

MODERN-DAY PROPHECY

(Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 4–5, 2025)

Summary

From the beginning of the Assemblies of God, prophecy has been affirmed as a spiritual gift for the Church today. Since the Day of Pentecost, the Church has functioned as a prophetic community. Any Spirit-filled believer may prophesy while discernment and judgment of prophecy belong to the full body of Christ.

Introduction

The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal Movement within the twentieth century and the subsequent rise of the charismatic movement led many Christian traditions to accept the ministry of the laity through spiritual gifts and the use of signs and wonders in evangelism. Much of the evangelical world, in particular, has turned from cessationism, the belief that spiritual gifts ceased with the writing of the New Testament, to an understanding that New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the Church.

The Assemblies of God seeks to maintain the proper balance of encouraging prophecy as a spiritual gift while correcting abuse. Because a prophet claims to speak for God, few gifts can cause more damage when misused. The abuse of prophecy, however, does not invalidate the gift of prophecy. The Church needs to recognize and respond to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy given to the Church today.

Biblical Prophecy

Prophets have a unique responsibility to declare the words of God. In the Old Testament, that responsibility carried a unique authority because the community did not have the same Spirit of revelation as the prophets (Numbers 11:25–29). Furthermore, the community could not always easily discern between true and false prophets.

The Old Testament provides a few assessments for testing prophecy. Moses told the people that any prophet who speaks in the name of another god is false (Deuteronomy 18:20). When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, what they prophesied must come true. Otherwise, “that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously” (Deuteronomy 18:21–22).¹

¹ Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

How do we determine the true prophet if prophets speak in the name of the Lord but offer conflicting messages (1 Kings 22:23–24)? Jeremiah offered this advice in his encounter with the false prophet Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:5–9). The recipient should assume the message of judgment is true over a competing message of good tidings until the good things promised come to pass. In other words, a message Israel does not want to hear is more likely to be a true prophecy than a message Israel wants to hear. True prophets sometimes offer good news (2 Kings 14:25), but false prophets only offer what they think will win favor with others (Lamentations 2:14; Micah 3:5).

On the Day of Pentecost, the entire Church received the spirit of prophecy and spoke by the Holy Spirit in other languages (Acts 2:4). Peter also addressed the crowd in their shared language (Acts 2:14). At the same time, some followers of Jesus were recognized as prophets in the Book of Acts, including the prophets at Antioch (Acts 13:1); Judas and Silas, who traveled with Paul (Acts 15:32); the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8–9); and Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10–14).

The apostle Paul accepted prophecies from individual believers throughout Acts. When Agabus prophesied a coming famine to the Roman world, Barnabas and Paul raised a collection from Antioch to care for the churches in Judea (Acts 11:28–30). The prophets at Antioch served as the likely source of the Holy Spirit's directive to separate Barnabas and Paul for apostolic ministry (Acts 13:1–2). When Agabus traveled from Judea to Caesarea and prophesied Paul's coming arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10–13), Paul regarded it as confirmation of what he was already determined to face rather than a directive not to go. Paul offered one example of judging prophecy.

Paul's letters refer to the presence of prophets in the churches. To the Corinthians, Paul recognized the activity of female prophets (1 Corinthians 11:5–6), encouraged prophecy in worship gatherings (1 Corinthians 14:1–5), and instructed that prophecies were to be tested by apostolic teaching (1 Corinthians 14:37–38). He called on the Romans to exercise the gift of prophecy "in accordance" to their faith (Romans 12:6). Paul cautioned the Thessalonians not to "treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thessalonians 5:20). Paul spoke of prophets, along with apostles, as foundational to the Church (Ephesians 2:20) and, along with apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, as gifts that Christ has given to the Church (Ephesians 4:11). To Timothy, Paul noted a prophetic message had accompanied the laying on of hands by the elders (1 Timothy 4:14).

A prophetic word acknowledging the Incarnate Lord also serves as proof of Spirit-inspired speech. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would glorify Him (John 16:14). According to Paul, no one who is speaking by God's Spirit will curse Jesus, nor can anyone declare the lordship of Jesus except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). John wrote us that any spirit which acknowledges Jesus has come in the flesh is from God while any spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:2–3).

These accounts make clear (1) the recognition of prophets in the early churches, (2) the recognition of both men and women as prophets, (3) that prophets traveled on

occasion, and (4) the validation of prophetic authenticity through inspired utterance that was true to the Scriptures, apostolic teaching, and the revelation of Jesus.

The Gift of Prophecy

The key biblical teaching regarding the gift of prophecy is found in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Paul wrote that all believers may prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:31). He also made it clear that not every believer will be a prophet or be regularly used by the Spirit in that way (1 Corinthians 12:28–29). This is implied by naming prophecy as a separate gift of the Spirit. At the same time, Paul encouraged all believers to “desire . . . especially prophecy” (1 Corinthians 14:1), for the person who prophesies does so for the “strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3) of others. There is no statute of limitations on the spirit of prophecy in the life of the Church.

The Church needs the prophetic function to strengthen, encourage, and comfort believers. A word of prophecy can warn, correct, predict, confirm, and console. Proper prophetic functioning remains crucial to today’s churches’ development, health, and well-being. As a spiritual gift, prophecy’s primary outcome is building up the body of Christ.

When people function in the prophetic, they must magnify the Lord, not themselves. They must not contradict the Bible. There are numerous ways to deliver a prophetic message. Those who serve in the prophetic should seek God for the proper method, timing, approach, tone, place, and audience. Much prophetic work is informal and not done in a formulaic way (as in “thus saith the Lord”). We all need to ask for ears to hear what God is speaking in all situations. Further, a person may receive a prophetic insight not to be shared as a message but to be prayed for as a concern. Prophesying people must be praying people.

A word of prophecy should be given as a message in context with a limited scope. No prophecies today carry the authority or weight of Scripture. The context for a prophetic word in 1 Corinthians 14 is the local congregation where the person speaking is better known and more accountable to the congregation. No prophetic word can be given that is insulated from the discernment or judgment of a community of believers who also have the Spirit of God. No prophet can hide behind titles like “man of God” or “woman of God” when they speak to other Spirit-filled women and men of God.

Judging Prophecies

Paul called churches to weigh or judge prophecy carefully (1 Corinthians 14:29). Such judgment should begin with recognizing that the completion of the New Testament does not invalidate the ongoing need for prophecy as a spiritual gift for the Church. Despite the assertions of cessationists, prophecy did not end because the New Testament was completed. One reason they condemned spontaneous prophecy was the belief that it adds authoritative words to Scripture, thus cheapening the authority of Scripture overall.

Pentecostals responded to this charge by highlighting the authority of Scripture in judging spontaneous prophecy.² They held to Paul's guidelines for exercising prophecy and judged the message against the whole of Scripture so that no prophecy contradicting the Bible was accepted. Pentecostals also limited the value of prophetic words to the particular context or community they are given rather than treating them as having authority over the whole Church. With these restrictions in practice and the presence of signs and wonders accompanying the spread of the gospel, more evangelicals have accepted the possibility of modern-day prophecy. Today, cessationism has fewer adherents than it did during the early years of Pentecostalism.

Scripture indicates how we should judge prophecy. Within the church, prophets speak for the edification of the community (1 Corinthians 14:26). While a prophetic word, like Scripture, may be given to rebuke, correct, and encourage (2 Timothy 3:16 through 4:2), it should be given for the good of the church. A prophet's message should not be self-serving.

A prophetic word should also be exercised in an orderly manner and not cause unnecessary confusion. People may reject a prophetic word, but the reason for confusion or controversy should not be careless behavior by the speaker. No one giving a prophetic word should act as if they cannot control themselves because prophets must know when and how to sit down and be silent for the good of the community (1 Corinthians 14:29–33).

A prophetic word must also be true. Prophecies may not all be predictive but will be informative. Every prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit will be for the glory and truth of Jesus (John 16:14; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:2–3). Any prophecy which dishonors or disregards the authority of Jesus cannot be from God. Any prophecy that contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture cannot be from God. No prophecy of the Spirit can contradict the Spirit who inspired Scripture.

If a word of prophecy is predictive, we must be cautious and vigilant in assessing it. Some might deliver prophetic words that offer predictions of things with a fifty-fifty probability. Others may wrongly prophesy based on what can already be known. We must carefully distinguish between a prophetic word and a "good guess." If a prophetic word offers a prediction so general that it cannot be discerned as invalid or false no matter what happens, we should not count that as a predictive prophecy that has come true.

Some predictive prophecies might be conditional and are given to generate a response rather than merely predict. Ninevites received a message of judgment, but their repentance led God to relent (Jonah 3:10). Hezekiah received a message about his impending death, but his cries to God led to a promise of healing (2 Kings 20:1–5). If the prophecy of soon-coming events does not come true and is not conditioned on the response of the recipients, then the prophecy is false. If the prophecy leads to a turning toward God and does not come true, it may still reflect the will of God in being given.

Prophecies must be judged according to:

² Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Prophecy, Prophesying," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 761–762.

1. their “why” or the intent of the message (Does it edify the Church?)
2. their “how” or the delivery of the message (Does it cause unnecessary confusion?)
3. their “what” or the meaning of the message (Is it biblical?)
4. the “who” or the one delivering the message (Are they trustworthy?). However, a stranger may give us a word from God, or a new believer may offer a prophetic word despite being immature. Neither of those would invalidate a prophecy on their own.

Guidelines

1. Pastoral responsibility includes equipping the saints (Ephesians 4:12–13) to exercise spiritual gifts, including prophecy and discernment. Equipping someone involves preparing and correcting them. That correction must be done gently, or someone may never want to be used by God in that way again. At the same time, people must be taught that it is better to be corrected than to remain unavailable to God. Pastoral responsibilities also include teaching a congregation how to exercise discernment when a prophetic word is given.
2. Pastors can create an environment for prophetic activity within their community. Is the congregation attuned to the Holy Spirit and willing to listen? Have they been prepared to speak prophetically? Is the schedule open for the Holy Spirit to manifest the gift of prophecy? Is there enough trust within the community for people to step out in faith and speak?
3. The use of social media for the dissemination of prophecy is a serious concern. Prophecy works best where there is accountability. The potential audience for a prophetic word on social media platforms provides a loss of context, correction, and community from a prophetic word delivered in person. Every prophecy must be subject to pastoral correction and community discernment, regardless of how it is delivered.
4. Christians must learn to distinguish between genuine and false prophecies. A prophetic word that departs from biblical truth is false. Similarly, a prophetic message that, if believed, would turn a church away from the ways of Jesus is false. A prophetic word should not disciple people in the wrong direction.
5. The prophet who prophesies in a self-serving manner is false, while the prophet who lives a hidden life that does not represent godliness is untrustworthy. False prophets are more concerned about titles, honor, and personal power than serving humbly and sacrificially. They often charge for their ministry services and make demands of people, lording it over others. Instead of magnifying Jesus, they focus on their notoriety.

Jesus warned of false prophets who looked innocent but were inwardly like wolves. We can tell the difference between true and false prophets by the fruit of the Spirit they exhibit (Matthew 7:15–20). False prophets usually work independently, expanding their empire without proper local church covering. Rather than appreciating checks and balances, they often reject teaching and correction. Many appeal to people’s itching ears and tell them what they want to hear. They expand their reach and control beyond God’s authorization.

However, we should not allow a fear of false prophets to dissuade us from recognizing the value of prophecy as an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit, broadly distributed throughout a responsive Church until Jesus comes. The Spirit sovereignly chooses and directs persons open and sensitive to His gifts and promptings and endows them variously with verbal gifts. Both men and women may expect to exercise the gift of prophecy in varied ways, as seen in the New Testament, to the glory of Jesus and the good of the Church.