they are false, and are to be disregarded. **(6.) God will raise up prophets from among the people of God.** God will initiate their call. God will put His message into their mouths. They will faithfully speak what God has given them to speak. I think it is amazing that God laid down such clear information about this gift in the *first 14 occurrences* of it in the Bible. There are literally hundreds of other occurrences, but these form the basis of what we substantially need to know.

What does the NT add to this? (1.) We know there were prophets in the NT church. From what we can glean, they appear to have the same characteristics, and operate in the same kind of way as did the OT prophets (Acts 2:17,18; 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9,10; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 11:4,5; 12:10,28,29; 13:2,9; 14:1-6,22,24,29,31,32,37,39; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Thess. 5:20; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14). **(2.) It is one of the "equipping gifts" mentioned in Ephesians 4:11.** This is a significant, strategic gift for building people up, speaking edifying things into their lives, and helping them grow. To hear specific things from God to say to His people is profoundly strategic and effectual. To develop the intimacy with God to hear from Him and accurately speak His messages to others in a timely manner is a powerful tool for building up the body of Christ. **(3.) A developed, functioning prophetic gift enables us to hear from God to speak words that will be right on target to build people up.** Paul says that those who can prophesy in a personal way are able to edify people, to come alongside them with exhortation or encouragement, and to comfort or exhort in a timely way. That is because God knows the unseen circumstances and the inner struggles that other people have, and He can reveal those hidden things, ...or even just give specific messages that would be targeted to address concerns in areas that are difficult to talk about. **(4.) A functioning prophetic gift will lead to greater interactive expression in the body of Christ.** Being equipped by God to speak His encouraging, ...even envisioning or commissioning words to others..., will cause us to interact more, according as He directs. **(5.) A deepening intimacy with God will also lead to a deepening life of intercession.** We saw that in Abraham and Moses, and Samuel indicates the same, "...far be it from me that I should sin against Yahweh by ceasing to pray for you..." (1 Sam. 12:23). **Intimacy with God seems to lead to intercession.** **(6.) It is the one spiritual gift that we are told three times to "earnestly desire"** (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,39). The word translated as "earnestly desire" also means to "eagerly seek, strive for, set one's heart on, show great interest in, to be completely intent on, to pursue, to exert oneself for". As you can see, **this is not just a longing for, ...this is to be a pursuit after.** Moses wished that all God's people would have the Spirit and that they would prophesy. Well, all of us in Jesus *do* have the Spirit, and **the apostle Paul exhorts us to eagerly pursue the gift of prophecy.**