

Who Were the Prophets?

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In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul identifies the manifestation of God's gifts among the Church. He wrote, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). In this brief listing, we tend to recognize the role of the apostles, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. We know the apostles by name. Among our congregation, we can name evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. But who were the prophets? What was their function within the Church? Are there prophets today?

New Testament Presence of the Prophets

Eph. 2:19-20: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

In this text, the prophets are mentioned with the apostles. Together, they represent the foundation of the household of God. This passage has led some to group the apostles and prophets as one entity: *the apostles who were prophets*. Certainly, the apostles prophesied occasionally; however, apostles and prophets describe two distinct classifications.

For example, the apostles and prophets differed in their roles and authority. First, there were two qualifications for being an apostle. 1. Each was selected and approved by God (John 17:6). 2. Each witnessed the ministry and resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:15-26). Second, the apostles were given exclusive authority to make judgments (Matt. 16:19, 18:18-19). This authority was given to them by Jesus through the Spirit (John 16:13). They established orthodoxy within the Church.

Therefore, the prophets were accountable to the apostles. The prophets were not permitted to establish orthodoxy for the Church. For example, Paul made a distinction between his role as an apostle and the role of prophets within the church at Corinth: "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14:37-38).

The apostles wrote the commands of the Lord. Christians and churches were to obey the writings of the apostles. The prophets in the church at Corinth were to obey the writings of the apostle Paul. If the prophets rejected the authority of the apostles, God would reject them.

While the apostles were different from the prophets, their respective works were related. Both being guided by the Spirit, they revealed the mind of God. Paul acknowledged this when he wrote, "...the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:3-5).

The apostles and prophets received divine insight into how the Gentiles could become part of God's family through faith in Christ. They were united in their message. This specific revelation is foundational to the household of God. Both Jews and Gentiles could become part of God's household. Everyone's incorporation into God's family rests on this foundation: the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Are There Prophets Today?

There are no prophets in the Church today. This is true for a simple reason: the foundation of God's household has already been laid. The truth concerning human redemption has already been revealed by the apostles and prophets. If someone claims to be a prophet today, they are attempting to lay another foundation of faith. Another foundation is another gospel. Another gospel is perverted. Those who proclaim another gospel are cursed (Gal. 1:6-9). We must heed the warning of the apostle John: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

We do not need prophets to reveal the mystery of redemption. When we read the New Testament, we can understand how this mystery was solved by Jesus (Eph. 3:3-5). The work of the prophets was planned to conclude. Concerning the fulfillment of prophetic ministry, Paul wrote, "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Conclusion

The prophets documented in the New Testament had a critical role in God's plan of redemption. By the Spirit, they were able to reveal the meaning of the cross. They communicated the knowledge of God. By doing this, people could understand the Gospel and obey it. Also, the prophets performed their work under the authority of the apostles. If they rejected the teaching of the apostles, they rejected God (1 Cor. 14:37-38).

The work of the prophets is in the past. Prophetic revelation is no longer in practice today. The foundational truth of the Gospel has already been laid and recorded in the New Testament. Someone who claims to be a prophet today must be exposed as false and rejected. We can have confidence and hope by believing and obeying what we read in the New Testament: the foundation of the apostles and prophets.