

EMBRACING TOMORROW

Guidelines on developing prophetic gifts
to release destiny

Embrace
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future
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Inspiration
the
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Prophets
Edification

Martin Scott

ebook edition

Embracing Tomorrow

Guidelines on developing prophetic gifts to release destiny

Martin Scott

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Dedication

Susan Scott (January 10, 1955 – February 14, 2005). Your life influenced me greatly. I saw in you an honesty, an integrity, a faithfulness in friendship, and a desire that the rising generation find the destiny they aspire after.

Contents

Preface	1
Chapter 1 Introducing Prophecy	3
Chapter 2 Beliefs: Good and Bad	15
Chapter 3 Getting Started	22
Chapter 4 How God Speaks	30
Chapter 5 Dreams and Visions	37
Chapter 6 Ministering Prophetically	46
Chapter 7 Receiving Prophecy	54
Chapter 8 Responding to the Prophetic	63
Chapter 9 Prophecy and Creativity	69
Chapter 10 Prophecy and Justice	73
Chapter 11 Prophetic Ministry	79
Chapter 12 Developing in the Prophetic	90
Chapter 13 Prophets in the Season of Transition	95
Appendix 1 False Prophets and how to recognise them	103

Preface

This book was practically born out of a call from Brazil for teaching on prophecy. The material, though, has been shaped through years of being with people who have influenced me. I believe that prophetic ministries have to maintain a relationship that is rooted in the Lord Jesus, and to such an extent that they will not always be understood, even by those immediately around them. But they also need to have relationships around them that challenge, affirm and shape them.

In the pages that follow I seek to be as practical as possible so as much of the mystery surrounding prophetic ministry is removed. I, inevitably, write from my own context. I write as one who is very grateful for the past but who wants to see a new day dawn that will give the major place to a rising generation. I write as someone who believes in the need for continual transition, and seek to cover that in the final chapter, as that is where I want to the emphasis to remain.

I write as someone who grew up in a small island, who spent my first school in the context of six other children in my class. Those factors have helped me come to realise that our experience to date can either disqualify us for the future or it can become the very framework that the Lord uses to take us into our future. My overarching prayer for those who read this book would be for a release from mind-sets that have previously bound. If we can think differently then we can experience new things, and go new places in God.

In the following paragraphs I am going to give some acknowledgments. Not simply because this is the thing to do, but because it will indicate what we can be for one another in encouraging us to find our place in God and in the body.

I am grateful for those I have journeyed with for many years. There are so many I could mention but there are those, in the context or the prophetic, that I must mention. I am grateful to all of the following people.

Gerald Coates: you encouraged me when there was only an embryonic prophetic gift that could develop.

Company of Prophetic People: we have not finished journeying and there are many diverse companies to rise. Many of you have challenged my levels of commitment (also thank you to those who worked on material for those companies – you will see some of your thoughts coming through in this book).

Dale Gentry: a major transition took place when our lives intersected. I still have prophecies you spoke over me that continue to shape me.

Sharon Stone: you have become a faithful and trusted friend. You have carried prophetic ministry with integrity. I am very grateful for the day we met in Guildford. Thank you for 'marrying' the land.

Richard Fleming: you live on the edge, believe in people, and stretch me.

Victor Lorenzo: you are wholehearted. It has been a privilege to have you and Sylvia journey with my family. We are changed people.

Roger and Sue Mitchell: your friendship is not taken lightly. Sue's pursuit of the release of the prophetic realm amidst discouragements means she will have the joy of seeing a generation rise up who are free.

Michael Schiffmann: we met in the context of European prophetic roundtables. Your singleness of eye has provoked me to go higher in my aim.

Obii Pax-Harry: you have helped me understand the Issachar anointing at new levels.

Steve Lowton: you have modelled what it is to leave the securities of yesterday to open up a path for another generation. You have walked a long way, my friend, but you are helping re-connect the passion and freedom of the Gospel to our culture. Your feet give us hope.

Then a big thank you to all in Brazil who have opened doors for me, in particular to Silas Quirino whose request led this book. Your nation is rising in the global political scene but you are also increasing in spiritual authority for the nations. I pray that this book will open doors for many in Brazil to experience a new destiny. In the Brazilian context I have to mention Anderson and Patricia Lima. You are a God-given connection, and I trust I can be something of that in return.

Andy and Kat, Gareth and Laura, Kyle and Rachel, Justin and Ele. You are all a little younger than I am, but may your influence increase.

Finally, I acknowledge and dedicate this book to the memory of Sue Scott. You taught me much. If I become as honest as you were, and if I develop as deep a desire for intimacy as you had then I will be a changed person. Our last year together I will never forget. It was the richest and most challenging ever. I am grateful to you, to our children, and to the Lord who brought us together.

Chapter 1

Introducing Prophecy

Welcome to this journey of exploring the realm of the prophetic gift. I trust as you read this book that your desire for a true manifestation of prophecy in the body of Christ will increase and that your understanding of the gift will also develop. This will be a journey that will not end when you have finished this book, and perhaps for some of you your life passion will be ignited as the Lord leads you to serve the body of Christ prophetically.

Paul gave many practical instructions regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12-14. He did not cover every situation in those chapters as he was mainly bringing correction into a situation where there had been many abuses of the gifts. He does, however, take many things for granted, suggesting that his expectation was that spiritual gifts were to be part of the every day life of the early church. Likewise we should anticipate that they will be a vital part of the ongoing experience of the body of Christ today.

Although Paul did not cover every aspect he gave us more than sufficient guide-lines in those chapters to help us understand the gift. And when we place what he said alongside the general principles of Scripture and the specific teaching on prophecy we have more than enough to help us, not only to understand the gift of prophecy, but to develop in our use of it.

There are two aspects that immediately stand out that will be good to consider at this stage:

- He did not want us to be ignorant about the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1).

The first time I saw someone move in the realm of personal prophecy I had no idea how someone could declare things with such intimate knowledge over a person that they had never met before. I was ignorant of how such a gift could operate. Paul, however, expressed the desire that the saints would not be ignorant. He wanted to take away the mystery concerning the gifts so that they would not be the possession of some small group of 'super-saints' but would be available to the whole body of Christ. The gift of prophecy is to be a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit, but it is not supposed to be a mystery beyond our experience.

- He provoked us to desire to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1)

Many times we have probably wondered about the appropriateness of

desiring spiritual gifts. I am glad that Paul clearly encouraged such a desire. Of course the Lord wants to purify our motives, but we cannot wait for absolute purity of motives, otherwise we will be in danger of becoming disobedient to the command of Scripture to 'eagerly desire spiritual gifts'. (In later chapters we will talk about motives and purity, but as we begin this journey of exploration it is important that we settle in our hearts that it is a godly desire to seek to move in the gift of prophecy.)

Prophecy then is supernatural, but it is not to be a mystery. We must allow the Lord to deal with our motives but we cannot become paralysed through waiting to arrive at a particular spiritual high point. We have to open ourselves to the Lord for his training so that we can begin to step out in the gift.

A prayer to start our journey: Lord I am accepted by you. Your commitment to me is awesome and I am privileged to be on a journey with you. I desire to learn from you, and to do so I submit myself to your instruction. I ask that you will illuminate my mind and stir my heart to know you more. I bring before you my lack of knowledge but ask that you develop my understanding of the prophetic gift. Increase also my desire to prophesy and increase my willingness to serve your people wherever I find them. Amen.

God's purposes through prophecy

Destinies can be released through prophecy; faith can be imparted, wonders can be worked and enthusiasm for the purposes of the Lord can be generated. That sounds – and should sound – invaluable. However, we cannot approach the gift naively and we also need to understand that when the prophetic is mishandled it can cause considerable confusion.

The prophetic can be mishandled and bring confusion when:

- The words given are false words

To give a false word is not the same thing as to be a false prophet. Indeed a false prophet can give a true word, but the characteristic fruit of a false prophet is that they do not lead the people to serve the Living God.

A false word is when a word is given that is inaccurate and misses what the Lord is saying. The real problem arises when such a word is received. All prophecy is to be judged, so there is always the possibility of a word (or part of a word) being inaccurate. It is vital therefore that we teach people how to discern what they receive, and that those who prophesy learn to develop an accuracy in their hearing so that they do not become guilty of giving false words.

- The words given are 'weak' words

All prophetic words are given in human language. In that sense they all contain a mixture of the human and divine. They are divine in that what is being communicated is from heaven, but the communication comes across a human bridge. We could define prophecy as divine thoughts clothed in human words. A problem occurs when there is such a strong element of human interpretation placed on what the Lord is saying that the resultant communication actually miscommunicates. A weak word is when the clothing (the human words) actually obscure the God-given words. Sometimes the temptation to explain everything can lead to this experience of releasing a 'weak' word. The one who prophesies does not always understand what they are communicating. They are to be like the person who delivers mail. They do not have to understand what is in the letter or the implications of what the person has received. They are simply called upon to deliver what they have received from the Lord. Again this indicates why words have to be judged and why those who prophesy need to grow in the gift so that they do not miscommunicate the Lord's heart.

- There is a false interpretation put on the word

We all live with preconceived ideas. This means that when we hear something we can very quickly decide what it means. This can cause confusion when a prophecy is given and it is misunderstood because we too quickly assume we know what it is speaking about. Some words will be absolutely clear as to what they refer to, so we must not be too cautious about interpreting words. We do, however, have to be mindful that it is possible to misinterpret a word. We must avoid trying to force an interpretation. Sometimes a word is misinterpreted when there has been a lack of understanding of the prophetic language that was used, or when there was a failure to appreciate that what was spoken of was symbolic and not literal. We must also allow the Lord to renew our minds so that we are not so fixed in our mindsets that we cannot be open to the Lord speaking into whole new areas of our lives.

- Manipulative and dangerous practices are involved

This can take place where the motivation of the one who is speaking is so clearly wrong and as a result (and this can even happen subconsciously) there is the transfer of emotions and perspectives in the process of prophesying that completely skews what is said. Or it can happen when a wrong pressure is placed on the one who prophesies so that they speak out a word that has been 'enticed' from them. It can also happen where the relationship between the one prophesying and the one receiving is wrong. Any ministry that causes a dependent relationship to develop is dangerous. A dependent relationship is one where needs are being met that only the Lord should meet. Such relationships are marked by wrong obligations and false loyalties. We do not own other people but are here to help them get established in the Lord.

Fear not...

I hope the above caveats have not caused too much caution to arise. There are pitfalls, but through a measure of training we can avoid those and see the release, not just of the prophetic gifts at a new level, but a release of the people of God to new levels of connecting with their destiny. This, I can assure you, is a very rich journey and one that is definitely worth pursuing.

We can minimise the hazards through putting in place good principles and through developing a spirit of humility and teachability. And we can certainly work with the prophetic in such a way that the level of the prophetic is raised and the potential for the negative is minimised. We will achieve these goals by learning how to discern the voice of God, through testing prophecy, through rightly interpreting it, and partnering with it for fulfilment.

So immediate questions that are raised are such ones as:

- how do we know something is of God?
- how do we weigh something that is given?
- how do we give a prophetic word in such a way that it causes genuine faith to rise?
- how do we partner with the word of the Lord?

These and many other questions will be provoked as we journey... but for now we will take a step back and give a brief overview of the prophet in Scripture. This will not cover every Scripture on the subject but is intended to help us understand that the desire of the Old Testament for the widespread distribution of the prophetic gift is to be fulfilled in and among the people of Christ today.

Scripture and the prophetic gift

Moses and the seventy elders

Moses had a very intimate relationship with the Lord. We read in Numbers 12:6-8

When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of God.

It is easy to see that he had a unique position before the Lord and unique privileges, yet the Lord took of the Spirit that was on him, and put it on seventy elders of the people (Num. 12:17). The Lord always desires to pour himself out and to make himself known to the many not the few. The result of

this outpouring was that they prophesied. However, two elders, Eldad and Medad, remained in the camp among the people but they also received of the Spirit and they began to prophesy in the camp. A young man ran to Moses to inform him of this, and Joshua called for Moses to stop their activity (Num. 11:24-28).

Moses immediately perceived that Joshua was being stirred by jealousy on behalf of Moses (11:28). At the root of jealousy is the fear of losing one's place, so we understand that Joshua feared that if the people of God saw the prophetic gift being experience on such a widespread basis then Moses' uniqueness would be under threat. Moses however, did not wish to preserve that uniqueness as he understood that a wonderful day would come when the gift would not be limited to a few but would become widespread. He responded:

I wish all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them (Num. 11:29).

He knew that the future was not to be one of restriction but of expansion. The outpouring on the 70 elders was to be a sign that one day there might be the possibility of all of God's people prophesying. This was indeed the burden that he expressed.

From the context this prophetic gifting was more than the giving of prophecies, but it was in order that the elders might carry the same spirit as Moses to give righteous judgment. It was in order that the very heart of the Lord might be known. In Psalm 103:7 we read a very insightful perspective concerning the difference between Moses and the people of Israel:

He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

The prophetic gift is therefore released in order that God is known and not just his acts observed. The heart of prophecy is to reveal the Lord as he is through a discernment that sees beyond what simply is presented at a surface level. Moses understood why God acted in the ways he did, whereas the people simply saw his acts. As we experience the outpouring of the Spirit that Moses called for, we are to increasingly know, and make known, the ways of God. That is the rich result of the gift that we call prophecy.

This desire for a future outpouring of the prophetic gift that is widespread a main focus for Joel as he looks to a new day dawning.

An all-flesh outpouring Joel 2:28-32

Joel spoke of dreams and visions being part of the experience of the new day that would come when the Spirit was outpoured on all flesh. The extent of the outpouring would indeed be widespread. It would not be limited to the few. We see this in the very categories that Joel uses: sons and daughters, old and young, servants, both men and women. There were to be no exceptions, no longer was the experience of the Spirit to be limited. The few would not lose their place, rather the many would find their place.

This became the defining Scripture to describe what took place on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter begins to quote the Joel passage in his proclamation in Acts 2:17-18. And he adds the following clarifying words, 'and they shall prophesy'. Should there be any doubt as to what dreams and visions spoke of this is certainly clarified by Peter. The coming of the Spirit was in order that the gift of prophecy might be released. The prophetic Spirit is outpoured at Pentecost, and this becomes the means by which God is known. This is more than speaking prophetically, it is so that the people of God might be 'witnesses'. Likewise this is more than witnessing, it is in order that the very essence of God's character can be embodied in a community in such a way that there is a living testimony to the Lord of glory. Such a community will indeed prophesy, they will declare out what is on the heart of the Lord, but they will do more than that – they will be a prophetic community.

If we are to live in the fulfilment of these Old Testament hopes, prophecy will have to impact our lives and not just our words. God's words are to be lived out – so that the Spirit of prophecy becomes the very means by which the community is shaped. This inevitably involves a release of prophetic speech in and through the community of believers.

The first prophet: Abel – Luke 11:50,51

Jesus spoke of,

The blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah...

There is no record of what Abel ever spoke prophetically, or even if he ever spoke in such a way. However, there is record of how he died. How he died was reflective of how he lived. If he then is the first prophet we can easily understand that prophecy is to be embodied. To desire to prophesy must include this element of desiring that one's life speaks.

Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

God certainly reveals information, but his desire in revealing his secrets to the prophets is that the word is not just received at an informational level, but is actually incarnated at a heart level. The Lord does not simply speak at a head but at a heart-level. So much of what is revealed to prophets is not just revealed to them but is revealed through them, their circumstances and lives.

Old Testament to New Testament

So in the Old Testament the prophetic Spirit came on those who were set apart as prophets, priests and kings; there was a limiting element to the outpouring, but the whole of Scripture was pointing forward to a day of great outpouring when the Spirit would rest on all believers. All who were the Lord's would be anointed. Many speak of the priesthood of all believers but we also have to speak of a prophethood of all believers. We are all priests before the Lord; we do not need someone to go on our behalf but can come before the throne of grace with boldness. Likewise we do not have to depend on someone else to speak the word of the Lord, for his word is within us by the power and presence of the Spirit of God. Truly we can all prophesy.

In the Old Testament it was the prophets who prophesied. Under the New Covenant there still are prophets, but even those who are not prophets can prophesy. Prophecy then is a manifestation open to all; the prophetic office is a calling not open to all. There are differences between what a prophet is called to and what the gift of prophecy can release. This, however, does not mean that we should lower our expectation for there is to be a continual development and growth. All who become recognised as prophets begin through moving in the prophetic gift. So my encouragement is that we develop our gift and allow the Lord to appoint us, if he chooses, as a prophet. Indeed, we should not be too concerned as to whether we are called to be a prophet or not, for we can all prophesy and need to develop the gift as far as we can so that many are touched by the knowledge of the Lord.

A note on levels of gifting

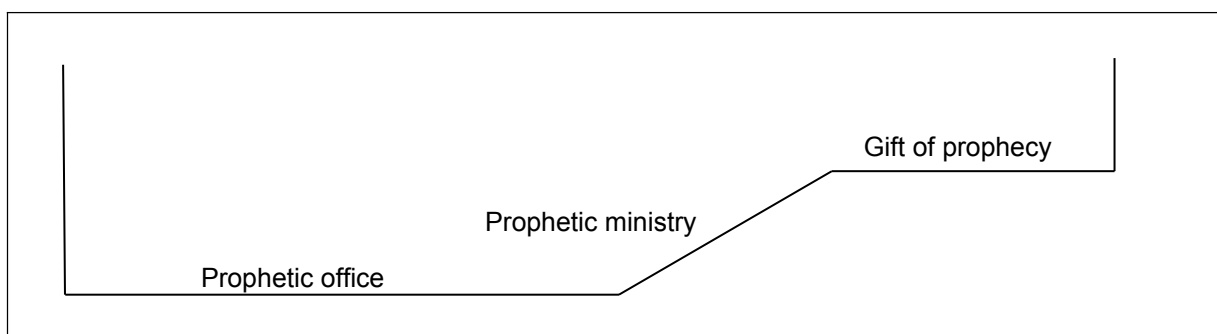
Although definitions can become restrictive if applied too tightly they can become helpful to analyse a situation. A number of people helpfully speak of levels of gifting, distinguishing between the gift of prophecy, prophetic ministry, and the office of the prophet.

The gift of prophecy is something for all to move in. This is where we all begin, and where there will at times, through inexperience, be a considerable mixture of God's words and our thoughts. The realm that the gift of prophecy speaks into is that of 'edification, exhortation and comfort' (1 Cor. 14:3). As one develops in this gift, though, there will come the time when a person is recognised to have a proven ***prophetic ministry***. This does not mean that they are infallible, but the consistency with which they hear the

Lord means that a weight should be placed on what they say. Although their words must be tested we would want to take very seriously what they had to say. A person with a prophetic ministry will increasingly release the gifts of others, see things that were hidden to the eyes of others, move much more in the realm of prediction, and have increased understanding about timings.

The office of the prophet would be someone who is recognised as having a seasoned prophetic ministry. They will not be motivated about the title, but will know how to stand in that appointed place of authority before the Lord. They will fulfil all that is intended to take place through the gift of the prophecy, and also in the ministry of the prophetic, but they will have a much greater level of foundational gifting to release destiny to churches, communities, and even nations. They will particularly have great understanding of times and seasons. And when led by the Lord – and normally this will be confirmed by other mature prophets – they can even release the judgments of the Lord. Prophets are not infallible, but their alignment with the Lord and his alignment with their words will mean a very strong attestation of their accuracy.

We could illustrate this like a swimming pool. There is a shallow end where we begin; there is a deep end and there is a development of one to the other. In the shallow end it is much more likely that we will depend at times on our own abilities not to sink, whereas in the deep end there has to be a reliance on the buoyancy of the water to stay afloat. So those who speak from the office of the prophet will carry a greater weight than those who are moving in the gift of prophecy. Both can and do speak from God, but there is a greater possibility of there being more of a mixture with those who are operating in the gift of prophecy.



Again I do not suggest that we become focused on what level we think we are at. Rather, we should focus on being everything the Lord wants us to be for as many people as possible.

In this introductory chapter there are three more aspects that I am going to cover. Paul lists nine gifts or manifestations of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, and although these might simply be illustrations of the diverse ways in which the Spirit moves, it is useful to look at three of those giftings mentioned

there as they are 'tools' that often manifest in and through prophecy. I then want to explore the very real possibility that the gifts of the Spirit are better understood as tools rather than as gifts, and finally, I will look at the component parts of a prophecy.

Prophetic tools

Word of knowledge

God has absolute knowledge, technically called omniscience. A word of knowledge is when he makes known to us a fragment of his complete knowledge. A word of knowledge will often be a revelation of facts that could not be known without revelation or without 'inside' information.

There are many biblical examples, such as: Samuel instructing Saul that his father's donkeys had already been found (1 Sam 9:2); the revelation Ahijah received that the woman in disguise was actually none other than king Jeroboam's wife (1 Kings 14:2-3); Elisha's knowledge of the king of Syria and his military tactics (2 Kings 6:8-12); Jesus' revelation that Nathaniel had been under the fig tree (John 1:47,48).

Many times in prophecy there will be words of knowledge that are released. This will particularly be the case when the Lord is speaking of future issues that cannot be immediately verified. There will often be words (of knowledge) that can be verified so that faith to trust the Lord for what cannot be verified is released.

Word of wisdom

A word of wisdom is a supernatural impartation of specific information, insight or counsel that resolves a situation or brings about life-transforming effects. It is more than the wisdom that comes through diligent study, but is the impartation of a fragment of God's infinite wisdom.

Biblical examples would be of Noah building an ark through being forewarned (Gen. 6:14-21), or the well-known example of Solomon resolving the dispute between the two women who were both claiming the baby to be their own child (1 Kings 3:16-28).

In prophecy there will often be the release of a strategy that will make clear the way forward even when there was no evident way forward. When that manifests this is the release of a word of wisdom.

Discerning of spirits

This gift is when one has a supernatural ability to discern what spirit is motivating words or behaviour. Through the discerning of spirits there is an ability released to discern the source that is feeding something. The spiritual source could be that of:

- the human spirit
- demonic spirits
- a divine source

This gift is vital in discerning the presence of demonic powers. It is also vital to safeguard against deception. If deception is released this could be directly from a demonic source but could also come as a result of someone who has been damaged emotionally. The gift of discerning of spirits is much more than insight into human personality; it is insight from heaven into the source behind something. And the gift is certainly not to be confused with some 'fault-finding' gift!

Through the discerning of spirits revelation can come concerning spirits over an area as well as spirits that are troubling individuals. In those cases the gift will often work with the word of knowledge that will reveal when and how something originated.

It will always be difficult to nicely box the gifts up so that we can categorically call this manifestation a 'word of knowledge' and that one a 'discerning of spirits', etc. For the purposes of analysis we can pull things apart and put labels on them, but in life they flow together. So when one prophesies, many times within what we call prophecy there might be words of knowledge, or discerning of spirits. We can simply call the whole delivery a prophecy.

Tools or gifts?

Paul uses different terms to describe the 'gifts of the Spirit'. He calls them spirituals (there is no word 'gift' in 1 Cor. 12:1), gifts (12:4), but I particularly like the term 'manifestation' (12:7). If we emphasise the latter term then perhaps it might lead us to (helpfully) view them as tools that the Holy Spirit causes to become manifest in order to achieve a goal rather than as something resident that we carry round with us.

I do not need to know whether I have, for example, a gift of healing or of prophecy as much as I need to rely on the Holy Spirit at any given moment to manifest with what is needed. If a person is sick they need the Holy Spirit to manifest through me with a gift of healing at that time. So I suggest we do not become too focused on what we think we have been given, but we become increasingly reliant on the Holy Spirit who can manifest through us in any way at a specific time of need.

The gifts are sourced in the Holy Spirit. In that sense we cannot simply decide that we will prophesy as the initiative and inspiration has to come from him. But the gifts are activated by our faith. Faith brings about a connection with the Spirit who then manifests through us in a particular way. If we desire to prophesy we certainly cannot be passive, but by faith we become stirred to

reach out to the Lord who is always speaking.

We will in later chapters look at the interaction of our faith with the sovereign Spirit who gives as he wills. For now we need to simply note that the Lord is looking for those with faith who will reach out to him for whatever tool will glorify his name and by doing so they will help advance the coming of his kingdom in any given situation.

‘Prophetic components’

There are three components component parts that bring a prophetic word from heaven’s realm to the place where there can be a manifestation on earth. Those three parts are: **revelation, interpretation and application**. It is at times with the latter two component parts that mistakes can be made. It is possible to have a revelation that is from God, but to misinterpret what the Lord is saying, and then to go and mis-apply it.

Let us assume we have seen something that is truly from the Lord. The revelation then is of the Lord, but the revelation needs to be interpreted (and this is so often the case when we are dealing with visions that we have seen). It is with the interpretation that we have to be careful not to impose something on the revelation that actually causes the word to be misinterpreted. And we must be doubly careful whenever it is a situation that we are emotionally involved with.

Once an interpretation is made – and sometimes all we will have is a revelation and no interpretation – an application also needs to be made. It is with respect to the application that we have to be slow to make a contribution. If we have no insight over the application then we should be very wary about giving our perspective. It is perfectly in order to give a revelation and then to give the interpretation and/or application with a measure of tentativeness, such as ‘and I believe what this means is...’

When we start out in the realm of prophecy it will be very rare that we will be used by the Lord to give words that are directive. And even when we mature and have a good track-record we will still want to be very cautious about words that speak into issues such as births of babies or marriage partners for people and any other similar areas that are both emotive and carry such major personal implications.

I trust that this initial chapter has helped to open up the realm of the prophetic to you. Please do not be put off by any statements such as ‘we need to be aware of...’ or ‘we need to take care about...’ The Lord has outpoured his Spirit. His children will prophesy; his sheep will hear his voice. You and I can progress without coming under any fear that we will miss our way.

A prayer: Lord I thank you that I hear your voice. Open my ears and connect my understanding to your voice. Now as I journey help me to discern your voice. If I have lived under false expectations break those from my thinking. Give me a strong confidence that you will lead me and I will not be deceived. I honour you as the one who speaks. Amen.

Chapter 2

Beliefs: Good and Bad

When we come to the gifts of the Spirit we face strongholds that seek to hold us back from stepping out. These strongholds are within our minds, and we have to confront and deal with them so that we can be free to move out confidently in God. If we have no expectation of being used by God we will find it very hard to step out. If we continually question whether God would use us, or speak to, and through us, then we will for ever be holding back. Eventually we have to get to the place where it seems more reasonable to believe what we are hearing or sensing is probably from God, rather than the normal default position of 'this is probably not God'. In other words we will, through experience, have to get to the place where we doubt our doubts rather than give them authority to imprison us.

There are a number of insidious beliefs that seem to linger around in the minds of many people. We might not have imbibed them directly but they can even affect us subconsciously. As with many beliefs there is truth contained within the statements, but they are not the truth. And when elevated to a level where we live under them they will totally incapacitate us. We must therefore expose them to the light of God's word and bring them down to the right level.

Beliefs to be abolished

The Spirit's fruit is more important than the gifts

We do need to allow the fruits of the Spirit to develop in our lives and that development will take time. But the problem with the statement is that there is a false dichotomy being set up. If we are to see fruit develop in our lives we have to be obedient to the Lord, and part of that obedience is to 'eagerly desire spiritual gifts'. We do not have the right to pick and choose what we will be obedient over.

We are not to seek the gifts for selfish reasons, but there are many people who need a touch from the Lord, and that touch is going to come through the lives of those who have been seeking gifts in order to communicate the heart of Jesus to others.

We do not receive gifts because we have earned them through good behaviour. Gifts are by definition free. Fruit develops because we submit to

the Lord. So let us be clear that we need *both* the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. The central fruit is love, and in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul says that love is the only valid context for the gifts. He does not say that love does away for the need of the gifts, simply that love is the better way – the better way for the gifts to be operated.

So we need both. Gifts without love, and gifts being used with pride, will cause us to fall. If we set the two aspects of the Spirit's work in opposition to each other we will be in grave danger of quenching the Spirit and we will soon discover that a major stronghold has developed in our mind that hinders us moving in the Spirit.

We should seek the Giver not the gifts

Again there is truth contained within this statement, and it certainly sounds as if it is a truly spiritual perspective. However, we need to ask how can we legitimately seek the Giver of the gifts without also seeking to become those who are able to receive what he so longs to give? The Spirit of Christ longs to minister to people and in order to do so he has to minister through the likes of you and I.

The gifts of the Spirit are there to manifest his presence, so if we desire that people discover the Giver we will also need to be those who manifest the Giver through the gifts. In Ephesians 4 Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 when he writes about the Ascended Christ giving gifts to people, and the final part of that verse in the Psalms says that this was in order 'that you, O Lord God, might dwell there.' One of the ways his presence comes is when the gifts of the Spirit are manifest.

Again let us remind ourselves that we are to earnestly seek after the gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1). Paul wrote those words to an immature church, so he certainly did not see the antidote to immaturity being contained within some spiritually-sounding slogan of seeking the Giver not the gifts. To seek the gifts is a biblical command to obey.

Those who seek gifts are manifesting a selfish spirit

There is a very real problem when someone seeks gifts, or desiring to have a ministry, in order to gain an identity, and that will be something we will address in due course. The true purpose of gifts is to serve and release others and we have to return to that motivation and then seek God that he might equip us for the sake of others.

The sectarian and immature attitudes within the Corinthian church indicated that many of them were motivated by selfishness. Yet Paul never rebuked them for seeking the gifts – quite the opposite. We must confront selfishness when we see it rearing its ugly head, but we do not correct selfishness by forbidding people to seek the gifts.

We can become deceived when we ask for gifts

The possibility of becoming deceived is always present – but it is only a real threat when we lose sight of the goodness of God and allow pride to enter our hearts. A pride that is manifest through a lack of teachability will open us up to deception, but this does not occur through simply asking for the gifts.

Jesus himself showed us who the Father was and how good he is. He declared that we are not to fear asking him for gifts. He will not give us a snake or a scorpion when we ask for what we desire (Lk. 11:5-13). The God we serve is the one who wants to give us the desires of our hearts as we delight in him (Ps. 37:4), and we will find ourselves delighting in him as we meditate on how good he is. It is the enemy of our souls who wants to question the goodness of God so that we back away from him in fear (Gen. 3:5, 10).

God wants us to dream in him of new days and of new possibilities. He wants us to reach out after him. In 1 Samuel 8:15-17, we even read that God had not chosen Jerusalem but chose David, and in David's heart was the desire for a Temple. He chose David and chose to work with David's dream. Surely he desires to work with us and our desires, and as we delight ourselves in God it will amaze us how far we can go in God in expressing the life of God using the gifts that he manifests through us.

Prophecy is for the few who are more spiritual

There are those who are chosen to be prophets. That choice is by God's design and those so called must respond to that choice in order to develop within the office. So not all are prophets, but we can all prophesy. We might not all prophesy at the same level, but we can all prophesy. Paul says:

I would like every one of you... prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5)
while everybody is prophesying (14:24)
you can all prophesy (14:31)

There is no excuse to persist in immaturity but it is evident from Scripture that the gift of prophecy is not reserved for the spiritually mature. There is even an occasion when the Lord opened the mouth of a donkey so that she could speak (Num. 22:28-30). This surely indicates that speaking from the Lord is not down to maturity but is dependent on the gift of God.

When we examine these strongholds, they all contain a measure of truth and at a surface level sound spiritual, but once we expose them to the truth of Scripture we discover that they are ultimately half-truths that the enemy seeks to use to paralyse us. The result is that we become passive, not moving in the gifts of the Spirit ourselves and in turn robbing people of

experiencing the heart of God through us.

So we have to reject those beliefs, and at the same time develop ways of thinking and believing that will foster a culture for the prophetic. So here are a few beliefs that need to be nurtured.

Beliefs to be embraced

As we develop the beliefs and ways of thinking I am about to outline below, we will begin to create an environment where we will hear the voice of the Lord much more consistently. This surely is our desire.

God speaks and I expect to hear him

One of the first revelations about God is that he speaks. Communication is part of who he is. As one author said: 'He is there and he is not silent'. God created through his speech – he said let there be light and there was light. Speech is intimately bound up with who the Lord is.

We therefore have to raise our expectation that God speaks. There are times when he is silent but this is far rarer than the times he speaks. The issue we face is of developing ears that become attuned to the voice of God. We have to learn to hear him in a variety of ways, or perhaps, we need to realise that we do hear him but that we do not often connect with the reality that we have heard him.

As we cultivate the expectation that the Lord speaks we will eventually get to the point where we will become more confident that what we think we hear is actually from the Lord. We do not begin with that level of confidence, but this confidence should develop as we create this expectation that he is communicating.

I often ask people to lay their hands on their ears and ask for their ears to open spiritually. He is speaking, but we need our ears to open, we need to tune in (like we would with a radio receiver) to his frequency.

An openness to things new

The person who is cynical, who does not commit themselves can appear wise, but Jesus strongly warned against this. It seems to me that the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees was rooted in cynicism. In Matthew 16:1-12 where Jesus warned the disciples about the evil nature of their teaching the immediate context was that the Pharisees and Sadducees had come to Jesus to ask him to categorically prove to them who he was (they asked for a sign from heaven). He said that no proof of that nature would be given. Those who only commit themselves after there is overwhelming proof will wait a long time. But for those who are of humble heart and are willing to believe they will find that the presence of the Spirit is with them strongly. Having told the Pharisees and Sadducees that they would not be given a sign, Jesus reminds

the disciples of the signs they had already experienced! He instructs them to recall how many baskets were gathered after the five thousand and the four thousand were fed. They gathered 12 and 7 baskets respectively: indicating that everyone who wholeheartedly commits themselves will be impacted at a personal level. Those who refuse to live with cynicism but commit themselves to the Lord's purposes will find they receive something of the Lord's presence back in their lives beyond anything they gave away. In fact we only receive more as we give away what we have. Cynicism is an evil thing. Cynics can critique everything and they can sound wise, but their cynicism enables them to put up a barrier that protects them from having to take action or make any level of commitment.

An over-analytical mind-set will hinder the flow of the Spirit. Prophecy is not illogical, but it cannot be judged by the intellect alone. Prophecy can take us beyond what we are able to rationalise so we have to realise that we do not submit the word of the Lord to our intellect, rather we have to submit our intellect to the word of the Lord.

God has words to release that are not on our agenda. There are (from our perspective) new words to be released. Faith is what draws us out after the impossible to hear God; cynicism and an over-rational approach is what will prevent us moving forward.

Jesus spoke of the religious traditions that nullified the word of God (Matt. 15:6). We have to live with an openness to things new, always approaching something new with humility realising that our current knowledge and experience is so limited. The wise scribe does bring things out of the storehouse that are old as well as new – but we should note that Jesus put the order the other way round (Matt. 13:52). He says that they bring things out new and old. If new things are not embraced then the old things are in danger of simply becoming tradition that will foster a religious spirit.

Although credulity (a willingness to believe anything) is not a good thing, for we are instructed to test everything, it is more often our cynicism that has to be dealt with. Cynicism is normally a bigger problem than credulity. We have to be like little children in our humility and also in a wonderful openness to the ways of the Lord.

Thankfulness is to be cultivated

We need to learn to be responsive whenever God moves. Even what we consider is the smallest thing that he does we are to learn to be thankful. A thankful spirit is what opens us up to the Lord. A critical and ungrateful spirit is what closes down the realm of the Spirit to us, but thankfulness keeps our spirit sweet, and ensures that bitterness is kept away. If our spirits are sweet then the flow to others will be refreshing for them.

There are higher levels to be reached

We have to keep alive the knowledge that there are always higher levels to reach in the prophetic. Perhaps it was a continual flow of low level prophecy that caused some of the problems at Thessalonica. We read that Paul instructed them with these words:

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:19,20).

Perhaps they were familiar with prophecy at a certain level, and so almost began to shrug their shoulders with the inner response of 'just another prophecy'. We have to anticipate that our experience will be stretched and that we will not always be at the same level. One way in which we will raise the level will be through mixing with others who carry a prophetic anointing and in particular with those who carry an anointing that is greater than the one we carry.

Speech is important

It is amazing, but heaven manifests through speech. Spiritual realities manifest through speech. In creation when God who is Spirit spoke there was a physical manifestation. Many times we will discover that the presence of angels manifest as we talk of them.

So if speech creates a spiritual atmosphere we have to take note of what we say. If we want to be in touch with heaven's presence we cannot afford to be bitter or to complain. It says in Scripture that,

Those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name (Mal. 3:16).

As they spoke of spiritual things the Lord became attentive. As we become more disciplined and more focused in our speech and talk of the Lord and his presence we will find that heaven will come close to us, and we will create a culture where it becomes much easier to hear the voice of the Lord.

Getting it right is not the number one priority

A final piece of advice, but it is perhaps the most important advice that can be given over the issue of prophecy. For many this might be a surprise, so let me even make the statement even stronger. If we make getting it right our prime priority we will be in danger of becoming unbiblical, and will soon find how

easy it is to get it wrong. To be biblical we always have to run the risk of getting it wrong – otherwise the instruction for prophecy to be weighed would not mean very much.

Our number one priority has to be that of loving people. We will be willing to get things wrong, to look stupid, to be embarrassed, all for the sake of seeing someone else blessed. If we focus on loving people, and are willing to be adjusted should we get things wrong we will find it is actually quite hard to get things wrong. This is because when we make loving people our number one priority we will be flowing with the heart of the Lord. His heart is for people. As we love people they will also open up far more readily to the Lord; if we love people and we were to miss it with our prophecy we would discover that things are corrected much more easily in that context. Love is the way forward and we are told that faith has to express itself through love (Gal. 5:6).

We do not plan to get our prophecies wrong but we must not hold back through a fear of making a mistake. That fear is often rooted in a desire to look more spiritual than we are. Our motivation has to be for the person or situation to be blessed, and to fulfil that we have to be willing to lay down our lives through love.

As we deal with the strongholds that manifest, and also cultivate attitudes and responses as outlined above we will find ourselves becoming much more open to the voice of the Lord. Experience, training and mentoring will all help us develop but if we do not give attention to the foundational environment we will not progress very far, even with the best training possible. From the foundation outlined in this chapter we can begin to look practically at how we get started, for the prophetic is not to be theoretical, but a living reality that we move in.

A prayer: Teach me, Lord, how to be truly thankful for every touch from you and everything that you do. Teach me to recognise the strongholds that grip my thinking. Teach me to live in your presence. Make my ear sensitive to your voice, and make my heart sensitive to the needs of others. Clothe me with humility that people might truly hear you through me. Thank you for the many good gifts you have given me, and the many more that will come my way. Teach me to steward them for the sake of the people you love. Amen.

Chapter 3

Getting Started

There is only one way to develop in the prophetic and that is through practice. The more we step out the more our confidence will grow and the more we will learn to discern the voice of God. Developing in the prophetic is an ongoing exploration as there is always growth that can take place. Below are some key elements that will help provide a framework to help us get moving.

A framework for getting started

Expect to hear the Lord speak

God is communicating continuously. Scripture does not argue for the existence of God, but simply affirms that he speaks, which rather settles the issue of his existence (Gen. 1:3; Heb. 1:2). That God speaks is therefore one clear biblical perspective. God is there and is not silent – so when we come to a situation where a word from God is needed it is highly likely that he has something to say and to reveal. Another clear principle is that his people know his voice (John 10:4), so we also should accept that it is highly likely that what we receive is from God!

As we grow in the prophetic, and as our faith increases we will ‘pull down’ more of the revelation that was always there. So as we approach situations or opportunities to release something from the Lord we need to expect to hear him. In using the term ‘hear him’, as we will discover, we mean that there will be a thought, an insight or a sense that will come to us.

Desire to prophesy

This is more than a piece of good advice. It is a command (1 Cor. 14:1). Of course issues to do with motives have to be clear, but the command still stands. We do not desire to prophesy in order to gain a profile of importance, but we have to continually stir this desire to prophesy within us.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15 the household of Stephanas had a reputation for being a people who were addicted to serving (ministering to) others. One way we can do this is to serve through being open to hearing the Lord so that people receive the word of the Lord. Our desire has to be to serve, and prophecy is a key way in which we can serve people.

In desiring to prophesy it is perfectly in order to fast and pray for a

greater manifestation of the gift, and it is a wise aspect to mix with those who are moving in the gift already. We can do all of that, but we also need to do so knowing that we are not twisting God's arm to give us something that he is reluctant to do. God is willing and desires to give gifts.

Learn to pray prophetically

Many people start (and often continue) to move in the prophetic through learning to pray prophetically for people. The difference between praying prophetically and prophesying is that in prophecy something is declared out, from the heart of the Lord to the person or situation that is receiving the prophecy. In praying prophetically, the person is acting more as a bystander who is talking to the Lord. So it might go something like this: 'Thank you Lord for this person. You know how they are asking you for so many new perspectives, thank you that you were listening to their requests the other morning as they were driving into work...'

What is taking place is that we are praying for them beginning with what we know, but as we 'flow' in prayer we will soon be praying for them with aspects that we did not know. We might have known that they were asking God about seeing things differently, but we might not have had any proof at all that they were in prayer while coming into work. As we learn to pray in this way, we will catch the heartbeat of God and flow even more deeply into areas that we had no proof for.

This is often a safer way to begin to step out, than seeking to make declarations, and it is often a very good way to begin to experience how to speak prophetically.

So a good principle is to begin to thank the Lord for what you know about a person, and allow your thankful heart to be joined to what the Lord feels for the person. Many times it will not be long before you find yourself praying beyond what you know, and begin to touch on what the Lord knows about that person. As this takes place increasingly you will discover what it is to flow in the Spirit, by being moved within.

One of the key elements in prophecy is learning how to flow. Scripture says that,

no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of a person, but people spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy spirit (2 Pet 1:20,21, translation changed to make the language gender inclusive).

Those who prophesied were 'carried along'. This is the same concept as of a sailing ship being blown along by the wind. The sails have to be set and then catch the breeze and the ship is blown along. In the prophetic we raise our

sails and catch the breeze of the Spirit. Once the wind of God is caught we will move in a direction. As we pray prophetically we are catching the direction of the wind and are blown along in the direction that the Spirit is setting. We cannot create the wind, but we can pick up the wind and its direction. As we mature in the gift we simply become more sensitive so that even a small breath of wind we can sense.

If you speak in tongues use that gift

Given the importance of the gift of tongues, and the many different understandings there are on the gift, we will come back to some teaching on the subject later. At this stage, though, I want to note that Scripture clearly indicates that the individual who speaks in tongues edifies themselves (1 Cor. 14:4). Through doing so they are building up a reservoir from which they will be able to minister. The prophetic gift is to edify others (1 Cor. 14:3), but if the person prophesying are themselves already edified it will be easier for them to be used of God to edify someone else.

As we speak in tongues in our everyday lives and in our private devotions before the Lord we will discover that the Lord builds us up so that we are spiritually stronger when we come to others. If it is appropriate we might also speak in tongues immediately before prophesying over someone as we will then move having been stirred spiritually.

There is a public use of tongues that Paul speaks about, particularly when the gift is interpreted. But it seems that Paul's main emphasis on the gift was to encourage it to be used privately. In spite of the situation at Corinth where they majored on speaking in tongues Paul made the point that he spoke in tongues more than them all (1 Cor. 14:18). Even if it is not one of the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31) it is a unique gift in that the major impact is on the person who is exercising the gift. Because of its unique nature and its unique effect, I would strongly urge those who speak in tongues to exercise the gift regularly and as one does I am there will be an increased flow with respect to the other gifts, including the gift of prophecy.

Make the connection

Prophecy comes from heaven to a person or situation through someone who delivers it. There is a responsibility on the person delivering the word to do whatever they can to build a bridge to the one receiving the word. The word of God is precious, but it is the entrance of God's word that brings light. We cannot create the word of God through some amazing effort. The word has to come from God. We can, however, have an influence on how it is received through either building a bridge or not. So we are those who want to do whatever we can to make a good connection.

This element of building the bridge and seeking for the word to enter will shape how we give what we have and we will return to this issue later in the

book. In prophecy there has to be a connection to heaven and a connection to the person or situation. If we find it difficult to connect to the Lord's presence it is unlikely that we will hear from the Lord. Every illustration has its limitations, but let me suggest that prophecy is the connecting lead between heaven's reality (the power source) and the person or situation (the appliance). If the appliance is to start the lead has to connect the source to the appliance; it has to plug in to the Lord and in to the person or situation. In prophecy then we are to make a connection. There are some practices that will help us connect with the Lord and with the person who will receive the word. Speaking in tongues will certainly be one of those ways. Two others are:

Thanking God in prayer

Many times I encourage people to be thankful to God for the person they are about to minister to. When we begin by being thankful, and begin by thanking God verbally for the person, we often have nothing specifically prophetic to give, but as we do this we firstly align ourselves with the Lord and his feelings for the person. As we continue to thank God in this way we will begin to be aligned according to his heart and so set ourselves in the position where we can pick up his direction. This puts us in a strong connecting point with the Lord. Having begun in this way we will then often begin to speak or pray out things that were not in our thinking before we began to pray. Now we are beginning to make the connection with the person. So by thanking God we will make a strong connection both to the Lord and to the person.

Touching the person

Sometimes we might need to lay hands on the person. By doing so we identify with the person, and at some level will touch who they are in the Lord. The physical contact is drawing something out of our spirits so that we begin to connect with the Spirit of the Lord and the call on their life. The physical might be the means by which the initial connection is made and from that point the word of the Lord is released.

Stir the gifts of the Spirit

Gifts of the Spirit come from the Lord, but we have a responsibility with respect to their use. We are called into partnership with God over their use. So Paul told Timothy to:

not neglect your gift, which was given to you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you (1 Tim. 4:14)

fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of hands (2 Tim. 1:6).

To the Thessalonian church Paul instructed them not to put out the Spirit's fire nor to treat prophecy with contempt (1 Thess. 5:19). We are not to be neutral or passive over the gifts of the Spirit, but must again and again stir ourselves and our expectations. Then as we exercise our gifts there is a principle that the gifts will mature and come to a new level, and consequently through that constant use we will come to a new level of discernment (Heb. 5:14).

Even if we have been moving for some period of time in the gifts it will be necessary to stir again the desire and practice of the gifts. Every fire needs fresh material in order to stay burning, and our lives are no different. One way of being stirred is by spending time in an environment that strongly encourages or even provokes us to go deeper.

Mix with people who prophesy

If we have opportunity to mix and fellowship with others who move in the prophetic gift this will stir our own gift. We will experience 'iron sharpening iron'. The prophetic anointing rises when prophetic people come together. We note that a well known New Testament prophet, Agabus, appears twice in the book of Acts, but both times in the context of other prophets or prophetic people. We meet him first when he travels with some prophets who came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27-30) and then subsequently in Caesarea where Philip had four prophetic daughters (Acts 21:7-11). It was not just an Old Testament principle for prophets to be together in what has commonly been termed 'schools of the prophets' but it is clear that they also worked together in the New Testament. As they did so the anointing would rise and the revelation would become clearer. We will find the same experience as we meet and fellowship in a similar way.

So if there is the possibility to mix with other prophetic people, or if there is a prophetic environment that is available, take the opportunity with both hands. Don't be intimidated by those who have gone further, but be influenced and shaped by them and their experience in God. As we do so we will in turn grow in the anointing that God has given us.

What about speaking in tongues?

In the final section of this chapter I am going to expand some on the issue of speaking in tongues as it has proved to be such an invaluable gift for so many who move prophetically. It is a unique gift, for Paul says it is with this gift that we edify ourselves. It is also a gift that has many different (and sometimes contradictory) teachings surrounding it. There are those who teach it is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit, or as is often put, 'the initial evidence of having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit'; there are those who minimise the gift saying it is the least of all the gifts, and so we could go on to list a huge variety of perspectives. I do not expect I will answer every

question in what follows, but hope at least to give some more than helpful pointers to a way forward. I deliberately tackle the subject as it is such a key gift for many people who move prophetically as it is often the means by which they are stirred up as they use it regularly in their prayer life.

First, let me suggest that Paul expected that tongues speaking would be very common. It was not a few at Corinth who spoke in tongues, and he himself (in spite of the abuse of the gift there in Corinth) could claim that he spoke in tongues more than them all (1 Cor. 14:18). It cannot be proven that all spoke in tongues in the book of Acts when they had a Holy Spirit encounter, but we can note how widespread a phenomenon it was. From this we can safely deduce that speaking in tongues was, and should be, a normal (even if not a universal) experience in the body of Christ. We cannot say that all must speak in tongues, but we can raise our expectation to suggest that it is very likely that the vast majority will (or, at least, could).

Speaking in tongues is also a wonderful sign. The tongue is an unruly member of our bodies, so for the Holy Spirit to come to a person and for them to speak in tongues is a sign of the harnessing of this unruly member. Godly praise coming from the tongue is a very positive sign (James 3:5-12). There is also an element in which tongues are a sign of the reversal of the confusion at Babel – this was certainly the case on the day of Pentecost, when the nations found a new understanding of what was being said (Acts 2:5-13; Gen.11:1-9).

When someone who does not speak in tongues asks the question, 'how do you speak in tongues?' it is always difficult to answer. It is similar to someone who does not ride a bicycle asking, 'how do you ride a bicycle?' An answer can be given that is a little technical. Balance yourself, if you feel you are falling to the left, lean to the right to compensate, and so on. Once one knows how to ride a bicycle it is something that is done without thinking. One just does it! Speaking in tongues is something similar. Once a person speaks in tongues they just do it. That answer of course does not help too much, so I will try and make a fuller response below. I will try and do this by asking some very basic, but important, questions.

Who speaks in tongues?

Tongues speaking is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but as with most manifestations of the Spirit there needs to be a human response and partnership. The Spirit is the inspirer, but we are the speaker (Acts 2:4). If we are totally passive we will not speak in tongues. There might be times when the impulse is very strong, but there might also be times when there is virtually no inner impulse; regardless of the experience we have to speak in tongues through exercising our choice.

How do we know we are speaking in tongues and not making it up?

This is a concern for many people, particularly those who want to be real. At one level we cannot absolutely guarantee that we are not making it up, but that is the nature of faith. There are no absolute guarantees about our faith but there are significant evidences. When I was a young Christian I often used to rest back on the evidence that so many people were willing to give their lives for Jesus that there had to be something very substantial to the Christian faith. I also found a place of peace when I considered how many people I had seen transformed by the Gospel – for me that spoke loudly. Those aspects were not absolute proof for the reality of the Christian faith, but they were significant evidences of the reality of Jesus and the power of the Gospel.

Likewise with speaking in tongues, it will not be possible to give absolute proof that what we are speaking is from the Holy Spirit. We might not be able to rid ourselves of all doubt, but there will be some evidences that point strongly in the direction that the tongue is from the Lord. Those evidences will be such things as finding that we are being edified as we exercise the gift, and that we increasingly find ourselves experiencing a significant level of freedom in worship and in our relationship with the Lord.

So there will be no absolute proof, but I strongly suggest that we continue to step out, and even if we *feel* that we might be making it up that we press through that phase, because my conviction is that before too long we will have the assurance of the Spirit that this is indeed from the Lord and we will experience an increasing freedom and well-being.

How do we begin to speak in tongues?

There are no rules, and the personal testimonies from people often differ. It might be helpful to request for ministry through the laying on of hands. Any fresh experience of the Spirit begins through yielding to the Holy Spirit, so with or without hands being laid on you, let me suggest you actively cultivate a fresh yielding to and awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. While corporate worship is taking place is often a very good time to step out. As we participate in that worshipping environment the release of speech or even new sounds is something I would encourage. I include the word 'sounds' here as there are some who begin to speak in tongues in the same way as a baby begins to speak. They do not begin with articulate words but with sounds. This was how it began for me, but within a short time the sounds were becoming words. If we do not step out we are unlikely to ever break through.

The requirement then on us is to step out. Even experimenting is certainly better than total passivity. We must recall that we speak in tongues

as *he* gives the inspiration.

As our tongues develop we will often find that we develop new tongues, or we find ourselves speaking in a tongue that we have not spoken in before when we confront a new situation. This is often the experience of people when it comes, for example, to confronting a particularly hostile spiritual scenario, or in coming into a new geography.

Tongues are like any gift. They have to be kept fresh. There is a danger of simple endless repetition when the tongue is coming partly from the memory. We must allow the tongue to stir our spirits, and we must also allow our spirits to be stirred in order to keep our experience of speaking in tongues fresh.

A prayer: I am willing to be taught by you Lord. I do not profess to understand all your ways. But I do want to learn how to discern the moving of the Holy Spirit. I want to be able to discern his presence, and to be moved when he speaks. Develop in me sensitivity to your voice, so that I can hear you even when you whisper. Develop in me sensitivity to those around me so that I can connect sensitively and appropriately to them. Take me on. Take me deeper. Teach me even new ways in speaking in tongues. Stir within me all those godly desires. Amen.

Chapter 4

How God Speaks

We know from Scripture that our Lord is one who speaks and he promised that his children (sheep) would hear his voice. This should give us a confidence that the gift of prophecy should not be too mysterious. The main task for us is to grow to the place where we can discern his voice. The Lord speaks and it is not unreasonable to consider that the Lord is saying much more than we hear. We have to tune our ears to his voice. Many times our ears have been tuned in to so many other sounds, so there is a process of retuning that has to take place. There is revelation to be received and we need to train ourselves to receive that revelation – those who are mature in the gift will receive more: not necessarily because the Lord is speaking more to them than to others but because they are hearing more.

A fundamental element in understanding ‘how God speaks’ is to understand that he speaks in very personal ways. In other words how one person hears the Lord speak might be different to how another person hears his voice. Our God is an incarnational God: he manifests himself in our world, in ways that we can touch him, so part of developing our hearing is in understanding who we are and how we function as individuals.

There are varieties of ways in which it is recorded that people heard the Lord, for example we have biblical records of people who heard a voice, had an angelic visitation, received a burden, saw a vision or received dreams. There is a diversity of how God will communicate.

Given that people will hear the Lord in different ways we will appreciate that there will be particular ways that the Lord will communicate with us. We will be able to learn from the experiences of others, but as we press on we will also need to discover some of the very personal ways in which the Lord will speak to and through us.

The Lord will use our personality – he has made in such a way that as we yield to his Lordship, and allow the Holy Spirit to heal us of past damage that we will find that a big overlap between what is supernatural and what is natural. It is this understanding that enables us to consider three basic ways in which people will hear the Lord. As we connect with the dominant aspect of our personality we will then be open to hearing the Lord along that vein.

Visual – aural – kinaesthetic

In general terms people are either visual, aural or sensory / feeler (kinaesthetic) people. These are not to be understood as an absolute set of definitions but are helpful categories to consider. The language a person uses can be a guide. There are those who respond with such phrases as, 'I can't **see** that taking place', or others who tend to say something like, 'that does not **sound** good to me', while others might say something along the lines of, 'I have such a bad **feel** about that'. The language is a guide to how they react to the world around them. It indicates how they are wired – either as seers, hearers or feelers.

It is important to emphasise that these descriptions are generalisations, but it remains true that most people major in one area more than another. We can operate in all three areas and we can certainly develop all three ways of receiving from the Lord, but the majority of us will find that one way of receiving will be the main way for us. One way of responding to the world is not better than another. The important element is being open to hearing the Lord speak.

Seeing

When one uses a term such as 'a vision' it can create an idea in our mind of something that is so clear that it is as real, if not more so, than what is being seen physically. This can indeed be the case, but often the vision that is seen is something that is seen with one's own mind. So it is important that we understand that a vision can cover the whole spectrum from an inner image right through to an open vision or even in some unusual cases a trance.

Many people see more than they realise. This is easy to illustrate – if I were to ask people to close their eyes and then I began to describe an unfolding scene, such as, 'you are walking down a narrow pathway that has trees growing on either side. The pathway is very uneven and because there has been a lot of rain in the last month there are a number of puddles of water that you have to walk around. As you come down the path you see a cat run across the path being pursued by a dog....' Probably something like 80% of people would actually 'see' what is being described. They will not only hear the words but they will create a picture of what is being described. What they would see is a picture that my words are helping shape in their imagination. They are experiencing a vision, and although it is not a vision from God it is something akin to many visions that come from God. The similarity is that many visions are just like that: they are seen within the imagination; the difference is that a God-given vision is stimulated because he is initiating it. A God-given vision is not created by our own imagination nor created by the scenario being described to us, but it is often seen in our imagination.

There are of course visions that are more external than the one I have

described. This can range from seeing something superimposed on what is physically present to seeing the non-physical realities as more real than the physical. Many times when I drive along I have some papers resting on my dashboard of my vehicle. When the sun reflects on the window I can still see out of the window but I can *also* see the reflection of the papers in the glass. Visions can be like that. In the normal course of driving I ignore the reflection as it would be a distraction and I mentally filter that image out. With some visions we have to become aware that we are seeing something alongside what we are seeing physically. We then choose to focus on what we are seeing (like the reflection in the glass) so as we can be clear about what we are receiving from the Lord.

An extreme form of external vision is the situation with a trance. That experience is one that is so strong that the normally-experienced physical realm would not be present to the senses. Trances are rare, but are recorded in Scripture (Acts 10:10; 22:17). They are not to be sought in the sense of doing something physical in order to have a trance. That would be most dangerous as it would open a person up to the realm of the demonic. However, God in his sovereignty can occasionally give such an experience to someone.

We can also place dreams in the category of visions, but as they happen when we are asleep we will examine them later in another chapter.

Hearing

What has been said about visions can be equally applied to the area of ***hearing*** the voice of the Lord. The 'hearing' can range from a thought that is within our minds to an external audible voice. Both could be the voice of the Lord to us. The internal thought is something that we could easily discard with a response of 'that's just me thinking that', so part of our journey will be in discovering what is 'just me' and what is from the Lord.

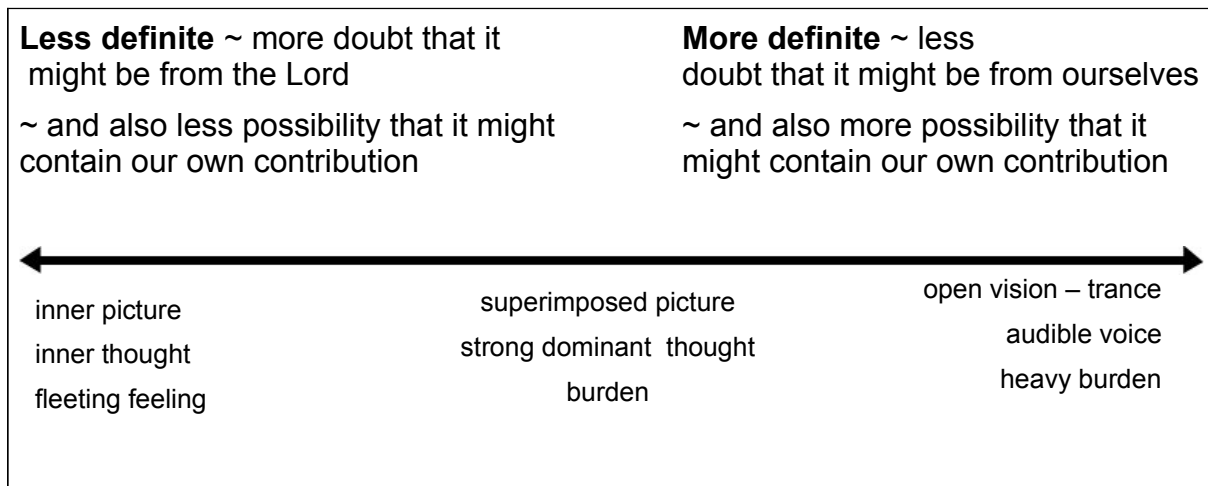
Feeling / sensing / having an impression

Again something similar can be said. The feeling can range from a fleeting sense through to a strong overwhelming external burden of the Lord. The feeling might come in a moment or it might be a burden that has developed over many months.

Having read the above paragraphs we can understand that there is such a variety of ways in which the Lord speaks. The more external something is the more we will 'feel' it is of the Lord, but the Lord can also be in such a small impulse. Maturity in the gift is, in part, learning how to discern the voice of the Lord, and in being able to pick up the slightest God-element. It is important that faith is developed as it is faith in the word of the Lord that brings about a manifestation of heaven to earth.

We can illustrate the spectrum of external/internal and

overwhelming/faint with the illustration below:



As can be seen the less definite the experience, the more doubt this might be from the Lord. However, it is also important to note that a very slight impression might well be totally from the Lord. When the word of the Lord comes less definitely we have to release a level of faith to lay hold of it and often because of the faith required the effects of giving such a word can be significant with the Lord manifesting his glory.

In this journey into the prophetic it is important that we begin to discover *how* we hear the Lord and then also how we discern *what* was the Lord's voice. With respect to discovering how we hear the Lord it is likely then that we will more major in one of the above aspects than the other two. We can also develop in the other areas, and I believe it is important that we seek to be developed by the Lord in all aspects of our personality, so that we do not simply develop along the line that we are comfortable with. So, for example, if we are primarily hearers it will be important to develop the seeing part of our personality too.

Do you think you are primarily a seer, a hearer, or a feeler? Why do you think that? Over the next week take note of the times you respond in ways that would give an indication of the type of person you are. Ask the Lord to develop your sensitivity to hear him along those lines.

There are many other ways in which the Lord will speak to us and I want to explore three other ways in this chapter.

He speaks through natural events:

Many aspects of creation can speak to us. Weather patterns and unusual events can often get our attention. There was an outpouring of the Spirit that took place in Canada on January 20, 1994. This outpouring impacted many lives, and twelve years later, on January 20, 2006 a whale was discovered in the river Thames in London. This was an unusual event to say the least! However, it was more than an unusual event for during the first 12 days of December 2004 a number of people had prayed and fasted. They were interceding so that everything would be in place for the release of a new level of apostolic authority that was anticipated 12 years after the Canadian outpouring of the Spirit. (Twelve being the number normally associated with governmental authority.) Those 12 days of praying and fasting were shaped each day by the book of Jonah! When a whale shows up on the twelfth anniversary of that outpouring and is photographed outside of the British Houses of Parliament it seems reasonably clear that the appearance was more than coincidence and was most certainly a sign.

God can also speak though through some very natural events that might have occurred numerous times before but when we observe them yet again we hear the Lord speak. A situation of that order was something that Jeremiah experienced one day when he went to the potter's workshop. There he observed something that was not totally unusual. He saw a pot being made but had a flaw in it. The potter reworked the pot, and through what Jeremiah observed the Lord spoke to him that just as the potter was doing that to the clay so he would do to Israel (Jer. 18:1-10). What he saw with his natural eye sparked Jeremiah to see with his spiritual eye what the Lord was doing.

Another similar example is what took place in one of Samuel's encounters with Saul. In 1 Samuel 15:26-29 we read of Samuel rebuking Saul, and declaring that he would not go back with Saul. As he turned to go, Saul grabbed hold of his robe and not surprisingly the robe ripped. A natural occurrence, but as it took place Samuel, under the inspiration of the Spirit, knew that this was a sign that the kingdom was being torn from Saul that day.

I recall the occasion when I was wearing a T-shirt that had the words 'Jesus revolution' on it. But the bottom half of the word revolution was cut off for stylistic reasons. One day I was having breakfast and a prophet-friend said to me, 'Why do you have only half a revolution?' I had been aware of the style of the writing but had made nothing of it before. The Spirit of God came on me and I began to prophesy. 'Because I cannot get my revolution without you, you cannot get it without a new relationship, the rich cannot get it without the poor, the old without the children...' Through that T-shirt I released a call for relationships that are relationships across the boundaries, relationships of people who are different.

It will be important that we become sensitive to what is around us for

the Lord will often speak through the natural events that we observe and experience. Also it is most likely that a number of those who read this material will develop into prophets who interpret the signs that are within our world and society.

He speaks in riddles and puns

There are times that the Lord speaks in ways which are not so clear. Numbers 12:8 says that the Lord speaks clearly but also in riddles to some prophets. It is not that he does not know how to put it in plain language, but simply that he speaks so that we have to ponder over what he means. We might even have to do some research to get an understanding of what he is saying.

He can also speak to us through plays on words. He can help us rearrange letters, or perhaps we will hear how one word sounds like another word. We should not try and manipulate this as we can be guilty of inventing something that is not of the Lord, but these creative ways with words can take place when he initiates it. There are examples in the Hebrew language of Scripture. Jeremiah saw an almond tree (Jer. 1:11-12; almond tree being *shaqed* in Hebrew) and then understood from the Lord that the meaning of the vision was that the Lord would watch over his word to fulfil it (watch over being *shoqed* in Hebrew).

Amos saw a basket of summer fruit (Amos 8:1-3; *qayts* in Hebrew) and understood that it spoke of God bringing things to an end (Hebrew: *qets*). There would be no further delay as all things were now ripe.

He speaks from the resources we carry

The Lord can, and many times does, speak spontaneously. Suddenly we become aware of what he is saying. However, it is also the case that he speaks through us from the resources we carry. There needs to be a deposit in all of us of the truths of Scripture. It is those truths that build us up and keep us stable in the difficult times. From those resources the Lord can also bring to our memory many things that become in that moment the living, relevant, prophetic word of God.

Prophecy is no substitute to having a good working knowledge of Scripture. We are to be subject to the eternal truths that are revealed through the Bible and in that way we will both develop a strong deposit to draw on for others and an ability to discern what is spoken prophetically. We cannot judge every prophecy by finding a Bible verse, but all prophetic utterances must line up with the authority of Scripture.

Finally in this chapter I want to make just a few comments on how we discern what is the Lord's voice.

How do we know something is of God?

One of the challenges is to know when the impression we have had is of God and not just a random thought, or when the inner picture is from God and not just something that has sprung up from the imagination. The principle I am going to give is not totally definitive but is one that will prove to be a very reliable guide. When something comes to me and I am tempted to discard it as not being from the Lord I ask myself if there would have been any natural or contextual reason why I would have had that thought or impression. If there was no natural reason, and nothing from the immediate context that would have provoked that thought, then I realise this is not something that was pre-meditated and so I then give it a lot of weight. I lean heavily toward believing it was from the Lord and then am willing to go with the impression. In other words I seek to doubt the doubt and go with the impression. Let me suggest if there was no immediate reason for having seen (heard or felt) what we saw then it is almost certainly of God. Sometimes, of course, the very thing that was premeditated could also have been of God. When that is the case it will normally carry a weight of conviction on it.

Provided we are willing to be corrected and we give what we have with humility it is unlikely that we will cause much harm. It is also true that many times the conviction that something is of the Lord will grow even while we give the word. So my strong advice is to lean heavily on the side of believing what we have is from the Lord. We should doubt our doubts rather than submit to them and remain silent. As we give, the Lord can correct and develop us. If we remain silent and passive there will be no development.

If we do find that we are getting it wrong try and analyse how that took place. If, for example, we are continually speaking of how old a person was when something happened to them but they come back to us to say that the description was not accurate, then it is best to stay away from that aspect until we develop an accuracy in that area of prophecy. So in all of this the motto is give what we have, be willing for feedback, and be teachable. That is after all the meaning of the term 'disciple'. It simply means one who learns.

Chapter 5

Dreams and Visions

Sadly in the Western world dreams have tended to be relegated to the category of 'irrelevant', other than in the area of psychology where they are understood to reveal the inner self. With the increase of new age philosophies there is a growing interest in dreams and the pursuit of alternative spiritualities. In line with many aspects of truth that have been lost, there are partial recoveries and also counterfeit understandings of those truths in the non-Christian spheres. The ancient world believed in the guidance of God through dreams and it is important that we recover an understanding of dreams in order to:

- recover the biblical emphasis on dreams.
- take back what has been lost. We want every tool that the Lord has given for us to be as effective as possible. Dreams are a vital part of our armoury in the battle.
- engage with society. Many people in our communities have dreams that when interpreted will either help them understand the journey they are on or even become the very means by which they encounter a God who speaks. Dream interpretation can truly become a servant to those people as well as a strategic evangelistic tool within our community.

This chapter will focus more on the area of dreams than of visions, but with the principles of interpretation there will be a significant amount of cross over. Dreams tend to be a little different to visions in that they are often more symbolic and therefore need a greater level of interpretation. It is also the case that, as we experience dreams while asleep, we have less opportunity to directly influence a dream that is truly God-given. There are other dreams that are not in the category of God speaking directly to us, but they can nevertheless be very instructive to us in our Christian walk, particularly when they become tools to help us deal with issues that are rising from inner conflicts such as our own fears, insecurities or pains.

Dreams

Dreams are often incredibly incisive as they cut across our normal cerebral ways of thinking and seeing things. When we dream there is the possibility of moving beyond the ways of thinking and processing that are predetermined

by our culture, upbringing and past experiences. This means that we can dream while our human conscious mind makes virtually no contribution.

Not all dreams are of the Lord, certainly not in the sense that our conscious mind made no contribution at all to the dream, but even then many dreams can still be interpreted to help plot one's personal journey. Dreams can be the means by which there is a sorting out of the day's pressure, and can very much indicate our spiritual and emotional journey.

It is good to record dreams – particularly those ones that we wake from and there is a clear sense 'God was in that'. Even when we do not understand all the symbolism it is good to record them as over a period of time we will begin to discover the keys to the symbolism. So as we build up a resource we will learn how to interpret at least a proportion of dreams. The symbolism will belong to different categories. There will be symbolism that is rooted in Scripture, symbolism that is rooted in culture and symbolism that is personal. (The book of Revelation with its strong symbolism is very much like that, with both biblical and also cultural symbolism present.)

In dreams there can be experiences that are very real – in fact some of them might even be real. Angels can visit and communicate with us. We can find ourselves travelling to places where we have never been. Some of those dreams might actually be reflecting what is really taking place. We might well be having a conversation with an angel; we might well be travelling in the Spirit to other lands. It is not, however, important to decide that these events are really taking place, but we should treat them as at least representing reality. (It is also possible to have such experiences while not in a dream – but the situations I describe are probably more common in dreams.)

Sources for dreams

There are **spiritual dreams** which the Holy Spirit has inspired – these can be as literal as seeing something that actually took place or something that will take place. So this would be comparable to watching a video recording of an event. Perhaps some experiences known as déjà vu might be where we have experienced the situation already in a dream but the conscious mind did not record it. This could be why we encounter the situation and everything seems very familiar. Spiritual dreams can be absolutely factual or they can be symbolic. The factual type dreams do not need interpretation, but the understanding needed is over why we received the dream. The symbolic dreams are the ones that need interpretation so that we gain what the Lord wants to show us through the dream.

There are **soulish dreams**. These arise from within our own subconscious. They can also carry weight and give us understanding but we would not place as much weight on them as on a spiritual dream. Their value would be more for self-understanding, although as the Holy Spirit resides within us there might indeed be a wisdom and revelation that flows in and

through the dream. It is said that Albert Einstein had revelation that came to him about the theory of relativity while dozing – was this a God-dream or simply his subconscious working things out?

There can be **demonically inspired dreams** where the enemy seeks to invade our minds. Certainly some nightmares might belong to this category, although many nightmares will be exposing inner weaknesses and fears, thus being more in the soulish than simply demonic category of dream.

We will want to put a lot of weight on the spiritual dreams, less weight on the dreams that are soulish, and take our stand against the demonic coming to oppress us (although there might even be some insights we gain as we seek God as to why at this time we have been vulnerable to attack).

Biblical background and examples

When the Spirit is outpoured there is the promise of dreams and visions (Acts 2:17-18). In other words this is not a periphery manifestation, but one which is singled out as a sign of the Spirit's activity. In Numbers 12:6 we read that God makes himself known to the prophet in a dream or a vision.

We read of many dreams within Scripture, so for example, Joseph, Pharaoh, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph (the husband of Mary) and Pontius Pilate's wife all had dreams. Dreams are a frequent means by which God communicates and it reveals that the language the Holy Spirit often uses is that of pictures. The power of pictures is that we have to engage with them at more dimensions than simply the mind. We have to see and feel them. By so doing they shape us more than we control them.

Biblical dream types

What follows is not an exhaustive list of the different types of dreams but will give some idea of the variety of dreams we find in Scripture.

Reminder dreams

We have an ability to forget what is important – the promises of God to us. And we also sometimes have an ability to remember things we should forget – offences that we have taken, and by remembering them we keep them alive! God can bring to remembrance his promises to us in dreams, through reminding us of the past he can stir faith for the future.

- Abraham is both reminded of the promises of God in a vision and a dream, and also given insight into the future (Gen. 15:1-6, 12-16).
- Jacob flees from his home and travels to his uncle Laban's land. Amidst this insecurity he has a dream in which God assures him that he will be with him (Gen. 28:11-16).
- A remarkable thing happens with Gideon. He is assured when he discovers that someone in the enemy's camp has had a dream that

confirms that he (Gideon) will defeat the Midianites (Judg. 7:13-15).

- Solomon dreams and in the dream God reminds him of the nation's responsibility before him (1 Kings 9:2-9).

So there are examples of dreams that are given to keep things in focus. In these type of dreams past events and responsibilities are brought to our attention to call for faith and obedience as we move toward our future.

Warning dreams

A common experience in Scripture was to receive a dream that gave a warning so that danger could be avoided.

- Abimelech had a dream in which he was warned not to get involved in an inappropriate way with Sarah as she was married to Abraham (Gen 20:2-7).
- Laban became angry with Jacob but was warned that when they met he was not to speak to him in a wrong way (Gen. 31:24).
- And there were a series of dreams surrounding the birth and early years of Jesus that warned and gave direction as to what people should do (Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 13, 22).

Repetitive dreams

There are repetitive dreams where either the same dream is had or different dreams are had but they carry the same interpretation. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar both had these type of dreams.

- Pharaoh had two dreams that Joseph interpreted as both predicting the same thing – seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:1-7).
- Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue (Dan. 2:24-45) but we are told in the first verse of that chapter that this was one of a number of dreams.

Where something is repeated like that we know that it means we are to take it most seriously. There is a principle of everything being confirmed through multiple witnesses (Deut. 19:15), so repetitive dreams serve to underline the importance of what has been dreamed.

Nightmares or fearful dreams

Many nightmares are demonically inspired and there needs to be prayer to shut the door that makes the person vulnerable to such nightmares. We must never allow fear to dominate over us and have to find a trust in the Lord that overcomes the fear (Ps. 56:3,4). Fear is cast out as we give our lives away to others. Scripture says that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 3:18) and John clearly explains that love is perfected when we love one another, so a major

way to deal with fear is to love those around us.

There are however dreams that bring fear to us that are not simply demonic dreams. They are intended to help us see things as they are and to bring us to the place of seeking God. We see examples in the following Scriptures:

even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions (Job 7:14)

for God does speak – now one way, now another – in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword (Job 33:14-18).

I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me (Dan 4:5).

while Pontius Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Matt. 27:19).

Dreams of this nature then are to cause us to soberly take stock and seek the face of the Lord so that we make the appropriate response by taking the right action so that we avert danger or pray through what the Lord is doing.

Predictive dreams

There are dreams that predict the future. Such dreams are to stir faith so that we play our part in advancing the future (the kingdom of God) into the present (the earth). Here are some biblical examples:

- Jacob saw himself prospering in a dream and that dream was truly fulfilled (Gen 31:10-13).
- Joseph was well known as a dreamer and he saw his future calling to rule many years in advance (Gen 37:5-11). His brothers despised him being offended by the dreams, but we are told that his father kept the dreams in mind. It is important we know who we should share our dreams with. This is particularly true of dreams we have (or desires we carry) that are to do with our future calling. We want to find those who will carry those desires in their hearts and thereby protect us. We do not want to share such intimacies with those who will react through offence and jealousy
- We don't know if it was a dream that shaped Nathan or not, but the Scripture says that the Lord spoke to him that night (thus probably indicates it was a dream) and he heard the Lord say that David would

not be the builder of the Temple but that his son Solomon would be used to do this (2 Sam 7:4-17).

The few biblical examples that I have chosen illustrate the variety of dreams, and the profile Scripture gives to dreams indicates their value.

God can communicate in so many ways in dreams. When the dream is literal that makes it easy to interpret, but often the language of dreams is symbolic language and so needs insightful interpretation. Interpreting dreams is something that certain people seem to have an incredible ability to do, but it is important that we all develop some basic ability in understanding dreams. Below are some principles that we can adopt, with a few concluding comments on symbolism and the interpretation of symbols.

Interpretation of dreams

Our first step in interpretation is to try and determine the nature of the dream – is it a God-sourced dream or a soulish dream (even if it is the latter it might still have value). If it is a God-sourced dream one would expect a sense of the presence of God or a strong inner conviction as one wakes or as the memory of the dream comes back. In a God-sourced dream there might even be a measure of interpretation or understanding that takes place within the dream.

We should write the dream down as soon as possible. If we are able to write it down as soon as waking all the better – even if it is still the middle of the night. It is amazing what can be forgotten by the morning, so the sooner it is recorded the better. As the dream is being written down other elements that have been forgotten might well come to light, or parts that did not initially seem to have significance might become significant. This is also why it is best to record as much of the detail as possible, even the details that seemed totally incidental.

If there were a series of dreams at night it is normally the case that the first dream remembered will be the last dream that was had. Once the dream is written down sometimes earlier dreams from the same night will then come back to remembrance.

Before rushing into an interpretation it is always good to pray over the dream asking the Lord for insights. Praying in tongues can help clear away some of the mind-blockages.

In many dreams there are often successive scenes. The first scene is the one that normally gives the setting to the dream. As we consider the dream we can ask some questions that will help us in our interpretation. Questions such as:

- Who does this dream refer to?
- What exactly is it about?

- What aspect of life is it speaking to?

As we start to consider the interpretation we should first look for symbolism that can be interpreted. Dream symbolism comes in two categories. There are **biblical** symbols that we would interpret along the lines they are already been interpreted in the Bible (unless there was a clear reason not to). When reading the Bible it is good to note the symbols that are there and what they mean. Then there are symbols that are **personal**, so that what they would mean to one person might be very different to what they would mean to another person. If we are looking to understand our own dreams it is good to note recurring symbols so that we learn that 'when I dream such and such it virtually always indicates...' Then there are **contextual** symbols that will carry specific meaning at that given time. These are personal symbols that carry meaning specific to our situation at that time.

A friend of mine had a dream many years ago that outlined his future ministry. It was of him driving a car along a road that was marked by trees either side. Then the pathway came to an end, and before him was a beautiful and immaculately kept lawn with many people on it having an afternoon picnic. In the dream he carried on driving across the grass, both upsetting the people and damaging the grass. The interpretation he was given was that the dream was outlining his call and future ministry. The car was his journey with the Lord and the release of his call (vehicles often speak of making a journey with the Lord, and often have a bearing on our ministry). The trees either side of the road were the people who had marked out his pathway thus far. (The biblical symbolism here is of people being like trees.) But what had been marked out for him was coming to an end. Before him lay some challenges. God would call him to drive across the grass, and as 'all flesh is as grass' this would mean disturbing elements of fleshly behaviour. The worst kind of flesh – because it appears so good and orderly – is religious flesh, so the person interpreting the dream suggested that my friend was being called to drive right across religiosity. The result would be two-fold: the disturbance of people who are in bondage to religion and not in submission to Christ, and also disturbance to the wider religious world. The interpretation given was certainly proved true in the subsequent ministry of this person.

Another vital element to consider when interpreting a dream is to recall the **emotions** that were experienced while dreaming. The emotions will give a good indication as to whether something was good or evil, threatening or releasing, etc. The emotions can often also help determine what some personal symbolism means. The appearance of a dog in a dream could for one person be very positive, particularly if that person had had a dog as a well-loved pet while being a child; in contrast if a person had been attacked by a dog the symbolism might speak of fear and threat, not of comfort.

The meaning of some dreams might become clearer later. This can be

when later circumstances throw light on the meaning, or where subsequent dreams help us understand the symbolism involved. For those reasons it is good to keep a record for dreams.

Symbolism

What I list below are some general guidelines. They should not be used as a definitive set of meanings but might become useful as a starting point.

Objects:

altar: place of sacrifice

anchor: security

basket: provision

chains: bondage

cloak: protection, anointing

fire: purification

helmet: protection for the mind

iron, brass: judgment

linen: righteousness

plumb line: God's standard

trumpet: prophetic voice

well: eternal life, salvation

arrow: suffering or conviction

barns: storehouse for the future

bread: Jesus, the word

city: stability, security

door: entrance / opportunity

hammer: God's word

house: church

lamp: word of God, illumination

net: the Gospel message

staff: protection

tower: safety

window: illumination, insight

Animals and birds:

dove: peace, Holy Spirit

serpent: danger

lion: Jesus, the Lion of Judah

These examples illustrate well that there can even be opposite meanings. The lion could also speak of the prowling lion of 1 Peter 5:8 – the devil. The serpent could speak of wisdom in that we are to be wise as serpents. In bringing an interpretation where the symbolism could mean something totally opposite we would need to discover the emotions experienced surrounding the particular imagery.

We can also note that biblical imagery is very rich. The Holy Spirit is not described in one image form but in a variety of ways, such as rain, fire, oil, wind, water, as well as the dove imagery that we noted above.

Colours:

Amber: God's glory

Blue: sky, heaven, Holy Spirit

Purple: kingship, royalty

White: purity, righteousness, joy, victory

black: sin, death and famine

green: life, growth

red: bloodshed, war, sacrifice

Numbers:

one: unity, God, beginning

three: Trinity

five: grace

seven: perfection, completeness

nine: manifestation of the Spirit,
harvest, fruit

eleven: mercy, finish, last

thirteen: double blessing, double cursing

two: agreement, witness, division

four: earth, world-wide

six: humanity

eight: new beginnings

ten: testing, judgment

twelve: government

A prayer: You give to those you love sleep. I yield my sleep to you, and I invite you to speak to me. Come and train me in the skills of interpretation. I want to understand the mysteries of the kingdom, and I want to be obedient to you as my king. Teach me the language of the Holy Spirit, the symbolism and imagery that will become meaningful to me. I thank you that you are committed to communicate. Amen.

Chapter 6

Ministering Prophetically

Only the Holy Spirit can give the inspiration and revelation for prophecy that comes from the heart of God, but the person who is the vehicle through whom the prophecy is delivered also has some work to do. We cannot simply give the word with no thought as to how the delivery is made. Scripture does not simply attribute light to the word of God, but to the *entrance* of that word (Ps. 119:130). How the word is given and how it is received will determine how much light is brought. We cannot dictate to the Lord as to how we will receive the word from him but we have a responsibility to build the bridge so that the word of the Lord can find an entrance. So we have a great responsibility in shaping how we give a word of prophecy.

There are also protocols that certain places or people will insist on (rightly or wrongly) and we will have to work within those in certain situations. Some of those might be tighter than one would wish but we are here to communicate God's word not simply to do things our way.

So for example:

- some places will not accept any audible speaking in tongues without an interpretation.
- you might be asked to submit any word to the leadership first: this might be seen as 'controlling' but there is a responsibility with those who are 'shepherds' to work through any word given.

Even if the protocols employed are too strict, it is a good reminder that whenever prophetic words are given that there are consequences. This chapter is not going to be about the discussion of right and wrong protocols but about setting in place a suitable framework for releasing the prophetic. In doing this I will focus on principles that will develop helpful practices and attitudes.

Be accountable for what is given

We are allowed to make mistakes but we cannot live our lives responsibly and under the Lordship of Christ if we do not make ourselves accountable. Accountability is not compliance with a system, but a yielding to people who can help shape us and ensure that we last the race. Those who demand accountability to a system are normally living under fear and exercising a

spirit of control. But it is our responsibility to find ways of making ourselves accountable. It has long been my practice when I travel of making a public statement. I say that if I do something that is different, then it is probably not because it is better, but because it is simply reflective of my style. If that takes place I ask for grace from the people I am with. If however I do or say something that dishonours Jesus and the Gospel my request is that they do not keep quiet, but pick this up with myself or those I travel with. Too often we have been offended about the wrong thing. We have been offended by a different style, but kept silent when we have seen attitudes portrayed that fall way short of the Gospel.

So accountability has to be first to those within the context that we are in. We have to help people in that context understand that the first area of comeback is always to do with how Jesus is being honoured and how faithful we are to the Gospel. It is good for people to know that they can go back to people who know us and talk to them about what has been said and done. The people who know us need to be those who want us to succeed. If people come to bring a word of correction to us it is important to know that they are only doing it in order that we can move forward, and are not doing it to pull us down.

There is also a clear principle that the greater the level of gift the greater the accountability that is needed. And likewise the more significant the word that is given the greater the level of accountability for that word is required.

In fact our authority in the Lord is in proportion to our ability and willingness to be accountable. But again by accountability we have to make sure that we are not just submitting to a system that is demanding obedience. A friend of mine put it this way: systems demand loyalty. When they ask me to jump I am only allowed one question: 'how high?' Relationships demand faithfulness, and that means that we can also give a 'no' in response to a request.

God-given relationships release and do not tie us up, so although accountability is an absolute necessity we must make sure that we are not being controlled by a system. It is first and foremost an attitude rather than a structure: an attitude of teachability. It will be helpful at a practical level when we exercise prophetic ministry that we put the following in place:

Record what is said

In our culture we can often find an electronic recorder for what is said. When this is not possible then to have someone write down the main points is the minimum we should try to get in place. There are many advantages in having the word recorded:

- the person receiving is not under pressure to remember every word

spoken.

- they can listen / read again and again. Sometimes something that seemed clear first time round will have another application later. And many times in the prophetic there are phrases and words that are missed because they had no direct application when they were first heard, but at a later date they can make a vital difference.
- the word is on record and what is said can be verified at a later stage. The one giving the word can then be held accountable for what was spoken.

Give personal but avoiding private words

By using the word 'private' I mean allowing situations to arise where we prophesy in an environment where there is a lack of openness about it. We want to be as open and as public as is appropriate. If ever we develop a reputation for having prophetic insight we must be wary of those who seek us out for a private word. We are not to get locked in emotionally to someone. And we certainly must never act as the 'guru' for someone – such types of relationship are all-but destined to going wrong and being exploited.

Personal words are words given to individuals, but done in a setting where there is as great an openness as possible so that others can hear and judge the word.

This is obviously a principle. It is not that a prophecy that is simply one-on-one is inherently wrong, but if that becomes a continual practice then there will be significant difficulties. The strong rule of thumb is do everything, as far as possible and as far as is appropriate, in as open a context as one can find.

Do not use prophecy to avoid confrontation

If we are in conflict with someone, or if our relationship with them is not totally at peace we have to be radically honest with ourselves and do everything in our power to avoid giving them words that we want them to hear. Words such as, 'The Lord says you are to stop being so annoying to the servant who is now speaking!!' are certainly not to be allowed!

Any issue of relational breakdown has to be dealt with relationally and Matthew 18 gives an outline of the steps that are appropriate to follow. We are not allowed to use prophecy to get a point of view across with the hope that the other person will now change into someone that will comply with our desires.

Likewise we are not to use prophecy to manipulate anyone to do what we want them to do or to do what we think they should be doing. God gives people choice – even the opportunity to choose wrongly and we must preserve that right.

Whenever prophecy is used in such manipulative ways it will not be

long before a spirit of witchcraft comes in on the relationships. Rather than freedom being experienced people will find that bondage is their experience, and from witchcraft there will normally be sexual problems in relationships that also surface.

Other aspects to giving prophecy

Prophecy within the measure of your faith and revelation – Rom. 12:6

Prophecy will often talk of things beyond where people are at and the prophetic will release faith to believe for more than we are currently experiencing. When we hear the word of the Lord many times we will be stretched in our minds and hearts. But we also have to be clear that to simply talk of things beyond where we are at does not make that prophetic.

When we prophesy we have to ask about our faith level when we speak out our words. We are to prophesy according to our faith. When there is a strong spirit of prophecy present there will be a great release of faith, and at those times we will be challenged to prophesy of things that stretch us significantly. The faith will be genuine, but the real test will be our willingness to keep the vision alive when that environment has gone.

So the term prophesying according to our faith works two-ways. We are restricted to that measure in that we are not to prophesy beyond our faith. Yet we are also challenged to prophesy as far as our faith and that at times will pull us to an uncomfortable level.

Just as we are to stay within our faith level we also need to keep within the level of revelation we have. Sometimes things go wrong when we feel a pressure to say more than we have. When we reach for something that the Lord has not revealed to us and go on to speak out beyond the boundary of our faith we will end in trouble. We must be those who stay in a place of peace. We cannot respond to false manipulative pressures so must avoid going beyond what we have. If we are asked to give more we must make sure that we either hold our peace or explain that we are not putting a great weight on what we are about to say.

Do not add or subtract to what the word is

This describes another principle and not a rule. There might actually be times when you do not give everything that the Lord gives; some of what he reveals is for prayer and for our personal 'consumption' behind the scenes and was not given for total release. But the general principle is that we give what we have, not expanding on it or holding back.

When we feel insecure we can at times be so pressured to add something to the word that we end up going too far and release something

that was partly the Lord and partly our own thoughts. I remember learning the lesson when I was in a church meeting. I heard someone come in the door and turned my head to see who it was. As I did so the Lord said to me (or I could put it this way, this clear train of thoughts went through my head), 'Tell that young man what happened to his mother will not happen to him.' I was later teaching and while teaching I was desperately trying to work out what could have happened to his mother. I could not with integrity come up with anything, and at the end of the meeting I said to the young man in question, 'This probably won't make any sense to you, but what happened to your mother won't happen to you.' He began to cry. I still had no more insight so asked what the significance of the word was. I was told that his mother had recently died and that he had been informed that it was from a hereditary disease. Had I tried to guess what the Lord was speaking of I would not have guessed that was the situation. Had I then gone beyond the revelation I had received I would have given something to the young man that might have been helpful in parts, but would not have given him God's answer to his burning question.

I was so glad that I ignored my insecurities and gave what I had without embellishment. That lesson has stayed with me ever since. I have jokingly said that the bit I did add, 'This probably won't make any sense to you,' is shorthand for, 'I know this is wrong, when you hear it you and everyone else will know that I have missed it, but please treat me with care and only use very small stones when you feel the urge to discipline me!' We might not be too sure something is right, for the simple reason that we do not know what is being addressed. Prophecy is supernatural when particular words connect with the circumstances of the person who receives the word – it is not supernatural when we have inside knowledge and understand exactly what is being spoken of. So when we do not know what is being addressed we need to give what we have and not add to it through trying to make sense of it. The word of the Lord only needs to make sense to the person receiving.

Do not use prophecy to gain an identity

If we are insecure we can wrongly try to have our insecurities met through our function. However, the Lord wants to heal us at a deep level so that we are secure in *who* we are. From a place of identity our function can then flow. If we prophesy in order to gain self-identity we will be so driven that we will make mistakes and end up in a performance-mentality that will take away our joy. When operating in this way we will feel good when we do well, but become depressed when either we do not do well or when people do not put a draw on us.

Our identity is to be gained from our relationship with the Father. We read in the Gospels that the Father spoke words over Jesus twice in a public setting. Both times the words underlined the relationship between them and

the identity of Jesus as Son (see, for example, Matt. 3:17 at his baptism and Matt. 17:15 at his transfiguration). In speaking those words it was not Jesus' function that was confirmed but his identity. We might become the most gifted person on the planet, but if we are not secure in who we are, even that level of giftedness will not heal the inner person and before too long we will miss our way. From a position of security we can then function with ease and safety.

We therefore need to be careful about those who wish to elevate us and our ministry. We must not allow people to put us on a pedestal. As our gift develops it is important that we are real with people so that they know our own human weakness. And we have to be watchful so that we do not become those who are driven rather than called.

Jesus lived out of his relationship with his Father. He was not on a performance driven journey. When the crowds were putting him on a pedestal ('Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Matt.6 :14), we read that Jesus 'withdrew to a mountain by himself' (John 6:15). He did not live to have the crowd's approval for he knew that his Father approved of him and he was there to serve him by making him known.

Beware of being enticed

There is a very sobering passage in Ezekiel 14:7-10 where a scenario is described of someone coming to seek a word from a prophet, but they are coming with the wrong motives. The prophet succumbs to the request and a word is drawn forth from the prophet. (For this to happen there has to be something of what we have described above where the identity was being gained from the function; such a prophet would be insecure over their identity.) In drawing a word forth the prophet is enticed but the sobering part is that God allows the word to be given although he promises that he will then subsequently judge both the person seeking the word and the prophet.

We cannot therefore be those who respond to pressure. We must have an ability to say 'no' by saying that we do not have a word to give. We must not be under the pressure to give everyone a word. Also practically we must be careful about being pushed to go at a speed that we are not comfortable with, as this can also be when we miss it.

In all the above I am simply seeking to set out some helpful guidelines and principles that will enable the word of the Lord to be as fruitful as possible, and for us to be as accountable as we need to be. The principles I have outlined above apply in every setting including that of ministering to unbelievers. But given the uniqueness of ministering to those who have not yet found personal faith in Jesus I include some further points relating to that situation.

Building a bridge to a non-believer

In every situation of ministry we have to be those who are the servants of Jesus *and* the person that we are ministering to. So when it comes to ministering to an unbeliever we must make sure that we always put ourselves at the disadvantage. We make sure that we are giving them an 'opt out' possibility. So practically:

- Give them enough of an explanation so that they can connect. If we simply say, 'this is what the Lord says to you...' we will probably not see them open their hearts to receive the word. We might even have to say to some something along the following lines: 'I don't want to intrude, nor be inappropriate, but I am a follower of Jesus and a little earlier on I was deeply impressed as I prayed for you that he wanted you to know that he hasn't forgotten about...'
- Although we will give them a word I suggest that, without abusing the situation, we seek to communicate our faith in Jesus and who he is. Our desire is that they receive the word of the Lord and so they need to know something of who he is. Prophesying to unbelievers is not simply giving them a non-evil version of tarot cards. It is communicating the heart of a Person who knows and loves them.
- We must always think through how we are going to express what we have, and with an unbeliever it is important that we choose the wording that will best enable them to respond. We do not want them shutting down because of fear of being exposed so we would be very careful about the specific exposure of sin and weaknesses through the prophetic word.

It is both challenging and exciting to minister to unbelievers. Challenging because we have to move beyond our comfort zones and beyond the religious language we often use. Exciting because they can discover that Jesus is so fascinating, and so unlike many of the caricatured images that they have been fed.

This chapter has been to so with principles rather than a set of rules about the how to's of delivering a prophetic word. We will continually be challenged to think through the best means to communicate what the Lord gives us so that the word of the Lord is heard and not just spoken; so that is received as well as delivered. An accurate word spoken that is not received will not be effective.

Prayer: Lord I realise that I will forever have the privilege of being a learner. Open my eyes not simply to great mysteries, but to see you as you are. I realise that I am so unlike you in many ways but you have promised to work in me so that I become more like you. I welcome that. Help me to live and

Speak in such a way that your word enters the hearts and minds of many. Forgive me for my pride and every desire for self-elevation. Help me take the pathway you took: the pathway of the servant. Teach me how to speak so that your word enters the hearts of those you long to speak to. Amen.

Chapter 7

Receiving Prophecy

There is most certainly a very real responsibility on those who prophesy to seek to give the prophetic in a way that will effectively connect so that faith can rise. But prophecy also needs to be received in such a way that the word spoken bears fruit and comes to pass. The fulfilment of a prophetic word is not normally automatic as the word has to be received. There are some words that are spoken and will be fulfilled without any conditions attached (this is called unconditional prophecy); certainly words such as the ones relating to the return of Christ are unconditional in the sense that the event will take place. There could well be many other words that are given that are of this nature – however the majority of personal words are conditional. This means that they will not automatically come to pass but have to be responded to with faith for their fulfilment. Hebrews 4:2 informs us that the people of Israel heard the word but did not mix it with faith (a necessary condition) so the word proved unfruitful. In that situation a whole generation died in the wilderness and did not enter in to what had been promised to them.

The judgment word that Jonah pronounced on Nineveh was conditional. Jonah proclaimed that judgment was coming in forty days to the city yet the judgment did not come as it was averted through repentance. Although no conditions were explicitly attached to the word it was still a conditional word. Likewise, Isaiah declared to Hezekiah that he would die and so he needed to set his affairs in order. The king, though, cried out to the Lord and before Isaiah was able to leave the palace grounds he had to return and reverse the word that Hezekiah was going to die. After prayer the word had changed and the king was given another fifteen years of life. Again a word that was spoken so definitely proved to be conditional (2 Kings 20:1-11).

So prophetic words must be connected with, and responded to, in order for those words to be fulfilled, and words of judgment can often be averted through repentance. Understanding the conditional nature of prophetic words means that we must learn how to receive the prophetic if we are to benefit from a word.

It is always our responsibility to weigh any word given (1 Cor. 14:29 and 1 Thess. 5:19-21 make that clear). We must not reject something either through cynicism or because it does not fit our world view. Neither, though, can we simply receive every word just because it was spoken in a prophetic

style. So responding rightly to the prophetic is what this chapter will seek to address.

Receiving the prophetic

Weigh it in spirit

The first aspect to be weighed is not the detailed accuracy. Accuracy can help confirm a word as being from the Lord, but accuracy in itself does not validate a word. In Acts 16:16-18 there is a woman who speaks publicly a very accurate word concerning Paul and Silas. The word was accurate yet the source of her speech was a demonic spirit of false prophecy. Paul discerned the source because his spirit was troubled (16:18) and after some time cast out a demon from the woman.

Discerning the source of a word means that we are discovering if the word is sourced from God, the demonic or the human spirit. In some prophetic words there could be even be a mixture, particularly a mixture of God and human-sourced elements.

Paul uses the phrase 'manifestation of the Spirit' to describe the gifts, including prophecy. Therefore if prophecy is a manifestation of the Spirit a key element is to ask is the simple question: was there a manifestation of the Spirit's presence when we heard that prophecy? To manifest something is to make that thing visible and tangible. So the presence of the Lord needs to accompany any true word of prophecy. If there is no tangible presence of the Lord then it indicates that we would be wise to be a little cautious about automatically accepting the word as being from the Lord.

The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19:10), so we can also ask if Jesus was promoted and uplifted. Jesus is at the centre of what is truly prophetic. We are to be edified (another test) but this does not mean that we will be promoted and puffed up. A true edification is not where we are promoted but where we are built up in our faith and our hearts are drawn out after the Lord.

So in weighing the source of the word we are not trying to examine the accuracy of every detail but we are seeking to discern the spirit of the word. We could even receive a word that was in parts inaccurate, and then later discard those inaccurate parts, and so benefit from that word. In fact we could receive a word that was mixed in a way that we could not receive a word that was accurate but not from God.

We do need to analyse the accuracy of a word but we must make sure that we do not reject a word simply because it did not make sense to us, or it was beyond our faith level at that time, or it did not seem to fit with our current situation.

Ask about the track record of the one who gave the word – Deut. 18:20-22

God can speak accurately through anyone. However, if there is someone who has a long and accurate track record we can give more weight to the word that they speak. We anticipate that those who have been moving in the prophetic for some time at this level will normally release words that carry greater weight. However, we must always remember that the Lord can use anyone. Ananias released a strong prophetic word (and also a healing) over the one who was called to be the Apostle Paul. He declared what his future would be and we should be enormously encouraged that Scripture simply refers to him as 'a disciple' (Acts 9:10). Although there is such a reality as spiritual stature (and I am not talking of earthly titles, but of being recognised in the spirit world such as Paul was – Acts 19:15) alongside that we gladly affirm that the Lord is always looking for disciples who are available.

Realise every word is partial – 1 Cor. 13:8

When a prophecy is weak then it can have both human and God-elements in it, but even when the word is strong we know that no prophecy tells the whole story. Prophecy will not answer every question we have – in fact it might even raise some further questions!

A prophetic word will not speak to every area of our lives. The Lord does speak, but he speaks in part so that we walk with him day by day and not from a set of instructions that maps out the remainder of our lives. If we receive a word from the Lord we do not discard previous words, or even deeply held convictions, on the basis that the most recent word did not mention those aspects. We might, though, have to re-assess how we have understood a previous word in the light of a new word that we have received.

Words speak into different 'categories'

Words will speak to us along four main lines (and a prophecy could of course contain all four elements. The four elements are:

- a now word
- a future word
- a confirmatory word
- a new word

A now word: many words speak in to our situation as we find it at this current time. Often there will be references to the past as our current situation arose out of our previous experiences. When we receive a now word it is very encouraging that the Lord is with us today. Having received the word we will often then need understanding as to how to apply what the Lord is saying.

A future word: there are words that speak into our future. We might be living

in chapter 3 of our life-story and the prophecy speaks to (for example) chapter 8 of our life. This might be the case even when the word is spoken in the present tense. This can take place for two reasons. Sometimes the one who prophesies has actually misunderstood what they have seen, or the Lord is communicating in the present tense in order to let us know that the future is as certain as the past when we cooperate with him.

If we receive a future word we need to make sure that we do not simply jump on the first opportunity for an apparent fulfilment unless we are convinced that this really is what the Lord was speaking of.

I received a word in 1996 that spoke of two new aspects of ministry that were to come. There was an immediate possibility of being involved in a new aspect of a ministry that was developing that would fit with both those aspects. The 'job description' and the prophecy could be matched up easily, but when I began to move in that direction the Lord said a very firm 'no'. Two years later I began a whole new aspect of ministry, and it was only after I set that new direction in the Lord that one day I realised 'this was that' that the prophet spoke of. We have to set our direction in the light of what the Lord says but we must do this in the context of actively seeking his face. If we seek the Lord for fulfilment of the word eventually we will be able to look back and look at our lives, relationships and circumstances and realise this is what was being spoken of in the prophecy. In other words prophecy is actually interpreted more accurately after the fulfilment than before. Peter was able to declare *after the day of Pentecost* what Joel was predicting. He might not have described what would be the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy too accurately had he tried to do so before the actual fulfilment on the Day of Pentecost. So we have to work with future words and continually seek the Lord over their fulfilment.

A confirmatory word: the Lord loves to confirm his presence, his love and intimate knowledge of us many times over. Many words do just that. They come and confirm who we are; they confirm his oversight of our lives; they speak deep affirmation into our spirits. Confirming words should increase our faith and give us strength to follow the Lord with greater resolve.

A new word: there are new things the Lord has to speak to us at times. He will answer prayer above what we ask for or even imagine (Ephes. 3:20-21). This means there are aspects of his dealings with us that we have not yet been able to conceive of. If we receive a new word we should not simply accept that word and change everything on the basis of the word. All words have a timing to be fulfilled (and sometimes the fulfilment comes in stages) and a new word should be confirmed as we walk with him. It needs to be confirmed both internally (the clear witness of the Spirit within us) and externally (for example through, other words, circumstances lining up, or relationships coming in place that open up the new pathway).

Discerning the category of word (as outlined in the preceding paragraphs) will help us work with the prophetic for its fulfilment. We need to remember that the fulfilment of a word is something that develops. A word is finally fulfilled when it is fully filled. It is also good our future is normally dependent on new relationships coming into place. This is not, however, advocating that we should go out and force new relationships or go looking for those who will do us a favour and open a new door of opportunity for us. If we do that we are beginning to manipulate what the Lord has spoken and we will run the great risk of seeing the very word God has given being aborted. Rather, as we trust the Lord to open the pathway we should anticipate finding ourselves relating to some new people. God does this because he operates relationally and the new relationships are brought in to our lives to challenge our current ways of thinking so that we do not settle where we are but rise to a new level.

Meditate and pray over the word – 1 Tim. 1:18

Given that prophecy is conditional, we understand that words are not automatic in their fulfilment. When we receive a word we are to meditate on it, use it in prayer so that we make war in the Spirit with it. As we do this, faith will begin to rise and our circumstances will begin to shape up and come in line up with what the Lord desires. With many words we have to contend for some time until there is evidence of a change.

As we pray we keep prophetic imagination alive. Prophetic imagination has to precede prophetic implementation. We do not simply receive a word and then try to implement it. Rather the word has to stay alive through our prayers, then, as we come to the time of fulfilment, there will often be further insight about how the implementation will take place.

Many years ago I gave word to a city about a significant sized youth movement in the city arising. Eventually I found out how few young people were passionate for the Lord in the city and was tempted to abandon the word. But prayer keeps words alive. One day we were praying over a map of the city. Someone placed some soil on the map to help us connect, and then wrote on a piece of paper '300 – 10000'. As I read this I realised that this was the prophetic implementation being laid out before us. Good soil produces a harvest, and in the parable of the sower Jesus spoke of the harvest ranging from 30 to 100 times the original seed. I realised this city had seed of around 300, so if we could see 1) the land healed so that it was good soil and 2) the seed (the 300 young people) sowed into the land that we had the strategy for the harvest. The word that seemed to be so far beyond the possibility of fulfilment was now within reach as we discovered that it was closer to hand than we realised. As always there will be a path of death to the fulfilment, for those young people have to sow themselves into the city not looking for personal fulfilment. But this was one example of how prophetic imagination

had given way to prophetic implementation.

The need to pray over the word and work with it underlines again how important it is for the word to be written down. We can read and then later re-read it. Each time we read it the word will be kept alive, faith can rise, and even fresh insights can come as time proceeds.

Avoid private interpretation: open it up for comment and fellowship

There will be times when we hear a word and it is immediately very clear what the word means. But there will also be times when we give a premature interpretation to what we have heard. If the word is a future word but we try and connect it to our current situation and context we will make a mistake. We can also have blind spots so cannot see what others see. For these reasons it is good to open the word up to others that we trust, for they will often have another perspective and so help us see more clearly.

We need wisdom as to who we open it up to. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and put him in a prison (Gen. 37:5, 11, 17-36) but his father hid the dreams in his heart (Gen. 37:11). We need to walk with those who will not be offended but want to see God's word fulfilled in and through us. So we are looking for people who believe in us but are not simply 'yes' people. They will be honest with us, but they will always speak the truth in love.

Words have a timing

The fulfilments of many words are future. We find it so difficult to see the future. Often our unbelief rises up and we say in our hearts, 'How can this be possible?' One of our problems is that we normally project where we are today forward, and cannot see how we can get there from here. In Scripture God is presented as the one who comes from the future: he is the one 'who is, and who was, and ***who is to come***' (Rev. 1:4). The sense in that Scripture is of God living in the future and being the one who brings the future to us. This helps us understand that we do not simply arrive at the future by living longer, but as we welcome our Lord the future breaks in on our present situation. (Indeed some by living longer move further away from their future as they grow older.)

As already mentioned words can be future even when the tense that was used in the prophetic word was present tense. It is also important to understand that words are not always spoken chronologically: so the beginning of a word could be referring to the future and the latter part could be to the present.

The prophetic is not there to confuse us but to encourage us. However, it is not designed to take away our need to seek him, so we will always need to pray and meditate over the prophetic words.

Outwork the word with patience – Heb 6:12

Faith is always a challenge, but the partner of faith according to Hebrews 6:12 is patience. If faith is a challenge then patience is an even greater one. The fulfilment of a word comes through God's initiative and at God's timing. This means that we have to wait for that to take place. Waiting is not a passive activity, but important things take place while we are waiting. God is at work in us to prepare us for what will take place. The main changes are not normally to see our circumstances changed, but our hearts, attitudes and ways of thinking.

So God is preparing us for the time of fulfilment. When the door opens we will be ready to step through into the new opportunity provided we have allowed God to change us, and bring us into the new relationships, should that have been necessary.

An example of a journey: Abraham and the promise of an heir

Abraham had a word from God about an heir and only with the miraculous birth of Isaac was there a fulfilment. In between the promise and the fulfilment there was a long journey, during which time Abraham is changed and his understanding is challenged. We also know that he made a major error when he sought to help God out and Ishmael was born. (Although the situation with Ishmael being born to Hagar is not a situation we could endorse morally it was not abnormal within Abraham's culture.)

Abraham did not move from promise to fulfilment immediately but there were a number of key steps along the way. We can list the key ones below:

1. He received *the promise* of a descendent. This is always a key element to the promises of God. They are not just for us but they are given to us in order to affect the future and even future generations. God's desire is to put something into our hearts so that we can steward the promise in order that those who come after us see an even greater fulfilment (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-18; also compare John 1:50 and 14:12 for the hope that future generations will see even greater things).
2. He had clearly *meditated* on the promise and had decided that the fulfilment would be through the servant Eliezer. He would be the one to inherit what Abraham would pass on at death (Gen 15:2-3).
3. God responds to Abraham and informs him that the heir would not be a servant but that the heir would be his own child (Gen. 15:4-6). We should note that God says nothing about Sarah being the mother of the child, only that Abraham would be the father. So a measure of, but not full, clarity comes.
4. Abraham connects with faith to the promise and then through Sarah's encouragement he has a child through Hagar (Gen. 16:1-4). Abraham

was 86 when Ishmael was born (Gen. 16:16) and he must have thought Ishmael was indeed the fulfilment of God's word that he would have a son.

5. Some thirteen years later (Gen 17:1) Abraham receives the promise that Sarah will be the mother of the son that would be the fulfilment (17:15-16). Thirteen years is a long time to wait for the next level of clarity but sometimes it takes a considerable length of time for clear understanding to come about certain aspects of God's promises.
6. In Genesis 21:1 we read that Sarah gives birth to Isaac. A wonderful day of fulfilment, but what a long and challenging journey had preceded that day. Immediately prior to the announcement of the birth of Isaac we read that Abraham was called to Abimelech's household to pray for the women so that they could have children (Gen. 20:17,18). That must have been an enormous challenge to Abraham. He had the promises of God hidden in his heart yet his own wife was barren. We might well find ourselves being challenged to pray for others to enter into their inheritance and for them to find fulfilment before we have our own breakthrough. If we can do that we will often find that experience is one of the keys to the fulfilment of the word of God in our own lives.

These steps that Abraham had to take in order to see the will of God unfold meant that his faith grew as he responded. He did not have the full revelation at the beginning, and when he looked back he must have seen the mistakes he made. But our God is a God who journeys with us and what is more important than analysing the mistakes is to see how Abraham made the journey, step by step. We will have to do the same and allow our understanding of God and how he fulfils his word to develop.

There is one final sobering step that the Lord took Abraham through. We read of that in Genesis 22 where he is called to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham's life pivots around chapter 12 and chapter 22 of Genesis. In chapter 12 he has to leave the security of the past behind him so that he could begin to journey toward his future. By chapter 22 he has the promise God gave him. But he is now challenged about his willingness to sacrifice his future, the very evidence of his answered prayers, in order for something greater to come through. He has to let the promised seed go into the ground (Gen. 22:2; John 12:24).

Every move of God also hangs between those two pivotal moments that Abraham experienced. To leave the past to embrace the, as yet unknown, future is very challenging, but the willingness, in the right season, to allow what the Lord has given go into a God-initiated death is even more challenging. God is the God of resurrection but it takes faith and courage to believe that. Once Abraham makes that final step, the promise that his descendents will take possession of the gate of their enemies is given to him

(Gen. 22:17). This is the fullness of our inheritance for it is that promise that tells us our warfare will be effective and when our warfare is effective we can see the earth increasingly filled with the glory of God. The prophetic word of God can help establish this authority for us and for our descendents if we are willing to journey with the Lord, and that journey will include the laying down of things we have already received and now hold precious.

A prayer: Lord I want everything you have spoken to me to bear fruit. I recognise I am not always good at understanding how to cooperate with you. I ask for enough wisdom to make the journey; enough courage to keep going when I cannot see the path ahead; enough humility to always acknowledge you as my source; and enough faith to respond with worship when you ask me to allow what is precious to me to enter into a level of death. Amen.

Chapter 8

Responding to the Prophetic

Prophecy is intended to be powerful and releasing of the future, so we want to be able to respond to the prophetic word correctly. A very significant part of responding to the prophetic is gaining an understanding of the language used. It is not that prophetic language is deliberately mystical, but there is often an ambiguity of language employed so that we will have to seek the Lord even further. And there are often phrases that cannot always be simply interpreted in a 'straight line' in the sense that we can proclaim that 'this definitely means that'. In this chapter I will examine some of the issues that will help us understand more deeply the prophetic so that we can respond in a clearer way.

Issues of timing are always important

Many people miss what the Lord is doing because they do not understand his timing. We can easily abandon the process that the Lord is leading us through simply because we have become weary as time has progressed. Two aspects about the Lord seem to be fairly self-evident when it comes to issues of timing:

- God is always on time

Scripture speaks of God working in 'the fullness of time'. He does things in due season. We simply have to learn to rest in the Lord knowing that he has the timing just right. God's apparent slowness to bring about a fulfilment will stretch our faith but the stretching of our faith is important.

- He always seems to take longer than we think he should

We are told in Scripture to

not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal. 6:9).

A delay is never a denial. Mary and Martha witnessed the amazing miracle of their brother rising from the dead, but before Jesus acted he stayed another two days longer where he was (John 11:6). He was in no hurry to get there but the delay was not motivated by a lack of compassion. We can, at times,

panic during the waiting period and try and force a premature fulfilment. By doing so we actually precipitate a delay in the actual fulfilment and this can even lead to the aborting of what the Lord has promised. When something opens up that looks to be the fulfilment we need confirmation that this is indeed the fulfilment – that confirmation will come as an over-riding peace in the heart (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15).

There is always a right time for the fulfilment of the word of the Lord. It says of Joseph that he was in captivity until the appointed time. We read that the captivity lasted ‘till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true’ (Ps. 105:19).

There are ‘suddenlies’ in Scripture (Acts 2:2) but the ‘suddenly’ of the Day of Pentecost followed a time of waiting. So even when a fulfilment takes place quickly it will have been preceded by a process. During such times of waiting we have to cultivate the word of the Lord within us, and allow him to change us so that we are ready for the fulfilment.

Prophetic ‘time’ terminology

If we were to hear such phrases as ‘now’, or ‘this day’ we would think short term and expect imminent fulfilments. However, we find such terminology in Scripture and that the actual fulfilment of those words is only after quite a period of time. Samuel prophesies judgment on Saul in the following words: ‘now your kingdom will not continue’. But Saul’s kingdom lasted in excess of another 10, or perhaps even 20 years (1 Sam. 13:14). Samuel later prophesies that ‘this day’ the kingdom was taken from him (1 Sam. 15:28). Again this takes years for the fulfilment to manifest.

A prophetic word that decrees something brings about a shift in the heavens, but it may be years later before we see the outworking of that decree in the natural realm. Should we need any convincing that words of declaration do not take place as quickly as we would expect we should consider the words of Jesus who announced that he would return *soon!*

When we hear words such as: ‘immediately’ this probably indicates that the fulfilment is anything from days to a few years away; ‘very soon’, ‘now’ or ‘this day’ probably indicates that the fulfilment is most likely quite a few years away.

And if the Lord speaks through a prophecy and says, ‘I will do such and such...’ with no time reference our responsibility is to wait in faith for the fulfilment. It is even possible that some fulfilments will take place in a future generation for we have to develop an ability to think generationally. There are aspects in our society that are here because of decisions taken generations ago. We, likewise, must make decisions now to affect the generations that are to come. Part of that will be to carry prophetic words faithfully even if they are not fulfilled in our lifetime.

While we wait for a self-fulfilment the Lord is producing in us such fruit as:

- patience (Rom. 5:3)
- wisdom (Rom. 8:28,31; 2 Cor. 4:15; 4:17)
- love – this is the primary character of Christ, and the opposite of self-centredness
- faith increases as we know that faith is developed in a time of testing
- clarity over the revelation that the Lord gave will increase

The greater the promise the more time it is likely to take to make the person ready for the fulfilment. We should also realise that quick 'success' normally ends in a quick fall. The lives of Saul and Solomon do not mature sufficiently to be able to hold the calling. The Lord wants to develop us in our private lives so that we can hold any public profile. He wishes to close the gap between what we are in public and what we are in private. If our public profile grows and there is a significant gap between the public and private aspect God will eventually allow what is private to be made known publicly. This explains the many falls in Scripture and in current ministries that we have read about.

There are often humbling experiences we go through. This is not because the Lord wants to humiliate us, but to work in us the humility that characterised Jesus. It is this humility worked into our lives that becomes our safeguard against a spiritual downfall. Failure, rejection and hiddenness will often accompany us as we journey seeking to respond to the Lord. The lives of such biblical characters as David, Joseph, Abraham and Moses all illustrate this. The issues of failure, rejection and hiddenness are not as important though as how we *respond* to those issues. How we respond can determine our future.

Another aspect of language we need to understand is when God says, 'I will do such and such for you....' that this does not normally mean that we will be passive observers. When God makes a promise it means that we will be called to be co-workers with him. The 'I will' soon becomes a 'we will' as he calls us to respond in active partnership with him.

Responding to personal prophecy

We understand that prophecy is:

- partial: it does not give us the whole picture.
- progressive: we gain more insight as time progresses.
- virtually always conditional: even when there are no conditions explicitly stated we will have to walk out the fulfilment in obedience to the Lord.

So will need to be willing to wait before him and seek his face, being shaped

by the prophetic word, and always being ready to go to a deeper place in our relationship with him in order to see a fulfilment take place.

We should pray over the word having received it, but it is advisable to do nothing different after the word than before unless the word itself instructed us to do that. David was looking after sheep the day before Samuel anointed him as future king of Israel. The day after Samuel left, David was found to be looking after sheep. The encounter was something that had to impact him *internally* but in the same context as he was in before. After the encounter the context was part of the training school that David was in so that his future call could be fulfilled.

After receiving a word we wait patiently for God to unfold his timetable. He will not be late but will (from our perspective) miss many opportunities to be early!

Some common hindrances to the fulfilment of prophecy

- Unbelief (Heb. 3:18-4:2). When a word is given it is good to make an initial response to the Lord by faith. I often say 'I receive it Lord' when I am being given a prophecy. I am not saying this uncritically as I know this word has to be weighed, but I want to send out a signal that I am open to the Lord. I cannot afford to allow cynicism and unbelief to enter.
- Mindsets. We all have preconceived ideas and ways of thinking that lock us in. We might have been taught to think a particular way and so are unable to think outside the box and thereby automatically exclude something the Lord has for us.
- Poor self-image. If our self-image has been damaged to the point where we cannot see who we are in Christ we will find it very difficult to receive the future that the prophetic word is speaking of. If all we can see is that our circumstances, family background or failure disqualifies us, we will not be in a place to receive from the Lord. There is no saint in God who did not have a past that needed to be dealt with, and there is no sinner who cannot have their past dealt with and become someone in God.
- Impatience. I cannot apologise for bringing this up yet again. When we are not willing to wait for God and his timing we will find that we are raising an enormous blockage to the fulfilment of prophecy.
- Misapplication or misinterpretation of prophecy. When we misunderstand prophecy we will set a course that will not be toward the fulfilment but away from it
- Pride. God has to deal with our pride in order that we can walk into what he has for us. God wants to appoint us to a position of true spiritual authority (and we are not to confuse earthly titles with spiritual authority) but any appointment can lead to pride. Pride is destructive and brings

with it a downfall. So the Lord requires that we give attention to the depth of our lives, and then he will look after the breadth of our influence.

- Disappointment and disillusionment. Past failure can leave a block on us so that we will not risk again. Failure in itself is not a problem – how we respond to it will determine if there is a problem or not. We can either rise up above past failure or we can let it dictate our future. If we let disappointment dominate us it will prevent us finding a future fresh appointment.
- Blame shifting and self-deception. We must be willing to take responsibility for our own lives. Jesus said that offences would come to us all. But we are not to take offence and then blame others for our situation. Joseph understood that what others had done to him out of jealousy and revenge the Lord turned for good (Gen. 50:20). God can use what others have done if we allow him to work in us. We have to take full responsibility for our own attitudes and reactions if we expect the Lord to fulfil his word to us.
- Disobedience. There are promises to us when we are willing and obedient and warnings to us when we resist and rebel (Is. 1:19-20). If we yield to the Lord we will find ourselves flowing under his mercy. If we resist him and insist on our own ways and values we will discover how frustrating it is to live seeking to make our own pathway in life.

The need to make a right response: Elisha and Jehoash

Jehoash, the king of Israel, made a good response to the prophetic word when it was given, but did not hold through with that good response and as a result the prophetic word was watered down considerably (2 Kings 13:14-21).

The passage tells us that with the prophet's help (Elisha placed his hands on the king's hands) the king shot the arrows from the bow out of the open window. He then received a very clear prophetic word. Elisha says to him,

The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram... You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek (13:16-17).

Then *without* any help from the prophet the king is instructed to strike the ground with his arrows. The king does not respond with great enthusiasm and only struck the ground three times. The telling words are that he 'stopped' (13:18-19). Elisha then revised the word in the light of the king's response. This time Elisha says,

You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times. (13:19).

The word is modified within minutes of being given (the prophecy being conditional) because of the king's reserved response. The final outcome is that the anointing that Elisha carried is lost to the land, for it goes to the grave with him (13:20-21).

When we hear a word from a prophetic voice it is as if their hand is placed on ours, and we receive the help of their faith and gift. There will, however, normally come a time when we will have to hold through with what the Lord has said without help from external sources. At that time we will have to contend for the word so that it really does become 'flesh' in us. We will have to strike the land so that our situation responds to the promise of the Lord.

A prayer: teach me to respond. I am not always good at waiting. Or, if I wait, I wait passively. Teach me to wait patiently, clothed in what you have spoken. Teach me to establish what you have said. Help me declare that your word is true, and help me manifest the truth and power of your word. Thank you for calling me to be a co-worker. Amen.

Chapter 9

Prophecy and Creativity

Prophecy is intended to communicate the heart of the Lord into a given situation. Heaven is a colourful place and our God is a creative God. We even read that he created the trees because they were pleasing to the eyes as well as bearing good fruit (Gen. 2:9). So we know that when it comes to communication he does not communicate in the same way each time. By contrast we can easily fall into the trap of delivering a word simply through speech. In Scripture there are a variety of ways that the prophets communicated. Prophetic actions were very common, and it is generally held that many prophetic utterances were delivered as songs. Certainly many prophetic oracles were in the form of poetry, and there is evidence that prophecy and psalmody had been very close at one time in their development.

Prophets were more than those who declared words, their activities were often characterised by signs. Signs are more than visual aids. They do more than illustrate the word – they actually make the word visible, and in some way cause what is being signified to be made manifest. So as well as imprinting the word on the mind of the audience (we remember more when we can also see what we are listening to), signs would have been understood, in the biblical context, as the means by which something came to pass or was made manifest – this is similar to the theological concept of a sacrament.

Sacraments and prophetic actions enact or bring to pass what they symbolise. They become the connecting point between the unseen realm of spiritual reality and the seen realm of material reality. They bring this about, not in some magical way (this is where abuse comes in) but in an effective way when instructed by the Lord and endued with faith. The very thing enacted brings into the seen realm the unseen reality it points to.

Hence anointing with oil, pouring wine on the ground for cleansing, striking the ground with arrows (2 Kings 13), etc., are all used to help manifest the unseen realities that they signify.

The creative arts such as song, dance, painting, sculpting, acting and the like are so strongly in this category of prophetic activity that I believe the enemy has planned to take possession of them so that they do not bring about all they could for God but are harnessed to this demonic purposes. As

we develop a theology of spirituality that is bigger we will need to engage more strongly in seeking to recover these various art forms for the kingdom of God. As we do so the arts will do more than engage the senses, they will help incarnate what they illustrate and what they are enacting.

A good example of dramatically enacted prayer is when Elijah prays for the rain to come. By crouching down and putting his face between his knees he was adopting the position of the middle-eastern woman giving birth (1 Kings 18:42). Elijah was pregnant with the word of the Lord that there will be rain so he now must bring it forth. He does not go into this position to manipulate God, but as he yielded to what he was carrying the very position he took up was the dramatic illustration of his burden.

We are not all ‘artistic’... but we are creative.

God is a creator. This statement is saying more than the fact that he created. His very nature is to create, to make, and to fashion. And through his creativity he speaks, for he communicates through what he makes. Scripture even says that we are his workmanship (his *poiema* (Gk), from which we get our word poem; we are truly his creative piece of writing; Ephes. 2:10).

We are created in his image so in the very word ‘image’ is a call for us to engage with him in his creativity. Although we might be limited in our artistic abilities we are encouraged to step out in creative ways. Our ability to imagine and to create, to express something through a physical action or shape is part of our inheritance as those made in the image of the Creator.

With all prophecy we should be asking how best we can communicate what we have to give. Once we think beyond the words we can stir our imagination to consider what would add weight to the words. We might come up with some actions that could even make words redundant. ‘Actions speak louder than words’, is a saying that is very true when it comes to prophecy. Jesus enacted prophecies many times. In response to the leper who asked Jesus if he was willing to heal him, Jesus demonstrated he was willing to heal by touching him. His touch spoke louder than any words. He both cursed the fig tree and cleansed the Temple as very dramatic signs to Israel. Those signs were well understood and very quickly his opponents were planning on how to get rid of him. Not all signs, however, will be understood. Some signs will go beyond what we understand with our minds but they will touch our spirits; other signs will leave people wondering for days to come as to what the Lord was saying through the signs.

Those who have walked the land in prayer are doing more than putting legs to their prayers. Their very movement is a prophetic prayer. I once wore sack-cloth to a three-day long event as a sign that something was passing away. The imagery said that we were no longer to sit within the old framework but to embrace the new that the Lord was releasing. I have witnessed

someone prophesying while standing on their head proclaiming that the Lord was turning everything the right way up, and that we could only understand what he was doing if we were willing to see things from a new perspective. In Brazil I witnessed someone blowing loudly on a whistle, indicating that God was calling time on certain spiritual bondages. The whistle indicated an end and a new beginning. There were testimonies from some that as the whistle blew they had an instant spiritual encounter.

Many other examples could be quoted, and the few I have mentioned are simply some of the ways in which prophetic actions have been expressed in recent years. Beyond the examples quoted I would encourage us to consider areas such as painting, sculpture, wall hangings, tapestry, drama, dance, photography, mime, poetry, music, giving a present, sending a card... the list can simply go on.

Images are important and in our broken society images that speak of family, fatherhood, motherhood, masculinity, femininity, sonship and daughterhood are so vital. The creative person who has been touched by the Spirit can be led to address the negative images found in society and replace them with wholesome images that can become images that speak of healing (Rev. 22:2).

Some biblical examples of creativity

- Bezalel (Exod. 31:3) is recorded as being filled with the Holy Spirit. His God-given ('natural' talent) was yielded to the purposes of God. His involvement in helping to construct the tabernacle meant that he was used by God to communicate heaven's realities to people. The tabernacle was designed to be the connecting point of heaven and earth. The creative gifts were a main element in enabling this connecting point to be effective.
- In 2 Kings 2: Elijah took Elisha on a journey. They went from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel through Jericho to the Jordan. Elijah effectively took Elisha on a 'pilgrimage' through some key historic sites in Israel's history. This journey together was nothing less than a prophetic journey through the history of Israel which related deeply to the issue of receiving a 'double portion'.
- Hosea's married a woman who had become a prostitute and that was a sign to the people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel were all strongly sign prophets. God spoke to them through signs and they spoke to the people through signs. One example is Ezekiel 4, where he builds a model of the siege against the city of Jerusalem and then lies on one side for so many days, then on his other side for so many days – each day signified a year in the history of Israel.
- And as already mentioned, Jesus cursed the fig tree and cleansed the

Temple as prophetic signs to the nation (Mark 11:12-25).

Practically

Although some will engage more powerfully with the area of creativity than others, we all need to awaken our senses. We need to allow the Lord to speak through all of creation. The more we get used to the Lord speaking to us in this way the more likely we are to connect with objects around us that might communicate powerfully to others the word of the Lord. So I suggest that we take note of objects and signs that communicate to us, and be constantly open to God highlighting fresh ways of communicating through such things.

Another important aspect is to seek to interpret what we go through. This is vital if the Lord leads us to have a prophetic ministry as we will discover that our own lives are not privatised away somewhere, and if we are called to be a sign-prophet we will have no choice in this if we are going to grow in the prophetic. We can either resign ourselves to self-pity when our circumstances are not what we would wish, or we can find the Lord in our circumstances and discover that he is using them to speak to us, and if he speaks to us then perhaps he will go on to speak through us. As I write this chapter I have become very aware that I am now living in a household that has within it three generations. In 1991 I prophesied that the Lord was calling for three generations to work together within one 'house', and that too often in previous times the generations had not held together. Now I have to model something in a physical home (as the eldest of three generations) as to what that might look like, how it affects our inter-relationships and even finances. I could just view the situation as not being ideal, or I can learn from it and perhaps as I submit to the Lord, I might even find a word developing in my spirit for other people elsewhere. Seeking to interpret what we are going through will push us beyond being simply word based in your experience and communication.

Perhaps a good practice is to collect objects, poems, writings, cards, pictures (the list is endless) that the Lord impresses on us. At a later date we might well end up using them as we give them away to signify the word of the Lord to someone.

And finally, go experiment.....

Chapter 10

Prophecy and Justice

Old Testament prophets were not comfortable people to be around. When they saw injustice and oppression they did not normally approach the situation politely but would speak out vehemently against shallowness and corruptness. Because this was so much part of the prophetic call we do not read of those who were asking for the job of prophet! Rather the prophets were conscious of being called by God and they subsequently lived with a sense of awesome inner compulsion. Many prophets had a disagreement with the world they lived within. But their disagreement was one that they did not find easy to live with. They loved the world and their society but knew that they had to speak out against certain wrongs so that there could be a new future.

'Justice' was the benchmark that they used to measure society around them. The prophet Micah sums up the requirements of the Lord in this context. He said,

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)

It is sad that too often we have seen a divide between the issues of justice and what is often termed 'prophecy'. Sometimes those who have prophesied have even been used to defend oppressive structures rather than speak out for the marginalised. What the Lord has put together, too often has been pulled apart. Hence the need for a chapter that at least introduces us to this central aspect of biblical reality: the call for justice.

Some time ago while in a conference on prophecy, the Lord spoke to me in a way that was not an audible voice but was as clear as an audible voice. We had just begun to sing a song about these being the days of Ezekiel, when I heard this:

These are the days of Amos, I am now raising up an Amos generation

I knew that Amos had been one who called for justice, and that he was also someone who did not come from a prophetic school. So I realised that God was raising up a new wave of prophetic ministry that would major on issues of injustice and that in this wave that there would be new manifestations to prophetic ministry. Calling for justice is not a comfortable aspect. It is not comfortable for the ones who prophesy or for the hearers.

Although we are to be good citizens of our society our primary citizenship has to be heavenly (Phil. 3:20) and so can never pledge allegiance to any earthly system. We will be good citizens but not always those who will be easy to live with! We must honour and be faithful to the earthly and national situation where we have been placed, but every national aspect of life has to be submitted to our heavenly calling. And for the kingdom of God to advance this does not mean that our nation has to prosper.

From the foundations of creation we read that God created men and women equal in the image of God, and the prophets echo God's great concern for all humanity to experience and enjoy a just society built on true equity. So prophets are not there just to hear the voice of God, they are to know, and to make known, the heart and mind of God who is in essence, a God of justice. Thus for prophetic people there is the very real challenge to see a justice perspective impact every aspect of their life and ministry.

Archaeologists of biblical lands have discovered periods in history when houses were of a similar size and the spread of resources reflected relative equality between the people. In those periods we actually have less record for the activity of prophets. Perhaps there was no great need for prophets because God had very little to address in society. However, during periods such as the eighth century BC, archaeological evidence has been uncovered showing great gaps between rich and poor, and it is in those times that prophets emerge, it is then that they rise up and call for justice and it is then that we even read that they released the judgments of God.

Justice language

Jesus introduced a new order into the world. He called it the kingdom of God. The requirement of the kingdom of God is first of all that we recognise that there is one rightful king and that he calls us to enter his kingdom through repentance. To enter his kingdom means to come under his rule, to allow his values to shape us. The central term that is used for his values is that of 'righteousness'. This is a covenant term and did not simply refer to something internal. It referred to a response to God but a response that was outworked socially. The word itself means 'justice' every bit as much as it means to be rightly related to the Lord.

Matthew introduces us early on to Jesus' manifesto for his followers. We call it 'The Sermon on the Mount'. In this lifestyle agenda we read of

Jesus' call for justice and righteousness. We cannot legitimately reduce righteousness to describe our spiritual relationship with the Lord as if spirituality was divorced from the social realities around us. In that sermon Jesus focuses on our relationship with those around us and how we live. Our beliefs have to outwork in right behaviour. James puts this very strongly when he calls for a demonstration of our faith through our activities (Jas. 2:18).

Justice and Jesus

In the context of justice the prophets echo God's pain,

The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him and his own righteousness sustained him...the Redeemer will come." (Is 59:8-20).

Jesus was that redeemer who came in the zeal of the Lord to call for and establish justice. He clothed himself in the armour of the Lord and established a new order of *shalom*, subduing all hostile powers in the process. His baptism by John illustrates this powerfully. He stood in the gap to 'fulfil all righteousness' on behalf of his nation. Israel, God's covenant people, had failed to fulfil all righteousness. As followers of Jesus we too have to follow his example and to stand in the gap where righteousness has not been fulfilled.

A stand for justice will not always be popular and Jesus said that there would be those who would be persecuted for their stand on issues of righteousness (justice). Persecuted, not simply because they were trying to live lives that were privately moral, but because they realised that the Lord of heaven and earth was calling for injustices to be righted. In realising that the Lord was calling for justice they were seeking to live socially in the light of that call and also were willing to make known that this was required. Does that make such followers popular? No. But it most certainly makes them prophetic.

In Luke's gospel we read that Jesus used the reading from Isaiah 61 to encapsulate his ministry. His ministry was to be one of establishing justice and he made specific mention of proclaiming the time of Jubilee (the year of the Lord's favour). The time of Jubilee was when debts were to be cancelled, when slaves were to go free, when the inequalities in society were to be reversed (as outlined in Leviticus 25).

Jesus humbled himself, not just in the sense of becoming incarnate, but while in the context of his earthly Jewish life, he constantly lived the life of humility. He refused status, position and privilege. He demonstrated justice through:

- regular interaction with the poorest and the most marginalised in society. He ate with sinners, he talked to Samaritans, to women, to outcasts such as lepers, and he welcomed the children.
- confronting hypocrisy, ruling powers that placed undue weights on people, and false perceptions of the Father.
- exposing the corruption in the Temple.
- healing (often by touch) the sick, removing demonic oppression and calling for a re-distribution of wealth (Luke 19).
- promising that justice would come quickly for those who 'call out to God day and night' (Luke 18:6-8).
- commanding his followers to give to the poor and needy and for all giving to be clothed in 'justice, mercy and faithfulness' (Matt. 23:23).
- giving stern warnings to the rich, privileged and popular. Jesus stated in no uncertain terms let it be known that those who were rich, well fed and popular were not blessed. He said to them 'woe to you' (Lk. 6:24-26).

Justice and biblical prophets

One of the tasks of prophetic ministry is to nurture and evoke dreams that will capture the imagination about the possibility of an alternative to the dominant culture around us. Through those dreams actions will spring up from the grassroots that demonstrate alternative possibilities. Many times prophetic communities will arise that sit on the margins of society but they will be communities that image something of heaven's equity. Alongside such grassroots (and often ignored) communities there will be those that the Lord raises up who will become radical reformers and champion justice in the public arena. Here are some biblical examples of those who were raised up in that public sphere:

- Joseph: he became a national leader in Egypt empowered to prepare for a coming famine and then provide aid during that famine.
- Moses: he was used by God to liberate a whole people from slavery and to lead them out from under the empire of his day, calling them to become a nation that exhibited radical justice.
- David: he was touched by God to rule wisely, and we can read in many of the psalms how his understanding echoed God's bias toward the marginalised and oppressed.
- Isaiah: his voice was one that called God's people to remember and maintain justice among themselves. He was one who called for reformation.
- Ezekiel: one of his main challenges was over issues of the neglect of

the poor and the oppression that resulted from unrighteous trade.

- Daniel: he was a national leader raised up to serve alongside the royal court in administering justice.
- Amos: his voice was raised against corruption in economic practices as well as the effects of dead religious rituals.
- Micah: he confronted false-prophets, the cycles of sin that had not been broken and he re-envisioned the people calling for a commitment to exercise justice.
- John the Baptist: he called for repentance not just over personal moral issues but over attitudes to money and abuse of position.
- James; the brother of Jesus called for 'faith in action' that addressed suffering that was being experienced from unjust pay and work conditions.

In all of the above we realise that morality and righteousness cannot be reduced to a privatised part of our lives. Prophets spoke up on behalf of the marginalised and called the powerful to account and to repentance.

Justice, prophetic community and society

The former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, is quoted as saying, 'We believe in a God who created humanity in his own image. I refuse to believe in a God who is poor, starving and illiterate'. It is the passionate belief in a God who restores and gives dignity to all that is behind the prophetic call for justice. It is that passion that enabled prophets to conquer kingdoms and administer justice (Heb. 11:33).

It would be a tragedy if in our desire to see prophetic gifts restored that we only saw personal words relating to the blessing of God released. But it would be wonderful if through the restoration of prophecy a new emphasis on justice could be heard. If the church has foundations that are laid by apostles and prophets (Ephes. 2:20) we should be entering a time when those with a prophetic call will enable Christian communities to spring up that are committed to justice being demonstrated among themselves, and who also work for justice in their wider community.

In the light of the call for justice we say: Let the empires of our day again be challenged by a people who are motivated by a different set of values, who follow another king and through the gift of the Spirit bring together every dimension of the prophetic. Let there be major inbreakings of supernatural wisdom and knowledge, and let there be major outworkings of the call of Jesus. Let God's just kingdom be manifest.

Will all prophets major on issues of justice? Probably not. But if a justice perspective does not clothe all we do perhaps we will be found to be naked and exposed.

Chapter 11

Prophetic Ministry

Prophecy is a gift for all to move in: the Spirit that comes at Pentecost is the Spirit of prophecy. The Reformation taught us that the priesthood of all believers was a New Testament reality. We do not need an intermediary to go before God on our behalf, for even those who once were afar off have been brought near through the cross (Ephes. 2:13). This view of the priesthood of all believers has to be endorsed but we also have to insist on the 'prophethood of all believers'. All of God's people have received the Spirit of Christ and that Spirit is indeed the Spirit of prophecy. Perhaps as we hold true to the priesthood of all believers and see a developing understanding of the widespread distribution of prophetic gifts that we will then learn that we are also a *kingdom* of priests: that as a community we are to rule in the heavens so that our society is touched by heaven's peace (Rev. 1:6).

The gift of prophecy is indeed widespread, but the office and ministry of the prophet is not open to all. It is one of the 'five-fold' ministries that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4 (some understand this as a four-fold list with teacher and pastor joined together). We must never let terminology offend us, and Jesus warned us not to be focused on titles. For some of us it might be more comfortable to use the term 'prophetic ministry', but we should also recognise that the New Testament uses the term prophet (and apostle). We are not to be elevated through a title nor are we to elevate others by giving them titles, but we must also press in so that we see greater manifestations of the ministry gifts.

If someone is called by the Lord to become a prophet they will grow in the gift of prophecy, and they will continue to give personal words, but their main task will not be that of delivering personal words for edification. Their call will be to help shape churches, cities and even nations. They will be used by the Lord to understand times and to rightly align people and situations time-wise. They will be like the tribe of Issachar of whom we read that they, 'understood the times and knew what Israel should do' (1 Chron. 12:32). This tribe is referred to here and also in Judges 5:15 during a time of significant transition. In times of uncertainty they did not wait to see what the outcome would be, but gave themselves to shaping the outcome as they were convinced that the season they were in was one of transition. For them, transition demanded action, and the action had to have a forward momentum. Prophets will help discern seasons of transition, they will then embody the

transition personally, and indicate the direction that the people should move in through their words and actions.

In the light of the calling there will tend to be a greater depth in what a prophet brings when compared to what is brought by someone who is operating at the level of the gift of prophecy. We cannot draw up a set of rules as to what a prophet will do and what will take place through someone moving in the gift of prophecy, but the comments below will illustrate some typical aspects of prophetic ministry that go beyond the normal manifestation of the gift of prophecy. Prophets will be used by the Lord to:

- provide direction (1 Kings 22:7; 2 Kings 5:10).
- bring correction (Ezek. 3:18).
- pronounce divine decrees of judgment and blessing (there are numerous Old Testament examples of prophets moving in this even with respect to words over nations; Revelation, in the New Testament, is a prophetic book that pronounces judgment).
- bring higher levels of revelation knowledge and even make predictions.
- provide foundational levels of ministry (Ephes. 2:20).
- anoint ministries and impart gifts (1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 19:16; 1 Tim. 4:14).

Although there is the distinct office of 'prophet' and such a person will be trained through the discipline of the Lord the same principles of discipline will be applicable to anyone operating in the realm of prophecy. The requirements on a prophet will be more stringent than on someone else, as the prophet is called to move in the areas outlined above much more consistently than others who are operating at the level of the gift, but who do not stand in that office.

Without a doubt the main tool of the prophet is that of revelation. Prophetic gifts often are stirred as a result of inspiration, but there is a difference between inspiration and revelation. As a person progresses in the gift of prophecy they will increasingly move in the realm of revelation. Dreams, night visions, and words of knowledge will become more frequent.

Inspiration and revelation

Inspiration takes place whenever there is a move of the Spirit. This will often be when we gather together and we are 'inspired' by the manifest presence of God. This even happened to Saul when he came in touch with the prophets, and as a result he began to prophesy. (1 Sam. 10:9-11). Although he was not a prophet the dramatic impact on his life meant the question was asked, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' The effects of inspiration can be most dramatic.

Revelation, however, goes deeper than inspiration. Revelation is not so affected by, nor dependent on, an environment. What is 'seen' will not simply be because of a 'spiritual' environment. The challenge that came to the prophets was always the fundamental challenge of, 'what do you see?' (Jer. 1:11,13; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Luke 7:44).

Prophets were actually known as 'seers' before they were known as 'prophets' (1 Sam. 9:9; Amos 1:1), thus indicating the essential element that revelation has to play in the life of the prophet. (There are those who are 'seer prophets' who operate for the majority of their ministry from a visionary basis. They have to wait before the Lord until they see. They tend to operate a little slower than the prophets who speak out of a flow from their spirits. But even those that are not 'seer' prophets will flow out of revelation. That revelation might not always be in the form of visions or dreams but nevertheless it will be based on what they are seeing.)

In Amos 3:7 we read that revelation is given to prophets prior to the events that will take place. The level of partnership the Lord is looking for with prophets is indeed both very high and very demanding. This revelation that comes to prophets before events is not always something that is external and objective; it is not simply that of receiving information about what is to take place. The revelation is normally incarnated in the life and circumstances of the prophets. They will live out what they are going to prophesy; they will live through what the Lord is saying to the land (Isaiah. 8:18).

Prophets will often live through what is going to manifest in the next phase, or they might even experience something symbolic relating to the next phase. A prophet friend of mine carried for a long time that a certain city would experience a flood which would mark a turning point in the city's spiritual journey. He prayed by the river and was saying, 'Lord I don't know how big a flood is coming, all I need is for the river to break its banks.' As he prayed this he was absolutely deluged by a flood of water as a vehicle drove past him through a vast puddle of water. That was his answer. Sometimes then the revelation is through incarnating the reality of what is to come, and at other times through experiencing a sign that points to what is to come.

Prophets, prophecy and prayer

Elijah as a prophet was an example of someone who persevered in prayer. He was just like us but prayed earnestly that it would not rain (Jas. 5:17). It seems to me that he prayed earnestly because he aligned himself so closely to whatever the Lord was saying. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah said that there would be no more rain until he said so. He did not say this because he was arrogant thinking that he could control the weather but because he aligned himself to whatever the Lord said. He did not set out an easy path for himself. Perhaps he prayed earnestly because his own integrity was on the line. If there were clouds in the sky I am sure he would have given himself to prayer so that the

word he had spoken was fulfilled. Likewise he prayed earnestly after proclaiming the drought would be over (1 Kings 18:1, 41-44).

His identification with the word of the Lord was so strong that he could say what the Lord said was what he said, and vice versa. As he stood in the presence of the Lord he had one purpose and that was to serve the Lord's purposes.

It is also worth noting that once he had prophesied he had to pay a personal price. When the rains dried up his brook eventually dried up also (1 Kings 17:7). Prophets will never be immune from the effects that take place within their land and community, for they will identify with the people and carry the situation in prayer. Prophets are normal human beings, but they must embrace their circumstances discerning where they need to resist the devil, but even then they have to discover what the Lord was working in and through them in the circumstances (Gen. 50:20).

Prayer goes through three stages:

In the realm of prophetic intercession there are three basic phases that prayer goes through. It begins as prayer for revelation, passes through a phase of prayer for release, but will end in prayer that realises what has been carried over a period of time.

- Prayer for revelation

In the place of prayer and meditation there comes a time when revelation will form. This can take place in a moment of time but more often it is something that grows over a period of time. This aspect is vital as nothing leaves heaven until it has been revealed, for the Lord does nothing without first revealing it to his servants the prophets). Revelation is vital and without it there is a lack of restraint, a lack of focus on what the Lord is calling for (Prov. 29:18). True revelation needs to be carried and nurtured and there have been times when genuine heaven-inspired revelation has not come to fulfilment because the revelation was not carried full-term.

- Prayer for release

Once we have seen something through revelation we have to persist in prayer so that we do not forget what we have seen. Revelation must be kept alive through consistent prayer and the rehearsing of what has been seen. As we do so it will open up the possibility of further revelation and it will also maintain the connection to heaven. Then, as we continue in that vein, we will begin to pray for and see the release of the revelation from heaven to earth. Although the revelation is not literally travelling through space, it is as if we have made a connection to heaven's 'space' through revelation and then in prayer are pulling that revelation to our space and time. Persistent prayer then will press in until we gain confidence that something is in motion.

- Prayer for realisation

It is vital that we get things moving toward our situation. This means that what was once in heaven is now being released toward the earth (Matt. 6:10). Then we must press through even further, right through to the point of connection, where what was once simply a revelation that we saw by faith becomes the context within which we live. Elisha requested the double portion anointing (this was the right of inheritance for the first born – Deut. 21:17), and Elijah replied saying that he had asked a difficult thing. Not difficult in that the Lord was reluctant to give it, but it would prove difficult for Elisha to receive as he could only receive it if he persisted in travelling the full extent of the journey set out for him (2 Kings 2:10).

Prophets have to learn to journey right to the end, and they have to be there to encourage a people to journey to the end. Beginnings (revelation) are so important, embarking on the journey is vital (release), but completing the task set before us (realisation) is what we have to do. For prophets to help others they have to experience this aspect themselves.

Prophets and their sphere

We all have to learn what our sphere of influence is. A prophet can be powerfully anointed in one area but not in another. Given that a prophet's anointing might not be as strong across every expression of prophetic ministry it is important that a prophet learns to stay within the sphere of their particular anointing. These spheres can relate to such areas as:

- **timings and dates:** some prophets have an accuracy with respect to dates but some do not have the same level of accuracy. Some prophesy accurately as far as the past is concerned, but when they come to future predictions make mistakes.
- **territories:** we have to discern where we have been given territorial authority and where we have not. If we try to exercise the same level of authority wherever we travel we are likely to find that we soon go too far and find ourselves being exposed to a needless level of attack.
- **different phases of a journey:** Some are called to release events through initial words but are not always gifted to work through the follow up. Many prophets are gifted to work short term not long term. Others have a gift that functions best when situations are not working well – their call is to sort things out and get things moving; others have a gift that keeps things moving upward once foundations have been cleared.

Another aspect that has to be considered is the difference between those who are called to be prophets to the church and those called to be prophets within the church. (And by the term 'church' I am meaning a defined Christian community of people who journey corporately.)

Prophets to and in the church

We desperately need those who will exercise their prophetic ministry in the context of Christian community. They have the pain of knowing, that within that context, they might not be received as they should (Matt. 13:57). Their words might not be received with as much weight as could be. Their calling is to live prophetically, to carry the burden, and as they do that it opens the way for others to come and minister into that community prophetically.

When operating among the people that we live with there are also the challenges of prophesying from what is known, or from vested interest. So this is indeed a difficult place to operate within. Then there is the further pain of listening to someone else coming in and prophesying something that we have been carrying faithfully but the person from outside is heard! That pain is all part of the wonderful world of being disciplined by the Spirit.

There are also prophets who are prophets *to* the church. (And in some situations a person might be a prophet *in* the church while in another setting they are a prophet *to* the church). The prophets who are prophets to the church (Christian community) are often received with greater honour. Prophets to the church come with an authority that the Lord has given them but we must still remember that no one can impose something from the outside and demand compliance with what is brought. Prophets who come to a community are no exception to that. There are right protocols of respecting the leadership in a community.

Prophets and leadership

This is often such a challenging area. It has always been a challenge and will increasingly become a challenge as the Lord shakes, and even pulls down, the walls that have been erected to define church. (Sadly, too often the walls that were there to define and protect have become prison walls that have locked people in from discovering their destiny. It is sad to live in a prison, to be allowed to exercise within certain boundaries and then to be told that this is the freedom that the Lord promised.)

Within a community there are those that God has appointed as guardians. They are not appointed as some type of policing community to keep us out of trouble, but they are appointed by the Lord to help protect the environment so that the gifts and calling within the people of that community can flourish. Their responsibility is for what comes in and goes out of the gates of that community. Part of their responsibility is to help people grow in God so that they can ask the hard question without losing their love for the Lord Jesus.

These 'gatekeepers' have to be bold enough to invite prophets to come and input such communities. Prophetic people within those communities and prophets to those communities must partner with such gatekeepers to see the

body released and come to a new level of maturity. Ministry gifts are here to impart and bring release, and their input is so necessary to any Christian community in order that there the body is trained and released to do the work of service.

Sadly, we need to note that there have been those who have used different expressions of the body to establish their ministry. That is a perversion of the calling that is on the ministry gifts. Paul expressed the vision he carried in the total opposite way, for he said that ministries were here to establish the body in its ministry. Jesus had said the same thing earlier. He stated that it was better that he left so that the disciples could do the work of ministry being empowered by the Spirit (John 16:7; 14:12).

We have to see communities who are willing to walk a journey with those who are called to be prophets. As they walk together tensions might well rise, but tensions can be worked through where there is genuine humility.

Prophetic ministry and motivation

To be able to speak on behalf of the One true God is a high privilege. The central aspect that has to motivate the prophet is to know that they have been approved of by the Lord, for what they have said and how they have spoken. To know that they have answered in the affirmative and with integrity the question, 'Is there any word from the Lord?', is what they want to know (Jer. 37:17).

If a prophet knows that the Lord has used them to help people discover their destiny and calling then they are contented.

Those are the elements that motivate a prophet. Or at least those aspects are what should motivate them. If they are motivated by position, money, or adulation they will find that they walk a lonely and insecure path. This is time for the prophets to rise up who cannot be bought, and who are serious about fulfilling their call so that the next generation can go further than the current one.

Prophetic teams

Prophets are not to be those who operate alone. Prophets to the church, as well as those who are prophets within the church, should be those who live and work within community. Those who are truly representing the Lord will be those who are known and accountable, and they will work with the body as a whole and with those who are in responsibility.

They will also work with other prophets. It is important for prophets that they find other prophets to mix with. This will sharpen their gift but also soften them as people. The concept of what was called schools or companies of prophets is not just an Old Testament concept. One of the best known New

Testament prophets is Agabus, and he did not act alone. In Acts 11:27, he appears and speaks of a coming famine, but he is present as one *among* a team of prophets. He then appears again in Caesarea and in the context of other prophetic people, for this is where Philip had four daughters who prophesy (Acts 21:8-11). Another example of prophets working together is in Acts 15:32, where Luke says that Judas and Silas were prophets who worked together.

When prophets deliberately work together it is often termed a prophetic presbytery. (1 Timothy 4:14 is often used to endorse that practice, and although the body of elders mentioned in that Scripture might not be referring to what is often called a prophetic presbytery, this term is still a suitable description to give to deliberate working together of prophets.) When prophets come together in that way, to prophesy together into lives or a situation, it is essential that there is no competition between them but that they flow together. If they can do that then the level of revelation will increase considerably.

Another way in which prophets need to work together is in the context of a roundtable. In such a context they come together as equals, to share their revelation, come to a consensus so that a corporate word can be released.

Prophets and teachers are another combination that should work together (Acts 13:1-3). They both handle the word of God but in different ways. The prophet wants to communicate the big picture and the relevant 'now' word. The teacher wants to break the word down so that it can be inwardly digested, and the word must relate to the eternal (and balanced) revelation that is found in Scripture. This can produce a tension that can pull them apart, or a tension that pull them as ministries to a new level. Prophets working with apostles is another powerful combination (Ephes. 2:20). It takes the prophet to pave the way for a new wave of apostolic ministry to come through, so often in a new phase of God's activity it is the prophets who emerge first, sometimes in conflict with the apostles of the precious move of God, but it is the prophets who must faithfully proclaim a new dimension of apostolic ministry.

Knowing one's identity as a prophetic ministry

All function flows safely out knowing who we are. If our identity is found from our function we will be setting ourselves up for a major fall. John the Baptist was asked, 'who are you?' How he handled that question is most instructive to any aspiring prophet – and is also generally applicable to all believers (John 1:19-28).

John knew he was the fulfilment of the promise of Malachi 4; that promise being that one would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. John as

fulfilment of that promise was confirmed by Gabriel (Luke 1:17) and by Jesus (Matt. 11:14). Two very powerful witnesses! Further, John would have been taught by his parents that this was his calling, and it seem clear through John's choice of geographical location that he self-consciously lived from this identity. When we put all this together we can say that John knew that he was the 'Elijah' of promise. But when he was asked if he was 'Elijah', he flatly denied it.

A prophet who is going to go the distance and fulfil their calling has to know inwardly who they are. They will eventually have to stand in that clear identity that they are a prophet. John stood in that identity, and so must we if the Lord has called us in that way. Yet in spite of knowing who he was he vehemently denied being the very person he knew he was. He said he was not 'Elijah'. What can we learn from this?

First, I believe it teaches us that we are not to fight to prove who we are. If there are those who do not receive us, we are to keep our peace and take the path of humility. Ironically John's answer was more a comment on those who asked the question than a disclosure of his own identity. Jesus said that John was the Elijah of promise *if* people were able to receive him as such (Matt. 11:14). By implication if people did not receive him as Elijah, then to and for them, he would not be Elijah. They would still be looking for another fulfilment and they would prove to be the ones who were mistaken.

If people do not receive us, that is not our problem. It might indicate that it is actually their problem. If they do not receive us it is certainly not an indication that we are to fight to prove anything. It heralds that we are to be of humble heart, to bless, and to continue to be faithful to the Lord's calling.

Secondly, I believe we have to learn that we cannot be sidetracked to prove a point. John, called to fulfil that Elijah-ministry, knew that he had to fulfil it. However, in one sense, although he was called to be the Elijah of promise, the jury was still out on him. He had to prepare a way for the Lord to come. If he had taken time out to prove his credentials it is almost certain that he would have moved away from his calling, by seeking to prove that he was Elijah he would have failed to live up to that calling. We cannot afford to miss our way. We, and all those called to be prophetic, have a job to do. Let us fulfil that and then let it be said with hindsight, 'they must have been prophets'.

There is a calling to be fulfilled and not a title to be grabbed. Let the jury remain out on who we are. If we are called of God to act and speak prophetically it is in order to establish something beyond ourselves. It is not to establish ourselves, but those who come after us. If we are going to be successful in that we will have to be clear in our own identity and not demand that others recognise us.

There are many prophetic flows

In an earlier chapter we mentioned the three main means of receiving insight and revelation from the Lord. We mentioned sight, hearing and sensing. We also related those to personality leanings. Prophets will also tend toward one of the above three mentioned aspects, but there are two other prophetic flows worth mentioning:

There is what is often called '*nabi*' prophesying. The Hebrew word *nabi* is a normal word for prophet in the Old Testament. The root of the word is to do with something that 'springs up' or 'bubbles forth'. This word indicates that prophecy comes from within us, and whether the term '*nabi*' is used correctly in the way that I will now describe can be debated, but it is certainly worth considering the type of prophesying that is often being described when the term '*nabi*' is used. This term is used to describe a way of prophesying that has a delivery that is at a pace and is mainly unpremeditated, so that it rises up from within and flows out of the speaker's mouth. When that flow is strong the prophet has to seek to put enough words around the flow to make sense of what is coming. The experience in the delivery is as much of being a listener as of being a speaker. In some situations there is very little (if any) conscious shaping of the prophecy.

Along a similar vein there is the ecstatic prophetic speech. Many would see Ezekiel as primarily ecstatic. The word literally means to 'stand outside oneself', so the term 'ecstatic' is descriptive of an experience that is considerably beyond oneself. It can thus describe a strong overpowering of the Spirit where behaviour and even bodily movements take place that are outside of the normal experience, but a strong – and almost uncontrollable – flow of prophecy proceeds to take place.

There will normally be a close correlation between the ecstatic and the *nabi*. Not all who experience the *nabi* dimension will do so in an ecstatic state, but those who experience ecstatic elements will almost certainly prophesy in a *nabi* mode.

There are many prophetic flows and streams. No expression is better than another. It is the word of the Lord we value not the way it came, nor through whom it came. We are to be open to new experiences but we do not seek a new experience for experience sake.

In the next chapter we will look at developing one's prophetic gift, and as we prepare to consider that, here are a few comments to meditate on:

- we must allow an investment to be made into our lives not just into our ministries.
- we should take our ministries seriously, but we should not take ourselves too seriously. We must be able to laugh at ourselves, particularly at our mistakes and idiosyncrasies.

- we must be prepared to be judged and disciplined, for real (and not just organisational) accountability is a safeguard.

Chapter 12

Developing in the Prophetic

This chapter will suggest some ways in which we can develop in the gift and ministry. Although the chapter is written for those who are called into the prophetic ministry the perspectives will be applicable for everyone.

The calling to prophesy

People are not prophets because they say they are but, as with the other gifts, people will recognise and respond to an authentic grace gift that is seen in their life and ministry. Jesus himself said,

By their fruit you will recognise (perceive) them...Many will come to me and say, Lord did we not prophesy in your name...? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Jesus (Matt 7:15-29).

Prophets are called to be inspired messengers who disclose (in part) God's thoughts and ways. They will instruct, interpret, fore-tell and forth-tell, bring insights, wisdom and warnings. As the gift is honed they will become increasingly intuitive and perceptive people. In the Old Testament prophets were key influential figures in society during significant times. They were often found in the popular market-places of the time communicating in a variety of creative ways, which included singing, speaking, poetry, and enacting out their messages symbolically. Biblical history records such individuals as being called by God to bring change and become important catalysts for the unfolding of his purposes (Jer. 1:10).

We know that a prophecy is a message of encouragement, comfort and strength (1.Cor. 14:3), and we can all prophesy, but we are not all prophets. In the New Testament we are told that prophets are one of the ministry grace gifts who are 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up' (Eph. 4:12). Given the nature of prophetic gifts and the prophetic calling there will always be room for growth. As we embrace the call we will soon discover that we only progress through clothing ourselves in humility.

Jesus: prophet and prophecy

Jesus is *the* measure of what it is to be in the image of God. He is not only fully human but is *truly* human. He is also our best and primary example of a person who is a prophet and who lived his life as a living prophecy. Jesus submitted to the discipline of his Father, and over many years was trained for his calling. His calling was unique and one that will never be repeated, but he sets a pattern of patient waiting. He waited until he was thirty years of age. The years before his public release in ministry were not empty years but years when he was being shaped for what was to come.

The true foundation for ministry is not that of amazing levels of gifting but of solid character that has been shaped through submitting to the hand of God. Character development is the only sure basis on which gift can then be developed. Paul expressed this saying that his passion was to know Christ, the power of his resurrection and be conformed to his death (Phil 3:10).

Jesus faced many of the issues we have to face. He had to overcome rejection and being labelled in a way that limited him. He had to overcome issues of offence, just as we have to. (Mark 6:1-6, highlights these issues in the context of his home town environment.) He, nor his message, was received or welcomed in Jerusalem (Lk. 19:28-48). Often prophets will recognise the time of God's coming before others (this can include their friends, those they look to, and churches they associate with). There are times that prophets will receive many wounds from within the body of Christ, but they have to overcome that and part of what helps them overcome is when they recognise that few people wound others in a deliberate way. At one of the lowest points of Jesus' life he proclaimed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Lk. 23:34). In the lead up to the cross Jesus took bread *on the night he was betrayed*. He did not hold back but overcame the temptation to feed any offence.

Before Paul gives us the material on the five-fold ministry gifts he calls us to live a life worthy of the calling. He underlines that character must precede gift. We read these words of exhortation,

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephes. 4:2,3).

If we develop those qualities we will be less concerned about who communicates and we will be taken up with the desire that the word of the Lord is communicated. The message will become more important than the profile of the messenger.

Some proverbs for developing in prophetic gifting

The book of Proverbs contains many pithy statements that need to be meditated on. They truly are wisdom for life. I cannot claim what follows is in the same league, but am simply ending this chapter with some short paragraphs that contain wisdom that I have gleaned from observation, failure, and from the wisdom of others. I trust they will enable the gift of God in each of us to positively develop.

It is good to learn to pray prophetically. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, praying in that way is a good way to learn to flow in prophecy. However, as we develop it is a good discipline to speak out the prophecy rather than simply pray it. As we speak it out we will need to exercise more faith and this normally releases a greater weight of the anointing of God's Spirit. There will still be times, though, even as the gift develops that you will not have anything of substance to say. On such occasions be humble and honest. *Please* avoid the temptation to make something up.

We need to be influenced by as many people who move prophetically as we can, but we must also to discover what it is to be ourselves. We should be willing to learn from tested prophets for we live out more of what we catch than what we are taught. So let's learn humbly but not become clones of someone else as there will be unique ways in which God will want to develop us.

Learn to be quiet. To be prophetic means much more than speaking on God's behalf. We have to learn to meditate, to ask questions such as, 'What do I see?', 'What am I feeling?', 'Why is that happening now?', and many other such questions. The more honest questions we ask the more answers we are likely to receive.

Seek to use language that is true. Truth-telling in the New Testament is more than not telling lies. It is much more related to leaving an honest and accurate perception with the hearer. If we say, 'God told me to tell you...' that might indeed be accurate, but sometimes something more along the lines of, 'The other day you came to mind and...' might actually be closer to communicating what happened. We must resist the temptation of trying to leave an impression with people that we are more spiritual than we are. Of course we cannot take full responsibility for the perceptions people live with but we can make a contribution as to how they perceive us.

Even when we mature in the gift we must be remain very cautious about predicting marriages, births, and deaths. Also if we are called in to minister to someone who has been diagnosed as terminally ill we have to be very careful about proclaiming them healed. We must always be willing to live with the consequences of what we say.

If there is a prophecy we gave that proves to be wrong we must be quick to apologise and be ready to do what is necessary to put that right. I

realise there are occasions when a prophecy might appear to have been wrong, but the reality is that the conditions were not met, but if we come to the place of acknowledging that we were wrong then all pride and power has to give way to humility and gentleness.

We must endeavour to keep the gap between our public and private lives as small as possible. We should close the gap in our *speech*. We are not to bless with our mouths when we prophesy and then 'curse' those who carve us up on the road. We cannot expect to gossip and criticise and then flow easily in the prophetic.

We must close the gap as far as our *sight* is concerned. 'What do we see?' is a prophetic question, and needs to be set alongside 'what are we watching?' or 'what is the focus of our sight?'

Likewise we have to consider what and who we are *listening* to. Moses sent out twelve spies, but Joshua, a generation later, only sent out two spies. He did not manipulate the situation nor ask for a false report. However, by sending out two spies Joshua limited the number of reports that the people were going to listen to. And given the strong Jewish culture of being shaped by narratives from previous generations, Joshua was effectively calling them to walk as he and Caleb had done a generation earlier. He was encouraging them to bring back a faith filled report, and he was seeking to silence the many voices that a generation before had caused the hearts of the people to melt. He asked for a report that came through the eyes of faith, but it was not a false report he requested, for he instructed them to make sure that they examined even the stronghold of Jericho. We, too, have to choose who and what we listen to. Faith comes by hearing the word of the Lord, not from listening to every voice that calls for our attention.

Make a choice to receive good input to your life. That input should come from a variety of people and influences. We need the encouragement of those who believe in us, for we develop best in an environment of acceptance. But we cannot simply listen to 'yes' people. We need those who will also ask us the difficult question.

We need to find ways of being accountable. Accountability is not something that works through a system, and it is best done 'in situ'. Wherever and whoever we find ourselves with we need to endeavour to make ourselves accountable. If we behave in a way that dishonours the One we are seeking to represent then those that we are with should be offended because the Gospel has been dishonoured. They must be given the opportunity to address what they have seen, and we have the responsibility to allow room for that to be done.

Be willing to give away what we have. We must not try and hold back what we have received hoping by so doing that we will always be superior to someone else. If we do hold back the flow of revelation will slow, but if we are

willing to give away what we have we open the possibility of receiving more from the Lord.

If we give out what others have sowed into our lives, where it is appropriate we should honour our sources, and those who have influenced us. Scripture tells us to honour our father and mother and that it is the first commandment with a promise. Those we have learned from should be honoured.

When we receive revelation what we will see will be of the Lord. This means that we will feel strongly about it. But we also have to live with the reality that it is also only a part of a fuller revelation. There will be times when we will have to learn to live with something that we are convinced God is saying but others, with integrity, choose another path.

We will have respect in one place and not in another. If we travel we will often discover a greater level of honour in the places we visit than at home. We will have to learn to live graciously with the tension and not to criticise nor compare.

There will be many occasions when we will not be understood or given credence. The words we speak might be so qualified that they are effectively disqualified. This might even open the door for some to personally criticise us. We in turn must bless those who criticise.

Every prophet will have to deal with the drivenness issue. Our first call is into relationship with the Lord and not to our function. We will have to learn the ability to say 'no'. If we find ourselves continually being driven by looking for ministry invites we are already in trouble. If we cannot develop a 'no' at the human level it will be very difficult to develop a wholehearted 'yes' to the Lord.

And the final 'proverb' is that we have to deal with the performance issue. We cannot respond to the taunt, 'If you were a prophet then you would know...' Even a prophet of the stature of Elisha had to confess on one occasion that the Lord had hidden it from him (2 Kings 4:27).

We can develop in the gift that God has given us if we are willing to walk the path of being yoked to the one who is meek. If we seek to develop the gift without being yoked to him and his rhythms we will find that there will be internal and external breakdowns. A loss of peace internally and strained relationships externally will be our experience. This does not need to be the case for with the Lord's help we can last the journey. We can start and finish well if we give attention to the discipline of the Lord.

The final chapter of this book deals with a very critical issue: the issue of walking through transition. If we can learn to do that well we will be among those who are part of the rising generation that responds to the Lord.

Chapter 13

Prophets in the Season of Transition

Transition is a common word for prophets to speak out for prophets are always looking to move on to the next phase. Indeed one way of looking at life is to see that it is made up of transitioning from one phase to another: from the womb to the world, from babyhood to infancy, from infancy to childhood, and so on. Each phase is to be a good and healthy experience but each and every phase must give way to the next one.

This is exactly how it is in the kingdom of God. There is a phase of God's activity that is to shape the community of faith during that period, but there comes a time when there is a fresh breath of God and the community must move on. Discerning the time of transition is one of the roles that prophetic ministry should exercise. Transition, whether of an individual or corporate nature, is always a key and difficult time. It can be particularly challenging to those who have carried a weight of responsibility for leadership, for old certainties are shaken and roles are challenged during this time.

The narrative of Saul's kingship giving way to David's rule seems a very appropriate story-line to reflect on during a season of transition. Whenever a biblical story of this nature is used there are often aspects that do not fit, or when we force them to fit it becomes obvious that we are making more of the narrative than we should be. Nevertheless this narrative remains as a helpful guide in these seasons.

Saul – a good beginning

At the start of his reign Saul was not arrogant, nor did he believe that he was the one to fulfil the task. His coming to the kingdom was marked by God's choice, by God's anointing. By the end of his reign, however, the mark of God on him was evidently lacking. It was simply his physical stature, being head and shoulders above others, that remained. This is a salutary lesson for us all. We can begin well, in humility and with deep gratitude to the Lord, but we can still end up having no significant evidence of God's Spirit on us, and even resisting the next move of God.

I am not looking in these paragraphs to analyse Saul, although that is something that would have great value. My purpose is rather to consider how we live in the period of transition. It is important, though, to note that Saul

quickly abandoned any practice of waiting on the Lord to seek his face for direction. That was probably what led to his downfall. If we do not seek the Lord we will resort to human wisdom as far as decision making is concerned.

Saul's leadership increasingly became a leadership devoid of the ongoing anointing of the Spirit and we could say that that it was dependent on position and this stature of being 'head and shoulders' above others. It is not a surprise that David, by contrast, is called a man after God's own *heart* (1 Sam. 13:14). The head with knowledge and ability, or the heart with a yieldedness and submission to the Lord's directive – that is a summary of the contrast between the two.

David – not lifting his hand against the Lord's anointed

Saul became motivated by jealousy, and pursued David seeking to kill him. Rather than supporting the one who would become king and enabling him to start well, he wanted to shut down all possibility of David ever coming to the throne. During that time David had two opportunities to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24:1-22; 26:5-25). On both occasions he refuses to take his fate in his own hands by ending Saul's time prematurely. In the time of transition we will have opportunities to move things forward in the 'right' direction, but must resist manipulating anything.

We can admire David for not taking Saul's life, but it would have been convenient if the Lord had removed Saul through death a short time after David acted righteously when he spared Saul's life. This would have confirmed that Saul's reign was over, that David was righteous and that he was evidently the Lord's choice; it would have confirmed that one era was over and another was ready to begin. But the Lord did not do that, and Saul carried on as king over Israel for a number of years. Further, he carried on as king in spite of Samuel having proclaimed that the kingdom had been removed from him, and in spite of David having already received the anointing of the Spirit to be king. The Lord does not remove Saul from the scene and we will discover that in transition there are many things that carry on (and are allowed to carry on by the Lord) although their 'sale-by-date' has long since expired.

Why is it this way? I consider the issue is as simple as the Lord's focus is on what is rising, not on what is passing. The real issue is not to end Saul but to get David ready. We will return to this in more detail as this chapter closes. I now want to focus on another Old Testament narrative that challenges our sense of fairness but is a vital passage for prophets (and aspiring prophets) to read.

Spare a thought for the young prophet

Every prophet should read 1 Kings 13. The story is as follows. A young prophet comes from the south to Bethel and pronounces a judgment over it.

The judgment is declared because this place (Bethel meaning 'house of God') had become a perverted house. The king is offended and stretches out his arm to call for the young prophet to be seized. As the king does this his arm becomes paralysed, and at the same time the altar splits open just as the young man had prophesied. As a result the king asks the young prophet to pray for him. A miracle takes place and his arm is restored. The king then asks for the young prophet to go home with him to eat and to receive a gift, but this offer is turned down for the young man cannot be bought and he is adamant about being committed to the instructions God gave him. He said,

Even if you were to give me half of your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.' (1 Kings 13:8,9).

Thus far the story is a challenge to all who aspire to move prophetically, and it contains patterns that those who are prophetic within something fresh the Lord is doing have to note of. The issue of obedience and the practical (but really it is a spiritual) issue relating to material reward are areas where such a person has to be clean.

From this point on the story takes a strange twist, for an old prophet begins to get involved. This old prophet hears about what has taken place and wishes to make contact. He finds out where the young prophet has gone and eventually meets up with him. He, like the king before, invites the young man to eat with him. Again he replies,

I cannot go turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.' (1 Kings 13:16,17).

The old prophet then proceeds to deceive the young man claiming not only that he too is a prophet, but that he had had an angelic visitation and has been instructed to bring the young man back to eat (1 Kings 13:18). The young man is understandably intimidated and goes back to eat. Now the ultimate twist takes place. In the middle of the meal the old prophet begins to prophesy to the young man saying that he had been disobedient and so would now die prematurely. That very day the young man loses his life.

I read that one day and was somewhat incensed. I spoke out, 'The old prophet should have known better. That is most unfair.' No sooner had I said that when clearly I heard the following words, 'No the young prophet must

know better.’

I meditated on this for days and came to the conclusion that the young man suffered as he did because he had the keys to the future. The old prophet no longer had access to those keys. He was by now a ‘has-been’, his days were over, and the weight of responsibility *for the future* now lay on the young man’s shoulders.

Whether it is David or the young prophet the principle is the same. They are part of the new manifestation of what the Lord is doing and as such the real issue is getting them ready to carry the move of God forward. The issue is not one of having to deal with the old order by removing them, for that order is now all-but irrelevant. The issue is of making sure that what is new is ready to step up and take responsibility. Once the new is ready to step into the gap the old can go.

What then are the lessons to be learned? I am sure there are many but here are ones I believe are worthy of consideration:

- transition is a reality. We have to be ready to adjust what we have been doing in the light of a new season. Whatever has served in its season has to give way to what is the next relevant manifestation. God makes everything beautiful in its time (Eccl. 3:11).
- God will declare things over long before they are removed. We, however, must not focus on trying to get rid of what has been. Our focus has to be on the development of what is rising.
- old things remain because the weight of responsibility is on preparing what is rising. Although the old is over it still acts in the purposes of God (and in a strange way to our perspective) as a temporary protection for what is rising.
- the old no longer has the keys to the future, so the requirements on those embracing something new is greater. They have to know better and submit to the discipline of the Lord. They cannot take their level of response from a previous generation as what is required of each subsequent generation is higher than for the previous one. (See how Isaac cannot follow in the footsteps of Abraham when he experiences famine – Gen. 26:1-11 and Gen. 12:10-20.)

Generational transfer

The term ‘generation’ is not necessarily defined by age. It is more defined by position on the journey. There was a generation in Egypt, a generation that died in the wilderness, and a ‘rising’ generation that crossed over into the land. Within that generation were two elderly gentlemen: Caleb and Joshua. The tragedy is that there were only two – there could have been many more of that age group. As always we are in desperate need of another rising generation. As they are drawn together, from across the age spectrum, they

will form one rising generation. However, although generation is not defined by age, we will not see a generation rise and be released if there is no focus on the younger generation. There has to be a strong element of those who are younger that rise at the forefront of that new generation.

There comes a time when there has to be a generational transfer. Such seasons are often marked by the deaths of some who have stood as generals in the army of God within a previous move. At such a time there will be the raising up of those whose hearts are soft (like David) and there will also be the marking out of certain movements as they become a shadow of what they were, but still having a 'head and shoulders' stature. There will be the raising up of those, at a grass roots level, who will carry the young prophet anointing. They will be marked in their radical commitment to the Lord. They will not be bought by the lure of success nor money. And there will also be the manifestation of those who are like the old prophet who can potentially derail the new prophetic voice.

With the application I have given to the biblical passages that have been quoted above, it becomes clear that the responsibility on the rising generation in a season of transition is enormous. They cannot raise their hand against what has been in place, but neither can they simply submit to it as there is a new level of call being issued forth from heaven. This calls for them to walk a path of great tension, but it is in walking that path that they are prepared for what they will step into. If they cannot walk that path of transition then the move of God does not move forward as it could.

A helpful analogy to generations working together is that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is a trans-generational God for he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But we must not understand that Abraham is father, Isaac son, and Jacob, rather it is father Abraham, father Isaac, and father Jacob. The generations are not to line up hierarchically but alongside each other. This becomes very evident in a season of transition when former generations have to yield to the subsequent generation. Too often the older generation demands that the younger lives within their 'house' but without disturbing any of the 'furniture'. If there has to be an order it must be the reverse of the above. We have to encourage the older generation to follow those who are increasingly carrying the keys to open up the future. The reality is that some of the furniture has to be disturbed so that we can see a significant reshaping of the house itself.

Transition time is very critical and if we are going to attain the maximum amount of movement forward it is vital that former generations bless the rising generation. Where a blessing is not given a vacuum is left, and sadly the vacuum actually draws a curse into it. Too often a fresh move of God begins in a state of being disapproved of and this makes it difficult to really move forward. In response to curse we are told to bless and this is why the rising generation have to bless, yet without compromising through any false loyalty.

Hezekiah – no thought for the future

Hezekiah received a wonderful miracle. Isaiah brought a message to Hezekiah and instructed him to set his house in order as he was going to die. But the king interceded, weeping before the Lord, and before Isaiah had left the palace grounds he had to return and say that the prophetic word had been reversed. The power of intercession is immense. Isaiah now said that God had heard his prayer, he was going to be healed and his life would be extended another fifteen years (2 Kings 20:1-6). An amazing miracle given that he was literally about to die, and one that we would wish to see repeated over and over. The remainder of the story, though, is so sad.

The relevance of the sign (let the shadow go back) seems at first to be simply incidental, but as we read through we realise that the direction of the shadow is not arbitrary. In calling for it to go back reveals a major problem in Hezekiah. This becomes clear when I paraphrase his request as asking for the clock to be turned back.

In life we have to learn that we cannot turn the clock back, and in a season of transition we have to resist the temptation of wanting to go back to a former time. Hezekiah is healed, a sign appears, but as the story unfolds we soon realise that this sign was an indication that Hezekiah is not making the transition to the next phase nor making preparations for the next generation.

Through his pride (2 Chron. 32:35) he allows Babylonian envoys to see everything within the palace. Isaiah then says,

The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendents, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20: 17,18).

Unbelievably Hezekiah responds with, 'The word of the Lord you have spoken is good' (2 Kings 20:19). This is a man who has lived through the power of repentance and intercession to see his own life extended, but now when something much bigger than his own personal survival is at stake he does not intercede at all. Now the relevance of the sign becomes evident. He received the word as a 'good' word because he thought that it would not happen in his lifetime (2 Kings 20:19). He had no sight of the future, his focus was on yesterday ('turn the clock back'), and he had no concern for what would follow him.

We must be those who are future-oriented. We can be thankful for every day that has gone, but we must long for the days we have never had.

I write from within a European, Western and Northern hemisphere context. We are at a major crisis point in history. Church as I have known it will survive throughout my lifetime, but that is not enough. We must be radically future-oriented now so that there will be something even more vibrant for our children and children's children. Otherwise what our 'fathers have stored up' will be lost and our children will be taken captive unable to bear fruit spiritually. Prophets must always be those who act today for the sake of tomorrow.

Premature death is a difficult thing to come to terms with, but lives that are extended (even through God's wonderful grace) and do not take thought for the future are an absolute disaster. The weight of responsibility is on the rising generation as the key-holders for the future, but the former generation have a responsibility to make preparations. They must be those who say, give us a sign, not just for us, but a sign of a new future. They must be those who ask for the clock to go forward.

Making personal transitions

Jesus always calls us to move forward and we often find ourselves battling with the desire to settle for a quiet life. The Lord calls us to journey with him in order to settle the land. The call is to respond to the cry of creation, to fill it with the presence of the Lord. In moving forward there are personal transitions and prophetic people have to make many personal transitions for they are to embody what the Lord is saying. As prophets they have to learn to do this for the sake of others, so they, more than any others, need to understand how to make successful transitions.

There are a number of issues that become relevant during personal transition. Understanding those issues will not remove every emotional reaction, but will help us know how to walk through that season.

- Transition is marked by a season ending in crisis

Most times of transition are normally marked by a season ending in a measure of ***crisis***. It can often happen when we were not even considering making a transition. Our situation could well be interrupted by circumstances beyond our control. (We will label it as 'our circumstances' but we will later understand that the Lord was in the circumstances at an amazing level.) This change can involve a change of geography or of relational connections. The greater the transition the greater the change of circumstances we will experience.

- Transition takes place before we are ready

When a transition begins to take place there will always be a sense of a 'what could have been, what might have been, and even what should have been' aspect to it. If we do not realise that seasons end in what seems an unfinished way we will try to hold on rather than yield. We will experience that

the full manifestation of the vision we were running with in that last phase has not taken place. We will have to let go, deal with regrets and grief, and then be ready to embrace the next season. At the end of a season there will be seed that remains but they have to go into the ground and die for the next harvest. Harvest only comes forth from seed that is sown, but the harvest is not identical to the seed. So a harvest comes from what goes into the ground. This will mean that the fulfillment of the visions we have carried will usually be different to what was originally expected. If we try and hold out for the fulfillment to be exactly as we thought we can run the danger of seeing the vision come to a stop at that point.

- How we leave a phase will shape how we enter the next phase

In marriage a major issue is of leaving the home of the parents in order to be joined to the marriage partner. If there is an inadequate leaving there will be very little effective joining that takes place. In personal transitions when the extent of the change is a significant one, then the measure of crisis will be greater, and there will be a very real experience of grief that ones goes through. Grief is there to cleanse us and take us to a new level, but if we do not pass through grief we will end in the prison of self-pity. (Grief that remains brings a crushing in spirit and will outwork in bodily pains – Prov. 17:22.)

Personal transition is a challenge for it appears as if things are ending prematurely, there is crisis around us, and it is not immediately evident as to the way forward. If these aspects are not understood then we hinder what is taking place, and the key way we do that is by holding on to the past.

Abraham's life was one of many transitions. The most traumatic one was when he was called to sacrifice the very thing (and for him, person) that the Lord had given him. He had to sacrifice the fulfillment of the promise that the Lord had given to him. He had to be willing to sacrifice his future, trusting in the Lord that there would be a resurrection. He patterned something for us. There will be some transitions where the very thing that we believe the Lord has given us he will ask to be placed on the altar. In such situations there will be a grace for yielding and a corresponding release of new authority.

Prophets will help the community of faith make effective transitions but they will not do that from some objective position. They will do so because they have been willing to make transitions in the private and public arenas. We began the first chapter with a welcome to the world of journey as a prophetic call was embraced. We end this final chapter to underline that our journey does not stop at some given point in our lives. Constant change is here to stay. We cry out, 'Maranatha', and we work and pray for the Bride to also call 'Maranatha', for the Spirit and the Bride must call for his return (Rev. 22:17).

Appendix 1

False Prophets and how to recognise them

The first time I wrote these notes I did not have anything in them about false prophets, other than a cursory mention in passing. The teaching, being initially developed for Brazil, I soon discovered that there was a need for a specific session on this. My experience there has taught me that the practices are very widespread in many cultures, and perhaps also insidiously present in some practices in other cultures. The horror stories I have heard are frightening, and the results when the curse of false prophecy is broken is so visible, with a times up to, or even beyond, 100 people being instantaneously healed of long standing physical problems, many times manifesting in shoulder, neck, and then compressed spinal scenarios – the visible result of a wrong yoke being placed over them.

So the following notes were put together.

There are warnings in Scripture about being deceived by false prophets. For example we read:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves... and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people... For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-if that were possible (Matthew 7.15; 24.11, 24).

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-bringing swift destructions on themselves (2 Peter 2.1).

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4.1).

We should encourage the release of prophecy without fear, but also need to be aware of the counterfeit:

False prophets and a word that is inaccurate

Note: There is a difference from someone who prophesies and there is something where they miss it and someone who is a false prophet.

- To get it wrong does not mean that a person is a false prophet.
- Also a false prophet could be accurate – but the results will not be positive.
- As we develop in the gift we are likely to make mistakes and **provided we remain teachable we should expect that people will cover** (but not ignore) our weaknesses.

However, when it comes to dealing with false prophets the situation becomes very serious indeed.

The danger arises because they are operating from a wrong source and the results of submitting to them is indeed very serious. If we were to receive a word from them that might be accurate we would soon discover that we had placed ourselves under a demonically-inspired bondage.

Balaam: a snare to the people

In Scripture we read of the situation concerning Balaam who was hired by Balak to prophesy (Numbers 22-24). He often operated by a spirit of divination and although he found that he could not curse the people of God, they eventually had to put him to death as their involvement with him had ensnared them (Joshua 13:22).

This indicates how dangerous the Lord considers those who operate from a false source.

Typical characteristics

There are always certain typical characteristics that surround those who are false prophets. These characteristics will be present even when the source (as with Balaam) is mixed.

If a person states that their source of revelation is something other than Christ then it will be easy to recognise them as a false prophet; if, however, they **claim** to prophesy by the power of the Holy Spirit then it is more vital that we exercise discernment.

I suggest that there will be some typical characteristics that will mark false prophets. The list is a **guide** as to what we would be looking for to indicate how genuinely from the Lord a person is who prophesies:

- They manifest a **superior spirit** with the strong impression (or they might even make the claim) that they have unique access to God
- They prophesy with **payment** required. This might be a financial payment, or they insist on an emotional tie. Beware of emotional ties: we do not owe something beyond faithfulness to anyone.
- They do not allow you to **question** them or to suggest that what they

have said might be wrong. There might even be the suggestion that to reject their word would be to bring a curse on you.

- The prophecy they give strongly leads to an ongoing connection and **dependence** on that person.
- The word given brings about a sense of **fear** rather than of faith to walk with the Lord. This fear might manifest by us becoming fearful about rejecting their word. Jesus always gives us the right to doubt and process something with integrity until we are convinced.
- The person does not have **healthy peer level** relationships with those who are in good standing in the body of Christ.
- There is no point of **accountability** so that once they have prophesied there is no means of bringing any necessary correction to them.
- The person does not exhibit a **relationship with Jesus**, their talk is more about them than it is about Jesus.
- They resort to **unusual rituals** that do not resonate with what we find in the Bible.
- They request something from you of emotional **value** to prophesy over, or they retain something of yours of emotional value.

If we were to submit ourselves to false prophets we would be in grave danger of submitting ourselves to spiritual powers that would bring us into bondage.

All relationships are to release us, not ones that bring us into false obligations and certainly not into bondage to spiritual powers.

If we have ever been deceived into submitting to a false prophet it is vital that we **renounce** that involvement, that we get rid of any object, or written prophecy that came from the false prophet, and then go to someone we recognise as being in spiritual authority and have them release us through prayer.

We can safely pursue the Lord for a word and submit ourselves to those with prophetic ministry when we see in them:

- a heart of submission to Jesus
- a spirit of humility
- and a willingness to be in relationship with others in the body of Christ

Without those characteristics we do not even consider going to such a person. Even if they start well they will end up in self-deception and bring deception and a bondage on us as well.

So, we walk by faith, not by fear, but we must also walk with our eyes open. Not deceived by spiritual language or 'presence'.

Anything manipulative, dominating and controlling are not of God – that is the source of witchcraft.

True prophecy and true prophets will contrast will release us to pursue the Lord with a deep love in our hearts for him.

True prophecy will bear testimony to Jesus (Revelation 19:10).

Breaking free

The biggest 'catch' is when there has been something true in what has been said, but it is vital that we renounce the prophetic word and trust God with the outcome. If there is any tie – an object, a written copy of the word, or any finances that is going toward that 'ministry', for example, it is important that everything is broken. There must be no ties that will continue to keep the curse active.

After renunciation, prayer for release needs to be made. This is best done with someone who can come in agreement with us. There needs to be a wholehearted agreement. Part of what needs to be confronted is the fear of breaking it might lead to problems, or a losing the destiny that was prophesied. This is the trap, the lie. The real bondage comes through holding on to the false word. Any manipulation is not from heaven.

Embracing Tomorrow

Embracing Tomorrow is at one level a handbook on prophecy, prophetic gifting and prophets. There are principles in this book that will enable anyone, regardless of their current experience, to develop within prophetic gifting. At another level the book itself makes a prophetic call that we recognise a new day is dawning - a day when prophets are being released; a day when a generation is rising up who are not prepared to simply follow previous generations, but will press in for a new release of the power of the Gospel. It is a book that suggests we are coming to an era that will see a new release of apostolic authority. An authority that has been cleansed from political power games, and one that develops because a pathway has been opened up by those willing to make a journey in the prophetic.

Overall it is a book that sends an invitation to everyone to move on, to lose the fear of failure, and to realise that there is a level of freedom that the Lord brings.

The title of the book is related to the option that Hezekiah turned down. We have to **Embrace Tomorrow**. Hezekiah asked for the shadow to go forward. The clock is not to be wound back. As prophetic gifting is developed the clock will mark a people who are increasingly coming in line with God's timings.

Martin Scott is widely recognised as a prayer leader and strategist with a strong prophetic gifting. Beginning in 1998 under the umbrella of Sowing Seeds for Revival he initiated bringing teams to an area to encourage unity and prayer strategies for localities. This has taken him across many European nations and also Canada, USA and Brazil. He has been awarded a Masters in Theology for a unique research thesis on the 'Eschatology of the New Church Movement', accredited by Brunel University. He is the author of a number of books including **Gaining Ground** and **Impacting the City**.