

(Prophecy) Prophecy in the New Testament

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the shift from Old Testament prophecy to the New Testament's call for all believers to prophesy, highlighting the importance of discernment and personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Duration: 1:00:03

Scripture: Isaiah 30:10, Luke 1:74, 2 Peter 2:3, 2 Peter 2:14

Topics: "Eschatology", "Discernment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being aware of deception in relation to the second coming of Jesus. He highlights that Jesus himself warned about deception multiple times in Matthew 24. The speaker also mentions that the apostles taught about deception and false prophets. They urge listeners to apply a four-fold test to any teachings they encounter, ensuring that it aligns with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. The sermon also addresses the prevalence of preaching that caters to people's desires rather than adhering to the principles of God's word.

Transcript

Let's turn today to a few verses that I want to mention in the Old Testament before we look at prophecy in the New Testament. We saw that in the Old Testament the emphasis was on the prophet and in the New Testament it is on prophesying more. There's a lot of mention of the many hundreds of prophets in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament we don't read cases of prophets as much as on all God's sons and daughters prophesying.

That's the important thing. I mention two chapters especially in the Old Testament that deal specifically with the subject of the misuse of prophecy by the false prophets in the Old Testament. Those chapters are really worthy of study.

They were Jeremiah chapter 23 and Ezekiel chapter 13. I just want to show you a couple of verses before we move on. One is Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 10.

Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 10 say to the prophets, you must not see visions, you must not prophesy to us what is right. Speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions. The Message Bible translates that as, or paraphrases it as, tell us what makes us feel good or feel better.

Paul told Timothy that the last days people would heap to themselves teachers who would tickle their ears. We're living in those days where people want to hear what makes them feel good. And the result is a lot of today's preachers are influenced by the principles of psychology where they want to make people feel significant, successful, secure, happy, good, rather than by the principles of God's Word.

I mentioned on the first day that if you really want to know God's mind, you have to get rid of all the concepts and understanding of Christianity that you have got from your tradition. And we are influenced by that tremendously. And we have to deliberately set that aside and come to scripture and say, Lord, show me what your word says.

Give me an understanding of your mind. Then we can understand the truth concerning every subject, including prophecy correctly. So prophecy, as I said the first day, is communicating God's mind to people, and that can relate to past, present, or future.

So there is the element of foretelling the future as well, which we see in a number of cases in the Old Testament, and in a very few cases in the New Testament. So we don't eliminate the possibility of foretelling the future. Now, I want to say a word also concerning the close connection you read in the Old Testament between false prophets and those who were involved with witchcraft.

False prophets and diviners were put very closely together, and there are numerous examples in the Old Testament where God warned the false prophets and linked them up with people who were involved in witchcraft. There is a very close connection between the two. It appears as though when a man drifted away from God and he had this gift, he moved into the realm of satanic influences.

So that's something that's happening even today. Now let's start with Luke chapter 1 and verse 74 in the New Testament. This is a prophecy that Zachariah made concerning John the Baptist's ministry, and he said here that one of the things that would happen in the New Covenant would be, in the last part of verse 74, that we might serve God without fear.

One of Satan's greatest weapons is fear. One of the words that was very frequently found in the mouth of Jesus was, fear not, fear not, fear not. God wants us to serve him without fear.

I've been amazed at the number of believers who live in fear. We must hate fear as much as we hate sin. Just like Jesus said, don't sin, he said don't be afraid, don't be afraid.

So the Spirit of Christ is what we see in Jesus, something that has come to deliver us from fear. Now that wasn't possible in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament they lived in awesome fear of a God who would punish a person for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day.

God was trying to teach them to fear him. But Jesus came to deliver us from all that type of fear, to serve God out of love. Now how does this apply to prophecy? When a prophet speaks in a way that brings fear into your heart and scares you, I wouldn't listen to it.

I would reject it, because that does not have the Spirit of Christ which says fear not. Cult leaders control people through fear, putting fear into their heart. There are numerous cults that will tell people, if you leave this church, some calamity will come upon you.

If you don't listen to me, some judgment will come upon you. I want to say to you, you should never listen to such people. When you listen to such people, fear comes into your heart.

Remember the words of Jesus, fear not, fear not, fear not, that is the Spirit of Christ. And whenever you hear a prophecy that brings fear, you can be sure that that is not the Spirit of Christ. And the other thing the devil uses is condemnation.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. So whenever you hear a so-called prophecy that makes you feel condemned and discouraged and useless, you can be absolutely sure, 100% sure, that's not the Spirit of Christ. You got to reject it in your mind.

When you hear preaching that makes you feel condemned and useless and good for nothing, you got to reject it outright. That's how we can protect ourselves from wrong preaching, from false prophecies and false prophets. And if God's people would rise up to understand the Spirit of Christ, these false prophets will have no place in Christendom anymore.

And I believe that many of you who seek to serve the Lord should go out and liberate others from this type of fear. You need to ask yourself whether in your ministry you're setting people free from all this fear that so many Christians are bound by, fear of the devil, fear that some harm will come upon them. God is a loving Father.

He isn't out to catch us and punish us. He's out to cleanse us. And when he points out a sin in us, remember, it's like a doctor pointing out a cancer or a tumor.

His purpose is to deliver us. It's not to condemn us or to punish us. So Satan's weapons are fear, condemnation, and another weapon he uses is worldliness.

Now I spoke about prophets in the Old Testament numerous times. God says, you prophets are greedy. You're grabbing and looting the people.

Now, the love of money is not the same as having money. We read in Luke chapter 8 verse 2 and 3, many rich women supported Jesus with their money. There must have been huge amounts of money they gave to Jesus.

But he never loved money. There's a difference between having and loving. Now, sometimes we don't make that distinction.

So we think that if somebody is poor, he must be hating money, and if somebody is rich, he must be loving money. Now, you don't see that in scripture. Have you ever seen a beggar? We've seen a lot of beggars in India.

Have you ever seen a beggar who doesn't love money? I haven't. Every beggar I've ever seen in my life loves money. So what does that prove? That poor people love money.

And I've also seen some very fine Christians who have a lot of money, which they may have earned through hard work or inherited from their parents, and who have given it for the Lord's work. And it's obvious that they don't love money. So I've discovered that love of money has got nothing to do with your salary or your income or the type of house you live in or what you own or what you don't own.

It's something in our flesh. And it's got nothing to do with whether you live in poverty or your standard of living. That's between you and God.

Now, it's important for us to know this. Worldliness is an attitude towards the world when we love it. And false prophets can be identified by that.

They love the world themselves, and they cater to this lust in our flesh for things of the world. And that's how Satan gets a grip on people. I remember once when I was seeking the Lord in a time of prayer, the Lord spoke to me and said that the battle with Satan is in the heavenly places.

I mean, it's written in Ephesians 6. That's not something new. But the Lord went on to tell me if you really want to fight that battle effectively, you must be a heavenly-minded person. Otherwise, the devil will have power over you.

You can know the whole Bible and know everything and be very gifted. But if you're earthly-minded, he has power over you. If you're worldly-minded, he has power over you, because he is the prince of this world.

And that's why in the Old Testament, where the Holy Spirit could not lift people up into the heavenlies, they could never fight the entire Old Testament. From Genesis to Malachi, nobody could fight the devil. They fought the Philistines.

They fought the Canaanites. They fought the Moabites. They fought with human beings.

All through the Old Testament, they fought with human beings. But Jesus never fought with human beings. He was the first person who fought with Satan.

And the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 6, today for us, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers in the heavenly places. So if you allow yourself to be earthly-minded, you won't be able to overcome Satan, who is the prince of the world. And all false prophets will be able to deceive you, because they are earthly-minded.

And they will speak to satisfy your earthly lusts. And that's another way we can distinguish a false prophet. Does he bring fear into my heart? Does he bring condemnation and guilt into my heart? Does he make me more worldly-minded? Who wants to make me worldly-minded? Is it the devil or is it God? So by these means, we can identify a false prophet.

Now, we can't say that some of those things these prophets may say about even the future. And I told you, the devil knows all about our past. I said that yesterday, because demons know everything that's happened to them.

They've got files on every human being that lived since Adam. And they can tell you stories about somebody who lived 4,000 years ago, because they've got it all on their records. That doesn't prove anything.

That somebody can tell you all about your past just means he could be in contact with the devil, or he could be in contact with God. I don't know. I've got to look at his life.

Now the question some people ask is, what is it that the devil doesn't know? I've thought much about it. There's one thing the devil doesn't know, and that's my thoughts. He's a created being.

He doesn't know my thoughts. He can hear what I say, and he can watch what I do, but he doesn't know my thoughts. He can inject certain things into my thoughts, but he doesn't know my thoughts.

That's between me and God. You, as a created being, don't know my thoughts either. My wife, who's been married to me so many years, she doesn't know my thoughts either.

God, that's an area just between us and God. But there's another thing the devil doesn't know. He doesn't know the future.

He doesn't know one single thing about the future. Now, I want to qualify that, but that doesn't mean that he does not know what somebody out there is planning to do tomorrow. For example, three years ago, we know that that World Trade Center in New York City was destroyed by terrorists.

Now the question is, could the devil have predicted that? Well, he certainly knew that there were a whole lot of people planning that for two years or more. He knew that these people went and got flight training, and he knew the day they bought their tickets to fly on these planes. So you could say that he could predict that on certain such a date, at certain such a time, these planes are going to go and crash into the World Trade Center.

But how did he know that? Not because he knew the future, but because he knew what planning was going on in different places which other people didn't know. There were a lot of people on earth also who knew about it, the people who were in gang with the terrorists. So now if somebody said that, you'd think, boy, that's a true prophet.

No, he could be a heathen prophet who could say that, because the devil knew about it. So when we say that the devil doesn't know the future, he doesn't know things which nobody has planned. For example, what God is going to do in the future, he doesn't know that.

And very often I find a lot of Christians think more about Satan than they think about God, and that's a very sad thing. And therefore they live in fear. Now we don't know exactly how many angels fell with Satan when Satan fell in heaven.

There's a verse in Revelation chapter 12 which could possibly refer to that, where it says about the dragon pulling down one-third of the stars in heaven. Now if it refers, I wouldn't be dogmatic about it, but if that refers, as many think, to Satan pulling down one-third of the angels, because the angels are referred to as stars in other places in scripture. If it refers to one-third of the angels following Satan out of all those millions, it means two-third of the angels are still there.

And that means for every demon there is on earth, there are two angels. How is it that most believers think more about those demons than they think about angels? I don't understand that. The Bible says in the last verse of Hebrews chapter 1 that the angels are sent to be servants to us who have inherited salvation.

So if every demon who comes at me, I've got two angels. God has planned things for me which the devil cannot frustrate. So in the New Testament, God's will is that you and I should receive the Holy Spirit in fullness in our life and have a living contact with him.

He's jealous for our spirit, the Bible says. And that means he does not want to have another mediator between him and me. Let's turn to 1 Timothy chapter 2. 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 5. There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Now we say we know that verse. Now this has relevance to the subject we're studying of prophets. Because very often prophets seek to be a second mediator between God and man.

That means in the Old Testament that was okay. They had to go to the prophet to find out what was God saying. But you remember in the Mount of Transfiguration when there was Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

And Moses and Elijah were the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. And Peter was so excited. He said, Lord, let's make three tabernacles here.

One for Moses, one for Elijah and one for you immediately. A cloud came and God said, no, things are different now. This is a new covenant.

And they opened their eyes and it says they saw Jesus only. The prophets had disappeared. I believe we need that experience.

We make tabernacles for prophets. And God says, no, there'll be a cloud between you and God if you allow a prophet to take the place that Jesus should have in your life. Like a cloud came and that comes in our life too.

We need to see Jesus only. That beautiful verse in Matthew 17 verse 8 in the Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Jesus only.

The prophets disappeared. A true prophet of God is one who will lead you to Jesus and disappear himself. That's what John the Baptist said.

He must increase and I must decrease. They asked him, are you Elijah? He said, no. Are you Jeremiah? No.

Are you that prophet? No. Then what are you? I'm a voice crying in the wilderness. The greatest prophet of all time up to the time of Jesus.

He said, I am a voice and my duty is to decrease so that Christ might increase. That is the mark of a true prophet. He never advertised himself.

God sent people into the wilderness to listen to John. If your aim in life is that in all things Christ might have the preeminence in your life, in your home, in your church and that you want to sink into insignificance and disappear, let me tell you this, the almighty power of God will back you in your ministry no matter what you do. That is the mark of a true prophet and I believe the church in India needs many prophets like that who are not seeking to promote themselves, who are not seeking to advertise themselves.

Like John the Baptist who are seeking to decrease so that Christ might increase. I remember when I was a young man and I read a poem which was saying how exactly a man should preach. It spoke about a painting of Jesus and this man shining a light on that painting in such a way that people could see the beautiful painting of Jesus and they never saw the man holding the light because he was standing in the darkness.

And that poem said, that's the way you should preach. And I said, Lord, help me to preach like that. That people will see Jesus at the end of it and not me, that I'll disappear in the darkness.

And if you want to be a true prophet of God, that's the way you should be. Like John the Baptist, Moses and Elijah disappear and we see Jesus. One mediator between God and man.

That means to go to Jesus, I don't need another person. I go directly to Jesus. All shall know me.

This was not possible in the old covenant. This is one of the tremendous blessings of the new covenant that I go directly to Jesus Christ. Now we know that our Roman Catholic friends teach that you got to go through Mary to Jesus.

And we know that's wrong. But what about some Protestant churches where the pastor would teach that you got to go through him to Jesus. What's the difference between that and the Roman Catholic teaching? And I'll tell you my choice.

If I had a choice between going through Mary and through some pastor, I would choose Mary any day. Because at least she's a holy woman. This guy, I don't even know what he's like.

I definitely recommend Mary over any pastor in the world. But thank God we don't have to choose a second mediator. There is only one mediator.

And don't you be deceived by these people who are trying to take you back into the Old Testament by saying, I'll find the will of God for you. Rubbish! You can find the will of God yourself. You say, but I'm a new believer.

Okay, let's turn to that verse we already saw in Hebrews chapter 8. Hebrews chapter 8 and verse 11. They shall not teach everyone. This is a new covenant as we read in verse 8. He's speaking about the new covenant, the terms of the new covenant.

And one of them is verse 11. They shall not teach everyone his neighbor saying, know the Lord, but for all shall know me. And notice this in the world, we use the expression from the greatest to the least.

But God uses the expression from the least to the greatest. Who is the least? The least is the fellow who was born again today. Were you born again today? God says, you can know me.

It's like, you know, a father sitting with a number of children around the table. And he listens to that little baby speaking. And he may even ask the older one to wait till this baby finishes speaking.

That's how God is from the least to the greatest. So you don't have to say that because you're weak or small, you can't know the Lord. This is a privilege.

And the devil, just like he tries to rob the world of the knowledge of salvation, he's robbed believers of so many riches. And one of the tremendous riches, one of the riches that God, that Satan has robbed God's people of is the riches of knowing God personally. And I want to say to all of you, you don't need a single mediator to know God.

Through the Holy Spirit, you can know Jesus personally. And don't let any pastor or preacher or anyone else try to rob you of that privilege of knowing Jesus personally. That's the most important thing you need to know.

You can know God's will yourself, which in the Old Testament, if you were living before Christ, that was not possible. You had to go to a prophet. And this is what the devil is seeking to do, to lead God's people back into old covenant times, to times which are BC, before Christ.

We say we're living in 2004 AD, but spiritually speaking, I have found the vast majority of believers I've met in my life are living in BC. When they want to learn about prosperity, they go to Deuteronomy. They don't find verses in the New Testament.

They go to the Old Testament for all their teaching, very often. And that's why they live defeated lives, because in the Old Testament, nobody had victory over sin. They make much of leaders.

They don't understand that in the New Testament, all are priests. There are no special category of priests. That was Old Testament.

But look at the number of churches today where some people are priests. Every person is to be connected to the head Jesus Christ in the New Testament. That was not there in the Old Testament.

In the vast majority of churches in Christendom today, we have a congregation and a priest or a pastor, one man. That's not God's will. That's Old Testament.

In the New Testament, all can be filled with the Holy Spirit. All can have a living connection with Christ. And it says, all can even prophesy.

It's amazing. And I want to encourage you to enter into your privileges under the New Covenant. Let's move on and see something more about what Jesus said about prophets.

First of all, we'll go through the New Testament, a few verses. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 12. Matthew 5 and verse 12.

When Jesus was speaking to his disciples, one of the beatitudes he said was, blessed are you, verse 11, when men cast insults at you. Now, have you ever believed that you're a blessed person when men insult you, persecute you, say all kinds of evil against you falsely? How many of you have experienced people saying all kinds of evil, not one or two, all kinds of evil against you falsely because of Jesus Christ, because of your stand for the principles of scripture? In that day, Jesus said, rejoice. In Luke's gospel, it says, jump for joy, because your reward in heaven is great, because they persecuted the prophets who were before you like that.

In Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 7, Stephen, when he was speaking, he asked the people a question, which of the prophets have you not persecuted? He asked those leaders in Israel, can you name one prophet whom you did not persecute? You know, the true prophets were all persecuted, every one of them, without exception. That's why Stephen could say that, and that's why Jesus said this in Acts 7.52. Now, I want you to turn to Luke chapter 6, verse 23 to 26, the parallel passage, here where Jesus says, now this is something important for us to understand. In Luke 6 and verse 23, he said, be glad, for this is the way they treated the false prophets, and then he said in verse 26 of Luke 6, woe unto you, it's like a curse be upon you, when all men speak well of you, because that is the way your father spoke about the false prophets.

Now, this is what Jesus said about true prophets and false prophets. A true prophet will have all types of false things being told about him. They said that about Jesus.

They called him a demon, they called him Beelzebub, they said this man is teaching false teaching, he's a heretic, he's not teaching what Moses taught us, and then after Jesus went away, Paul. They said the same things about Paul. This man's a heretic, he's a false teacher.

That's what they said about all the prophets in the Old Testament, and that's what they've said about every prophet of God in these 2,000 years. And the false prophets, everybody speaks highly of them. Oh, that man, that man.

Jesus said, woe unto you, when all men speak well of you. Have we understood Jesus' words clearly? Have we understood that one of the marks of a true prophet is that people speak evil of him falsely? Now, psychologists will say Jesus had a martyr syndrome. That's a clever way of getting out of it.

Don't listen to the psychologists. Jesus was the one who said these words, that every true prophet would be ridiculed, accused falsely. It's not a martyr syndrome, it's God's word.

So, remember that. Now, let's turn also to Matthew chapter 7 and verse 15. Again, Jesus speaks about false prophets.

You see, Jesus is teaching his disciples. Why is he saying so much about false prophets? Because there would be so many in Christendom. He said to his disciples at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, beware of false prophets who will come to you dressed like sheep, talking spiritual language, holding the Bible.

If they held some other religious book of some other religion, you wouldn't believe them. That wouldn't be sheep's clothing. Sheep's clothing means they pretend to be Christians.

But they don't lead you into a connection with Christ. They get you connected to themselves. They take advantage of you.

That's why Jesus said, you will know them by their fruits. Look at the fruits in their life. I've noticed that false prophets are interested in money.

They're interested in women. They're interested in publicity. You got to be careful when a man is loose in his attitude towards women.

When a man is interested in money, when a man is interested in publicizing himself, you will know them by their fruits and not by their gifts. We saw that earlier, that some of these people, verse 22, where he speaks about gifts, can prophesy in Jesus name, do miracles in Jesus name, cast out demons in Jesus name, and Jesus will say to them, I never knew you. Another verse about prophets Jesus spoke in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 55 to 57, we read about when Jesus came to his hometown.

In verse 54, he came to his hometown of Nazareth and they despised him like anything. He grew up there. They despised him.

And Jesus said, a prophet is not without honor. In verse 57, except in his own home and in his own household. I want to tell you something else, which is characteristic of true prophets in the Old Testament and the New.

In Matthew chapter 23, you see Jesus, the ideal prophet of Jehovah. See what he says in Matthew chapter 23 in verse 37. Again, he speaks in verse 34 of prophets being persecuted.

Jesus spoke a lot about that, prophets being persecuted. And then he said in verse 37, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I wanted to gather your children like a hen gathers her chicks, but you were unwilling. In Luke's gospel chapter 19, it says he beheld the city and he wept over it.

There are two places in the Bible where it says Jesus wept. One is at the tomb of Lazarus. And the other is when he saw the city of Jerusalem, he longed that they might turn to the father.

He used the whip in the city of Jerusalem. But before he did that, he wept. That's how these Old Testament prophets were.

Jeremiah was called a weeping prophet. It said about Jeremiah in chapter 13 in verse 17 of Jeremiah, he said, if you will not listen to me, he said, I will weep in secret places for your pride. A true prophet weeps not in public to get honor.

Public weeping will bring honor. And some people have the ability to weep in public. Fortunately, I don't have it.

But the prophets wept in secret. Jesus did not weep in public to get honor from people. As a very compassionate person, he wept in secret.

Jeremiah said, I'll weep in secret for your pride. Prophets have got a heart that's moved with compassion. They knew the word of God clearly, they received God's word.

You read in the Old Testament how God told Ezekiel, eat this scroll, let your word go into me. I've often said to the leaders of the churches I have responsibility for, there are two things you must have in your heart. One is God's word and the other is God's people.

If you have God's word and God's people in your heart, God will always give you a word for his people. I have found that for 30 years of my life, as long as I keep God's people whom I have responsibility for and God's word, not in my mind, in my heart, there's a lot of difference between having God's word in the mind and in the heart. You folks who study in a Bible school very often, you may have it in your mind, it doesn't mean it's in your heart.

Have you obeyed it? Have you meditated on it? Has God allowed that word to sink into your heart and has it become living to you? Or is it just information that you can analyze and do research on? No, you've got to have God's word in your heart. David said in Psalm 119, Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. When God's word is in your heart, it keeps you from sin.

And when you have God's word stored up in your heart, all of God's word, and you carry God's people in your heart, you can prophesy correctly. That is God's way. So this is one of the marks of true prophets.

And then he goes on to speak again towards the end of his ministry. Way back in the beginning in the Sermon on the Mount, he spoke so much about false prophets. And now in Matthew 24, he comes to the end of his ministry, and again he speaks about false prophets.

This is the time when the disciples said, Lord, what will be the sign of your coming? And at the end of the age, Matthew 24. And one of the things he said prominently was, the very first thing he said was verse four, don't let anybody deceive you. The first thing he said in relation to his second coming is deception.

Deception. Now there are a lot of other people who think about other signs of his coming. But Jesus spoke about deception.

And then he said, many will come and mislead you, verse five. And then he says in verse 11, many false prophets will arise and mislead you. Mislead, mislead, mislead.

Three times in a few verses. And the question is, what is the sign of your coming? Do you know that deception, widespread deception in Christendom is one of the things that Jesus said would characterize the days immediately before his second coming. So if you believe that Christ is coming soon, you should be alert to deception.

If you've read the Bible, I've read the Bible, so I'm alert to deception, because that's what Jesus emphasized the most in relation to his second coming. And he also said that there will be people coming with false signs and wonders. That's going to happen also.

And I want to show you this in verse 24. False prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Mislead, mislead, mislead, mislead.

How often do you want Jesus to say it? With signs and wonders that even the elect are in a very high possibility of being misled. How shall we protect ourselves? I know how I have learned to protect myself. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith.

He is my example. He's the one who said, follow me. And as long as I keep my eyes on him and compare every person I see with him and all the so-called manifestations of the Spirit with the manifestations of the Holy Spirit found in Jesus, I'm safe.

I ask myself when so many people seek to do things today and say this is the Holy Spirit, I ask myself, did Jesus do it? Read the Gospels and see whether Jesus did it. Ask yourself, did Jesus teach it? Ask yourself whether the apostles taught it? Whether the apostles did it? For me, that is a fourfold test. Did Jesus do it? Did Jesus teach it? Did the apostles do it? Did the apostles teach it? If it fails on all four counts, I say, I am not interested in that.

You can go ahead and follow it as much as you like, but I'm not interested. And I will not accept it. I don't care what it is.

And I can say God's preserved me and protected me. And if you want to be protected, apply that test yourself. Jesus said about deception, deception, deception, deception.

You turn to 1 Timothy 4, it says the Spirit speaks expressly. That means the Holy Spirit is underlining something. The whole Bible is written by the Holy Spirit.

But when we read in 1 Timothy 4.1, the Spirit speaks expressly that in the last days, deceiving spirits will come. And people will preach the doctrines of demons. These deceitful spirits are going to be there in the last days.

2 Thessalonians 2 says the same thing. In 2 Thessalonians 2, it says about the rise of the Antichrist was going to appear with the activity of Satan. 2 Timothy 2 Thessalonians 2.9 with powers and signs and false wonders.

How do you know whether a wonder is a true wonder or a false wonder? Well, ask yourself. Not whether you're healed or not. I'm not really interested in that.

Not even whether a demon is cast out or not. Jesus said to the Pharisees, your sons are also casting out demons. I've thought about that.

How did the children of the Pharisees cast out demons? Jesus asked them that question. You know, there's a lot of the devil's a deceiver. And all he's got to do to fool people that somebody is a man of God, that person may be possessed by the devil himself.

It's the devil play acting. Here's another person possessed with a demon. And this demon tells that demon, listen, when I tell you to get out, you get out.

So that everybody will believe that this man's a man of God. It's so easy. I'm amazed that Christians don't even have that much sense.

Is that man Christ-like? Has he got humility? What's his attitude to money? What's his attitude to the opposite sex? What's his attitude to fame and publicity? That's what I look for. Otherwise, you can be deceived by false wonders. Let me turn to Luke's gospel chapter 16.

Luke 16. We want to think about something positive. And the Lord spoke about a lot of negative things.

I need to mention that. But here's something positive. Luke 16, verse 11.

How to get true riches from God? Prophecy is one of God's true riches. And according to Acts 2, 17 and 18, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all mankind, we can receive sons and daughters can prophesy, speak forth God's word. You have to be faithful with money and unrighteous mammon.

Mammon is a word that comprises material things. I want to tell you what the Lord spoke into my heart in this area. If you want to prophesy, that means speak God's word with authority and power, speak forth the mind and the counsels of God in a way that will reach people's hearts, that will convict them of sin, that will lead them to Christ, that will lead them to godliness.

Not just convert them, but lead them to godliness. You've got to be faithful with money, number one. Not just righteous with money.

Righteous with money means I don't cheat, I don't tell lies, I don't steal. That's fine. To be faithful with money is one step beyond that.

To be faithful with money means I don't waste money unnecessarily on myself. I'm careful, I recognize that my money is God's money. Not 10% like in the Old Testament, but all of it.

I say, Lord, how do I spend this? To be faithful, I want to encourage all of you, my dear brothers and sisters, this is what has destroyed people in Christendom. From your youth, learn to be faithful with money. Never mind if people around you are unfaithful.

God needs prophets in India. Be faithful with money. The second thing, be faithful with your tongue.

Most Christians I've met are very careless with their tongue. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon people, it was a tongue of fire that was on their heads. Not a hand or a leg, but a tongue of fire, symbolizing that in this new covenant age, it's the tongue which God wants to use more than any other part of our body.

If you tell lies with your tongue, you can't prophesy correctly anyway. If you gossip with your tongue, you backbite, you criticize, you judge people and indulge in a lot of careless, useless conversation and dirty jokes and all that, don't ever think that when you stand up in the pulpit, God is going to put His word on

your tongue. You can't loan out your tongue to the devil part of the time and then come to the pulpit and say, oh God, please be with my mouth.

He will not. He wants your tongue 24 hours of every day. Give it to him if you want to prophesy.

Third, I told you about money, tongue, only three things. And third, your eyes. Be faithful with your eyes.

If you're married, have eyes for your wife. Only. Be faithful in that area.

A lot of people are not. They may know the Bible a lot, they may teach a lot, but they cannot prophesy because they have eyes for something else. If you're not married, the Bible says, look straight ahead of you.

That's a verse like that in Proverbs 4. Don't look this way or that way. God will bring Eve to you at the right time. So this is very important.

I was once reading, you know, prophets were married. It says about Ezekiel in chapter 24, verse 16, where God says to Ezekiel, I'm going to take away your wife in death. Do you know what God calls Ezekiel's wife? He doesn't say your wife.

It's a beautiful expression. I really love it. God says, calls his wife the desire of your eyes.

I love that. And the Lord said to me from that, your wife must be the desire of your eyes always. My wife is nearly 62 years old, but she's the desire of my eyes.

I'll tell you that. And I looked up that verse in other translations and it's beautiful how it's described. The desire of your eyes, your dearest treasure, your lovely wife, the delight of your life, the person you love the most.

My brothers who are married stick to that. Let's turn to Acts of the Apostles. I want to give you a little warning about Acts of the Apostles.

And that is, remember that Acts of the Apostles is a history book. It's not a book about doctrine. If you want to get doctrine in the New Testament, don't go to the Acts of the Apostles.

You can learn history from there. But there are good things and bad things that the Apostles did. And if you get doctrine from there, you will become selective.

You will choose what you want and you'll reject what you don't want. If you want to get established doctrine in the New Testament, go to the teaching sections of what Jesus taught in the Gospels and go to the Epistles. That's doctrine.

You go to the Acts of the Apostles, you will read that they spoke in tongues, which is correct. You'll also read that Paul circumcised Timothy, which is not correct. You'll read there that they healed the sick, which is correct.

You'll also read there that Paul shouted at the high priest, which is not correct. And people pick and choose. For example, they read that everybody spoke in tongues.

Good. But it also says they all sold everything that they had. Why don't they choose that verse? You see, this is deception.

They are inconsistent. Lot of Christians are inconsistent. They pick out one verse, they all spoke in tongues, but they don't pick out the other verse which says they all sold everything that they had and shared with everybody else.

And when God sees that a man is inconsistent, he doesn't love the truth, God himself allows him to be deceived. And that's what's happened. So, whatever you read in the Acts of the Apostles, it illustrates what the Apostles did, but it says there Paul fought with Barnabas.

What doctrine do you get from that? So, Acts of the Apostles is history. It records the good actions and the bad mistakes of prophets and apostles. We can learn a lot from it, but don't establish your doctrine in the Acts of the Apostles.

A lot of confusion in Christendom has come because they've established doctrine not on the teaching of Jesus, not on the Epistles, but almost entirely from the Acts of the Apostles. Now, you've got to be very careful there, and that's how you get into a lot of confusion in the area of prophesying. Now, in the Acts of the Apostles, let me show you something about what prophets.

In Acts 11.27, first of all, we already saw Acts 2.17, I don't want to mention that, you'll all prophesy. Acts 11.27, it says, at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. There were prophets in the New Testament.

There are prophets. Ephesians 4 says God has given to the church apostles and prophets. It's a gift to the church, the person of prophets.

One of them was Agabus, and here is foretelling the future in the New Covenant. There will be a famine all over the world. How could he have known that? That wasn't from the devil.

That was from God. But notice one thing. He never told people what to do.

This is one consistent thing about Agabus, and that's how I know he's a true prophet. We read that here he said there'll be a famine on the world, and he shut his mouth. He didn't say, therefore, all of you should get some money and give it to the poor people.

That they did, but he never told them to do it. Later on in Acts 21, you see the same Agabus saying to Paul, he took his girdle and said, the Holy Spirit says the man who belongs to this girdle is going to be tied up when he goes to Jerusalem. He didn't tell him whether to go or not to go.

That's the mark of a true prophet. Directive prophecy is never found in Agabus. It's never found in a spirit-filled man in the New Testament.

Immature people think that they can direct others, and here's an example of that in Acts chapter 21. In Acts chapter 21, we read that Paul and Luke went to a certain place. It says they landed at Tyre.

In verse 3, Acts 21, 3, they landed at Tyre, and there the ship was to unload its cargo. Verse 4, and they looked up the disciples in Tyre, and they stayed with the disciples for seven days, and these disciples kept telling Paul through, this is directive, through the spirit, you must not set your foot in Jerusalem. Thus said the Lord, you must not put your spirit in Jerusalem.

Now, when it says through the spirit, I believe it means it's a small s, not Holy Spirit. They spoke from their spirit. You see, from the original Greek, it's impossible to say whether it's capital S or small s. I believe it is

a small s. Through the spirit, they were saying what came in their spirit.

Hey, Paul, you shouldn't go to Jerusalem. Paul said, nothing doing. I'm going to Jerusalem.

Now, the question is, was Paul's going to Jerusalem right or wrong? Let's turn to Acts chapter 23, verse 11. When Paul was in Jerusalem, in prison, the Lord stood at his side one night and said, take courage, Paul, for as you have solemnly witnessed to my cause here at Jerusalem, you will also be at Rome. The Lord said, you're in the right place.

Well, what did these guys in Tyre say in the spirit? Thus said the Lord, Paul, you shouldn't go to Jerusalem. He had completely missed the will of God if he had listened to those people who were sincere, but they were going outside their boundary into directive prophecy, which is never found in the New Testament. If Paul had to know God's will, he didn't have to know it from those guys.

He had the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit would tell him warning. Yes. Now notice the maturity of Agabus in Acts 21.

He came and he only said the Holy Spirit says the man who owns this belt will be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. Acts 21, 11, full stop. That's the mark of a mature prophet.

People like Agabus were rare in those days. One among many hundreds of prophets and they are rare today, but one mark of them is they'll never tell you what to do and they'll never make you scared and they'll never make you condemned. They will say something and leave it.

We read here also about Philip's daughters who prophesied. I don't believe they were prophetesses. There's no prophetess in the New Testament except Jezebel, the false prophetess, but they prophesied and women can prophesy too.

I want to turn now to 1 Corinthians 14, which is the great chapter on prophecy in the New Testament. And here is the clearest definition of prophecy in the New Testament. It's different from the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 14, 3 is the clearest verse in the entire New Testament which defines prophecy in the New Testament. One who prophesies speaks to men for edification. Edification means building them up, not condemning them.

Encouraging them, building them up, not tearing them down. Exhortation, challenging them like the Lord told Habakkuk in Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 3, write the vision and make it plain so that he who reads it will run. And that's how a true prophet is.

He challenges and when you hear a prophet, you are challenged to press on and run the race. And third, consolation, comfort. Many of God's people are battered out there in the world.

They come to the church, they don't need a battering there. They need comfort, encouragement, challenge, edification. So whenever you listen to a person who says he's prophesying, ask yourself these questions.

Is that encouraging me? Is it challenging me? Is it lifting me up? Or is it pushing me down? Is it scaring me? That's the way to find out whether it's a true prophecy or not. Further down, in a church it says in verse 24, if all the people in a church prophesy, now I've never seen a church like that, it's talking about a theoretical situation where a church, every single person is filled with the Holy Spirit. And Paul is taking an

ideal situation where every single person is filled with the Holy Spirit and all, they're not prophets, but all have the ability to prophesy, to speak in this way in verse 3. And they all prophesy, what happens? An unbeliever or an ungifted man comes in and he's convicted.

And the secrets of his heart are made manifest to whom? To himself. And he falls on his face and say, boy, how did that preacher know about me? And he worships God and says, God is here. You know, that's the mark of prophecy.

And we've experienced that numerous times in our churches, where we know nothing about the person. And we speak God's word, we don't even know who the person is. And he comes in and God is speaking directly to him and showing him to himself, this is the condition of your heart.

And he falls on his face and says, God is here. My brothers and sisters, this is what we need. Beware of the false prophets.

Just a couple of verses more and I close. 2nd Peter chapter 2, beware of false prophets. Two things he mentions about false prophets in 2nd Peter 2. 1, verse 3, they are greedy.

2, verse 14, their eyes are full of adultery. Money and their eyes, just like in the Old Testament. That's why we have the background of the Old Testament.

Finally, Revelation 22, verse 9, when John fell down and worshiped the angel. The angel said, don't worship me. I am a fellow servant like the prophets.

That means a prophet will never allow people to worship him. A prophet will never allow people to be attached to him. He will push them away.

Be connected to Christ. And in conclusion, Revelation 19, verse 10, the last part of that verse, beautiful expression. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

That is the spirit we must test. Is it leading us to closer to Jesus? Or is it leading me to a dependence on himself? Or leading me to become more worldly and more attached to the things of the earth? He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Let's pray.

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