



Theological analysis of prophecy and its implication for the Church in Nigeria

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Abstract

Prophecy is one of the ways God communicates with His people through his chosen vessels (prophets). It's the voice that speaks with the authority of God for the benefit of humanity. Prophets prophesy the mind of God to the people and he stands in gap between God and man. As good as prophecy which should contribute to the development of the Church, abuse of it has bedeviled the Church and many lives, marriages, and destinies were ruined. The study therefore examines the effect of prophecy on the growth of the Church. The methodology used in this research is descriptive survey; questionnaires were administered to gather analyses. Findings revealed that prophecy brings about positive growth and development of The Church in Nigeria. It supports the improvement, expansion and unity through the directives that prophecy gives, and the Church in Nigeria at large hold firmly the prophecy and rely on the word of God, thus says the Lord, for glorious Future. It brings about edification, exhortation and comfort of the Church. The research recommended that authority of the Church should regulate the use of prophecy in the Church, train the prophets on how to use the gift of prophecies to prevent any form of abuse that may adversely affect the growth of the Church.

Key words: Theology, Prophecy, Church



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Introduction

Prophecy serves as a means through which God communicates with humanity, a practice that predates creation itself. Despite initially speaking directly with mankind, God turned to prophecy when disappointed by certain human actions. He appointed individuals of exceptional character to convey His message to His people. In religious contexts, prophecy entails receiving messages from a supernatural entity. Prophecies are prevalent across various cultures and belief systems, often conveying divine will, laws, or foresight into future events. The term "prophecy" originates from the Greek word "Propheteia," derived from "Prophetes" and "Prophemi," signifying "to speak forth." It involves conveying God's message under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, distinct from merely predicting future events.¹

As The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia noted: "According to the uniform teaching of the Bible the prophet is a speaker of or for God. His words are not the production of his own spirit, but come from a higher source. For he is at the same time, also, a seer, who sees things that do not lie in the domain of natural sight, or who hears things which human ears do not ordinarily receive."

In reference to Paul's first letter to Corinthians chapter 14 verses 3 and 4:

"But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the Church (1 Corinthian 14:3-4).

According to Apostle Paul, in his prove of superiority of prophecy to other spiritual gift point it out that prophecy is meant for the following:

- i. Edification (oikodomen), this implies building up.
- ii. Comfort (paraklein), this implies encouragement, calling to one's side.
- iii. Consolation (paramuthian).

All the above benefit is meant to manifest in the local Church.

¹Hamon, B & Roberts, O. (2010). Prophets and Personal Prophecy. God's Prophetic Voice Today.



In another sense, prophecy is the ability to apply the Word of God to people's situations in a way that is clear, direct, and relevant. Finding from pre-interview and observational studies on Christian in general have reveal the following:

- i. That many people believe prophecy to be a direct revealing by God about information (often about the future) which would otherwise be unknown. It is sometimes claimed that this is a gift which largely had ceased in the Church.
- ii. That the Bible tells us that prophecy is something all believers can and should do (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21). A prophet was never in a trance or a frenzy, but was in complete control (I Cor. 14:32). As with other gifts, all Christians were expected to prophecy (Acts 19:6; I Cor. 14:1, 23-25, 31), men as well as women (I Cor. 11:5), yet not all people were called "prophets" (I Cor. 12:29).
- iii. That the prophets before and after Pentecost foretold the future, the essence of prophecy was to apply the truth of God to the people rather than to supplement the truth. (Ex. 7:1-2; I Cor. 14:3). In the Old Testament, prophets were "covenant lawyers". So in the New Testament, they preached the truth for conversion (I Cor. 14:24-25) and encouragement (Acts 15:32).²
- iv. That prophecy was not ordinarily considered new words from God. It was to be weighed and evaluated (I Cor., 14:29) according to the apostolic revelation (I Cor. 14:37-38) which was never to be weighed and evaluated! Thus an apostle was bringing new words from God, but a prophet was a preacher of the word given the power of the spirit to drive words home.

Frequently, prophecy is linked to foreseeing the future, but research indicates that prophets are primarily concerned with contemporary social and political issues. They prioritize matters such as public morality, social justice, religious integrity, and responsible exercise of authority. Their messages encompass not only warnings and condemnations but also words of encouragement, compassion, and optimism for the future.³

The tradition of Biblical prophecy emerged following the division of the united kingdom of Israel during David's reign. Prophetic activity originated in the Northern region, influenced by the region's affluence

²Archer, G. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago, IL: Moody. 1964.

³Brueggemann, W. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 1998.



and the prophets' role in confronting the cultural norms of the Israelites.⁴ The writings of Biblical prophets convey the idea that prophets may endure suffering for their convictions. References in historical accounts and Jeremiah suggest a recurring theme of prophet failure and the subsequent hardships they faced. Matthew suggests that a prophet cannot be easily categorized as merely a fortune-teller, social reformer, harbinger of doom, messenger, moral authority, or even a predictor of Jesus.⁵

Understanding certain historical elements is crucial for gaining insight into the culture of biblical prophets. Various factors contributed to the emergence of prophecy and prophetic literature, such as the worship of Baal, economic and social advancements in both the Northern and Southern kingdoms, and political instability. The culture of Hebrew prophets encompassed every facet of life, as they delivered their urgent messages directly to the people rather than serving as mere aides to the ruling or elite classes. This cultural phenomenon is exemplified through the stories of Moses and other prophets found throughout the Bible.

Although the culture of biblical prophets adhered to general principles, each prophet was unique. Moses, while not classified as a prophet, embodied a lifestyle that became the archetype for prophetic culture. While the concept of culture can be interpreted in various ways, when examining prophecy holistically, Moses' narrative provides the clearest illustration. While not all prophets mirrored Moses' cultural framework precisely, many did. Subsequent sections of this webpage delve into specific prophets and their relationship to Moses' paradigm.

Prophets were depicted in diverse ways, sometimes leading to misconceptions regarding their roles. Six main components outline the lifecycle of a model prophet⁶:

1. The prophet's call: Moses, for instance, was called by God through the burning bush and initially hesitated to heed the call.
2. Contestation with hierarchy or societal norms: Moses challenged the Pharaoh of Egypt and tested God's power against the Pharaoh's sorcery.

⁴Wiseman, D. J. (1958). *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁵Brueggemann, W. A. *Commentary on Jeremiah; Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1998

⁶Rice, Karen. (2001). "Encyclopedia of Prophecy" *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 2, winter.



3. Prayer for divine intercession: Prophets, like Moses, sought divine assistance throughout their journeys.
4. Struggle with the prophetic role: Moses grappled with God's command to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, fearing his own inadequacy.
5. Confrontation and challenge: Prophets faced various challenges throughout their missions.
6. Death: The passing of a prophet symbolically paves the way for the emergence of new prophetic voices.

The most pertinent definition of culture regarding prophetic culture, as posited by Helen Spencer-Oatey, describes it as a nuanced collection of shared assumptions, values, orientations, beliefs, and behavioral norms that influence but do not dictate individuals' conduct and interpretations of others' actions. Prophetic culture's fuzziness stems from the variation in how prophets adhere to the six components. As we engage with prophets' narratives, we interpret both the written accounts and the prophets' interpretations of divine messages. Notably, prophets did not document their own stories; instead, they were initially transmitted orally before being transcribed by others.

The prophet's message is conveyed through compelling language intended to evoke emotional responses. Prophets often employ vivid, provocative, and intimate imagery of human sexuality to allegorize issues of social, political, and religious justice. They scrutinize overarching societal and cultural issues of their time and personalize their message using analogies drawn from human relationships. Metaphors wield considerable power, eliciting feelings of shame and contrition.

The Fulfilment of Prophecy

The manifestation of the fulfillment is meant for the appointed time. Scripturally, prophecy have being since the time of old kings have been chosen through it and the calling of men into God's mission have been as a result of prophecy. History have it that The Apostolic Church Mission was an outcome of prophecy. Finding also have it that people that are spiritually gifted in the act of prophecy are allowed to operate with full recognition the office of prophesying to the congregation of people so as to continually hear the message of God for the benefit of edification (*oikodomen*), which function not only building up the Church as a building or numerically but also building up the people in term of fruitfulness, multiplication, and dominion.

In time past, prophecy had benefited the Apostolic Church by providing the Comfort (*paraklein*), this implies encouragement, calling



to one's side. The Consolation (*paramuthian*) and Edification (*oikodomein*). Prophecy is the ability to apply the Word of God to people's situations in a way that is clear, direct, and relevant. Finding from pre-interview and observational studies on Christian in general have reveal that many people believe prophecy to be a direct revealing by God about information (often about the future) which would otherwise be unknown. It is sometimes claimed that this is a gift which largely had ceased in the Church.

Also, that the Bible tells us that prophecy is something all believers can and should do (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21). A prophet was never in a trance or a frenzy, but was in complete control (I Cor. 14:32). As with other gifts, all Christians were expected to prophesy (Acts 19:6; I Cor. 14:1, 23-25, 31), men as well as women (I Cor.11:5), yet not all people were called "prophets" (I Cor. 12:29). That the prophets before and after Pentecost foretold the future, the essence of prophecy was to apply the truth of God to the people rather than to supplement the truth. (Ex. 7:1-2; I Cor. 14:3). In the Old Testament, prophets were "covenant lawyers". So in the New Testament, they preached the truth for conversion (I Cor. 14:24-25) and encouragement (Acts 15:32). Again, that prophecy was not ordinarily considered new words from God. It was to be weighed and evaluated (I Cor., 14:29) according to the apostolic revelation (I Cor. 14:37-38) which was never to be weighed and evaluated! Thus an apostle was bringing new words from God, but a prophet was a preacher of the word given the power of the spirit to drive words home.⁷

Maimonides's Theory of Prophecy

Drawing from Numbers 12:6-8, Maimonides formulated a method of interpreting prophecy in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, likening it to "Freudian" dream analysis, given the belief that prophets recount dreams and visions.⁸ Maimonides' conception of prophecy stems from his studies in politics, psychology, and ethics, viewing the prophet as an exemplar political leader, with Moses epitomizing this ideal.⁹ The prophet's objective is twofold: to attain both material prosperity and spiritual excellence. In less advanced circumstances, prophets serve

⁷Bullock, C. H. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody, 1986.

⁸Bakan D. "Contributions to the history of psychology: LIII. Maimonides' "Freudian" theory of prophecy. *PsycholRep*. 1989

⁹E. Schweid. (2007). *Maimonides'S Theory of Prophecy*. Netherlands: Brill.



as guides and educators, leading their followers to the truths embedded within the Mosaic Torah.¹⁰

A prophet embodies traits of a statesman, including a sense of mission, charismatic influence over the masses, refined practical reasoning, and the ability to forecast future events based on people's actions.¹¹ Their breadth of knowledge rivals that of theoretical scholars, endowing them with a practical wisdom surpassing that of conventional politicians. Additionally, prophets serve as models for emulation, possessing a unique perfection that includes intimate knowledge of God.¹²

Setting them apart from mere politicians, prophets not only espouse laws and leadership marked by political and moral purity but also aim to cultivate psychological perfection in their followers.¹³ Their pursuit of intellectual excellence parallels that of philosophers, seeking ultimate truths. This understanding is aided by psychological analysis, portraying the prophet as both philosopher and statesman, characterized by flawless practical and theoretical reasoning, as well as a creative ability to interpret events and instruct.

While this conceptualization underscores the ethical purity requisite for prophecy, it falls short from a political and theological standpoint. A generic explanation of prophecy's nature and purpose overlooks potential discord and schisms arising from differing degrees and powers among confirmed prophets, as evidenced in Christianity and Islam. Maimonides introduced a distinction between prophetic missions intended solely for the prophet and those intended for both the prophet and others, forming the basis for further exploration within this research framework.

Theory of Cognitive Mapping of Prophecy: in reference to Robins this can be explain to as mental mapping or mental modeling. This is a type of mental representation which serves an individual to acquire, code, recall and decode information received through prophesy.¹⁴

¹⁰Honeycutt, R. L. (1975). *Hosea and His Message*. Nashville: Broadman.

¹¹Lemke, W. E. (1987). "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future". In Mays, James Luther; Achtemeier, Paul J. (eds.). *Interpreting the Prophets*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

¹²Price, P.A. (2006). *The prophet's Dictionary: The Ultimate Guide to Supernatural Wisdom*. Pennsylvania: Whitaker Houses.

¹³Bailey, J. M., Vasey, P. Diamond, L., Breedlove, S. M., Vilain, E and Epprecht, M. "Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science". *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. 2016

¹⁴Eppler, M. J. (2006). "A Comparison between Concept Maps, Mind Maps, Conceptual Diagrams, and Visual Metaphors as Complementary Tools for



The early work of Tolman, proposes that memories of recently traveled routes are combined with memories of previously traveled route to create an integrated map of the environment.¹⁵

Based on the above theory and principle, there are three major technique for Cognitive Mapping in Prophecy, they are:

- a. Causal Mapping: A causal map can be defined as a network consisting of links or arcs between nodes or factors, such that a link between C and E means, in some sense, that someone believes or claims C has or had some causal influence on E.
- b. Semantic Mapping: Semantic mapping is the process of creating a visual representation of related concepts using a web or word cloud. This process helps humans understand and retain new concepts and the words to describe them by linking the new information to existing knowledge.
- c. Concept Mapping: Concept maps are visual representations of information. They can take the form of charts, graphic organizers, tables, flowcharts, Venn Diagrams, timelines, or T-charts. Concept maps are especially useful for students who learn better visually, although they can benefit any type of learner.

A cognitive mapped prophesy enhance and project paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmark in order to improve both the speaker and the hearer spiritual and psycho-physical legibility.

Theory of Emotional Drives in Prophecy: to be emotionally driven means that your emotional, impulsive brain is always overriding your rational one and shutting it down. To move toward the middle, you want to keep your rational brain online, and to do that you need to slow down so your brain can reboot. The theory of emotional drives in prophesy can be otherwise refer to theory of Self-fulfilling prophecy, also known as interpersonal expectancy effect, refers to the phenomenon whereby a person's or a group's expectation for the behavior of another person or group serves actually to bring about the prophesied or expected behavior.



Principle of Gestalt Device: The word Gestalt is used in modern German to mean the way a thing has been "placed," or "put together." There is no exact equivalent in English. "Form" and "shape" are the usual translations; in psychology the word is often interpreted as "pattern" or "configuration." In relevant to art and science of prophecy, the principle of Gestalt device is seen in the following:

- a. Proximity,
- b. Similarity,
- c. Continuation
- d. Closure

Nature and Significance of Prophecy

There are instances where the roles of prophecy and priesthood overlap, as priests may undertake prophetic duties by announcing a deity's oracle. Such oracles are sometimes incorporated into rituals, as seen in modern Christian denominations where ministers or priests recite scripture texts beginning with the proclamation "Thus says the Lord," thus fulfilling the prophetic obligation within the religious practice. The convergence of prophet and priest roles is paralleled by that of the prophet and shaman. While a possessed shaman may seldom recall the message conveyed, a prophet consistently remembers the events and messages received. Additionally, the priestly function of foretelling is often attributed to the diviner, who is frequently likened to the prophet. Utilizing hidden knowledge, diviners predict the future through various means, including astrology, auspices, haruspicy, chiromancy, cleromancy, pyromancy, and other specialized areas of expertise.¹⁶

Ancient Greek and Chinese poets frequently intertwined prediction, prophecy, and poetry, delivering predictions in verse and often being referred to as "vates" or prophets. Both poets and oracles claimed inspiration from external sources. In ancient China, divination, represented in verse, was regarded as the earliest form of occult inquiry.¹⁷ Theological revelation and poetry are typically viewed as distinct yet interdependent in their origins, intentions, and outcomes within modern Western societies. Political poetry in Middle English is

¹⁶Aitken, K. T. "The Oracles Against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51: Structures and Perspectives." *TynBul* 35 (1984).

¹⁷Armenti, P. "Poetry and History, and Prophecy. Catbird Seat: Poetry & Literature at the Library of Congress." [Http://blogs.loc.gov](http://blogs.loc.gov) Accessed June 24, 2023.

associated with Latin and vernacular prophecies, often revolving around eschatological or apocalyptic themes.¹⁸

Types of Prophecy

Prophecy can be divided into three categories: inspiration, behavior, and office. Divinatory prophets, such as seers, oracle givers, soothsayers, and diviners, use instruments, dreams, telepathy, clairvoyance, or visions to forecast the future or declare the divine intent. These prophecies might also be based on inspiration or common sense, understood religiously.¹⁹ The cult prophet, sometimes known as a priest-prophet, is a member of the priestly staff of a sanctuary who is responsible for speaking the divine word at the right place in a ritual. They have always felt a heavenly summons, yet each time they prophesy, their words are deemed new. As in the examples of Zarathustra, Jesus, and Muhammad, missionary or apostolic prophets think that the religious truth revealed to them is unique to them and may lead to the formation of a new religion. Many modern religious cults' founders should also fall within this category.

Reformative or revolutionary prophets, who are closely connected to restorative or purificatory kinds, focus on the past and future, frequently trying to liberate Yahweh's religion from Canaanite accretions. Classical prophets from the Hebrew Bible, such as Amos and Jeremiah, who strove to change Yahweh's religion, are examples of these prophets. Prophets have developed in India and Africa to preserve or purify historic tribal religious forms and rituals, frequently turning revolutionary as a result of societal and political pressure. While there may be numerous sorts of prophecy, there is no clear cut line that separates them. Maimonides offers twelve forms of prophecy. From less to clearer in his philosophical book *The Guide for the Perplexed* they are as follows:

- i. Inspired behavior
- ii. Inspired phrases
- iii. Dream metaphorical disclosures
- iv. Auditory dream interpretations
- v. Human speaker/audiovisual dream disclosures
- vi. Angelic speaker/audiovisual dream disclosures
- vii. Divine speaker/audiovisual dream revelations
- viii. Awakening vision with allegory

¹⁸Franke, W. (2016). "Poetry, Prophecy, and Theological Revelation". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.

¹⁹Hirsch, E.G., McCurdy, J. F., Jacobs, J. (2016). "Prophets and Prophecy". *Jewish Encyclopedia*. JewishEncyclopedia.com. Retrieved 17 April 2023.

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- ix. Aural awakening revelation
x. Human speaker/audiovisual awakening revelation
xi. Angelic speaker/audiovisual awakening revelation
xii. Audiovisual awakening revelation/Divine speaker (implicitly referring to Moses)

Prophets

The Israelite or Judean *nevi'im*, known as prophets, not only conveyed messages but also enacted prophetic parables in their lives. For instance, Jeremiah invited the Rechabites to partake of wine, which they refused, earning God's commendation for their obedience. Other prophetic actions include burying a linen belt to symbolize Judah's downfall, purchasing a clay jar and smashing it in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, and fashioning a yoke from wood and leather straps to symbolize the nation's subjugation to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Prophetic calling is often depicted as demanding and rigorous in the Hebrew Bible, with prophets frequently facing persecution and opposition. Jeremiah, for his fidelity to God's directives and proclamation of divine messages, endured attacks from his own brothers, physical assault and imprisonment by a priest and false prophet, incarceration by the king, death threats, confinement in a cistern by Judah's officials, and opposition from a false prophet.²⁰

The earlier term for *navi*, *ro'eh*, meaning "seer," possibly reflects an ancient transition from viewing prophets as diviners for hire to regarding them as moral instructors. In the era of the First Temple, seer-priests, belonging to a guild, performed divination, rituals, sacrifices, and were also scribes. Canonical prophets, however, abstained from such practices (and even condemned divination) and were primarily messengers of God's word. Notable prophets in the Tanakh include Abraham, Moses, Miriam, Isaiah, Samuel, Ezekiel, Malachi, and Job. Daniel is not traditionally recognized as a prophet in Jewish tradition. According to a Jewish tradition, the number of prophets is said to be twice the number of individuals who left Egypt, amounting to 1,200,000 prophets.²¹ The Talmud identifies 48 male prophets and seven prophetesses whose messages have enduring significance for all generations: Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. Prophets in the Tanakh were not exclusively Jewish; for instance, the non-Jewish prophet Balaam is mentioned in Numbers 22. Additionally, according to the Talmud, Obadiah is believed to have

²⁰Jackson, W. (1997). *Jeremiah & Lamentations*. Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications.

²¹Young, E. J. (1949). *The Prophecy of Daniel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.



converted to Judaism. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who lived at the conclusion of the 70-year Babylonian exile (circa 586 to 539 BCE), are the last nevi'im mentioned in the Jewish Bible.²²

In Christianity, a prophet is an individual inspired by God through the Holy Spirit to convey a message, including those who served as prophets in the Church. Several Christian denominations prohibit personal messages not intended for the collective body of believers (MacArthur, 2006: 124). The reception of a message is termed revelation, while the delivery is termed prophecy. The term "prophet" encompasses individuals who receive public or private revelation as part of the Deposit of Faith, which was completed by Jesus (Beyer, 2017: 5-7). The Deposit of Faith denotes the entirety of Jesus Christ's revelation transmitted through sacred scripture and tradition to subsequent generations. A false prophet is someone who preaches a Gospel contrary to the one revealed to the apostles and recorded in the Bible.²³

Prophets and their Calling

Prophets in the Old and New Testament Churches were chosen and summoned by God Himself, not by their families or through human appointment. This call was specific and intimate, and only genuine prophets dared to respond to it. God alone took the initiative in ordaining a prophet, and true prophets received a distinct calling from Him. This divine summons could occur at various stages of life and amidst diverse personal circumstances (see Jer 23:21).

Moses, in his old age, received his prophetic calling while pondering a burning bush. Isaiah encountered a vision of the triune God, prompting him to accept the prophetic role despite feeling humbled by his sinful nature. Hosea, through the turmoil of his personal life, sensed God's calling to prophesy. Jeremiah, initially hesitant due to his youth, was assured by God that the words he needed to speak would be provided to him.²⁴

Similarly, Samuel, as a young man, heard God's voice calling him to prophethood one night, though initially hesitant to relay the message. Amos, a Judean shepherd, felt compelled by God to abandon his

²²Aune, D. E. "Ancient Israelite Prophecy and Prophecy in Early Judaism". *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1983.

²³Wagner, C. P. (2000). "Emanuele Cannistraci Had Told Me". *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*. Michigan: Baker Publishing.

²⁴Honeycutt, R. L. (1975). *Hosea and His Message*. Nashville: Broadman.

pastoral duties and confront the influential priests and rulers of Bethel in Israel. Micah received his prophetic calling when the Holy Spirit descended upon him, granting him the ability to convey God's message to both Israel and Judah. Ezekiel, amidst the exile of God's people in Babylon, was overwhelmed until he received his prophetic commission in the fourth month of the fifth year of their captivity.²⁵

While some prophets hesitated to convey the message they received, only Jonah attempted to flee from his prophetic calling. Yet, through God's persistence and grace, Jonah was granted a second chance after enduring terrifying events. Although not all biblical prophets disclose the specifics of their calling, upon hearing God's word, they had no choice but to respond.

Qualifications and functions of Prophets

Below are ten qualification and functions of prophets highlighted below by the researcher.²⁶

- i. **Obedient:** A prophet is meant to convey God's word to certain individuals. For a prophet's word to be accepted, he must first have a good relationship with God. This will be evident in how much he submits to God's instructions. Also, God frequently sends prophets to Church leaders who are about to make a bad decision or confronts them with wrongdoing.
- ii. **Compassionate:** Anyone who will operate in the ministry of the Prophet must be compassionate towards lost should. It is the compassion that enables a prophet to create a bond with the people and God respectively. He must be able to use words of encouragement to strengthen, urge, and console Christians (I Corinthians 14).
- iii. **Expose the consequences:** A prophet must be able to foretell future repercussions and warnings when individuals sin intentionally or innocently and walk away from God just as the case of prophet Nathan that was sent by God to rebuke David (2 Sam 12).
- iv. **Blunt with the Truth:** One of the major qualifications of a real prophet is the will to speak the mind of God. They don't add to or amend the Bible. Rather, they shed light on God's Word.

²⁵Dyer, C. H. (1985). "Ezekiel". *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, eds. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁶Wise, B. (2022,). "10 Characteristics of a Prophet in the Body of Christ". *Writing for JESUS*. <https://writingforjesus.com/10-characteristics-of-a-prophet-in-the-body-of-christ/> Accessed August 23, 2023.

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- v. **Intercessor:** A prophet must be an intercessor. Prophets place a high value on reconciliation, especially when it comes to reconnecting a believer with God, standing with others for the redemption of loved ones, or finding spiritual solutions to earthly issues.
- vi. **Sensitivity:** A prophet must be constantly sensitive and offers words that bring witness to Jesus Christ. He/she must be able to show God's heart to others and stress the Lord's impending return.
- vii. Prophets must be able to demonstrate a high level of integrity by leading pure and virtuous lifestyles. Their lives reflect their Christian values, and their personalities emanate completeness.
- viii. Know God intimately: Prophets must gain closeness with God via scripture study and spending time with Him. They do this to become acquainted with God's personality and to remain in His presence. In a dark world, God's Word is a blazing light.
- ix. Spirit-Filled: Prophets must strive to employ every spiritual gift at their disposal to serve God. They communicate in His celestial language in order to become closer to Him.
- x. Wisdom: Prophets are defined by their wisdom since they cannot do their duties without it. God's understanding directs their movements and keeps them out of Satan's traps and deceptions.

Prophecy in Christianity

The issue of false prophets during the classical Hebrew prophetic era had parallels in the early Christian communities. The Hellenistic world saw a proliferation of prophets and diviners, with the Greek *prophētēs* not only acting as fortunetellers but also interpreters of divine messages. Visionary seers, mantics, were interpreted by prophets, soothsayers, and various types of diviners, including astrologers. Much of this activity stemmed from Babylonia, where the influx of new religions from the East brought a surge of astrologers and prophets, leading to the establishment of numerous astrology schools across the Hellenistic world.²⁷

The New Testament is perceived as a continuation and fulfillment of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, known as the "Old Testament," with the correct interpretation of Old Testament prophecy centering on Jesus Christ. Jesus is regarded as the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy, but

²⁷Forbes, W. (1997). *Prophecy and Inspired Speech: in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson.



more significantly, he is seen as the anticipated Messiah, predicted by ancient prophets to reign as the Son of David and the Son of God. Several prophets are mentioned in the New Testament, including Zechariah, who is noted to have perished "between the altar and the sanctuary."²⁸

In the early Church, the prophet held an esteemed position alongside evangelists and teachers, as seen in the case of Timothy, referred to as both a minister and a prophet in a letter bearing his name. The role of the prophet was to reveal divine mysteries and God's plan of salvation. Paul the Apostle emphasized the importance of prophecy and deemed it more beneficial for congregations than ecstatic glossolalia (speaking in tongues). Immediately after the Apostles, prophets continued to play a significant leadership role, sometimes even being called high priests. They were the only ones permitted to freely speak in the liturgy due to their inspiration by the Holy Spirit. However, as the liturgy became more standardized and innovation was restricted, coupled with the threat of false prophecy, the influence of charismatic personalities diminished.²⁹

One such problematic figure in the early Church was Mani, the 3rd-century founder of Manichaeism, a dualistic religion that considered him the final messenger of God. Throughout Christian history, millenarian movements, often led by prophetic figures, emerged based on the belief in Christ's return. These movements advocated chiliasm, the belief that Christ would establish a theocratic kingdom on earth and reign for a thousand years. While chiliasm was generally opposed by the early and medieval Church hierarchy due to its association with nationalistic aspirations, it did influence various reform movements, including Anabaptist circles and Protestant Reformed theology, as well as revivalist movements like Pietism in Lutheran Churches.

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²⁸G. Friedrich. "Prophets and Prophecies in the New Testament," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6. 1968

²⁹Stacey, C. (2008). *Ecstatic Prophecy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books/Baker Publishing Group.

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