

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Prophetic Theology:
The Essence of Prophecy**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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August 1, 2024

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this action research project is to equip the members of Jesus Strong Ministries to discern the authenticity of contemporary prophetic messages. This research project aimed to measure the effectiveness of teaching the members of Jesus Strong Ministries the purpose or essence of true prophecy, focusing on discerning and interpreting prophetic messages. To accomplish this, the researcher developed and taught thirty-two participants an eight-week virtual prophetic training course via Zoom. The course examined eight vital elements of prophecy: the definition of prophecy, types of prophets, history of prophecy, relevance or purpose of prophecy, dimensions of prophecy, Spirit of prophecy, and discerning or testing the spirit behind prophecy. The literature review establishes the fundamentals for a theological and theoretical framework, systematically exploring the purpose of prophetic ministry and discerning or testing the spirit. A pre and post-survey was conducted to measure the study's effectiveness and the participants' growth. The results yield significant changes in participants' responses, indicating that the intervention was effective and that it is possible to discern true and false prophecies. This research is foundational in filling a theological gap in systematic prophetic theology because not enough discussion exists surrounding the concept of discerning and interpreting contemporary prophetic messages. Overall, this research contributed to educational religious studies, providing insights for religious organizations seeking to understand the challenges and benefits of prophetic ministry training, enhancing and supporting the prophetic ministry within the local church.

Keywords: discernment, interpretation, false prophecy, testing the spirit, authenticity, prophetic literature, prophetic history, sources of prophecy, cessationism, continuationism.

Dedication

The journey to achieving this milestone was paved with many obstacles. Looking back, I do not see how it was humanly possible. I am acutely aware that I could not achieve this goal without the help of the Holy Spirit, my children, and my prayer partners.

I dedicate this work to my late husband, who began this journey with me but could not be here to witness its ending. One piece of advice that he gave me when I began this journey was to block everything out of my mind while working on the project. Little did I know how much I would need that advice in the weeks and months ahead.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this achievement to my four children as an example that we really can do all things through Christ, who gives us strength (Phil. 4:13). Never give up on your dreams, even when the path becomes arduous.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FBC	<i>First Baptist Church</i>
RQ	<i>Research Questions</i>
OT	<i>Old Testament</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
BSB	<i>Berean Standard Bible</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The pandemic was more than a paradigm shift for this generation; churches and business places closed, food shortages, and city streets eerily empty for the first time in centuries, and to complicate matters, there were riots and political upheavals. Many wondered if the world was ending and the book of Revelation was fulfilling, so people began prophesying like never before. Dien states, “The pandemic pushes individuals to reflect on the current social status quo; old assumptions and ways of life are questioned, leading to a new beginning like the Book of Revelation, contemporary apocalyptic discourse.”¹ Some prophesied that the pandemic and political upheavals were God's judgment for America and that Trump was God's chosen instrument for reformation. According to Dien, “Trump's triumph raises the question of whether the republic is in crisis or a harbinger of change, not the kind of change that bodes well for democratic politics.”² This leads to many and varying prophecies concerning the outcome of the 2020 election; some prophesied that President Trump would win the 2020 election, others prophesied that President Trump would not. These varying prophecies created quite an uproar in the prophetic community. Some people in the Christian community stopped talking to each other, leaving their churches, while others ended up divorced over these false prophetic messages. These, among other reactions, are not new reactions to prophecy because, looking back over history as early as the sixth century, political prophetic discrepancy has caused societal problems that spill over into everyday individual life. Bowling and Walker stated, “Public and

¹Simon Dein, “COVID-19 and the Apocalypse: Religious and Secular Perspectives,” *Religion and Health*. 2021, 60(1):5-15. doi: 10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w. Epub 2020 Oct 30. PMID: 33128223; PMCID: PMC7598223.

² Robert L. Ivie, “Trump's Unwitting Prophecy” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 20, no. 4 (2017): 707-717. muse.jhu.edu/article/685412.

governmental interest in prophecy peaked in the first half of the sixteenth century, the period of English literary history served most poorly by the medieval/modern periodization.”³ However, modern scholars find it challenging to embrace political prophecy because some view it as social-political propaganda while some view it as divine instruction from God. Others believe some prophecies are authentic; however, their interpretations are inaccurate, further complicating the response to the 2020 election prophecies. That is the crux of the matter that caused so much disturbance in the prophetic community during the pandemic and the 2020 elections. Bowling and Walker stated, “As recent political elections demonstrate, prophecy is never a neutral form of discourse. Rather, it implies cause-and-effect relationships.” Political prophecy’s anticipatory functions have an influential role that can incite contentious debate throughout history and today.⁴ It goes without saying that amidst the varying election prophecies, some were authentic, while others were proven false.

Jesus Strong Ministries grappled with false prophetic messages and saw firsthand their impact on the ministry and its families. As such, the leadership of Jesus Strong believes that the body of Christ is not taught how to discern and interpret contemporary prophecy; therefore, they are left to fend for themselves when confronted with false prophecies. It is inevitable that without the proper tools of discernment and interpretation, many will be deceived.

Since people do not understand how to discern or interpret prophecy, they ignore it. However, ignoring prophecy creates the perfect environment for false prophecy to thrive. The Apostle Paul did not ignore prophecy in the early church but instead encouraged them to prophesy and taught them to test the spirit behind each prophetic message. Therefore, prophecy

³ Joseph Bowling, and Katherine Walker, eds. *Prophetic Futures*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). 9.

⁴ Ibid., 2.

should be studied and articulated well among believers because it is a fundamental tool to communicate with God.

Therefore, this research aims to identify areas where people need help discerning, interpreting, and responding to prophetic messages. This is not a groundbreaking study, as many and varying studies have been conducted concerning the wonder of prophecy. However, the difference with this study is that it focuses on discerning and interpreting modern-day prophecy. Compared with other studies, little or no attention is given to discerning or interpreting contemporary prophetic messages, which is a massive oversight on those charged with leading the body of Christ because, without prophetic discernment and interpretation, no one can glean the wealth of spiritual knowledge contained in prophecy.

Ministry Context

Jesus Strong Ministries is an online ministry that developed and thrived during the pandemic when there was a high demand for virtual church meetings. During the 2020 chaotic civil unrest and political upheavals, several prophetic messages were presented in and outside Jesus Strong Ministries concerning the 2020 election. One prophetic message that became problematic for Jesus Strong Ministries and other ministries was a prophetic message concerning President Trump. Some people outside Jesus Strong Ministries prophesied President Trump would win the 2020 election, while Jesus Strong Ministries prophesied that he would not. This caused a great uproar in Jesus Strong Ministries, and many people left the ministry; however, the latter prophecy came true, and President Trump did not win the election. Some people have repented for their negative behavior, while others continue to believe the false prophecies they heard from other prophets, allowing it to cause great division in the ministry. However, it is essential to highlight here that prophecies flourish during times of crisis when the ‘socially

established norms are shattered and a state of de-regulation is caused.⁵ The social norms were shattered during the pandemic, and people lost faith in institutions, science, and technology; they were looking to anything and anyone to find answers, which gave rise to prophetic interest which caused many to prophesy that President Trump would win a second term because he could provide solutions for the crisis the country was facing.

Prophetic messages are warmly embraced at Jesus Strong Ministries because they believe that God does not only speak through the Scriptures but also speaks to people today through modern-day or contemporary prophets. Kessareas states, “The gift of prophecy in the Church is no mere desirable option; it represents the essence of the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated.”⁶ Although some theologians and believers have contended that prophecy ceased with the death of the last apostle, the church is God’s representation on the Earth, and He continues to speak to and through them. During times of crisis, when everything is uncertain, people look to God for answers, and God most often speaks through prophets to deliver His messages. According to Kessareas, it is not uncommon for prophets to intervene in critical times; their role is to specify the root causes of the crisis and provide hope of restoration and renewal.⁷ Therefore, the church must be God’s mouthpiece, especially concerning spiritual matters that shatter the norms of life. However, prophetic messages must be discerned and interpreted because some people prophesy falsely in the name of The Lord. This is where the problem lies with modern-day prophecy because false prophecy exists, and modern-day prophecies are not authenticated as biblical scripture; therefore, their validity should undergo extreme scrutiny.

⁵ Efstathios Kessareas, ‘Signs of the times’: Prophecy belief in contemporary Greek Orthodox contexts. *Social Compass*, 70(1), (2023): 73-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231154110>

⁶ Kim M. Maas, *Prophetic Community: God’s Call for All to Minister in His Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books), 2019. 23.

⁷ Kessareas, *Signs of the times*, 2023.

Although contemporary authentic prophetic words should not be added to the canon of Scripture, they do not carry any less authority than those of the canon. If God speaks to a person through a modern-day prophet and the message is rejected, they did not reject the prophet but the word of God. Jesus Strong Ministries believes that creating a culture where people can accurately receive and interpret prophetic messages is essential, especially since Jesus warns that in the last days, false prophets will arise and deceive many (Matt. 24:11). It is not uncommon for people at Jesus Strong to share prophetic messages and pray for interpretations or ask questions about someone else's prophetic messages. However, parameters must be set around these prophetic messages because every spirit must be tested.

Since false prophets exist, some believe it would be best to completely disregard prophecy because it is too complicated to discern whether a message is from God. However, the leadership at Jesus Strong is convinced that God still speaks through individuals; therefore, facilitating a prophetic culture is encouraged. Therefore, individuals must distinguish between true and false prophecies in such prophetic environments because issues can quickly escalate. Prophecy can be very ambiguous; therefore, it is difficult to discern between the true and the false. Vallotton says, "What distinguishes a false prophet from a true prophet is the heart. It is not signs and wonders. It is not even the accuracy of a prophetic word."⁸ The motive or the reason behind the prophetic word is the driving force; hence, the prophet's heart must be pure for pure prophecy to flow from it. So, although a person can prophesy and demonstrate signs and wonders, it does not mean that the source is God; this was the case with the many false prophecies that occurred in the 2020 election. Many people were prophesying out of their minds to gain notoriety, fame, and financial gains. So, although modern-day prophecy is relevant today,

⁸ Kris Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers), 2014.

one cannot embrace every wind of prophecy; instead, one must learn to discern what is true or false. Discerning prophecy can be tedious because there are no set guidelines; however, biblical prophecy is a good place to start.

Remember that modern-day prophecy is very different from biblical prophecy when most people depend on the prophet to hear from God. Since the first advent of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, anyone filled with the Spirit of God can hear from God. Some may ask, if that is the case, why do we still need modern-day prophets? The answer is that God said out of the mouth of two or three witnesses let every word be established (2 Cor. 13:1). And he also says that He will do nothing on the earth without first revealing it to his prophets (Amos 3:7). Since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost more prophets have stood up and declared the word of the Lord so the prophetic age did not close with Jesus, John the Baptist or the death of the Apostles, instead it increases with the advent of the Holy Spirit because Joel 2 says in the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and my sons and daughters will prophesy. Therefore, contemporary prophetic messages are not going away soon because people are still getting baptized with the Holy Spirit and will prophesy as the Spirit gives them knowledge. It behooves believers to learn how to discern between true and false prophetic messages.

Prophetic people can see and hear spiritual things that others do not; however, some people do not understand this gift; they either ignore it or misuse it. Authentic prophets revered the gift of prophecy because they understood they were called to communicate sacred messages to the people of God. They understand that challenges will arise when the gift is operational because prophecy usually challenges the status quo. Prophets understand that they will face physical, intellectual, and spiritual challenges that oppose their messages. For example, when the Apostle Paul was on the way to Rome, a great storm rose and threatened the lives of all aboard

the ship, but he was not disturbed by the storm because he had a prophetic word from the Lord and knew that he would get to Rome safely and witness to them (Acts 23:11). Prophets are often entrusted with complex messages; therefore, they must develop an attitude of soaring above the disturbances their messages could cause.

Jesus Strong Ministries recognizes the spiritual warfare surrounding prophecy yet remains committed to embracing a prophetic culture because, like Eckhardt, they believe that “Our God is the living God who moves throughout the spiritual and physical realms in all power and authority as the Creator of every living thing, and He desires to commune with His creation.”⁹ Furthermore, that is the reason the Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy earnestly. Communication with God is necessary for a believer’s walk with the Lord, and communication cannot be one-way. The believer must speak to God through prayer and hear him speak to them through prophecy. Apostle Paul also told the Corinthians that he desired them to prophesy more than speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:1). Therefore, like Jesus Strong Ministries, he encouraged a prophetic culture among believers. Giving and receiving prophetic messages has become a way of life at Jesus Strong Ministries. However, practicing members should clearly understand prophetic ministry and, most importantly, be led by the Holy Spirit before giving a prophetic word.

Humility is another fundamental quality encouraged in the practicing members of Jesus Strong Ministries. Jesus practiced humility when he walked on earth and expected the same from those he gifted as apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. Humility is one of the signs of a true prophet. A true prophet recognized that they must depend on the Spirit of God to

⁹ John Eckhardt, *Prophetic Activation: Break Your Limitation to Release Prophetic Influence* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House), 2016. 13.

accurately prophesy, which causes them to humble themselves before God and wait for him to reveal his will to them.

The pastor of Jesus Strong Ministries believes that the church must teach people the essentials of the prophetic ministry so that they are not deceived by false doctrines and prophecies. This is not an easy task because the online congregation varies in age and stages of their Christian spiritual development. Some people do not know one Bible verse, while others are well-seasoned believers who can quote many scripture verses. Jesus Strong Ministries is primarily virtual but holds quarterly in-person meetings where people travel from all over the United States to gather and meet for prophetic encounters and fellowship. Since the culture at Jesus Strong is prophetic, it is imperative to understand prophetic theology. Learning to develop a relationship with God through hearing from Him daily is one of the reasons He sent His Spirit into the world. It is so that His people can hear his voice and not be led astray by false doctrines and false prophecies.

Problem Presented

For centuries, false prophecies have wreaked havoc in the church, caused many church splits, and ruined individual lives and relationships. The false prophecy surrounding the 2020 elections and President Trump caused quite a disturbance in Jesus Strong Ministries and other churches. Some people left their churches and labeled their ministers false prophets, and some marriages and relationships became strained. While all this was very appalling, the problem goes far beyond an election false prophecy. If people do not understand the essence or the purpose of prophecy, they will continue to be deceived and manipulated by false prophets. Since Jesus warns that in the last days, many false prophets would arise and deceive many (Matt. 24:11), people must learn the true purpose of prophetic messages and how to discern if a prophetic

message is from God or another source because false prophecy is only going to increase as the end of the age draws to a close.

The prophetic message that began this quest started with a vision that President Trump was standing on a stage giving a speech, but he had what appeared to be a balance scale across his shoulder. He struggled to balance the scale while speaking; eventually, he lost his balance, and the scale crashed to the ground. Then Biden stepped up to the stage, picked up the balance scale, and placed it across the podium, and it balanced perfectly. Then he proudly stated well, that is how you balance that. Large amounts of gold money were being placed into each scale. The interesting thing about the money was that some were shiny gold while others appeared to have been taken out of the dirt. President Trump was standing towards the back of the stage next to the American flag, watching all this unfolding. Then something incredible happened: a small balance scale appeared in the air over the podium that balanced the large balance scale with the money in each pan. Instead of scale pans, the small scale appeared to have the Liberty Bell hanging from each end, and it was sitting on a beautiful leather-bound, well-made Bible. As it came down over the podium, it crashed, and only the small scale sitting on the Bible remained. Everyone gasped, and Biden turned to see what was happening while President Trump watched from behind the stage.

While many interpretations could be drawn from that prophetic vision, one of the interpretations given for this prophecy was that President Trump would not win the 2020 election but would not be out of the picture, meaning he could run for president again in 2024. As this interpretation was presented in the prophetic encounter meeting at Jesus Strong Ministries, a gentleman became belligerent and shouted that President Trump would serve two terms because a Prophet named Kim Clement prophesied that he would many years ago. Others joined him,

affirming the prophecy by Kim Clement that President Trump would win a second term. Kim Clement prophesied 2007 that “Trump shall become a trumpet, says the Lord. Trump shall become a trumpet. I will raise up the trump to become the trumpet; Clement goes on just before the video cuts off to say that this president will serve “two terms.”¹⁰ Furthermore, prophets such as Jeremiah Johnson prophesied that Trump would win the 2020 elections. Needless to say, Trump did not win, so Johnson explains that he had predicted other prophecies right, such as the Roe v. Wade overturn and Amy Coney Barrett’s confirmation to the Supreme Court. “As far as getting the election prediction wrong, he says, “It was about humbling myself, dying to my public reputation, and a massive shift and purification that was coming to the prophetic movement.”¹¹ However, some believed Jesus Strong Ministry’s prophecy concerning the election. After a while, a shouting match ensued in the Zoom meeting about who was wrong or right about the election prophecies. After the Zoom meeting ended, the pastor received many angry text messages regarding the prophetic message, leading her to believe that people need to be taught how to respond to prophetic messages.

There were also many prophecies in the 2016 election, but most people did not take them seriously because they viewed Trump’s bid for office as a joke; therefore, most were shocked to see that he won the 2016 election. According to Klien, this was unbelievable because “suddenly, almost without rational explanation, a businessman without any political experience inexplicably was elected president. When all the polls showed otherwise, Donald J. Trump was miraculously

¹⁰ Damon T. Berry, *The New Apostolic Reformation, Trump, and Evangelical Politics: The Prophecy Voter 1st ed.* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 74.

¹¹ Ibid.

elected to the highest office in America and arguably the most powerful office in the world.”¹²

However, others expected this victory because Mark Taylor, a retired firefighter, prophesied that the “Spirit of God told me of your chosen, this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this.”¹³

This sets off a slew of prophetic messages concerning President Trump and a two-term presidency; however, President Trump did not win the 2020 election, but he is currently running for a second term as of the writing of this paper and could win, confirming Clements 2007 prophecy, of a second term. However, the second term, prophecy, was not the concern; it was the people’s reaction to the conflicting prophecies. They did not respond well to either prophetic message, which implies they do not understand how to discern or interpret prophecy.

Jesus Strong Ministries continues to grapple with the repercussions of the false prophetic messages in the aftermath of the 2020 election. One might say the best way to handle such situations is to get rid of the deceived people, but that is like throwing the baby out with the bath water. Those ‘deceived people’ love the Lord and are zealous like Saul was before he became Apostle Paul. If God supernaturally transformed Apostle Paul and worked so mightily through one man, can you imagine what God can do with thousands of transformed people when they learn the truth about prophecy? That is why getting rid of deceived people is not the answer. The remedy for deception is always to know the truth because it is the truth that sets people free (John 8:31-32). Furthermore, free people will free others, and that is the whole goal of Christianity.

¹² Kenneth B. Klein, *The Deep State Prophecy and the Last Trump* (Folsom, CA: El Dorado Publishing, 2019). 12.

¹³ Zachary Sheldon, “God Said, ‘You’re Hearing the Voice of the President’”: Citizenship in The Trump Prophecy, *Journal of Media and Religion*. 2020. 19:3, 93-107, DOI: 10.1080/15348423.2020.1812338

Jesus Strong Ministries believes prophetic messages are communication from God, which leads to life and freedom and strengthens believers' faith in God. However, some people lack knowledge and understanding of prophetic ministry. Therefore, the problem at Jesus Strong Ministries is that some believers cannot discern the authenticity of contemporary prophetic messages or interpret their meaning.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to equip believers to discern the authenticity of contemporary prophecy and accurately interpret its meaning. A clear understanding of the purpose or essence of prophecy will enable proper interpretation of prophetic messages and guard against deception. To accomplish this, an eight-week prophetic training course was conducted to teach people how to discern and interpret prophecy. The course will take people through an eight-step process that will help them understand the eight most relevant questions concerning prophetic messages: what prophecy is, why is it relevant, who are considered prophets, where do prophetic utterances come from, how to respond to prophetic messages, how to test the spirit, how prophecy affects culture and how to interpret contemporary prophecy. Before the course, a survey was conducted to determine the participants' prophetic views, and then a post-course survey was conducted to measure the outcome. This study is significant because most previous studies focus on biblical prophecies, and little to no attention is given to discerning and interpreting modern-day prophecy. This could be due to the popular notion that prophecy ceased with the death of the last apostle; however, contrary to those beliefs, prophetic ministry is still extant today and must be correctly understood to reap its immense benefits. It is the job of the church to steward prophecy throughout each generation. The nation of Israel was shaped through prophecy, and if the church follows the pattern of Israel, it stands to

reason that God will send prophets throughout the church age not only to communicate with his people but to build them up in their most holy faith.

Basic Assumptions

Although prophetic messages are often difficult to understand, they are vital to Christianity because Yahweh constantly communicates new messages to His people. However, prophecy can be highly controversial because, according to Thornton,

“Biblical prophecies were allegedly uttered or written by figures in the past, who might or might not be religious figures but were not formally part of the biblical tradition and Apocrypha. Its influence on events, through its mass appeal and its specific relevance to the conduct of politics by elites, and on a day-to-day level and in specific crises, makes it as significant as many economic, social, cultural, and ideological factors familiar to political historians.”¹⁴

In other words, many people were prophesying, but some did not get their prophetic messages from God. However, there are genuine contemporary prophetic messages that carry the same authority as the canon of scripture, for if God gave both, they are to be revered the same, for any message from God demands attention and, in most cases, an act of obedience.

Contemporary Prophetic messages are relevant for equipping people for kingdom work and calling their attention to sin and the coming judgment, leading them back to faith in God.

However, discernment is needed when giving or receiving a prophetic message because false prophetic messages can devastate people's lives.

It is easy to believe the prophecies written in the Bible because they have gone through rigorous scrutiny and are deemed authentic messages from God. However, that is not the case for contemporary prophecy, and herein lies the problem because contemporary prophecies often do not undergo extreme scrutiny before it is accepted as gospel. Some difficulties with these

¹⁴ Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics, and the People in Early Modern England* (Suffolk, VA: Boydell & Brewer), 2006. 1.

uncanonized contemporary prophetic messages are discerning whether they are from God and how they should be interpreted and applied to the listeners' lives; therefore, learning how to give and receive prophetic messages is essential because there is no set criteria, rules or laws governing contemporary prophecy. Therefore, the prophetic essentials course is geared toward providing solutions that will establish criteria for discerning prophetic messages.

After completing the course, participants learned how to discern, interpret, and respond to prophetic messages, resulting in less confusion and deception in the body of Christ. Participants learned that not all prophecies come from God because people can prophesy from their minds, demonic inspirations, or divination. Instead of accepting every wind of prophecy, the participants learned to cautiously approach prophetic messages, depending on the Holy Spirit to guide them in discerning the message. They also learned how to interpret prophetic languages to help them respond maturely to prophecy. They also learn to test prophecy by the fruits of the Spirit and by confirming God's revealed will rather than just the uttered prophetic words and people's interpretation. Remember that some accurate prophecies can appear false, while some false prophecies can appear authentic if not discerned or interpreted correctly. The Kim Clement prophecy that Trump will be in office for two terms could prove to be true if he wins the 2024 election; however, most people interpreted the prophecy for two consecutive terms, although the prophet did not say that the two terms were consecutive.

Definitions

This study utilizes several keywords, which can be confusing because there are so many similarities; therefore, they are defined as follows.

Biblical Prophecy: There are Biblical passages comprised of divine utterances by men or women who spoke on behalf of Yahweh. "Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but

prophets, though human, spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along” (2 Pet 1:21).

These biblical prophecies include predictions of apocalyptic events and judgment for individuals, the nation of Israel, and the world.

Charismata: Divine gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable individuals to perform specific spiritual functions such as miracles and prophecy.

Contemporary Prophet: A modern-day prophet living on earth or has lived in recent decades and contributed significantly to modern prophetic culture and literature. Their works or prophetic literature are not included in the canon but have been verified to be authentic.

Contemporary Prophecy: Refers to the current prophetic writings prophesied by modern-day prophets, whether in recent decades or currently.

Discernment: The ability to perceive, understand, and judge the spirit of prophecy clearly, especially those that are not obvious. This discernment comes from the Holy Spirit.

Essence of Prophecy: The intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of prophecy, the meaning or purpose behind the prophecy. The Testimony of Jesus (Rev. 9:10). The essence of prophecy is a revelation from God.¹⁵ “Prophecy marks the grief and hope of our present moment in light of the identity we know from our past and the vision of newness for the future.”¹⁶

False Prophets: Many people call themselves prophets, but many prophesy from their minds, divination, or demonic inspiration. Sometimes, their predictions and assumptions are accurate, while others are not.

¹⁵ Alan Bandy, and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy: A Biblical-Theological Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel. 2015). 17, 21.

¹⁶ Juliet Mousseau, *Prophetic Witnesses to Joy: A Theology of the Vowed Life*, 1st ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 2021. 10.

False Prophecy: It is sometimes difficult to discern false prophecy because many people can accurately predict events in the future, but their information did not come from the Holy Spirit. When a person prophesies an event, and it does not happen, the message is deemed false. Often, people prophesy out of their minds and agendas.

Forthtell: To Forthtell means to tell what to speak or utter a message received from God, whether through a vision or hearing the voice of God. This kind of message may or may not have a predictable future element; it is simple to speak what God says.¹⁷

Foretell: This kind of message primarily predicts future events. Often, when the kings of Israel went to war, they consulted with the prophets to predict the outcome of the war.

Interpretation: Prophetic languages or visions may often be allegorical or symbolic and must be interpreted, which can only be done by the Holy Spirit.

Modern-Day Prophecy: This type of prophecy is usually given to individuals, the church, and nations, such as a prophetic message concerning 911. Many prophets warned that it would happen, but the irony is that not many people believed it until it did. The purpose of such prophecies is still to edify, encourage, and build up the saints.

Prophecy: When most people hear the word prophecy, they immediately think of biblical prophecies, but prophecy is an inspired utterance of a prophet that declares God's divine will or predicts some future events and or edifies someone on a particular situation. "Prophetic language has an enormous power. It touches consciences, moves imagination, and energizes the will."¹⁸ Aquinas believes that "The gift of prophecy pertains to knowledge. Prophets know things that

¹⁷ McKenzie, Steven L. *How to Read the Bible: History, Prophecy, Literature: Why Modern Readers Need to Know the Difference, and What It Means for Faith Today*. (Oxford University Press, 2005). 67.

¹⁸ Maurizio Viroli, *Prophetic Times: Visions of Emancipation in the History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). 23.

are far from natural human knowledge. In this sense, prophetic knowledge includes more than future contingencies.”¹⁹

Prophecy: People often confuse prophecy and prophesy; however, prophesy is the act of uttering, speaking, or writing from a divine source, including making predictions and declarations of future events.

True Prophets: Prophets are spokespersons for Yahweh, both contemporary and biblical prophets. The Holy Spirit divinely inspires their messages; however, contemporary prophetic messages are not added to the Scripture as God deals with his people differently in every era. “True prophets reluctantly accept God’s order. They know they will not get rewards, at least not in this world.”²⁰

Prophetic Ministry: This means hearing from God on behalf of other people who cannot hear from God for themselves and declaring what the Holy Spirit wants to communicate to them. Technically, everyone is supposed to hear from God through the Holy Spirit, but many people are in various stages of their faith walk and need help hearing from God until they develop their relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Prophetic Culture: Some people believe that the gifts of the Spirit died with the apostles; therefore, they do not believe in modern-day prophetic ministry. However, a large segment of the population believes in and embraces modern-day prophetic ministry, so their culture and way of life are significantly impacted by prophetic messages.

¹⁹ Paul M. Rogers, *Aquinas on Prophecy: Wisdom and Charism in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

²⁰ Viroli, *Prophetic Times: Visions of Emancipation in the History of Italy*, 2023.

Prophetic Messages: Modern-day utterances of prophecies given to individuals or congregations and sometimes nationally. “While all Christians are called to be prophetic witnesses, the religious person’s interior and exterior freedom and deliberate focus on a relationship with God especially emphasize this call.”²¹

Testing the Spirit: This is not a test of the Holy Spirit but a test to determine the origination of the prophetic message, whether it was obtained through divination, fortune-telling spirits, or an authentic message for the Lord. “Through the power of His Spirit, we are given the ability to not only hear God but also to see what He is doing.”²²

Limitations

Many people began to prophesy that the world was ending during the pandemic, while others predicted economic collapse, food shortages, wars, and election outcomes. This deluge of prophecies caused many churches not previously engaged in the prophetic ministry to become involved because their members were getting caught up with mainstream media and political prophetic predictions. People were scared and prone to believe almost anything that resembled a message from God. Most of those messages were on social media. Because church buildings were closed, pastors tried to encourage and comfort their people from a distance and sort out varying and confusing prophetic messages.

In this post-pandemic world, prophecy will continue to impact believers in the local church and the online community. Church leaders and Christian educators must develop strategies and insights for effective measures to help people understand how to discern if a

²¹ Juliet Mousseau, *Prophetic Witnesses to Joy: A Theology of the Vowed Life*, 1st ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021). 11.

²² John Eckhardt, *Prophetic Activation: Break Your Limitation to Release Prophetic Influence* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016). 13.

message is from God, interpret its meaning correctly, and respond to it appropriately.

Contemporary prophetic messages, when given by faithful men or women of God, can serve as a source of comfort during difficult times or a source of protection and provision.

Further research could expand this study beyond its limitations to include other churches online or local communities; however, this action research is limited to the members of Jesus Strong Ministries; therefore, sampling might not accurately represent the general prophetic community. This could limit the study's results because the focus group is somewhat familiar with the prophetic ministry and is predisposed to contemporary prophetic messages. Another limitation is that most members are online; however, further research could focus on studying the experiences of local churches or larger churches affected by false prophetic messages to help leaders better understand the pervasiveness of false prophecies and how to respond to prophetic messages in their churches.

Due to the complicated nature of prophetic messages, limiting the studies to two prophecies given during the pandemic regarding the elections and President Trump is necessary. In other words, those two opposing prophecies will serve as a case study to examine how various people reacted and what proved true or false about each prophecy. This will help to solidify the need to understand contemporary prophecy and develop measures to help people discern between true and false prophecy.

While the pandemic and political unrest and their impact on prophetic ministries leave churches grappling with its ripple effects, contrary to the belief that prophecy ceased with the death of the disciples, prophetic messages are still relevant to the body of Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how to discern their truthfulness, interpret their meaning, and apply them to life. After the pandemic, many chose not to return to their churches because they lost

faith in their leaders because of false prophetic messages. Since this is an emerging issue, there is not much information in the data gathered to understand how churches handle the impact of these false prophetic messages, which again limits the study to what was observed in Jesus Strong Ministries and a handful of other churches. This could further limit the study in that the impact of this rise in false prophecy may be more far-reaching than is reported. As with many other issues facing the church, they must continue to learn and adapt to meet these prophetic challenges in the present and the future.

Examining how prophetic messages were received in biblical times is beneficial to understanding how people responded to prophetic messages in those eras. Understanding how the early church handled true and false prophetic messages is also beneficial. If people can develop a clear understanding of how prophetic messages were delivered and received in the Bible, they will have a canon or measure of how to handle modern-day prophetic messages.

Finally, a post-pandemic study of these prophetic messages could yield valuable information for church leaders when faced with prophetic utterances that may or may not be from God. Prophetic messages are not new to the church, but there have been varying reactions throughout the ages. Therefore, the times we live in call for a clear understanding of the subject. Several biblical prophecies predicted that perilous times would come in the last days, and Jesus himself said that birth pains would come upon the last generation to usher in the end of the age. The election prophecy has nothing to do with the end-times prophecy. However, if people are deceived by it, they can also be deceived by other prophecies, which could negatively impact their faith in God and lead to what the Bible calls the great falling away (2 Thess. 2:3).

Delimitations

This study examines prophetic messages in Jesus Strong Ministries against other prophetic messages its members introduced to the ministry. Its members are online; therefore, their locations vary but are limited to the United States. The age groups vary from young adults to eighty-year-olds. Understanding how the churches responded to prophecy during the pandemic is crucial because it will impact future generations. With this understanding, people will be better prepared to respond to future prophetic upheavals.

For this project, the study of the prophetic message includes messages from Jesus Strong Ministries concerning the 2020 election and other messages from other individuals, such as the Kim Clement prophecy regarding the election of President Trump. The study emphasizes the discerning and interpretation of prophecy. Limiting the study to only those prophetic messages that affected Jesus Strong Ministries is necessary because contemporary prophetic messages vary, and some are beyond the scope of this study. The goal of this study is not to analyze every false prophetic message but to understand how to correctly discern, interpret, and respond to authentic prophetic messages. Another delimitation imposed on this study is that only those who are a part of Jesus Strong Ministries could participate; therefore, it cannot account for the rest of the body of Christ who may have encountered similar prophetic confusion.

Thesis Statement

Discerning and interpreting prophecies has continued to be challenging over the years; however, prophecy is God communicating with and through His people; therefore, it is necessary to understand biblical and contemporary prophecies. One of the primary ways to understand contemporary prophecies is to view them through biblical prophecies that are clearly understood. The Apostle John warns, “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, NIV).²³ Therefore, while it is essential to embrace authentic prophetic messages, people must be aware of the deception of false prophets.

Some would say then that the solution is to ignore prophecy, but the Apostle Paul says, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil” (1 Thess 5:19- 22, NKJV). So, to dismiss authentic contemporary prophecy is to quench the movement of the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul also taught the early church believers to desire the gift of prophecy because the one who prophesies edifies the church (1 Cor. 14). If the members of Jesus Strong Ministries are equipped to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages accurately, then they will be able to recognize the difference between true and false prophecy.

²³ Unless otherwise noted, All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV).

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the nature of a problem and its present solutions is essential before attempting to address it. Therefore, reviewing the current literary information on the Doctor of Ministry prophetic research project is necessary before attempting to create a new model. This process enables the writer to observe relevant themes and identify existing gaps. Several relevant themes emerge when studying the literary works available on prophetic discernment and interpretation, and some are discussed below.

Prophetic literature is vast and varies in understanding and beliefs; however, this study focuses on literature that provides an understanding of modern-day prophetic ministry and message rather than biblical prophecy. Some of the literature reviewed will also consider biblical prophecy and its discernment and interpretations to draw insight into the discernment and interpretation of contemporary prophecy. The hope is that reviewing how biblical figures respond or react to prophecy, whether negatively or positively, will provide a canon of sorts to judge modern-day prophetic messages. Many themes were observed in the literature review that provided a clear understanding of the nature and characteristics of prophecy.

Literature Review

The prophetic message has become a normal part of some people's everyday lives; however, many people do not understand what it is or its purpose. Prophetic messages can significantly impact a person's life negatively or positively; therefore, it is vital to understand and apply them only when authentic prophecies are directed to the individual or a particular group of people. For example, suppose a prophetic message is given to a person to move across the country and start a ministry. In that case, another person cannot apply that message because it was meant only for the person who received it.

Apart from the Bible, prophetic messages are the primary vehicle through which God communicates with humanity; therefore, it is essential to analyze and interpret authentic prophetic messages correctly. While the Bible remains the primary tool for analyzing and interpreting prophetic messages, the literature review provides a spectrum of previous prophetic analyses and tools to further analyze, interpret, and synthesize contemporary prophetic messages through a theological and theoretical perspective.

Defining Prophecy

In reviewing prophetic literature, many themes emerge pertinent to this study. The first theme observed is the definition of Prophecy; with the recent uptick in prophetic messages, there is a demand to understand the essence of the meaning of prophecy. Many scholars have painstakingly tried to define prophecy because they know that no one can correctly understand prophecy if they do not know what it is. According to Witherington, “Defining prophecy is a notoriously difficult matter. Any description of prophecy that has bite will not apply to every Old Testament prophet, let alone to prophets in the New Testament.”¹ The recent definitions have moved away from prophecy as foretelling the future to forth-telling what God says.

Prophecy is primarily a message from God that communicates the will of God to the listener rather than foretelling the future.² In her book *Prophetic Community*, Kim Maas defines prophecy as the process by which God places revelatory truths in man’s heart that are delivered through speech to communicate his divine messages to mankind.³ In other words, prophecy is the communication of God to man regardless of what the message entails. Many other authors have

¹ Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).14.

² McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*, 68.

³ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 82.

also contributed to the definition of prophecy to help people understand that prophecy is not fortune telling but simply speaking forth God's divine will on the earth.⁴ So, although prophecy can and does foretell the future, it is primarily a communication channel between God and man.

Prophecy, then, is the bedrock of faith in God, for it reveals the will of God to the past, current, and future generations of the earth. Still, others have defined prophecy as speaking forth the counsel of God through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, which expresses the thoughts of God that no man could articulate by their natural mind.⁵ In this way, Goll also defines prophecy as the voice of God speaking to the church and individuals. Prophecy, in realism or simplicity, is hearing God's voice and speaking forth what He says.⁶ DeGraw supports Goll's claim that people can hear from three sources within the spiritual realm: the enemy, ourselves, and the Spirit of God. She makes it clear that to operate prophetically, one must hear the voice of the Lord accurately and unquestioningly.⁷

Another definition of prophecy is that it is one of the Holy Spirit's gifts to the church and can be exercised by the whole church or selected individuals. Prophecy is also defined as the will of God conveyed to the church through divine revelations.⁸ As a gift of the Holy Spirit, Hull also noted that the Holy Spirit must guide the prophecy to be effective in the church or the individual. The lack of understanding of prophecy's divine nature and purpose creates false expectations,

⁴ Bandy, and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 38.

⁵ Jim W. Goll, *The Seer: The Prophetic Power of Visions, Dreams and Open Heavens* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, Inc. 2012). 34.

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Kathy DeGraw, *Prophetic Spiritual Warfare: Partnering with the Holy Spirit to Manifest Your Destiny* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2021). 26.

⁸ John M. Hull, *Towards the Prophetic Church: A Study of Christina Mission* (London, England: SCM Press, 2014). 1.

leading to conflict between the receiver and the prophet. Defining prophecy is the first step to understanding prophecy, but its purpose must also be defined. “Prophecy can be broken down into revelation, interpretation, and application. Revelation is what God alone reveals. It can come as an impression, a tongue or language, a prophetic utterance, a vision, a symbol, a sensation in the body, a dream, or even a riddle.”⁹ Interpretation is where people stumble when trying to understand prophecy because they often do not know how to interpret the revelation they receive; therefore, they cannot make the correct application to their lives. When an authentic prophetic message is spoken, it is crucial to understand its purpose individually, corporately, or globally. In essence, interpretation explains or clarifies what God is saying, and application explains how the revelation applies to our daily lives.

Purpose of Prophecy

Another great theme from the literary review is the purpose of prophecy. Because most prophetic authors defined prophecy as a message from God, its purpose must also be discussed. The purpose of prophecy is multi-dimensional, and no one person sees or hears in all prophetic dimensions because Amos saw different visions from Isaiah, and Jeremiah prophesied differently from Ezekiel or Micah. No two prophets prophesy or see the same way, but the purpose of the message remains the same: connecting people to God through words. Remember that the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus (Rev. 19:10). Therefore, all prophetic messages should lead people back to the heart of God. According to Bookstein, prophecy is not given to build an elaborate timeline of how God will fulfill his promises but so that people present

⁹ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 84.

themselves as faithful witnesses to God.¹⁰ The role of prophets in biblical times was to point to the future mediatory work of Christ. In other words, prophets were the heralds of Christ's mediatory role, not the replacement of his ministry.¹¹ He also states that the core purpose of prophecy is to reveal the Kingdom of God and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.¹² Therefore, these prophetic purposes or functions depend on the prophet's relationship with the Holy Spirit and the revelation that the Holy Spirit chooses to reveal. The revelation needs to be imparted and activated before the application of purpose can occur.¹³

Another purpose of prophecy is to help people in their faith walk by equipping them with knowledge and understanding, encouraging and comforting them when their faith is weak.¹⁴ The prophetic word reveals and releases destiny and helps people to discover, pursue, and fulfill their destinies.¹⁵ Therefore, contemporary prophetic messages should not be ignored because tremendous courage and restoration come from discovering the mind and heart of the Lord through a word of prophecy. It restores people to the heart of God and restores the hearts of people to faith in their creator.¹⁶ On the other hand, Davis contends that the purpose of prophecy is to direct the faithful actions of God's people and provide a standard for judging people's

¹⁰ William Bookstein, *The Future of Everything: Essential Truths About the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019). 19.

¹¹ Mookgo S. Kgatle, Marius Nel, and Collum Banda, eds. *Christological Paradigm Shifts in Prophetic Pentecostalism in South Africa* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022).

¹² Bookstein, *The Future of Everything: Essential Truths About the End Times*, 16.

¹³ DeGraw, *Prophetic Spiritual Warfare*, 27.

¹⁴ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 83.

¹⁵ Michelle McClain-Walters, *The Prophetic Advantage: Be God's Mouthpiece. Transform Your World* (Lake Mark, FL: Charisma House). 2012.

¹⁶ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 83.

actions concerning God.¹⁷ Both are correct assumptions of prophetic messages because God intends for his people to be equipped through prophecy, walk humbly, live holy, and fulfill their God-ordained purpose.

Bembry says another purpose of prophecy is to speak truth to those in power and offer directions from God by calling them back to righteousness and holiness in God, as was the case when Elijah confronted King Ahab and the false prophets.¹⁸ As Enns mentioned, prophecies sometimes serve the purpose of announcing God's impending judgments and future blessings.¹⁹ Most people do not see this as part of the purpose of prophecy, but most prophetic books warn people of God's intended actions on earth, whether judgment or blessings. As Sharp said, prophecy aims to inform the listener of God's divine judgment and offer words of radiant hope amid the oracles of judgment, which often include graphic images of national violence and oracles of hope depicted by images of healing, national transformation, or the restoration of God's governing authority.²⁰

Some prophetic messages are certainly complex and serve diverse purposes. Sharp also said that prophecy teaches people about their traditions and culture, as was the case with the Israelites.²¹ One could say that the Israelites are God's exhibition of prophetic enactment on Earth. However, prophecy is not confined to the prophetic books of the Old Testament because "The New

¹⁷ Ellen F. Davis, and Drew Stevens, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). 59.

¹⁸ Jason Bembry, and Miriam Perkins. *Walking in the Prophetic Tradition: Models of Speaking Truth and Acting in Love for Everyday People* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018). 2.

¹⁹ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology, 25th-anniversary edition* (Chicago IL: Moody Publishers, 2014). 70.

²⁰ Carolyn J. Sharp, *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019). 19.

²¹ Sharp, *The Prophetic Literature*, 26.

Testament is about prophecy, its fulfillment, and its actualization from beginning to end, from how Matthew looks back to the authoritative prophecy to authenticate Jesus' birth (Matt. 1:23), to the experience of John on an Aegean island, who spoke in the language of the prophets of old and described how he too was called to be a prophet to peoples, languages and nations" (Rev. 10:11).²² Prophecy from the Old Testament to the New Testament underwent a significant shift because the OT prophet's task was to prepare people for the first advent of Jesus, while the NT prophet's or Apostles' task was to testify of Jesus' work on the cross and prepare them for his second advent. This is crucial to understanding biblical prophecies because, according to Rydelnik and Blum, "how messianic prophecy is viewed will ultimately affect the evangelical understanding of the inspiration and interpretation of the Scriptures, the defense of the gospel, and the identification of Jesus as the promised Messiah."²³ Without having the prophecies to provide perspective, it would be impossible to make sense of Christianity. No one would know who Jesus was or why he came. Therefore, it is prudent to examine both biblically and secularly prophetic history.

History of Prophecy

The foundation of prophecy goes back to the Garden of Eden when God first prophesied that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. (Gen 3:15). Then later, the Lord spoke through the Old Testament patriarchs who were not called prophets but carried a significant prophecy that would later develop and unfold throughout the history of the Jewish people. Therefore, the prophetic ministry began with the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets,

²² Mark S. Burrows, Hilary Davies, and Josephine Von Zitzewitz. *Prophetic Witness and the Reimagining of the World: Poetry, Theology, and Philosophy in Dialogue: Power of the Word* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). 49.

²³ Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019). 28.

whom the Holy Spirit empowered to speak on God's behalf, for as 2 Peter 1: 21 says, "Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along." According to Hvidt, from the times of Abraham, Moses, and the Old Testament prophets to the times of John the Baptist and the New Testament prophets, the charism of prophecy is evident in history as one of God's primary means of guiding His children to salvation.²⁴ Hvidt went on to say that prophecy was an essential and constant feature of the early church, and without prophecy, the church would not survive.²⁵ Christianity would not exist without the voice of the prophets in the Old and New Testaments and throughout church history.

The concept of prophecy emerges from historically patristic tradition and is usually considered a reference point for all Christian thought.²⁶ Noah was the first prophetic patriarch of the Jewish nation to whom God prophesied His plans to destroy the earth with a flood (Gen. 6). God told Noah to build an Ark and prepare for the flood. Noah did as the Lord instructed, saving him and his descendants from the epic flood. Then, God established a prophetic covenant with Noah to bless him and his descendants (Gen. 9).

Abraham, another patriarch of the Jewish nation, was the first to be recognized as a prophet. God told Abimelech in a dream, "Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live" (Gen. 20:7). Clearly, there is biblical evidence indicating that Abraham was a prophet who, through the prophecies received from Yahweh, was able to preserve his posterity on Earth. Long after Abraham died, his descendants adhered to the

²⁴ Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007). 35.

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁶ Andrea Colli, "Eternity and Prophetic Cognition", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 56, no. 1 (2022): 97–107.

prophecy by believing that God would make them a great nation and that all the nations of the Earth would be blessed through him. (Gen. 22:18).

Then, fast-forward to Moses, one of the most remarkable prophets ever to live. With the call of Moses, the deliverer came a dramatic shift in how God dealt with His people. Many signs and wonders accompanied Moses's prophetic ministry, from the initial meeting with God in the burning bush to the confrontation with Pharaoh and the multiple miracles in the wilderness to his successor, Joshua, who led the Israelites to cross over and possess the promised land. However, the prophetic ministry did not stop with the death of Moses or the Israelites possessing the promised land; it gained momentum, and there was another dramatic shift in the prophetic with the rise of prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Then, after Israel fell into apostasy and idol worshipping, another prophetic shift gave rise to what is commonly called the age of the major and minor prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea Joel, etc. That prophetic era continued to the time of Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, after which there was a four-hundred-year silence when no prophetic messages were recorded until John the Baptist.

The history of prophecy is the rich heritage of the Jewish people and is well documented in various Hebraic writings. However, other sources historically document prophecy, though not as detailed as the Hebrew Bible. According to Claassen, "Besides the Hebrew Bible, most of the available texts documenting prophecy derive from two sources— Old Babylonian Mari and the Neo-Assyrian Nineveh; other than these, we have only scattered texts from different times and places, giving only a very restricted view of prophecy in other historical contexts."²⁷ However,

²⁷ L. Juliana M. Claassens and Irmtraud Fischer, eds. *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2021). 76-77.

“Knowledge of ancient prophecy comes to us through several filters created partly by chance and partly by some ancient scribes and archivists who long ago determined what we see today.”²⁸

Therefore, the Bible is the most authoritative form of documented prophecy.

As prophecy progressed throughout the Bible, God raised up judges, prophets, and priests who could hear and declare God's heart to His people. The prophetic ministry became more prominent as the newly formed Hebrew nation began to turn away from God. Therefore, God sent many major and minor prophets over centuries to warn and plead with them to return to the Lord. The origination of the Old Testament prophetic message was easily discernable because most of its context was centered around calling Israel back to the Mosaic law after they transgressed against God.”²⁹ Therefore, the heart of the prophetic heritage is the freedom from the bondage of sin.³⁰ Throughout history, God used prophecy to awaken people to their sins and call them to repentance and a return to fellowship with him.

Being a prophet of God in biblical times meant the prophet had to go against the grain of culture, which could become risky business. “Speaking a word of prophecy in the biblical period was dangerous and often constituted an act requiring profound courage to cut across the grain of society and courage to risk life and limb to carry the divine message to the king, other leaders, and the people.”³¹ Some prophets were stoned or beaten and thrown in prison simply because they proclaimed the message that God gave them. Likewise, today, people do not always accept authentic prophetic messages, which causes them to miss the profound benefits of prophecy.

²⁸ Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, 101.

²⁹ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 69.

³⁰ VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 64.

³¹ Bembry, *Walking in the Prophetic*, 5.

Although a message was from God, for it to be actualized in people's lives, the prophets depended upon audiences for their effectiveness. For example, Jeremiah faced many difficulties as he prophesied against the culture because his prophecies were rejected. He prophesied and wept over the people of Israel, but they refused to believe because they chose to believe the false prophecies rather than the truth. According to Biltz, “Jeremiah was astounded at the depth of the deception of God’s people who believed in the false prophets’ proclamation of peace when the sword was about to descend, reaching to the very depth of their hearts.”³² Nevertheless, “The truth of Jeremiah’s proclamation as words from Yahweh was vindicated, and the opposing views were disregarded as false visionary experiences and false prophecy.”³³

Accurate prophecy sometimes makes people uncomfortable, for God sometimes uses prophecy to bring people face to face with their sins, as with the message of Isaiah, when God told him to lift his voice like a trumpet and tell My people their sins (Isa. 5:1). God’s prophetic message relied upon Him, and the people who embodied His signs were made visible in the community through His prophets, even when their presence was uncomfortable. Their symbolic names reminded the people of what they did not want to hear.³⁴ It was not just the discomfort of facing the truth of their sins that caused the people to be deceived but their desire to hear what was more suitable to their lifestyle, and that is one of the main problems with contemporary prophetic messages. No one likes to hear about their faults and failures, but God’s goodness leads man to repentance by pointing out their sins so that they can repent and return to God.

³² Mark Biltz, *Decoding the Prophet Jeremiah: What an Ancient Prophet Says About Today* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2020). 66.

³³ Wilhelm J. Wessels, “Prophetic Sensing of Yahweh’s Word.” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies.*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2015, pp. 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2923>.

³⁴ Grey, *Embodiment, and the Prophetic Message in Isaiah’s Memoir*, 431–456.

As prophecy progresses throughout Bible history, there was a 400-year gap between Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, and John the Baptist, who emerged as the first prophet of the New Testament. John the Baptist's message mirrored that of the prophets of the Old Testament, calling God's people to repentance (Mark 1). When Jesus came on the scene of the prophetic, there was yet another dramatic shift. The whole prophetic phenomenon was upended because he was the culmination of centuries of prophecies. Although Jesus fulfilled many prophecies in the Old Testament, he prophesied of many things yet to come. His prophetic messages were accompanied by great signs and wonders never done on the face of the earth, so much so that the Pharisees asked him by what authority he did those miracles. (Mark 11:28).

Jesus then gave his disciples the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to prophesy and do great miracles as he did. As the early church progressed, prophecy progressed right along with it. For when God poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, both males and females could prophesy. Therefore, the prophetic ministry was shifted from only a selected few to all whom the Holy Spirit enabled through the gift of prophecy, and this is a great change in the prophetic ministry; however, this is where the prophetic gets messy. Since everyone filled with the Holy Spirit can prophesy, discernment becomes vital because many people are prophesying, and some do so falsely, although not intentionally. This problem now raises the question of who should prophesy, who are considered prophets, and who are not.

Prophets

Prophets are ordinary, everyday people who are called to the office of the prophet by God. Some were called through supernatural encounters and miraculous moments of divine

experience, like Moses at the burning bush or Isaiah in the famous heavenly throne room.³⁵

Prophets are flawed human beings who carry their humanity with them into the office of prophets, and sometimes that humanity shows itself, as was the case when Elijah ran from Jezebel and prayed that he would die.³⁶ Jonah is another example of a prophet who allowed his human nature to really show itself when he became angry with God for saving the people of Nineveh. Moses's sister, Miriam, a prophet of God, was envious of her brother and gossiped about him until the Lord rebuked her. Abraham, the great prophet, was a coward and a liar because he lied to King Abimelech about Sarah being his wife. He would never have been chosen to be a prophet by human standards. Some would even call him a false prophet because his character by human standards was questionable, especially since he impregnated his maid and later sent her and the child away with only a jar of water and some food (Gen. 21). Thus, prophets are every day, normal human beings that God chose to use despite their faults and failures.

Prophets are simple people who usually hold a secular vocation, such as Amos, who was a shepherd but was anointed to prophesy. This means that the calling of God does not erase the prophet's humanity but uses it because the sinful nature of man and the anointed nature of man are both operating side by side in the same body. The encouraging thing about this is that God uses flawed human beings to carry out his perfect plans. A prophet is not perfect; they are flawed earthen vessels carrying the treasure of a message from God.

³⁵ Mark Rutland, *Of Kings and Prophets: Understanding Your Role in Natural Authority and Spiritual Power* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2021).18.

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

Prophets, though respected individuals, were seldom popular because they hardly ever prophesied what popular culture wanted to hear.³⁷ Their task of confronting and challenging the powerful, often with messages, warnings, and corrections, caused them to be seen as dark and foreboding, angry men filled with the wrath of God who fiercely confronted sin and wickedness.³⁸ Prophetic words and deeds call the community to remember the Lord's covenant with them and challenge the community to embody that same covenant and fidelity toward the Lord and each other.³⁹ However, a prophet is simply a spokesperson for the Lord, and there are different types of prophets based on the assignment that God gave them.

Types of Prophets

As with the diversity in the types of prophecy, there are different kinds of prophets; no two people are the same, and no two prophets will prophesy in the same manner, although the message may remain congruent. How a prophet obtains revelations from Yahweh is important when determining if the prophetic utterances are true. Some will see, and some will hear or discern God's message through the gift of prophecy. Several different Hebrew terms are used to describe a prophet. "The Hebrew term *nabhi* means a spokesman or a speaker and denotes "one who has been called or appointed to proclaim as a herald the message of God himself and *roeh*, which means "to see or seer (1 Sam. 9:9); it is the older word for prophet and is synonymous with *nabhi*. *Roeh* was the popular designation, whereas *nabhi* was the technical term."⁴⁰

³⁷ Rutland, *Of Kings and Prophets*, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹ Timothy R. Gaines, *Following Jesus: Prophet, Priest, King* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2018). 35.

⁴⁰ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 69.

According to Goll, the Old Testament uses two words primarily to refer to a seer: *ra'ah* and *chozeh*. *Ra'ah* means to see visions, and *chozeh* means to behold or gaze.⁴¹ Regarding prophetic revelation, a *nabhi* is primarily an inspired hearer and speaker, while a *seer* is primarily visual, which means they see in the realm of the Spirit through dreams or visions. “As visionaries, or prophetic speakers, the prophets interacted with their audiences publicly, in oral performances; they were inspired and therefore talked in poetry.”⁴² This is not always the case because Jeremiah, for example, was told to write the message on a scroll and send it to the King.

On the other hand, Ezekiel had to act out his prophecies by doing many weird things: baking his bread over cow dung, being bound, and lying on his side for many days for the sins of Israel and Judah (Ezek. 4). No one knows why God chooses to manifest His message through prophets in the methods or channels that He uses, but the important thing is that the people get the message. Another important thing to remember is that God can use anyone of any gender to communicate his message to his people.

Women Prophets

The role of women in any ministry has been a hotly debated topic throughout church history; therefore, women prophets are not warmly embraced by the Christian community or the public. However, several women prophets are recorded in the Bible and were authorized by God to prophesy. Prophecy is not a gender-specific role, just like salvation is not gender specific; it is for whosoever will (Rev. 22:17). Women have a prophetic role embedded in their vocation and femininity because they are called to communicate God’s message in their children's lives and

⁴¹ Goll, *Seer Expanded Edition*, 21.

⁴² Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature: Challenging Paradigms That Control Our Academic Thought on Jeremiah and Ezekiel.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 3 (2019): 565–86. <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1383.2019.658484>.

the community they relate to; however, this role can extend further if the Lord wills it.⁴³ In the Old Testament, Miriam was the first woman recognized by the Bible as a prophet. “Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced” (Exod.15:20). Not much detail was given regarding how or to whom she prophesied; however, she was recognized as a prophet.

The second notable female prophet was Deborah, recorded in Judg. 4:4, “Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time.” Not only was she a prophet, but she was the leader of Israel during those days. Another notable female prophet was Huldah, who prophesied to the young King Josiah, “So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. (2 Kings 22:14-16, NIV). Notably, five men, including the king, inquired of one woman’s prophetic gift. Therefore, a person’s gender has no bearing on whether a person can prophesy; the only requirement is that an individual be filled with the Holy Spirit and be authorized by God to speak on his behalf.

Female prophets in the Bible were not limited to the Old Testament; Claassens and Fischer observed, “Even the New Testament acknowledges female prophecy and female prophets played a prominent role in early Montanism.”⁴⁴ Anna is another female recognized as a prophet in the Temple when baby Jesus was presented to the Lord (Luke 2:36). Contrary to popular beliefs that women should be silent in the church, many Corinthian women were also prophets, such as “Philip’s daughters, Ammia of Philadelphia, Philumene, the visionary martyr

⁴³ Mary Hayden Lemmons, *Woman as Prophet in the Home and the World: Interdisciplinary Investigations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016). 114.

⁴⁴ Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, 77.

Perpetua, and several leaders of the Montanist movement, including Maximilian, Priscilla, and Quintilla. All these women were accepted as prophets and exercised prophetic authority within Christian groups.”⁴⁵ Throughout the centuries of Christianity, history records women in leadership roles of ministry, most of whom based the legitimacy of their ministry on prophetic experiences.⁴⁶ Therefore, women who are filled with the Holy Spirit and are authorized by God can and should prophesy as the Spirit leads them to do so.

God is the God of all flesh and can designate whomever he chooses as prophets, whether male or female. He promised that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. His sons and daughters would prophesy (Joel 2:28). Lemmons rightly observed that there could be no prophecy without the inherent idea of an individual election of a prophet chosen to speak for God. Women who prophesied create a diverse and multifaceted relationship between prophecy and election.⁴⁷ A person cannot indeed prophesy unless they are chosen and authorized by God to do so. However, a person cannot presume to be God's prophet without authorization; the Holy Spirit must enable them to prophesy in the name of God. According to Hvidt, “Most of the Old Testament prophetic books tell of a specific moment in which God called the prophet to his or her mission.” For example, Moses received his calling when he encountered God in the burning bush, and Isaiah when he saw the Lord in the temple. Therefore, prophetic ministry is a calling from God himself, and he can choose to use both male and female. “The gift of prophecy, indeed, according to Origen, is bestowed by God on both men and women. Origen reflects on

⁴⁵ Kienzle, Beverly Mayne, and Pamela J Walker, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2023). 21.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Bouldin, *Women Prophets and Radical Protestantism in the British Atlantic World, 1640-1730*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Deborah, the prophetess and judge of Israel, and the gift of prophecy offered to women, explicitly claiming that there is no gender diversity in spiritual gifts.”⁴⁸

Although Apostle Paul wrote that he forbade women from speaking in the church (1 Cor. 14:34), he also said women should cover their heads when prophesying, which means that he acknowledges that women can and do prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5). And it is no secret that, women have dominated the prophetic scene in church history, especially after the sixth century, when women outnumbered male visionaries.⁴⁹ Women's prophecies in early historical and literary texts written by and about women provide a comparatively rich field of study. However, many women had to endure tremendous opposition because they were prophesying in an age when women's voices were seldom heard. Still, they prophesied because they were certain God empowered them to prophesy.⁵⁰ Remember that although there were genuine female prophets, there were those who called themselves prophets who were empowered by demonic spirits to tell fortunes. Just because a prediction came through does not mean that the source is God.

Roles of a Prophet

The role of a prophet was also a significant theme in the literary review because some authors believe it is essential to understand the prophet's role when receiving and interpreting prophecy. The role and prophet are almost synonymous, but it is important to distinguish between the prophets and the purpose they serve. “The prophet enters God’s presence, hears His

⁴⁸ Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Prophecy in Origen: Between Scripture and Philosophy.” *Journal of Early Christian History* 7 (2): 2017. 17–39. doi:10.1080/2222582X.2017.1380504.

⁴⁹ Hvidt, *Christian prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 286-287.

⁵⁰ Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 12.

will, and then proclaims it to the people.”⁵¹ Their role was to speak what they heard from the Lord, and what they spoke was subsequently written down; essentially, they were spokespersons for God.⁵² A prophet was responsible for prophesying, predicting, and informing the nation of future events, reaching beyond the prophet's human abilities to foretell the future, thereby exalting God.⁵³ Prophets were incredibly courageous because they had to take their messages to real kings whose word was law and who could have ordered them executed in the blink of an eye.⁵⁴

As Maas stated, “It is of critical importance that the Body of Christ become a people known for hearing the voice of God and speaking His words. When the prophets of God speak his word to his people, lives change, cultures transform, and the kingdom of God expands. God becomes real. Hearts are revealed, and everything changes. The world will be changed by people who hear and speak the very words of God.”⁵⁵ As a spokesperson for God, some prophets' roles are to speak truth to power, unmask hypocrisy, remind their fellow Israelites of their past, advocate for the marginalized, and call for justice for all people.⁵⁶ Nogalski observes, “Prophetic texts often mediate scenarios wherein the prophet confronts the people or their political and religious leaders. Accordingly, it is hard to reflect on such texts without establishing some level

⁵¹ Rutland, *Of Kings and Prophets*, 20.

⁵² Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2010). 42.

⁵³ Paul D. Wegner, David G. Firth, and Tremper Longman. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2021). 7.

⁵⁴ Rutland, *Of Kings and Prophets*, 12.

⁵⁵ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 20.

⁵⁶ Bembry, *Walking in the Prophetic*, 5.

of confrontation within the modern setting.”⁵⁷ This meant that those in power do not always welcome prophetic messages, especially if it is not in favor of what they desire. Nevertheless, the prophet's job is to bring balance and order back into governing power by declaring truth and morality.

The prophet's message often resulted in direct confrontations with rulers, elders who made judicial decisions at the city gate, self-serving priests who fed on the people's infatuation with public displays of sacrifice, and prophets who spoke empty words of peace desired by the masses.⁵⁸ As Rutland rightfully observed, Prophets who prophesy presumptuously what they hope will happen are not prophets. God is not obligated to fulfill the wish lists of preachers who claim prophetic authority because prophecy is only authentic when it originates with God.⁵⁹

Another role of the prophet is to warn the nation of God's impending judgment, plead for repentance, and return to devoting themselves to God, so essentially, some prophets were preachers with the task of preaching to a backsliding nation. According to Watts, “Aquinas also emphasized that a prophet was also a teacher and preacher, called by God to speak His word to the people.”⁶⁰ To fulfill this mission, the church must be prophetic in its opposition to the injustices and corruptions that are the antithesis of the loving community of God's reign. The

⁵⁷ James Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015). 105.

⁵⁸ Gaines, *Following Jesus: Prophet, Priest, King*, 35.

⁵⁹ Rutland, *Of Kings and Prophets*, 18.

⁶⁰ Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Rochester, NY: D.S.Brewer, 1997). 21.

Hebrew Bible prophets condemned the injustice and inequality established in their society as an outrage to God.⁶¹

True prophets receive their messages from God and affirm the whole council of God. Most of the time, their messages are concerned with any human restriction on the freedom of God, whether people are breaking God's laws. Prophets hear from God, and they speak for God. They confront society for neglecting God's law, call people, nations, or cities to repentance, or summon them to align with God's will. As Kelly observed, "Closely related to the orthodoxy requirement for "true" prophecy, according to many, is the need to encourage repentance. Scholars have often highlighted the call to repentance as a primary feature of true prophecy."⁶² For example, the prophet Joel exhorted the people to repent because he envisioned a future day when Israel would return to God, and He would have pity on them.⁶³ A prophet speaks words that address the challenges and provide hope for the target audience, sometimes the current or future audience.⁶⁴ Their role is to unite two diametrical worlds, the supernatural and the natural. When a prophet gives a divine utterance, two worlds collide, and often, opposing views exist. This is the undercurrent fueling prophetic opposition and the embracing of false prophecy. This phenomenon can be likened to what Apostle Paul describes as the flesh and spirit nature of man opposing each other (Gal. 5:17).

⁶¹ Mary Doak, *A Prophetic, Public Church: Witness to Hope amid the Global Crises of the Twenty-First Century* (Liturgical Press, 2020). 11.

⁶² William L. Kelly, *How Prophecy Works: A Study of the Semantic Field of נָבִיא and a Close Reading of Jeremiah 1:4–19, 23:9–40 and 27:1–28:17*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019. 43.

⁶³ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 73.

⁶⁴ Jacqueline Grey, "Embodiment and the Prophetic Message in Isaiah's Memoir." *Pneuma: The journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. 39, no. 4 (2017): 431–456.

Sources of Prophetic Message

Prophetic messages can be inspired through three primary methods: receiving a mental or open vision or hearing the voice of God, internally or audible, oracles from the human mind, or inspired by evil spirits. Therefore, the Apostle John exhorts the early Christians to test every spirit because not all speak a message from God (1 John 1:4). When a person encounters the prophetic, they should seek to discern the source of the message: Is it coming from the enemy, the human mind, or the Spirit of God? The source of the message gives it credence. However, the source of the prophetic message can only be discerned with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Authentic prophetic ministry depends on hearing the voice of the Lord accurately and unquestioningly. According to Tibbs, discerning automatism as “true” and “false” occupied Christians in the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* during the late first and early second centuries. *Did.* 11 warns that not every prophet who speaks “by means of a spirit” can be trusted.⁶⁵ Tibbs continues to review the writings of the *Shepherd of Hermas* and finds that “*Mand.* 11 reveals that God’s spirits and the Devil’s spirits manifest speech automatisms through itinerant prophets during the *synagōgē*: “When the prophet speaks, it is either the Spirit of God which speaks through him or an earthly spirit.”⁶⁶ In other words, people can prophesy from their minds, demonic spirits, or God. “*Herm. Mand.* 11 discerns two types of spirits. The spirit of the true prophet is “divine,” “given from God,” “from above,” and “has power.” The spirit of the false prophet “comes from the Devil,” is “earthly,” and “has no power.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Eugene C. Tibbs, 2021. *Do Not Believe Every Spirit: Discerning the Ethics of Prophetic Agency in Early Christian Culture*. *Harvard Theological Review* 114 (1). Cambridge University Press: 27–50. doi:10.1017/S0017816021000043

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

People prophesy from their minds, as with the prophets in Jeremiah 23:21. God did not give them any message, yet they prophesied what the people wanted to hear. People also prophesied what they heard other people or prophets saying, as with Prophet Micaiah and Ahab. “The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, “Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs and speak favorably” (1 Kings 22:13). Micaiah, a true prophet of Yahweh, reluctantly prophesied that the king would attack and be victorious; however, the king swore by God and then gave the correct prophetic message. Recently, a modern-day prophet shared a prophetic message with another person who was a guest speaker at a church meeting. The speaker got up to speak and spoke the word of prophecy to the congregation as if he was the one who received the prophetic message from God. That speaker had no way of verifying if the message was true nor did he care to say how he received the message. So people can prophesy based on what they hear others say.

Then, there are demonic sources of prophecy where people either practice divination or receive prophetic messages inspired by demons. This takes place in two ways: people use divination to communicate with the demonic realm, or they receive demonic communication through their thoughts but are unaware of its sources. Two prominent biblical examples of these practices are the witch of Endor, whom Saul consulted after Samuel's death (1 Sam. 28), and the slave girl possessed by a demonic spirit that could predict the future (Acts 16:16). The witch of Endor used divination to speak to a dead person. The predictions were accurate; however, it was unclear if she spoke to Samuel's spirit. Just because a prophetic message is accurate does not mean it is from God. This understanding causes one to question how the trustworthy source of prophecy can be discerned. The researcher contends that learning to recognize accurate prophecies will provide a measuring tool or canon to help people recognize and eliminate false

prophecies. The first of those tools is prophetic authority because a prophet must be called and authorized by God to speak in his name and on his behalf.

Prophetic Authority

Every person who receives the gift of the Holy Spirit can prophesy, even young children because the Holy Spirit is the prophetic authority that fuels prophecy (John 16:13-14). Thomas Aquinas wrote, “The highest realization of prophecy occurred when the prophet was aware that God was addressing him directly through immediate revelation.”⁶⁸ Meszaros says that the Holy Spirit guided the Church in interpreting Christ’s words, deeds, birth, death, and resurrection, revealing God’s plan of salvation and His actions in history and the future.⁶⁹ The guidance of the Holy Spirit authorizes both men and women to speak on God’s behalf. Hvidt states, ‘The prophet receives the Word in God's power and authority: he or she is authorized to speak on God's behalf, and thus becomes God's ambassador.’⁷⁰

Scripture and reformist traditions teach that the Holy Spirit can transform anyone and that women and men are equal before God.⁷¹ According to Joel 2, God will pour His Spirit upon all flesh in the last days, and His sons and daughters will prophesy. This means whomever God pours out His Spirit on can prophesy. Apostle Paul said, “For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1 Cor. 14:31). Sometimes, the gift of prophecy will remain dormant in a person until the appointed time for it to be activated by the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁸ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 57.

⁶⁹ Andrew Meszaros, *The Prophetic Church: History and Doctrinal Development in John Henry Newman and Yves Congar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷⁰ Hvidt, *Christian prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 38.

⁷¹ Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

Prophecy is then an authorized utterance of God through human vessels. The person's gender does not matter; if the Holy Spirit empowers them to hear the voice of God, they can prophesy. Some individuals are authorized to prophesy regarding injustice, unfairness, and equality to ease the pain of those who are suffering. In other words, they are authorized to speak truth to power; they are not prophesying out of their fleshy desires or demonic influences but simply because the Spirit leads them. Many men and women did great exploits in the name of the Lord as the Spirit moved them to relinquish their reluctance to sacrifice personal desires for security and comfort, even to cling tenaciously to their very lives, in fidelity to what can be depicted in no other way than an inner fire.⁷² The Spirit of God authorized prophecy, for according to Apostle Peter, prophecy never originated in the human will. The prophets spoke from God as the Holy Spirit inspired them (2 Pet. 1:21).

Prophetic authority often comes with intense opposition, just as it did with the Old Testament Prophets. When they spoke truth to power, as Elijah and Jeremiah did, their lives were threatened; they were killed or thrown into prison like Jeremiah. However, people authorized by the Holy Spirit refuse to be intimidated; they boldly proclaim the word of God because they fear God rather than man. Scenarios such as those referenced above should cause a person to self-introspect before prophesying because to prophesy without the authority of God could place their lives in danger.

False Prophecy

People often prophesy falsely because they are afraid for their lives, or they conform to the culture. This caused the Church to shy away from prophecy because leaders wanted to shut

⁷² Andrew Skotnicki, *Injustice and Prophecy in the Age of Mass Incarceration: The Politics of Sanity* (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2022).

the door to false prophets and, in so doing, evade the difficulty of dealing with prophets entirely.⁷³ However, this is not an effective way to deal with false prophecies. The church needs prophetic ministry but must learn to discern true and false prophetic messages effectively. The New Testament and early church sources present prophecy as an essential and constant feature of the Christian church. “Christianity would not fully be Christianity without the voice of the prophets in the church.”⁷⁴ The world does not always want to hear real prophetic messages, considering that authentic prophetic messages sometimes cause people to come face to face with their sins. The prophet's message is usually contrary to people's agenda and is usually a message of correction, which could lead to prophetic conflict whereby people shun the truth and embrace a more favorable but false prophecy. People have itching ears and prefer to hear favorable prophecies about their future. This becomes a breeding ground for false prophecy because some modern-day prophets tell people what they want to hear rather than what the Lord says.

Sometimes, real prophets subtly conform to the world's expectations and popular culture, and, in so doing, they compromise the truth of God's message. However, “A prophet found lacking in the virtue of truthfulness will likely be considered unworthy of belief when speaking the truth.”⁷⁵ Therefore, the prophets must always speak what God says rather than speak to please the crowd.

In some cases, however, the church does not want the real prophetic message of God, as in the case when King Ahab was going to war and consulted the prophet Micaiah. Micaiah was a genuine prophet of God but gave a false message because he was coerced. So, this prophecy was

⁷³ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 24.

⁷⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 36.

⁷⁵ Mary Hayden Lemmons, *Woman as Prophet in the Home and the World: Interdisciplinary Investigations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016). 121.

false, although it came from a genuine prophet of God (1 Kings 22). “In any case, it is clear from the context that at least one of the kings knew he was not speaking the truth. At this point, Micaiah proclaimed the true word of God: Israel would be scattered like sheep with no shepherd, and its leaders—presumably the kings of Israel and Judah—would not return to their homes in peace.”⁷⁶ So, this false message originates in the heart of those who coerced the real prophet to prophesy falsely. “False prophets, by contrast, only reassure with messages of well-being, while true prophets “preached of sin and repentance, of punishment and judgment as the necessary way to find salvation.”⁷⁷ Real prophets do not prophesy out of their own presumptions and beliefs dictated by their observations or probability but Holy Spirit-inspired utterance.⁷⁸ A true prophet is concerned with effectively communicating Yahweh’s word to His people in every situation. They are less likely to be concerned about what people think than about being an instrument of God.⁷⁹ However, false prophets are more concerned about building a name for themselves than about declaring the will of God to the people. They would rather woo the crowd than speak a message that convicts them of their sins and challenges them to repent. False prophets come in many forms and sometimes are not easily recognized.

False Prophet

One thing to remember when distinguishing between true and false prophecy is that there is a significant difference between false *prophecy* and false *prophets*. It might be disheartening to

⁷⁶ Bemby, *Walking in the Prophetic Tradition*, 36.

⁷⁷ Kelly, *How Prophecy Works*, 43.

⁷⁸ Hakeem Collins, *Born to Prophecy: God’s Voice Speaking Through You* (Lake Mary FL: Charisma House, 2013). 148.

⁷⁹ Seth B. Tarrer, *Reading with the Faithful: Interpretation of True and False Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah from Ancient to Modern Times* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013). 138.

learn that a false prophet can give a true prophecy, and a true prophet can give a false prophecy. False prophets are not authorized to speak for God. Some do so out of their zeal to prophesy, while others presume themselves to be prophets without being called or authorized by God. For example, Balaam was a false prophet who practiced divination but prophesied truth regarding the nation of Israel. The Moabite king Balak hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22:6), but the Lord told Balaam not to curse these people because they had been blessed. (Num. 22:12). Balaam sought the Lord by divination three times because King Balak wanted him to curse the people of Israel. According to Kelly, “The difference between true and false prophecy concerns the inner person of the prophet in his or her understanding of God and God’s will.”⁸⁰ Although Balaam’s intentions were not pure, God spoke to him concerning Israel’s future, and he accurately prophesied about the nation of Israel. “I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the future, a star will rise from Jacob, and a scepter will emerge from Israel. It will crush the heads of the Moab people, cracking the skulls of the people of Sheth.” (Num. 24:17).

Although Balaam could not put a curse on the people, he advised them to entice the men of Israel to sin by committing adultery and worshipping idols. (Num. 31:16). Although Balaam, a false prophet, prophesied truth because he could not prophesy anything other than what was revealed to him, he turned around and caused the nation to sin. False prophets cannot be trusted even if they prophesy the truth and remember that the Spirit of prophets are subject to prophets.” (1 Cor.14:32), even true prophets can get the message wrong. Prophets can still act freely concerning how they use the knowledge they have come to gain; they can even use it immorally or not.⁸¹ Therefore, the prophetic messages must be carefully discerned and interpreted before

⁸⁰ Kelly, *How Prophecy Works*, 47.

⁸¹ Rogers, *Aquinas on Prophecy*, 160.

individuals can apply them to their lives. Prophecy will not cease until Jesus returns, and apart from Scripture, it is a primary method through which God communicates with people today; therefore, it is necessary to understand how to test the spirit behind contemporary prophecies.

Types of False Prophets

There are two basic types of false prophets. “The first type comprises people who have invited a spirit of divination into their lives. The gift, which enables them to prophesy, comes from an evil spirit and has nothing to do with God. The second type of false prophet is the group of people who receive a call on their lives to be a prophet or prophetess from birth or after they receive Christ, yet they later fall away from God and continue to prophesy without standing in the counsel of God.⁸² In other words, they prophesy from their thoughts. “The human soul is capable of voicing thoughts, ideas, and inspirations out of the unsanctified portion of our emotions (Ezek.13:1–6; Jer. 23:16). These human inspirations are not necessarily born of God because they prophesy out of their hearts.⁸³ The false prophets in Jeremiah’s day did not wholly reject Yahweh and His way but were blind to God's greatness. Jeremiah 23:16 says they used self-centered words laden with greed to fill the people with false hope because they sought self-gratification, power, and self-justification.⁸⁴

To be a false prophet in Jeremiah’s day and be recognized by the people, they had to depend on traditional values and operate from a closed theological system. They would include parts of God's words that align with Moses and David, but they did not share in the fresh interpretation of God's revelation or the development of the prophetic tradition. Further, they

⁸² Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*, 2014.

⁸³ Goll, *The Seer Expanded Edition*, 73.

⁸⁴ VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 61.

restricted their interpretation and application, so they could not readily adapt and apply God's revelation to a new situation.⁸⁵ “In contrast, there were court prophets who supported the kings. The fact that they were often castigated did not mean they were ‘shameless charlatans, but as far as the prophets were concerned, they were false witnesses, proclaiming peace when there was none and giving divine legitimation to unjust policies and idolatrous practices.’”⁸⁶ The king's prophets were often not Yahweh’s prophets, especially the kings who did not follow the Lord's way. The king's prophets used divination rather than depending on Yahweh to give them a message for the King. Often, these false prophets could accurately predict future events and perform various signs and wonders, but their prophetic source was demonic.

Divination

The two primary ways divination occurs are inductive and intuitive; inductive happens when the diviner uses objects to perform a ritual, while the intuitive form occurs when an individual acts as a medium to give a word from the gods.”⁸⁷ “Officially, the Bible emphatically and continually condemns and forbids praxes of magic, divination, sorcery, and witchcraft.”⁸⁸ However, Claassens and Fischer contend that “the boundaries between various magical and divinatory practices, prophecies, interpretation of dreams, necromancy, and so on are not always clear and definable.”⁸⁹ When the Priests and Levites also engaged in divination, employing the

⁸⁵ VanGemeran, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 63.

⁸⁶ John De Gruchy, “*Kairos moments and prophetic witness: Towards a prophetic ecclesiology.*” HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies Online, Volume 72 Number 4 (26 August 2016).

⁸⁷ VanGemeran, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 22.

⁸⁸ Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, 112.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:18–23; 1 Sam. 14:41–2) and the ephod (Judg. 17–18), none of them were censured or condemned for their magical activities.”⁹⁰ That appears to determine the biblical attitudes toward these practices as being either legitimate or illegitimate is their source of authority and the acceptability of the intermediaries performing the magical and divinatory acts, whether or not Yahweh empowered them.”⁹¹ One major difference between real prophets and diviners is that the diviners do not claim infallibility but offer probability. He or she used a variety of omens and left the final decision to the one who had sought the advice.⁹² According to Woodard, “Such divine science is the realm of specialists whose role is either to transmit the utterance of the gods to those who consult them or to interpret the appearance of prodigies in terms of human action.”⁹³

God is supreme over all divination, and He demonstrates this in Egypt when Israel witnessed God’s power over magic and mantic. The Lord afflicted Egypt’s economic, social, and religious structures through the ten plagues, causing the Egyptian magicians to recognize the sovereignty of Israel’s God: “The magician said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19).⁹⁴ This causes one to consider if some divinations are acceptable or not because everything that Moses did the Egyptians diviner were able to copy before, they started recognizing the finger of God. One could question whether it is acceptable to use divination as Moses did. Moses was not the only one to use divination because David consulted God through divination (1 Sam.

⁹⁰ Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, 113.

⁹¹ Ibid., 112.

⁹² VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 22.

⁹³ Woodard, Roger D., ed. *Divination and Prophecy in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁹⁴ VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 23.

23:8-13). Then, there were cases where lots were cast, dice rolled, or Gideon put out his fleece (Jud. 6:36-40). Divination was a common way for the Israelites to seek God. However, diviners did not seek answers from God but from evil spirits, as was the case when King Saul consulted the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28). According to Cahn, “The Bible speaks of the pagan soothsayers and warns against their practices, the channeling of spirits, the practicing of divination, and the worship of pagan gods. However, the Bible is also filled with those called and appointed to bring forth divine messages and revelations, to share divine counsel, to discern and interpret the signs of the times, and to speak of future events before they happen.”⁹⁵ To be clear, the Bible condemns sorcery, witchcraft, and divination; the only way to connect with God is through prayer and the Holy Spirit. Prophecies may or may not be accompanied by miraculous signs, but only as the Holy Spirit directs. Therefore, one should not seek to practice divination to hear from God. Prayer is the key to communicating with God through the Holy Spirit.

A case in point that demonstrates this dilemma is a study done by Carlo Caduff prior to the pandemic in which he studied the two scientists who were actually prophets. “The two prophets had deciphered the signs of the times carefully, predicted the course of events accordingly, and envisioned futures diametrically opposed to one another.” They both gave opposing prophecies concerning the pandemic.” One prophet, Webster, urged public health professionals to prepare immediately for impending disaster, while the other prophet, Palese, was much more relaxed when it came to the pandemic threat; he did not believe that the H5N1 avian influenza virus was likely to trigger the next pandemic.⁹⁶ What people label as false may not

⁹⁵ Jonathan Cahn, *The Oracle: The Jubilean Mysteries Unveiled* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2019). 13.

⁹⁶ Carlo Caduff, “Pandemic Prophecy, or How to Have Faith in Reason.” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2014, pp. 296–315. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.1086/676124>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.

always be false because, in this case, both prophets saw something, but their interpretations were off. Webster was convinced that a pandemic was coming, but he believed the H5N1 triggered it, while Palese did not believe that a Pandemic was coming, at least not by the H5N1. “Here we are face to face with the deepest problem of prophecy in the Christian church. Even the test demonstrating spirit and power is inadequate since it fails to reveal the true nature and origin of the spirit at work.”⁹⁷ How do you know which prophet is telling the truth? Only time will reveal the truth about such matters. However, people can pray for the Lord to guide them in the truth, like Solomon and the two mothers claiming to be the baby's mother. (1 Kings 3:16–28). Another thing to remember is that prophets know in part and prophesy in part (1 Cor. 13:9). Therefore, wisdom and understanding of prophetic language are needed to discern between conflicting prophecies.

Dimensions of Prophecy

Prophecy is multi-dimensional, meaning that one size does not fit all. The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied in different settings and situations. Some prophesied to the Northern Kingdom, and others to the Southern Kingdom. Some prophesied to Israel in general, and some explicitly prophesied to the king in affairs of the nation, while others were tasked with delivering individual prophetic messages. A close review of biblical prophetic literature reveals five significant prophetic dimensions: national, congregational, individual, global, and Israel-specific. Within those dimensions are sub-dimensions of dreams and visions. According to Hvidt, “Old Testament prophecy contains a clear view of the characteristics and tasks of the prophet; thus,

⁹⁷ Tibbs, *Do Not Believe Every Spirit*, 27–50.

prophecy, as observed in the Old Testament, is something “distinctively Israelite.”⁹⁸ Prophecy is a multidimensional phenomenon that has been extended to Christian preaching and teaching and can include a formal proclamation of faith in God, a source of courage, and a clear witness for Christ both situationally and individually.⁹⁹ Modern-day prophets likewise prophesied in varying dimensions, some to specific nations, individuals, congregations, or globally.

Individual Prophecy

Authentic personal or individual prophecy is more like spiritual fuel to a person’s soul. It helps them to understand that God is not some distant being in the universe but that he loves them and is interested in communicating with them. As Rogers rightly noted, there are many instances in scripture when the reception of prophecy becomes a transformative experience for the individuals who receive it.¹⁰⁰ There were many instances in the Old and New Testaments when personal prophecies were given to individuals based on their situations, and some of those were previously reviewed; however, it is worth reviewing another here.

Agabus was a New Testament prophet who gave a personal word of prophecy to Apostle Paul concerning his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). The interesting thing to observe is how Apostle Paul responded to the prophetic message. He discerned that the message was from the Holy Spirit, and although it was not a favorable prophetic message, he embraced it and declared that he was willing to die for the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13). One of the reasons Apostle Paul could so easily accept such a frightening prophetic message was because it was confirmation of what the Holy Spirit already revealed to him regarding the chains and afflictions awaited him (Acts

⁹⁸ Hvidt, *Christian prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 36.

⁹⁹ R. Walter. L. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 11.

¹⁰⁰ Rogers, *Aquinas on Prophecy*, 160.

20:23). This is an excellent example of how to receive a personal prophetic message even if it is not what the listener wants to hear. Some believers would reject or treat such a message with contempt because no one wants to hear a negative prophetic message. However, if the message comes from God, it will be fulfilled whether the receiver accepts or rejects it.

Congregational Prophecy

Congregational prophecy is prophesying to a particular group or gathering of people. There are many examples throughout the Bible; however, the best example is found in Revelation 2-3, When Jesus gave a specific prophetic message to the seven churches. It is important to note that each prophetic message differed for each church group because there were specific things that Jesus wanted to communicate to them. For example, in the Church of Sardis, he said, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember what you have received and heard; hold fast to it, and repent, but if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know when I will come to you” (Rev. 3:1-2). Then, to the church of Philadelphia, he said, “I know your deeds. See, I have placed an open door that no one can shut before you. You have little strength, but you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will keep you from the hour of trial that will come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev. 8-10). Likewise, many modern prophecies are only concerned with a specific gathering of people. Like individual prophecies, congregational prophecies are less known to the

public but are relevant only to those they were intended for. Then, some prophecies are intended for a specific nation.

National Prophecy

One example of a modern-day prophet who prophesies nationally is Johnathan Cahn, who prophesies extensively to America through various books such as *The Harbinger* and *The Return of the Gods*. His writings compared Israel's ancient prophetic messages to modern America, revealing prophetic parallels significant as current or contemporary warnings for America to return to God. He discussed 9/11 as a significant prophetic warning for America, pulling on Isaiah 9:10, "We will replace the broken bricks of our ruins with finished stone, and replant the felled sycamore-fig trees with cedars." According to Cahn, this resolution to rebuild represents an act of defiance, just like the Israelites who refused to repent after the attack of Assyria. "Remember, it is not just the words but the context surrounding them and the spirit behind them. The problem was not the rebuilding. The problem was the spirit and the motive behind the rebuilding. America had just been given a critical warning through the attack of 9/11 but responded defiantly."¹⁰¹ Cahn also wrote other prophetic books, prophesying and pleading for America to return to God.

Isaiah and Jeremiah were national-level prophets who prophesied to specific regions of the nation of Israel. Jeremiah prophesied mainly to the northern kingdom of Israel, while Isaiah prophesied mainly to the southern kingdom of Judah. It is important to note that although they prophesied nationally, they appealed to the nation to return to God. They also prophesied specific situations, such as whether or not a king should go to war and the war's outcome. Subsequently,

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America's Future* (Lake Mary FL: Charisma House, 2011). 51.

there are sub-dimensions within the dimensions of prophecy. A prophet does not get to choose what dimensions to operate in. They prophesy when God gives them a message for any dimension. Therefore, it was common for biblical prophets to prophesy nationally, regionally, and individually. Likewise, God can use modern-day prophets to prophesy multi-dimensionally because the prophet is not limited to a specific dimension. However, it is essential to distinguish between these dimensions of prophecies because it helps people heed the warnings and be prepared to discern the times.

Global or Apocalyptic Prophecies

Many global prophecies throughout the Bible and many contemporary ones confirm those written in the Bible. A prime example of global prophecies is Daniel 7:23-25 When the angel told Daniel, “The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them, another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High, oppress his holy people, and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times, and half a time.” Likewise, there are contemporary global prophecies, such as Pastor Kadesha Jenkins, who prophesied one year before the pandemic that there would be a viral sickness like a storm and many people would die. Other modern-day prophets also prophesied that a great Passover would occur globally, many people would die, and a crossover would occur in man’s DNA. These global contemporary prophecies were less recognized yet affected the entire world.

Dimensions of Delivery

The dimensions of prophecy also extend to the methods through which the prophets receive their messages and the types of languages used. Some prophets receive dreams and visions, while God sometimes speaks face-to-face with others or through impressions, words of knowledge, or discerning the times and seasons. God told Aaron and Miriam, “When there is a prophet among you, I, The Lord, reveal myself to them in visions. I speak to them in dreams, but this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful throughout my house. I speak with him, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord” (Num. 12: 6-7). Aquinas believes that the prophet’s mind can receive information in three primary channels: the senses, the imagination, and impressions of the mind.¹⁰² Therefore, it is essential to review the dimensions through which the Lord reveals himself to gain further understanding of the prophetic dimensions.

Dreams

Dreams are the most common way God speaks prophetically to his people. There are several examples throughout the Bible that bear witness to this fact. Firstly, God spoke to Abram in a dream, telling him that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land and that he would punish the nation and deliver them with great possessions (Gen. 15:12-16). Years later, God spoke to Jacob, the grandson of Abram, in a dream, telling him not to be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will go with you, and I will make you a great nation there (Gen. 46:2-4). It is worth mentioning that it was a dream that God used to activate the prophecy of the nation of Israel becoming a great nation in Egypt. Joseph dreams that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars are

¹⁰² Mirela Oliva, “The Experience of Prophecy and the Metaphysics of Providence in Aquinas” *Religions* 13, no. 10: 921. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100921>. 2022. 6-7.

bowing down before him. This made his brother jealous, and they sold him to Egypt as a slave. (Gen. 37: 18-36). It was also a dream that God used to promote Joseph to the highest office in the land of Egypt. After the exodus from Egypt and throughout the OT, God continued to speak to his people through dreams. The NT also provides an ample supply of examples of God speaking through dreams. For example, an angel appeared to Joseph in dreams, first to counsel him to take Mary as his wife, a second time to warn him to take baby Jesus to Egypt, and a third to return to Israel (Matt. 1:20, 2:13, 2:20). Apostle Paul dreamt of a man from Macedonia calling him to come and help him (Acts 16:9-10) and in Acts 18:9-10 the Lord appeared to Apostle Paul and told him not to be afraid because he is with him.

There are many speculations as to why God speaks to people in dreams. One speculation theory is that when a person is awake, their attention is drawn to many things in the natural world; however, when they are asleep, their spirit man is awakened and can hear and see in the realm of the spirit more clearly. However, the greater purpose of dreams and visions from God, according to Elihu, is that God speaks to people in dreams and visions of the night to turn them away from sin (Job 33:14-17). Pilat's wife affirms Elihu's theory by saying that she suffered many things in a dream because of this innocent man (Matt 27:19). Dreams have an indelible imprint on the human mind. When it's a God dream, there is an inner witness that reveals something supernatural like that of Jacob, who realized after his dream that the presence of the Lord was at Bethel (Gen 28:16). Yet one must also remember that not all dreams come from God and the God dreams most often requires interpretation.

Mental Visions

Another way that God speaks through his prophets is through visions. There are two types of visions: mental or open. Mental visions are like watching a movie in the mind. It is like

seeing things through the imagination. The only difference is that the prophets do not choose what they see; they only see what is shown to them. This was the case with Amos when the Lord kept showing visions of the impending judgment for Israel. He saw a vision of a swarm of locusts, fire devouring the land, a basket of ripe fruits, and a plumb line. He describes what he saw, “This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. Moreover, the Lord asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” “A plumb line,” I replied. Then the Lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people, Israel; I will spare them no longer (Amos 7:7-8). It is not entirely clear if Amos saw an open vision or a mental vision, but the book's first chapter started by saying he was a shepherd of Tekoa who had visions concerning Israel. (Amos 1:1).

However, in Amos 9:1, The prophet had an open vision of the angel of the Lord standing by the altar, recorded differently than the rest of the visions. Amos had mental visions of his previous encounter with the Lord, but in this vision, he stated that he saw the Lord standing by the altar instead of seeing him in a dream or trance. Interestingly, God gave Amos the interpretations of the visions without him having to pray and ask what the visions meant. Amos interceded for the nation and averted the judgment by locusts and fire; apparently, those visions may have been interpreted as literal locust and fire. The plumb line and the ripe fruits need a little more interpretation; one would not readily interpret the vision of a plumb line to mean destruction nor a basket of ripe fruits to mean the people’s sins are ripe for punishment. (Amos 7-8). However, that is the interpretation that the Lord gave to Amos.

These mental visions are secondary to dreams in which the Lord reveals his plans to prophets. It is also common to see visions when praying for people. Many modern-day prophets have reported seeing mental visions while praying for individuals, and most of the time, when

they tell the people what they see, it confirms something that they are either going through or have been through. Once, when praying for a gentleman, a prophet reported seeing a big heart intact and beating strongly, but there were cracks in it. As this was expressed to the gentleman, he started crying. He later told the prophet how much he loved his family, but they rejected him no matter how much he tried to love them and showed them kindness. Goll calls this phenomenon revelatory prayer or prophetic intercession, which is inspired by God and expresses the heart of God for individuals or nations.¹⁰³

Another time, while praying for the 2016 election, an individual had a mental vision of a red elephant trampling on the map of the United States. The elephant looks so proud and triumphant as if it was showing off. It was swishing its tail around and prancing along pridefully, especially in the upper Midwest of the map of the United States. The individual was from another country, so they did not know then that the elephant represented the Republican Party. Needless to say, President Trump, the Republican candidate at the time, won the 2016 election, and the vision became a reality. So, God is still speaking through mental visions; however, there are times when he also speaks through open visions.

Open Visions

Open visions are less common but more intense than mental visions. These open visions are like having a dream but being wide awake. A person reported that the first time she saw an open vision was when she was driving down the Garden State Parkway in New Jersey in 2004 when she suddenly saw a gigantic cross in the night sky. It extended up into heaven, and it was extended down into what looks like hell. As the person continued driving and looking at the

¹⁰³ James Goll, *The Prophet: Creating and Sustaining a Life-Giving Prophetic Culture* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image. 2019).

scene in front of her in the night sky, she saw what appeared to be people coming into the gigantic arms of the cross; some were going up into heaven, while others were going down into hell. Then she saw a huge hand took something that looked like a ball of white fire and throw it just above the base of the cross. Then she heard a voice say, “That is where I want you to plant my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The vision closed, and she continued to drive home. She instinctively knew that God was calling her to work in the ministry. The more challenging the task God requests of individuals, the clearer He makes the calling. God chooses to use open visions because they are so imprinted in the hearts of the receivers that they are strengthened enough to stay the course when they feel like giving up.

Several people in the Bible experienced open visions, and their tasks were not easy. Ezekiel, Daniel, Apostle Paul, and Apostle John all had open visions from the Lord. Ezekiel stated, “In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1). Notice that he said the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God, he was not sleeping or in a trance, he proceeds to describe the vision and the appearance of God but informed his readers that having experienced this he fell on his face before God (Ezek.1:28). However, the Lord said to him, “Son of man, a stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (Ezek. 2:1). He had a literal and spiritual experience in which God gave him prophetic revelations for the nation of Israel. As intense as this open vision was for Ezekiel, relating the message to stiff-necked Israel was more difficult because he faced rejection, stoning, or being imprisoned as his predecessors, such as Jeremiah, were.

Another example of the open vision experience was when Apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus. “Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him; he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground but could see nothing when he opened his eyes” (Acts 9:3-7). This was not a mental or mind vision. It was an open vision. He saw the light, heard the voice of the Lord, and observed that his companions heard the voice, too; however, they did not see anyone. The message was meant for Saul alone because, through that experience, he was chosen to take the gospel to the Gentiles again, not an easy task for the most unlikely man who was doing the extreme opposite, persecuting Christians. For a man like Saul to become Apostle Paul, it took an act of God and an open vision to convince him that Jesus is real and enable him to persevere through trials and hardship to preach the gospel.

Impressions/ Word of Knowledge

Another way that God speaks to his prophets is through the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, which some call impressions or words of knowledge. This is like knowing something you could not possibly know with your natural mind. God spoke to the prophet Isaiah in various ways, such as through open vision in the sanctuary (Isaiah 6:1). However, his prophetic writings expressed many words of knowledge that the natural mind could not know. With richly figurative language, Isaiah 11:1 predicted, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”¹⁰⁴ This kind of language needs interpretation,

¹⁰⁴ Boeckstein, *The Future of Everything*, 18.

for what does a dead man have to do with shoots and roots? The Israelites would readily understand who Jesse was and what a branch from his roots meant, but most people who do not read the Bible and are not familiar with Israel's history would have no clue who or what this prophecy is about. Likewise, when modern-day prophets give a prophecy, it needs interpretation.

Often, a prophet may experience knowing something about a person or situation they did not know. It was just an impression in their spirit, so they often kept silent about those prophecies and prayed about them until they received confirmation from the Lord. If a prophet is in a situation where they need to express what they feel in the spirit, it is recommended that they should quickly pray to God, asking for confirmation before giving the prophecy.

Impressions or words of knowledge are very common in the prophetic ministry; however, their source must be discerned, and the message must be interpreted with caution because many voices have gone out into the world (1 Cor. 14:10). Prophets must be on guard against false prophetic voices. Just because a prophet senses or feels something in the spirit does not mean it is from God; he or she must always test the source or spirit behind what he or she is sensing. Again, God confirms his word to the prophet through prayer and scripture.

Trances

Yet another way that God speaks to his prophets is through trance. Joyner describes trance as like having a dream while awake. "All of a sudden, you are caught up in a vision that is so real it seems you are literally there, but you are wide awake and aware of when you leave and return."¹⁰⁵ Apostle Paul described trances like this, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not

¹⁰⁵ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 103.

know—God knows” (2 Cor. 12:2). This was also a common phenomenon in the early church. In Acts 10, Peter went up on the roof to pray and fell into a trance. He saw heaven open and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles of the earth, and birds of the air. Then a voice said to him: “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” No, Lord!” Peter answered. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him again; “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:11-16). This vision needs interpretation. Why was Peter seeing animals in a sheet? Was it because he was hungry? What was God saying to him? Was this vision literal or figurative? What was he supposed to do? He came out of the trance no sooner than some men called him to go to Cornelius, the gentile's house. It did not take him long to figure out what God was telling him. As he entered Cornelius's home, He said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with a foreigner or visit him. However, God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean (Acts 10:28). Peter understood that the vision was not about meat or food but about Jews accepting Gentiles into the family of God.

Apostle John, who wrote the Book of Revelation, also had his share of trances. When he said he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Rev. 4:2), it meant he was in a trance. He was caught up to heaven and received the revelations of Jesus's life after his resurrection and ascension. The revelations he receives span twenty-two chapters and are expressed in many symbolic and allegorical languages. Apostle John expressed, “he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns” (Rev.17:3). Which indicates that John was caught up in the experience of the revelation he was receiving, he was literally there. He later stated, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city,

Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God (Rev. 21:10). Such revelations could only happen in trances because people would otherwise discredit them if they were dreams, visions, or impressions.

When a trance happens, the person experiences the physical and supernatural and lives to talk about it. Still, trance experiences need interpretation because, most of the time, the information expressed is shown or given in heavenly or spiritual languages that need translation. This is one of the reasons there are so many mixed reactions to the Book of Revelation; Its language needs significant interpretation before it can be correctly understood. However, even the most gifted theologians still squabble over its meaning. Some say that parts of the prophecies in Revelation are already fulfilled, others say that they are yet to be fulfilled, while others look forward to a future day when the revelations begin. However, the question remains: how does one recognize signs such as the four horsemen, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowl judgments? Are they literal or figurative? Again, one must rely on the Holy Spirit to provide the interpretation. Spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is needed to understand the book of Revelation.

Audible Voice

Yet another way that the Lord speaks to his prophets is through the audible voice of God. Very few people have been privileged to hear this audible voice, but it is worth discussing here. An example of this is when the Lord calls the young boy Samuel. He heard the voice of the Lord calling him but thought it was the priest Eli calling him (1 Sam. 3:1-10). After Samuel recognized that it was the voice of the Lord and acknowledged the Lord, he received a prophetic message for Eli and his household. It is unclear why God chose to speak to Samuel in this manner, but one can infer from the prophecy that God was dealing with Eli and wanted him to

know that this was his last chance to repent. “For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering (1 Sam. 3:13-14). This was a solemn prophecy, and not much interpretation was needed because Eli knew that what Samuel said came from the Lord because it was clear language he could understand.

Many instances in the New Testament occurred when God spoke to people audibly. When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples heard the audible voice of God. “While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell face down in terror (Matt.17:5-6). The message is clear here: they were to believe that Jesus was the son of God. In other words, they were encouraged to not lose their faith in Jesus because of the things He would suffer.

On another occasion, When Jesus was about to give his life, he prayed, “Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” The crowd heard it and said it sounded like thunder; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine (John12: 28-30). This was a sign to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus was the son of God, but many still did not believe (John 12:37-38).

Apostle Paul also heard the audible voice of God on his Damascus Road experience. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” The others with him also heard the audible voice but saw no one (Acts 9:7). Again, this revealed Jesus to him and caused him to turn from his wicked deeds of persecuting Christians. Most of the time, when God speaks in an audible voice, it is to get the person’s attention and confirm what he has been telling them through His internal voice

in their hearts. Some modern-day prophets have also professed to hear the audible voice of God. However, God speaks more frequently through the internal voice in people's minds.

Internal Voice

The internal voice of God is the Holy Spirit speaking to the believer's heart; in other words, God speaks to your mind through your thoughts. This is one of the easiest ways to hear the voice of God; however, it is the most difficult to discern because thoughts come from three places: God, our minds, and the enemy. When the Bible says *the word of the Lord comes to me saying....*, it is mainly thought form. Some people have experienced this many times but sometimes do not recognize until after a specific situation that the thought about a particular situation was from God. King David's writings in the Psalms are a great example of how God speaks through thoughts. The Psalms are unique because they share God-given thoughts and the psalmist's thoughts; for example, Psalm 23 is the thoughts of David reflecting on his life as a shepherd of sheep yet being comforted that the Lord is his shepherd.

Discerning Signs

Yet another way that God speaks is through discerning the signs of the time. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to ask Jesus for a sign, "He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times (Matt. 16:2-3). Jesus expected them to discern the signs of the times that they were living in. Their long-awaited Messiah stood before them, and they were asking for a sign to believe he was the Messiah. Jesus told them no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah (Matt. 16:4). "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly

of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt.12:40). Jesus had done some many miracles, and still, they did not believe in him.

The Sons of Issachar are a classic example of discerning prophets; they understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take (1 Chron. 12:32). They recognized that it was the Lord’s doing to make David king over Israel, so they gave him their full support along with their relatives. It is the same thing today; when the Spirit of God dwells in a person, they can recognize when a message is from God or not. Many of the prophets who prophesied of President Trump being God’s “Cyrus” for America did not receive an actual prophetic message. However, through discerning the signs of the time, they could conclude that President Trump was God’s man for the hour because of the things he could accomplish. According to Berry, “The prophetic narratives motivated this support tied as they were to other concerns, including issues like ending abortion and opposition to gay marriage, but also to claims that the political domain was a stage for the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil in a struggle for dominion.”¹⁰⁶ When candidate Trump emerged on the political scene, he took a stance against all those issues, and as such, most evangelicals view him as God’s obvious choice. However, others were not inclined to vote for him because of his character issues. Amidst his chaotic presidency, God used Trump to accomplish many things that were favorable to the Christian agenda. So, in a sense, those reading the signs of the time rightly discerned that God would use someone like President Trump to accomplish some desperately needed reset in America.

¹⁰⁶ Damon T. Berry, *The New Apostolic Reformation, Trump, and Evangelical Politics: The Prophecy Voter. 1st ed.* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023). 85.

Divine/Angelic Visitations

Yet another way that the Lord speaks to his prophets is through divine visitations. Sometimes, these visitations are angelic or the Lord himself. On one such occasion in Judges 6, Gideon was visited by the angel of the Lord. During this encounter, the angel gave Gideon instructions on how to save Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. The Prophet Daniel is another example of a person who had frequent angelic visitations during which he would receive the tremendous revelation of end-time prophetic occurrences, some of which have been fulfilled, and some are yet to be fulfilled. Although angels gave him prophetic messages, they still needed to be interpreted. On one occasion, Daniel asked the angel to tell him what the vision meant (Dan. 7:16). In other words, Daniel received a prophetic message but did not understand what it meant. Divine prophetic messages are often communicated literally and, other times, symbolically; therefore, interpretation is required.

On many occasions throughout the New Testament, angels appeared to people to deliver prophetic messages. Two of the most memorable ones are Zechariah and Mary. Zechariah was a priest offering incense in the temple when the angel Gabriel appeared and prophesied about his future son, John the Baptist. The same Angel Gabriel also appeared to Mary six months later and prophesied to her that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:26-28). Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, angels accompanied John through various parts of the revelation of Jesus. “Then the angel said to me, “These words are faithful and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants what must soon take place” (Rev. 22:6). So, angels participate in prophetic activities throughout the Bible, and many people have reported their angelic encounters in modern times. Nevertheless, the prophetic message must be discerning and interpreted because the Bible says Satan parades himself as an

angel of light (2 Cor. 14:11). Therefore, not all angelic visitations are from God. The message and the encounter must be analyzed and interpreted with the help of the Holy Spirit to determine if the message is from God or not.

Theological Foundations

Prophetic messages are a key method that God used to communicate to his people throughout the Bible. He first communicated a prophetic message to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the book of Revelation, in its entirety, is a prophetic message to the Church. However, it is safe to say that there is so much more to know about God than is written in the Bible. If the Bible was the only way that God communicated with his people, it would be equivalent to a man who marries a woman but only communicates with her through a pre-written book. What kind of relationship would that be? God wants his people to be intimately acquainted with him; therefore, he will continue to speak to them directly through his Spirit living in them. God is still moving and operating on the earth through humans and must, therefore, communicate his plans to his people. According to the prophet Amos, the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets (Amos 3:7). However, in the quest to hear from God, people must guard against false prophecy because it is prevalent in the body of Christ. False prophecy is not a modern-day prophetic problem because the Old Testament prophets and the early church had to grapple with false prophets and false prophecies while maintaining the integrity and continuity of genuine prophecy. Reviewing the Old and New Testament prophetic ministry to understand how biblical figures respond to true prophecy amidst false prophecies is beneficial in providing a framework to view modern-day prophecy.

Old Testament Prophetic Ministry

Contemporary prophecy and its delivery methods are quite different from those in the Old Testament, but the goal of the prophetic remains the same: turning people back to God. Most Old Testament prophetic messages were judgment warnings intended to invoke repentance in the people of God while communicating God's plan of salvation to them. Adam was the first to receive a prophetic message from the Lord, followed by Noah and Moses, to whom God gave specific prophetic concerning the nation of Israel and the entire human race. The prophetic message in those days served to preserve the posterity of the descendants of Abraham and bless the peoples of the earth. However, there was a dramatic change when Moses came on the scene. He picked up the task of fulfilling a six-hundred-year-old prophecy that God gave to his forefather Abraham that his descendants would be in slavery for four hundred years. However, he would raise up a deliverer to deliver them. (Gen. 15). Moses' prophecies to Israel differed from those of the major and minor prophets because he prophesied mostly about the promised land. However, there were times when his prophetic messages were more of a rebuke and a call to repentance. He also warned the Israelites that when they entered the promised land, they would turn away from God and worship Idols. However, God would raise a prophet like him, and they should listen to him. (Deut. 18:15).

Just as Moses predicted, when the Israelites entered the promised land, they turned away from God and worshiped idols, and God sent prophets to warn them and call them back to repentance. Most Old Testament literature focuses on God's prophetic messages warning the Israelites of judgment and calling them back to repentance. God sent five major prophets and twelve minor prophets to warn the nation of Israel. "The specific mission of the twelve minor prophets was threefold: to call the people to repentance so that they might avert divine judgment,

to warn them of the judgment of exile when there was no repentance, and then to offer hope for the future as the people returned to the land following the exile.”¹⁰⁷ The mission of the five major prophets was to announce the coming Messiah. They also warned of impending judgment if people failed to repent and prophesied the restoration of those who repented. The prophetic ministry was prominent in the Old Testament, although not without opposition. Prophets were vehemently opposed and sometimes beaten and imprisoned because they did not prophesy what the people wanted to hear. Much like today, genuine prophets are ignored or ostracized in favor of ones who will prophesy what the people want to hear, even if it is false.

The Old Testament prophetic literature warns of false prophecy beginning with Moses. He told the children of Israel that when a prophet speaks, and it is not fulfilled, then God did not speak, and that prophet should not be revered (Deut.18:15). Perhaps the most notable confrontation with false prophecy in the Old Testament is when Elijah confronted Jezebel’s false prophets on Mount Carmel. Jezebel tried to kill Yahweh’s prophets and employed Baal and Asherah prophets to advise the king. The false prophets caused great confusion in the nation to the point where people did not know if they should serve God or not (1 Kings 18:21). However, Elijah, a true prophet of God, was chosen and anointed and called for a great prophetic showdown on Mount Carmel that demonstrated the power of God. When the people saw how mightily God moved through Elijah, their eyes were open, and they worshipped God (1 Kings 18:39). However, Israel continued to sin and worship idols, and God continued to send prophets to warn them of judgment yet promising redemption.

¹⁰⁷ Al Fuhr, and Gary Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016). 1.

Another most notable confrontation with false prophecy in the Old Testament that mirrored the contemporary prophetic conditions was when the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would fall to the Babylonians; however, the king's prophets prophesied in opposition, giving the people false hope that no harm would come to them (Jer. 23:16-17). However, when Jeremiah inquired of the Lord, the Lord said I did not send them, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied (Jer. 23:21). One thing to observe here is that when true prophecy abounds so did false prophecy much like it is today. The Old Testament is rich in prophecies and sets the foundation for the continuation of prophecy in the New Testament.

New Testament Prophetic Ministry

The prophetic ministry continued in the New Testament; however, it is distinct from the Old Testament in three fundamental ways. Prophecy in the New Testament tends to be more universal. Rather than being entire books, prophecies are isolated passages of prophetic texts throughout the New Testament, and most prophecies were fulfilled with the advent of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ The advent of Jesus changed everything about prophecy, for most prophecies in the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus except for his future end-of-the-age return. New Testament prophecy tends to be more universal and is not as clearly defined as in the Old Testament.¹⁰⁹ The first to be recognized as a prophet in the New Testament was John the Baptist, whose message echoed the call of the Old Testament prophets, calling the people to repentance. "John the Baptist was regarded as a prophet according to (Matt. 14:5,19), and many scholars recognize

¹⁰⁸ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 48- 49.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 49.

Jesus as a prophet because his activities resembled those of preclassical prophets such as Elijah and Elisha (Matt. 21:11).¹¹⁰ John the Baptist, Jesus, Apostle Paul, Agabus, and John prophesied in the New Testament, so prophecy did not end with the Old Testament prophets; it continued throughout the New Testament and the early Church Age.

There were several prophets in the Book of Acts, including the apostles, who also prophesied to individuals and corporately. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people makes it possible for all people who have the Holy Spirit to prophesy. Even Moses had some prophetic insight in New Testament prophecies because he stated, “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29). Moses did not know it then, but that was precisely what Joel prophesied many years later (Joel 2:28) and was later fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when Peter stood up to the crowd and said, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams” (Acts 2:16-17). So, the prophetic ministry is not extinct, as some believe, because God intended for all people who receive his Spirit to prophesy, including the active church today.

Prophecy in the New Testament is a continuation of what was prophesied in the Old Testament. According to Schilt, “The books of the prophets contained ample historical references relating to contemporary and future events. The most poignant of these prophecies could be found in the book of Daniel, which, together with the New Testament book of

¹¹⁰ Benjamin D. Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 1 (1996): 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3266817>.

Revelation, dealt with the end times and Christ's second coming."¹¹¹ Jesus also made several significant references to the prophetic messages of the Old Testament, connecting the old to the new. According to Seitz, "The prophet says one thing to contemporaries and subsequent generations, who receive the message in the form of traditions and adapt them to the realities of their day and continue the process through each generation. The original prophetic messages continued to undergo profound and radical transformation until the process dramatically stopped in the New Testament with the advent of Jesus."¹¹² However, prophecy did not cease in the New Testament; many things prophesied in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament, with many other prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Prophecy in the New Testament took on flesh and lived among people while prophesying future apocalyptic events. Therefore, the church age could be considered the prophetic fulfillment age, which makes the prophetic messages even more relevant today.

Jesus the Prophet

When Jesus came preaching the message of the Kingdom, some people did not believe it because they did not discern that He was from God and that His message was God speaking to them. Although many people believed His message, some called Him Beelzebub (Luke 11:15), and many rejected His message. However, Jesus told them, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the words I have spoken will condemn them on the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken" (John 12:48-49). This means that Jesus was prophesying; he was speaking forth

¹¹¹ Cornelis Schilt, *Isaac Newton and the Study of Chronology: Prophecy, History, and Method* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021). 35.

¹¹² Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). 93.

the messages the Father wanted him to. Jesus went on to prophesy many other things, such as his death, the destruction of the temple, the persecution of the church, and his triumphant return to earth.

Jesus also prophesied, “I am sending you prophets, wise men, and teachers: some of them you will kill by crucifixion, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city (Matt. 23:34). Jesus was telling the Scribes and Pharisees that he was sending new prophets, such as Peter, James, John, Apostle Paul, and the other disciples, who were persecuted for preaching the gospel of Jesus’s resurrection. He prophesied to his disciples that they would be rejected as their ancestors were in the Old Testament when they rejected Jeremiah and the other prophets sent to them.

Jesus is interested in people hearing and receiving the message of the Kingdom, and He used the method of prophecy to reach people who did not yet have the Holy Spirit living in them. He also uses prophecy to confirm the messages already prophesied about him in the Old Testament. Therefore, the Apostle Paul later teaches the church not to despise prophecy (Thess. 5:21). However, New Testament prophetic ministry serves a different purpose than the Old Testament.

According to Joyner, the New Testament prophet's primary function is to equip the saints and open the church to the ministry of Jesus the prophet so that he could flow freely among his people.¹¹³ Therefore, prophecy in the New Testament is not just about judgment and redemption but also developing and maintaining a holy relationship with the Lord. Therefore, the church should embrace modern-day prophecy. Furthermore, Jesus expects those who become his

¹¹³ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 55.

disciples to prophesy as the Holy Spirit leads them in order to be his witness and lead people into an intimate relationship with him.

Modern-day prophecy will not be the same as Old Testament prophecy because the Old Testament contains a compilation of books dedicated to specific prophecies for a specific nation. Meanwhile, New Testament and contemporary prophecies are spread throughout the Church and take on many forms and genres. For example, the Book of Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that could be considered a dedicated prophetic book. Prophecies were instead interwoven into the life of the church and individuals in the New Testament. Although much universal prophecy was written throughout the New Testament, prophecies in the early church became more of an individual or congregational phenomenon rather than apocalyptic. One could then say that apocalyptic prophecies ended with the Book of Revelation because there is nothing more to reveal about the coming of Christ; it is all revealed in the life of Christ and the Book of Revelation. Conversely, the phenomenon of God speaking to and through people has not ended, and that is why prophecy should not be treated with contempt.

Prophetic Contempt

The prophetic ministry still serves the same purpose today, which is to warn and correct individuals and nations alike; as such, it should not be rejected or despised (1Thess. 5:20). It is also interesting that the preceding verse says, do not quench the spirit, could it be that despising prophecy is one way that believers quench the workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the life of others? To despise prophecy means to reject, discard, or treat it with contempt. However, authentic prophecy never came from the minds of humans but from the Holy Spirit (2 Pet.1:21). If the prophecy comes from the Holy Spirit, it should not be treated with contempt. Rejecting authentic prophecy is rejecting the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is quenching the Spirit.

Some treat prophecies with contempt because not all prophecies come from God. Apostle John said false prophets have gone out into the world and will deceive many. Still, the same passage of scripture says, “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). Apostle Paul also echoed this sentiment when he told the early church, “Test the spirit behind the prophecy and hold fast to that which is good” (1Thess. 5:21). In other words, believers must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit to test the spirit because the same Holy Spirit who gives the prophecy will provide the confirmation.

Whether individual, congregational, or national, authentic contemporary prophetic messages should be treated with reverential fear of the Lord. There is a story in the Bible of a man of God who was sent to prophesy against the wicked King Jeroboam. He prophesied as the Lord told him, and the altar split in two as a sign that the prophetic word would be fulfilled (1 Kings 13: 3-6). Instead of heeding the prophecy and repenting, the king treated the prophecy with contempt; he ordered his officials to seize the prophet, most likely to kill him or throw him in jail. God intervened on the prophet’s behalf, and the king's arm was shriveled up so that he could not pull it back. The king asked the prophet to pray to God for his arm to be restored, and it was. Yet the king continued to treat prophecy with contempt because he did not heed the word of the Lord and repented. This was not an isolated incident of people treating prophecies with contempt.

King Ahab was a wicked king in Israel, and he died similarly because he failed to recognize the true prophetic words of the Prophet Micaiah (1 Kings 22). The prophet Micaiah told him he would die in battle, but King Ahab treated the prophecy with contempt, so he locked him up in jail. This was not Ahab’s first rodeo with the prophetic, so he should have used better judgment when receiving a prophetic message. When he and Jezebel conspired and killed

Naiboth, the prophet Elijah went to him and told him that his house would be judged for the wickedness done to Naiboth. Ahab responded with remorse and repentance; he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, humbled himself, and fasted (1 Kings 21:27). Then, the Lord relented and did not send the promised judgment. So, what caused Ahab to treat Micaiah's prophecy with such contempt? It is not that Ahab did not believe Micaiah. However, he despised the prophecy because he hated Micaiah since he never prophesied anything that he wanted to hear. (1 Kings 22: 8). Contempt can cast shadows on authentic prophetic messages that could save a person's life. However, prophecy is not something to be ignored; people should seek to understand how to discern between true and false prophecy because it could mean life or death.

Similarly, when King Jehoiakim faced threats of invasion by the Babylonian army, he called a Fast to seek help from the Lord. The word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah to write the message of the Lord on a scroll with the hope that they would repent from their sins when they learned about the impending judgment (Jer. 36:2-3). However, the king cut up the scroll and burned it (Jer. 36:23). The Lord then told Jeremiah to create another scroll with the same message; this time, more severe punishment was added for the king and his family (Jer. 36:30). Therefore, it is unwise to treat prophecy with contempt or reject authentic prophetic messages from the Lord. It is crucial to remember that not all prophetic messages come from God. Furthermore, false prophecies can come from real prophets, such as the old prophet, who deceived the young prophet into returning and eating with him, causing him to disobey God and die (1 Kings 13:18). Therefore, the question remains: How do people discern whether a prophetic message is from God? Although there are no set criteria for measuring the authenticity of prophecy, one must always test the spirit behind the prophetic utterance. However, before one can test the spirit of prophecy, one must first understand the real Spirit of Prophecy.

The Spirit of Prophecy

Some researchers have developed a practical solution to understanding contemporary and biblical prophetic messages through understanding the symbolic language vs. literal language in prophetic messages such as dreams and visions. Bandy and Merkle state that to understand prophecy, one must read it with contextual sensitivity to history, literature, and theology.¹¹⁴ However, Hvidt rightly argued, “Before the heart of prophecy can be understood, it is important to understand the phenomenon of prophecy itself, which is, in fact, very broad and quite diverse.”¹¹⁵ While these are excellent approaches to understanding prophecy, this researcher contends that prophecy cannot be fully understood or interpreted without the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer, fasting, and Scripture reading. Most attempts to understand prophetic messages fail to incorporate prayer, fasting, and the Holy Spirit, leading to inaccurate interpretations and failed discernment.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Prophecy, yet most scholars ignore him when trying to discern and interpret prophecies. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit behind all genuine God-given prophecies. The fundamental Christian faith is that Jesus lives in humanity by his Spirit, The Holy Spirit. God chooses to make the human heart his temple where his presence abides through his Spirit living in them (Ezek.36:27). Prophecy is central to the Christian faith because communication with or through the Holy Spirit is central to life and faith in Christ. In agreement with Maas, “From the beginning, God desired a people who hear His voice and speak His words.”¹¹⁶ Benware also supports Maas’s claim that since The Holy Spirit now lives in the heart

¹¹⁴ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 30.

¹¹⁵ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 24.

of his people, they now have a new capacity to hear and understand God's voice because the Holy Spirit is committed to illuminating God's truth.¹¹⁷ Benware further solidifies his claim by stating that The Holy Spirit is the only one who knows God's mind and can reveal and open those matters to humanity (1 Cor. 2:11-13). Benware continues to argue his point by stating, "If that is true, then no Christian can legitimately say that Bible prophecy is unintelligible and in the exclusive domain of a few scholars."¹¹⁸ Therefore, whether written or verbal, authentic prophecy has only one origin, the Holy Spirit, and serves one unified purpose: guiding humanity to the truth of Jesus Christ. Knowing that all authentic prophecy ultimately points to the truth of Christ should reassure and strengthen believers' faith. Jesus said, "But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears and tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" (John 16:13-14). This same Holy Spirit led the prophets of the Old Testament to write as revelatory eternal truths from the heart of God were revealed to them. The present task of the Holy Spirit is to continue to reveal spiritual truths to people so that they will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus and be strengthened in their faith walk.

As previously detailed, The Holy Spirit reveals prophetic information in varying ways, such as impressions, dreams, open vision, mental visions, the audible voice of God, trances, angels, and experiences in the third heaven. Furthermore, the same Holy Spirit that reveals prophetic information also provides discernment and interpretation. No one can accurately test the spirit behind prophecy without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As such, the prophet and

¹¹⁷ Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006). 15.

¹¹⁸ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 15.

believer in Christ must develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit, for it is only through the means of the Holy Spirit that a person can communicate with God. This relationship can be developed through faith in God, reading the word of God, and prayer. Scripture reading and prayer help believers make sense of their dreams and visions through which the Holy Spirit may reveal spiritual truths to them. Without the discipline of prayer and Scripture reading, one can quench the moving of the Holy Spirit without being aware of it.

Quenching the Spirit

Many people inadvertently quench the Spirit when they treat prophecies with contempt because they do not understand that the Holy Spirit speaks to them through authorized prophets of God, dreams, visions, or words of knowledge. The Apostle Paul admonishes the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit or treat prophecies with contempt but to test them all and to hold on to what is proven to be good but reject everything evil (Thess. 5:19-22). In other words, to treat prophecy with contempt is to quench the Spirit. However, do not accept all prophecies; test them, and if they prove to be from God, accept them, but if they prove to be false, reject them. Furthermore, Apostle Paul also says, “But he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification, encouragement, and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3). So, if the prophecy does not provide edification, encouragement, or comfort, it is safe to say that it is not of God; however, do not treat authentic prophetic messages with contempt because doing so may quench or hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.

Many examples throughout the Bible exist when people receive prophetic words and respond without quenching the Spirit. For example, when the prophet Jonah prophesied that the city of Nineveh would be overturned in forty days, they fasted, and God averted the judgment (Jonah 3). When King Ahab received the prophetic word, that destruction was coming to his

house, he fasted and prayed, and the Lord relented from sending judgment in his lifetime (1 Kings 21:27-29). When King Hezekiah received Isaiah's prophetic message that he would die, he turned his face to the wall and prayed, and God heard his prayers and added years to his life (2 Kings 20: 1-6). Whether the prophetic word is negative or positive, the first response should always be to pray. So, the question now becomes how does one test the spirit?

Testing the Spirit

To test the Spirit means to discern the spirit behind prophetic utterances because not all prophetic utterances come from God. Satan seeks to deceive the world through cunning and crafty methods; prophecy, because of its spiritual ambiguity, provides an avenue for deception. Therefore, the early Christians were warned about hastily believing a spirit (1 John 4:1). Deception is the plague of the modern-day church, which shows up in false doctrines and false prophecies. Tibbs observes that the spirit world is ambiguous because "Satan masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14)—and such ambiguities would necessarily be a part of any careful adjudication of spiritual activity.¹¹⁹ Such ambiguities require spiritual wisdom and discernment because deception is Satan's most potent weapon against the body of Christ, and it is not readily discernable by the naked eye. Also, it is crucial to keep in mind that a false prophet does not appear recognizably false; they usually appear as wolves disguised as sheep (Matt. 7:15). Therefore, there is a dire need for spiritual discernment in the church; however, the average Christian is not concerned about false prophecy or the problems it creates in the church or their daily lives. Moreover, those who recognize the problem do not know how to handle it because there are no set rules or criteria to test or discern the spirit behind prophetic messages. Moberly

¹¹⁹ Tibbs, *Do Not Believe Every Spirit*, 27-50.

states, “One looks in vain for ‘discernment’ in the indices of major Old and New Testament theologies. ‘True and false prophecy’ is an optional item in standard textbook treatments of prophecy: sometimes a section or chapter is devoted to it, sometimes not, and overall, it is marginal rather than prominent.”¹²⁰ Most historians and scholars recognize that there is always a possibility of a mixture in the revelatory word because God chooses to use imperfect people with clay feet to do his perfect will (1 Cor. 14:29).¹²¹ In other words, God chooses to speak prophetically through fallible and imperfect people; additionally, some people deliberately prophesy in the name of the Lord but are not authorized by God, so there is always room for error.

However, strewn throughout the Old and New Testament are many guard rails against false prophecy, beginning with Moses telling the Israelites, “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed” (Duet.18:15). However, prophecies may take years to be fulfilled, so there must be other means to test prophecy. Jesus also provides a guideline for judging prophecy by its fruits (Matt.7:15-20). According to Tarrer, “A prophet’s ability to speak truth lay in that prophet’s relationship to Yahweh and subsequently in his ability to discern present reality, a privilege afforded by the immediacy of that relationship. Nevertheless, while the proclamation of truth was the duty of all who would call themselves prophets of Yahweh, discernment was also an ingredient of the office.”¹²² Therefore, discernment is a significant element of prophecy, and anyone who calls themselves a prophet

¹²⁰ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 14.

¹²¹ Goll, *The Seer Expanded Edition*, 79.

¹²² Seth B. Tarrer, *Reading with the Faithful: Interpretation of True and False Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah from Ancient to Modern Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013). 139.

must be equipped by the Holy Spirit to discern the meaning and interpretation behind their prophetic utterance or dream and vision.

Since there are no guidelines for discerning prophetic messages, most churches and Bible scholars have avoided discussing prophetic discernment. Hvidt rightly observed, “Without this process of “testing the spirit,” prophecy will remain an unopened book in the story of Christian history, simply because it is impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff.”¹²³ In other words, no one could make sense of prophecy or adapt it to the human experience, which would be a great tragedy since the Christian faith is based on biblical prophecy. Moberly supports Hvidt’s theory by observing that “If there were no rational and disciplined way of discriminating between claims to speak for God, or of knowing when human speech should and should not appropriately be recognized as being a word from God, the consequences would be far-reaching.”¹²⁴ So, although there are no set criteria for discerning prophecy, the church must strive to develop guidelines for prophetic discernment by thoroughly studying the biblical treatment of true and false prophecy. Thus, learning how to test the spirit should be a priority in the teachings of the church at large.

The early Christian church set principles by which they would judge the spirit; however, those principles fall short because prophecy is a complicated beast to reckon with. Tibbs noted that “In early Christian prophecy, moral distinctions between spirits of error and spirits of truth guaranteed successful discrimination in principle (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 John 4:1–6), but this was difficult to maintain in practice because early Christians warned that evil spirits impersonate

¹²³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 286.

¹²⁴ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 222.

good ones in prophecy.”¹²⁵ In other words, early Christianity judged prophecy based on the prophet's morals and values, but even people with good morals could prophesy falsely.

Therefore, a more robust standard is needed when discerning prophecy. That is why Apostle John writes, “By this, you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:3-4). For example, if the prophetic word causes one to doubt that God loves them or causes them to believe that they do not need Jesus, that spirit is not of God.

Tibbs also states that “there are signs to determine the nature of the spirit; by examining the life of the prophet and monetary compensation for prophecy, one can determine whether the prophet is true or false.”¹²⁶ Hvidt also proposed that the fruits of the prophetic experience can be studied under three different aspects: the content of the revelations, the personality of the prophet, and the effects of the message in religious life.¹²⁷ Vallotton puts it this way: “We must embrace the prophetic while also being careful to evaluate or judge all prophetic ministry, including the messages of those prophesying and those occupying the position of a prophet. No one is exempt.”¹²⁸

According to Moberly, “Claims to speak for God can be meaningfully tested both in terms of the moral character, disposition, and behavior of the speaker and in terms of the moral and theological content of the message.”¹²⁹ Therefore, biblical and theoretical criteria can be

¹²⁵ Tibbs, *Do Not Believe Every Spirit*, 27–50.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 27–50.

¹²⁷ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 287.

¹²⁸ Kris Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*, 36.

¹²⁹ Moberly, *Prophetic Discernment*, 225.

extrapolated to discern prophecy. It is not so much about developing criteria but recognizing and implementing the ones already present in the Bible and those developed and tested over time by the Church. Recognizing that prophetic standards in the Old and New Testament align with observing the early church and modern-day practices, a working list of criteria can be developed to discern the spirit of prophecy. To accomplish that, one must also examine the theoretical foundation of prophecy to ensure that all necessary aspects are accounted for. Therefore, this next section will focus on the theories surrounding modern-day prophecies.

Theoretical Foundations

Many theories surround modern-day prophetic messages; some have theorized that prophecy ends with the Old Testament prophets, others believe that prophecy ends with the death of the apostles, but some believe that prophecy continues to the present church age. This research is concerned with discerning and interpreting contemporary prophetic messages. However, to gain perspective on correctly discerning and interpreting contemporary prophecies, this research analyzes the discernment and interpretive methods of biblical prophecies based on the premise that if those interpretive methods work to interpret biblical prophecies, they will also work for contemporary prophecies. It is also necessary to review the theoretical perspectives of prophecy and compare and contrast them with the theological perspective. While much research has been done regarding interpreting historically biblical prophecies, little research has been conducted on the discernment and interpretation of contemporary prophetic messages. The cause behind the scant research on contemporary prophetic discernment and interpretation could be the prevalence of the doctrine of cessationism propagated by scholars such as B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham, and

F.N. Lee.¹³⁰ Therefore, this section of the paper will focus on refuting the doctrine or theories of cessationism while making a biblical case for continuationism, which holds that *Charismata* did not end with the death of the last apostles but continues throughout the present church age. To refute the claims of cessationism, one must first know what they are and how they came to be. Why would people believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit end with the apostolic era? Is not the gift of the Spirit for the continued development of the Church?

The Rise of Cessationism

The doctrine of cessationism contends that prophecy, among other gifts of the Holy Spirit, ceased with the death of the last apostles.¹³¹ Interestingly, the cessationist doctrine has many schools of thought, so they do not even agree on what gifts ended with the death of the last apostle or why they ended. Some have contended that prophecy died out in early Judaism; others claim it ended with the coming of Christ, the death of the last apostle, the closure of the Christian canon, or the rise of Montanism.”¹³² According to Resane, “one school of thought is that cessation concluded with the death of the apostles, while another school of thought belabor the point that cessation ceased gradually over the first few centuries of the church.”¹³³ There is no consensus among cessationists on when or why prophecy ended, which gives rise to varying types of cessationists. According to Resane, some consider themselves *full cessationist* who are

¹³⁰ Resane, Kelebogile T. “Cessationism and Continuationism: Pentecostal Trinitarianism Balances the Tension.” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022, 2022), <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu>
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cessationism-continuationism-pentecostal/docview/2737338325/se-2>.

¹³¹ Ibid., 2.

¹³² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 36.

¹³³ Resane, *Cessationism and Continuationism*, 2.

totally against the miracles and *Charismata*, *concentric cessationist* who believes that miracles or prophecies only occur in unevangelized territories; *classical cessationist* believes that prophecy ceases with the conclusion of the canon; however, they believe that God can heal through answered prayers, then there are the *consistent cessationist* who believe that the five-fold ministry gifts were only for a transitional period and are no longer necessary.¹³⁴ Additionally, Muindi stated that some scholars believe that “prophecy was an ancient phenomenon of the biblical times that is now extinct and perhaps no longer relevant. However, a form of prophecy phenomenon is reportedly extant in the contemporary Pentecostal charismatic wing of the Church.”¹³⁵ According to Hvidt, Church history reveals that prophetic ministry underwent periods of activities that faded entirely because of opposition to institutionalization. However, it maintained its relevance throughout those centuries, eventually revived and given prominence in the church.

One of the main reasons the prophetic ministry faded after the early church is because “In the second century of the Christian era, it appears that some, if not most, of the roles of the prophet were taken over by figures such as the monarchical bishop.”¹³⁶ Prophetic ministry became institutionalized, and anyone who has had any experience with prophetic ministry knows that it cannot be institutionalized. No one can choose prophets but God; he chooses to speak through whomever he wishes and whenever he wishes. Putting people in the position of a prophet without the gifting or calling of God makes that person a false prophet because they are forced to perform based on their positions as prophets rather than being called and authorized by God.

¹³⁴ Resane, *Cessationism and Continuationism*, 3.

¹³⁵ Samuel W. Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy: Empirical-Theological Analysis* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Peter Lang, 2017).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

Scholars have tried to explain the periods of prophetic inactivity as an indication that the gifts of the Spirit have ended because they were only given for a specific time and a specific purpose. The doctrine of Calvinism further propagated the prophetic cessation assumption. According to Craig, “Calvin sets forth embryonic cessationism conceiving of prophets as those who have a “particular revelation,” he observes that this class either does not exist today or is less commonly seen. Calvin believes that the offices of apostles, prophets, and evangelists “were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before, or where they were to be carried over from Moses to Christ.”¹³⁷ There is no scriptural evidence to back up Calvin’s assumptions. It is not clear how Calvin arrived at such an unbiblical conclusion. His writings have led others to share his beliefs, such as B.B. Warfield, who contends that miracles were for the church's establishment and are no longer needed.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, others have contested this cessationist claim by arguing that God has raised a veritable flood of visionaries since the Protestant Reformation precisely to clarify the obscurities of Revelation.”¹³⁹ Many accurate prophecies, given by contemporary men and women led by the Holy Spirit, have been fulfilled with undeniable certainty, so one cannot doubt that God has spoken. Such objections gave rise to the doctrine or theories of continuationism.

¹³⁷ Philip A. Craig, “*And Prophecy Shall Cease: Jonathan Edwards on the Cessation of the Gift of Prophecy.*” *The Westminster Theological Journal*. 64, no. 1 (2002): 163–184. 17.

¹³⁸ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today, True and False*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (1953). 9.

¹³⁹ Lionel Laborie and Ariel Hessayon. *Early Modern Prophecies in Transnational, National and Regional Contexts* (3 Vols.), BRILL, 2020. 88.

The Rise of Continuationism

With so many divergent beliefs in the cessationist theories and the inability to explain why miracles and prophecies still occur today, the continuationism doctrine opposes those unfounded and unscriptural claims. Continuationism doctrine contends that “*charismata*, including miracles and prophecy, are still in operation and mostly working in some corollary relationships. For instance, *glossolalia* is accompanied by interpretation and discernment.”¹⁴⁰ This means one gift of the Spirit may depend on another, for prophecy like *glossolalia* must also be accompanied by the gift of discernment and interpretation. Resane states, “Continuationism is significantly marked and observed among the Catholics, Methodists, Moravians, and the Pentecostals and Charismatics. For these traditions, *charismata*, and miracles, in general, are disbursed not exclusively through the 1st-century apostolic era but also as promises that go beyond time in the historical development of the church.”¹⁴¹ According to St. Augustine, “Miracles were published in order to produce faith, and the faith they produced was brought into prominence.”¹⁴² In this Augustinian school of thought, the gifts of the Spirit must operate to produce faith in both believers and unbelievers. So, although the prophetic ministry suffered many setbacks over the centuries, it did not cease.

Another notable systematic theologian who is unapologetically continuationist is Wayne Grudem, who also believes that spiritual gifts are given to equip the church until Christ returns (1 Cor. 1:7).¹⁴³ Grudem also believes that the gifts of the Spirit will continue to operate in the

¹⁴⁰ Resane, *Cessationism and Continuationism*, 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Second edition, Zondervan Academic, 2020. 1294.

contemporary church because God will continue to give people revelation that makes prophecy possible.¹⁴⁴ To say that prophecy ends with the death of the apostles is to say that God stopped pouring out his Spirit on people because Joel 2:28 says, “I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.” Since God keeps pouring His Spirit on people, they will keep prophesying. Witherington states, “Prophets might appear sporadically in some eras or more frequently in others, but one can never say that the prophetic phenomenon entirely died out throughout nearly two millennia.”¹⁴⁵

Another notable Theologian who indirectly supports the continuationist doctrine is Thomas Aquinas. He believes that the gift of prophecy is for building the church body by sharing God’s knowledge. Therefore, “the formal cause of prophecy, according to Aquinas, is a supernatural light, the light of prophecy, that is given transiently to certain individuals for the good of the ecclesial community.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, God reveals his supernatural knowledge to individuals charged with communicating it to others. Aquinas also believes that the underlying purpose of prophetic knowledge is to guide others to the full integration of faith and love in their moral lives.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Aquinas contends that prophecy continues post-incarnation and only increases throughout the three divisions of time: before the law, under the law, and under

¹⁴⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Revised edition., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000). 147.

¹⁴⁵ Witherington, *The Progress of Prophecy*, 404.

¹⁴⁶ Rogers, *Aquinas on Prophecy*, 122.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

grace.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, prophecy could not end with the apostolic age because God still needs to share knowledge of himself with individuals throughout the church age.

Another earlier theologian that most cessationists quote in support of their claim for cessationism is St. Augustine; however, in his latter writings, *City of God*, he wrote, “When I saw those signs of the power of God, like those of antiquity, were often repeated in our time as well, I thought that they ought not to be allowed to fade from the knowledge of so many people.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, he detailed many miracles that he witnessed firsthand, which led him to change his beliefs that the *charismata* ended with the apostle's death. Although some of his miraculous accounts are questionable because some were based on the use of sacraments, relics, prayers to the saints, and other divine objects, to him, it was the undeniable power of God at work. Therefore, he concluded, “Even now many miracles are wrought, as God works them through those he chooses and, in the manner, he chooses, the same God who did those things which we read in the Scriptures.”¹⁵⁰ Augustine also noted that those miracles were less known and not read about frequently, so they are not readily remembered or discussed as the ones recorded in Scripture; therefore, he recorded as many miracles in his writings in hopes of presenting evidence of the continuation of *charismata*.¹⁵¹

It is important to note here that praying to the saints and using religious relics are a form of divination and should not be recognized as acts of God. One explanation for such questionable accounts of the miracles witnessed by Augustine is that, in those days, the church was only a

¹⁴⁸ Oliva, *The Experience of Prophecy*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *City of God. Book XXII, Volume I*. (Harvard University Press, 1957). 239.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 243.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

fledgling compared to pagan religious practices. This means that while Augustine may have witnessed authentic divine acts of God, some in the church may have used pagan rituals to imitate miracles. However, Augustine must have witnessed some authentic miracles that caused him to change his views of the cessation of *charismata*. It is, therefore, clear that if the gift of miracles did not cease in the early church and historians such as Augustine could have a change of heart regarding the cessation of the gifts of miracles, then it stands to reason that the gift of prophecy continues.

According to Hvidt, “Prophecy has changed immensely throughout history, especially concerning its status within the institutional church, but prophecy has never ceased.”¹⁵² Moses told the people of Israel, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him” (Duet. 18:15). According to Seitz, this passage in Deuteronomy views prophecy in succession. There will be a lineage of prophets, though specifics such as total number, number per generation, means of selection, and transfer across generations are not stipulated; one can conclude that prophecy has a beginning and a future.¹⁵³ God intends for the gift of prophecy to continue until Christ returns. Remember that many biblical prophecies are yet to be fulfilled, and as long as there are prophecies yet to be fulfilled, prophecies will never cease. God intends for the prophetic ministry to continue in each era of his grand story because it is his communication line with his people on the earth; how else would the will of God be done on the earth? How will his people know him intimately? Also, remember

¹⁵² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy the Post-Biblical Tradition*, 36.

¹⁵³ Christopher R. Seitz, *Essays on Prophecy and Canon: The Rise of a New Model for Interpretation* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2021). 233.

that no biblical evidence exists to support cessationism; however, much biblical evidence supports continuationism throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Biblical Case for Continuationism

The theory or belief that prophecy ended with the Old Testament, New Testament, or the early church age has been debunked many times. However, comparing the Old and New Testament prophetic ministry is essential to recognize and appreciate the continuum of prophecy throughout the Bible and beyond the canonized Scriptures. Hvidt observed that “Prophecy is presented in the New Testament as inspired messages. Preachers and teachers present their material as reports of past events and past revelations and as the considered results of their expository labors.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, the New Testament prophecies are built upon the foundation of Old Testament prophecies. One could go as far as to say that without Old Testament prophecies, there is nothing to preach about, and without New Testament prophecies, there is no future hope.

However, the role of the prophetic ministry has changed because of the enactment of the new and better covenant with Jesus. This is not to say that the old covenant prophetic lens can be discarded, for the new covenant prophetic messages can only be understood and interpreted through the old covenant lenses. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and declared, “This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:17), he connected the Old Testament prophecies with the New Testament fulfillment. Without the Old Testament prophecies, believers would have nothing to judge the fulfillment of the New Testament, and without the New Testament prophecies, the church would have no hope.

¹⁵⁴ Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2019). 228.

The prophetic message in the new covenant is more focused on sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and leading people to repentance. So, although the times have changed and prophets have evolved based on the spiritual needs of their culture, they are not extinct or a forgotten relic of the Old Testament. According to Chalmers, “The OT prophets are part of a broader conceptual and intellectual world, and their messages were shaped by their sensitivity to their present traditions within their culture, as well as the cultures of the people around them.”¹⁵⁵ When Old Testament prophets predicted the future, it was to reveal God’s grand plans for humanity and help people get in alignment with them. As Hays rightly stated, “These prophets saw their era as preliminary and preparatory to complete renewal, which is still in the future.”¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Hays pointed out that “All the unfolding events, the prophets proclaim boldly, both the judgment and the restoration, are part of Yahweh’s grand plan to all of humanity together to focus on the Messiah as the ultimate answer to the problem of sin.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, it is fundamental that prophecy continues in the New Testament, revealing God’s grand plan of salvation to the rest of the world.

The priest Zechariah, Mary the mother of Jesus, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, and Jesus did their fair share of prophesying, as did the Apostles, John the Revelator, and various believers in the early church. Prophecy outgrew its incubation environment of Israel and took on a more global yet individualized approach in the New Testament because the Holy Spirit can now live in the hearts of Jews and Gentiles, convicting them of their sins and revealing the truth of Jesus to them.

¹⁵⁵ Aaron Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding, and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets* (InterVarsity Press, 2015). 143.

¹⁵⁶ Hays, *Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

According to Rogers, “Prophetic light causes supernatural knowledge conducive to inducing others to faith. Prophecy thus manifests both an individual and a social dimension.”¹⁵⁸ In Thomas Aquinas’s train of thought, prophecy is foundational for the believer’s faith; it is the material or content on which to base one’s faith.¹⁵⁹ In a nutshell, the Old Testament prophets told people that the Messiah was coming, but the NT prophets told people the Messiah came and paid the price for sin, and he is coming back to judge the world. To observe this transition in the New Testament, observe that When John the Baptist came on the scene of prophecy, he told the Pharisees, I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord (John 1:23, Isa. 40:3). Then he told them the one that is coming after me is mightier, (Matt. 3:11). Then told the people “Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). He wasn’t just speaking random words; he was speaking from the OT prophecies, providing the people with prophetic content on which to base their faith.

John the Baptist then handed the prophetic baton to Jesus when he prophesied that he must decrease so Jesus could increase (John 3:30-35). Jesus’s ministry exploded with miraculous signs, such as casting out demons and healing the sick, as well as prophecies both individually, nationally, and globally. Jesus prophesied of apocalyptic events that would take place in the future, such as the destruction of the temple, signs of his return, and the end of the ages (Matt. 24). When Jesus ascended to heaven, he handed that prophetic baton to his disciples. He commanded them to be his witness to the ends of the earth. The only way they can be an effective witness for Jesus is to share the gospel, which involves the prophetic ministry. That is why Peter prophesied to the crowds on the day of Pentecost that the promise was for them, their

¹⁵⁸ Rogers, *Aquinas on Prophecy*, 139.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

children, and future generations (Acts 2:39). The prophetic baton was then passed on to the believers as they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They, too, began to prophesy both individually and corporately (Acts 21:4, 10-11). Later, the Apostle Paul who also did his fair share of prophecies, taught the Corinthians that the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3). Therefore, the prophecy did not end with the original disciples.

One key Scripture verse that cessationists fail to account for is Romans 11:29, for God's gifts and call are irrevocable. God gifted some people to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The gifts are still operational on the earth, for Jesus said to whom much is given, much is required. (Luke 12:48). How could Jesus require anything of a believer if he took back his gifts when the apostles died? Jesus also said he came to set the world on fire, and he wished it was already burning (Luke 12:49). The fire that Jesus ignited in the world is the gift of the Holy Spirit burning through people's hearts everywhere, and he intends for it to keep burning until he returns. The fire of the Holy Spirit reveals hidden truths and enables people to prophesy.

The gifts of the Spirit strengthen believers' faith and enable them to live a life of power against the onslaught of the enemy while anticipating the glorious return of Jesus Christ. According to Hays, the prophetic message promises "a glorious future restoration for Israel and the nations, which is not merely to return Jerusalem to its former glory but a day when Yahweh's Spirit would indwell human hearts and God, and sinners would be reconciled."¹⁶⁰ The ultimate goal of prophecy is to restore faith in God and draw people back into a holy relationship with God. Therefore, prophecy cannot end while God is still in the process of saving souls because it is one of the primary tools that he uses to win souls.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 72.

One of the scriptures that cessationists used to support their argument is 1 Cor. 13:8, But where there are prophecies, they will cease; however, like many believers, they fail to consider verses nine and ten, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.” The question here is, when does the believer achieve *completeness*? Is it when they receive salvation or enter their eternal state in Jesus? As believers living on the earth, people do not achieve completeness in Christ until they are glorified as he is (Phil. 1:6, 3:10). Since believers have not yet achieved *completeness*, prophecy cannot cease because it is one of the tools that helps them to achieve *completeness* in Christ. Subsequently, prophecy did not end with the close of the canon but continued throughout church history.

Continuationism in Church History

Prophecy continued throughout the New Testament and the early church. Witherington states, “Early Christianity was a movement largely of preachers, teachers, and some prophets. Prophets, when performing their distinctive tasks, were not preachers, teachers, or exegetes, although various figures, such as Paul, could assume multiple roles in early Christianity.”¹⁶¹ The prophetic culture and ministry were a distinctive feature of the early church and continue to be a staple in the modern-day church, providing a reassuring thread of continuity in the prophetic journey. Hvidt states, “While dogmatic and fundamental theology provides the theoretical elaboration of prophecy, church history is the source of its empirical investigation. It is church history that portrays the many prophetic characters of Christendom and its failures, just as it is church history that can show the way prophecy has been important to the life of the church.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 403.

¹⁶² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 33.

Without prophecy, no church would exist, and without the continuation of prophecy, all that's left is a dead, dry religious system devoid of God. Hvidt also says, "If we are to find the possible continuation of the prophetic tradition in the church, we must be able to identify it through its function and not solely by its nominal designation."¹⁶³

Some scholars contend that the gifts ended after the early church was established because the gifts of the Spirit were only meant to establish the foundation. Imagine building a house and only using the proper tools and materials on its foundation; what would happen to the structure if the proper tools and materials were not used? It is illogical to think that God, the builder of the church body, would use spiritual gifts to lay the foundational work of the church and then revoke the gifts. As mentioned before, the gift of God is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29); God will not revoke the gifts of the Spirit because they are needed for the maturing of the body of Christ. When does the believer not need The Holy Spirit and his gifts? The church is not a physical body and cannot be built without the gifts of The Holy Spirit in operation.

The gift of prophecy informs believers of the gospel and future apocalyptic events and encourages them to live holy lives in preparation for Jesus's return. Without the continuation of prophecy, people will never repent from their sins and return to God. Therefore, it is of infinite spiritual value that people embrace the continuum of prophecy because the gifts of the Holy Spirit are a necessary and permanent part of the believer's lives until they are glorified like Jesus. Since the gift of prophecy is not going away any time soon, it is of necessity that Christians learn how to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages. The next two sections of this study will, therefore, examine prophetic discernment and interpretation literature.

¹⁶³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 53.

Prophetic Discernment

There are many theories surrounding prophetic discernment; however, there are no set guidelines or criteria by which to judge contemporary prophecy. This could be because discernment is another gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:10) and would merit its own study. To some extent, every believer has the gift of discernment to distinguish between false doctrine and false prophecies. However, there are individuals with special abilities to discern beyond the level of just distinguishing between good and evil. They can provide more detail on what happened in the spirit realm to make something evil or good and what must be done to remedy a situation. Furthermore, prophetic discernment can be achieved by anyone who has the gift of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 5:14), for his purpose in a believer's life is to guide them into all truth. According to Eivaz, "The Holy Spirit gives prophetic wisdom (Prov. 2:6), which is the ability to respond properly to the prophetic word and partner with the Holy Spirit for His divinely intended outcome."¹⁶⁴ According to Kitterman, "Because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we all have discernment within our spirit that tells us when something is wrong. Discernment is not a feeling! It is communication with the Holy Spirit."¹⁶⁵ One way to think of discernment is like a gut feeling or intuition or knowledge that did not come from a person's intellect.

The practice of discernment is not something new to the contemporary church; according to Tibbs, "Early Christians were told what to expect the Holy Spirit to say (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:12) and what to expect a demon to say (1 Tim 4:1–3). However, there is no clarity on how to unmask a deceitful spirit; what if a false spirit speaks highly of Jesus or behaves like a

¹⁶⁴ Jennifer Eivaz, *Prophetic Secrets: Learning the Language of Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2020). 27.

¹⁶⁵ Debbie Kitterman, *The Gift of Prophetic Encouragement: Hearing the Words of God for Others* (Ada, MI: Chosen Books, 2018). 60.

good spirit?”¹⁶⁶ How will the listener know if he or she is being deceived? That is why it is important to have more than one criterion on which to base prophetic discernment.

Most people fall for deception because the power behind it is a hint of truth mixed with a lie; therefore, wisdom is needed to distinguish where the truth stops and the lie begins. The wise discernor knows what to look for with the guidance of The Holy Spirit. When considering prophetic discernment, it is important to examine biblical and theoretical evidence to gain perspective for interpreting contemporary prophecies. Based on this research, there are seven criteria for discerning whether a message is from God: the lifestyle of the prophet, monetary compensation, prophetic content, the channel or method of delivery, the epoch, and dimensions of prophecy.

Criteria for Discernment

The first criterion for discernment is examining the prophet's moral life. One should remember that the prophet's vocation originates in God, not in the prophet's will or aspirations.¹⁶⁷ To be a spokesperson for God is no easy task, and although it is something to be desired, one should approach such calling with fear and trembling. Often, people whom God uses prophetically have no desire to do so. When God called Moses, He gave God every excuse he could find because he knew that the prophetic calling was a challenging vocation. (Exod. 4:10). Similarly, when God called Jeremiah, he told God, I do not know how to speak; I am too young (Jer. 1:5). And Isaiah told God he was a man of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5). In other words, God did not choose morally perfect people, but he chose imperfect people. According to

¹⁶⁶ Tibbs, *Do Not Believe Every Spirit*, 27–50.

¹⁶⁷ Hvidt, *Christian prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 37.

Aquinas, prophecy is not a habit, and the prophet does not need exceptional moral qualities to receive it.¹⁶⁸ However, when God begins to operate in a person's life, there will be notable moral changes. Therefore, the first criterion to examine the authenticity of a prophecy is to determine from the prophet's moral life whether God calls him or her and whether any spiritual or moral changes support this claim of being called by God.

One thing to remember when examining the prophet's life is that a genuine prophet can make mistakes and still be called and used by God. Some people believe that a true prophet cannot make mistakes and are offended when they do.¹⁶⁹ While it is true that no prophet can be a true prophet if their prophecies are not fulfilled, one must keep in mind that young prophets do make mistakes, especially with their interpretation, but that does not make them false prophets. According to Witherington, true prophets can occasionally speak beyond or against what God wishes them to say because the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets (1 Cor. 14:32). In contrast, false prophets such as Balaam can offer true prophecy.¹⁷⁰ This again brings into focus the ambiguity of prophecy and the need for spiritual discernment.

Since the spirit of prophecy is subjected to the spirit of the prophets, people can add or subtract from the message God is trying to convey to his people. For example, Moses was an excellent prophet, but God told him to speak to the rock and that water would come. Instead, he struck the rock (Num. 20: 7-11). Therefore, a true prophet can make mistakes and blunders when articulating God's prophetic messages. No one can doubt that Moses was a true prophet of God. However, he failed to represent God correctly and was not permitted to enter the promised land.

¹⁶⁸ Oliva, *The Experience of Prophecy*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 23.

¹⁷⁰ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 42.

The stamp of the prophet's call is evident in the prophet's before-and-after behaviors. Are there observable changes in the prophet's life? According to Kelly, measuring a prophet's truthfulness should consider the "fruit" of their moral life, the work of the Spirit of God in their person, and the prophet's dependence on the word of God.¹⁷¹ In other words, does the prophet's life demonstrate holiness or devotion to God? Are they living a life that is above reproach?

The second criterion for testing the spirit is monetary compensation. In other words, are the prophets seeking to further the kingdom of God or just prophesying for personal gain (Mic. 3:11). Some see the prophetic as a viable means to earn a living, just like the slave girl in Acts 16:16-19. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. Simon the sorcerer offered Peter money to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18), and this is where some true prophets of God fail because they accept monetary compensation for exercising the prophetic gifts. In another example, Balak hired Balaam to prophesy against the people. He was prepared to pay him even more than the typical diviner's fee if he could put a curse on the Israelites (Num. 22). Balaam was willing to do so; however, God forbade him. A prophet should not accept bribes because it blinds their discernment and perverts the words of the righteous (Exod. 23:8). It is unfortunate, but many people in the church today use their prophetic gifts for monetary gain. However, a true prophet is only concerned with advancing the kingdom of God.

The third criterion for discerning a prophetic message is its content. Although it is important to examine the prophet's life, discernment is more concerned with the content of the prophecies than with the prophets themselves. Judging prophetic content comes with its own set of criteria. According to Hvidt, the first basic rule for judging the doctrinal content of the

¹⁷¹ Kelly, *How Prophecy Works*, 52.

prophetic message is that nothing may oppose the Gospel.¹⁷² The premise is that *the Spirit and the Gospel must agree* because God does not contradict himself. Apostle John says, “This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in an actual body, that person has the Spirit of God. However, if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and is already here (1 John 4:2-3). If a prophecy does not support the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection, it should not be accepted as authentic. For example, if a prophecy claims that Christ did come in the flesh and died, but he was not resurrected, that prophecy must be rejected.

The content of the message should be *confirmed by two or three sources* (Prov. 15:22). In the Old Testament days, a person could not be convicted of a crime on the testimony of only one witness; there had to be two or more witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Apostle Paul also quotes this same verse when the Corinthians were demanding proof that Christ was speaking through him. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (2 Cor. 13:1). He told them to test the words he was speaking to them by other disciples who were in Christ. Apostle Paul wanted them to sift out the prophecy and doctrine through confirmation. As Witherington stated, “Historical evidence and literary evidence must be allowed to interact before one can make pronouncements about prophecy failing.”¹⁷³ In other words, is there a precedence for the prophecy uttered? Do history and scripture confirm the content of the prophecy? However, “If a word does not confirm a current situation or issue, it does not necessarily mean the person

¹⁷² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 288.

¹⁷³ Witherington, *The Progress of Prophecy*, 79-80.

speaking it is wrong. It could mean it pertains not to a current issue but a future one.”¹⁷⁴ Some prophetic messages are for an appointed time, and the receiver must wait for them to be fulfilled (Hab. 2: 3). Often, when the prophecy is delayed, God will still send confirmation to encourage his people to wait for its fulfillment.

Next, the content of the prophetic message should *align with the Scripture*. As Vallotton contends, “The word must be congruent with the Scriptures as well as the heart of Father God, and the fruit of the prophecy is that it brings people closer to God.”¹⁷⁵ This does not mean that every prophecy should have a matching Bible verse; it means that the concept of the prophecy must align with biblical truths. According to Witherington, “On the one hand, this suggests that such utterances are to stand or fall on their own merit, and on the other hand, it suggests that oration might exceed inspiration, in which case such sayings could never have the same authority as the oracles offered by Jesus or the Old Testament prophets.”¹⁷⁶ In other words, do the messages conflict with the revealed truth of the Bible? For example, if someone prophesies that using astrology can bring a person closer to God or help them understand spiritual things, that prophecy does not align with scripture because Jesus is the only way back to the Father (John 14:6). Likewise, the base purpose of contemporary prophecy must lead people back to the heart of the Father and must therefore be in alignment with his revealed truths.

Last but certainly not least, the best approach to discerning the contents of the prophetic message is *by its fruits or lack thereof* because all criteria used to judge its authenticity relate to

¹⁷⁴ Kitterman, *The Gift of Prophetic Encouragement*, 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*, 38.

¹⁷⁶ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 47.

the fruits of the experience.¹⁷⁷ In other words, does the prophecy display the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:22)? The fruit of the Spirit must be evident in the prophet's life and message because the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. Therefore, the effects of the contemporary prophecy should be to encourage and build up the body of Christ rather than to disparage a person's character and cause separation and division in the church body.

The fourth criterion for discerning the spirit is the epoch. When a prophetic word is uttered, one of the first questions people ask is, when will it happen? According to Bandy and Merkle, "Understanding prophecy from a biblical-theological perspective is recognizing that prophecy was always given in particular historical settings."¹⁷⁸ The epoch in which the prophecy is given and the time of its fulfillment is also necessary to discern prophecy. Jesus told the Pharisees you know how to discern the weather, but they did not know how to discern the times that they were living in (Matt. 16: 2-3). Jesus called them faithless and perverse because he was standing in front of them as the fulfillment of prophecy; however, they did not believe him; they wanted a sign to prove that he was really the Son of God. According to (1Chron. 12:32), The sons of Issachar were discerning of the times they were living in and knew exactly what Israel should do. When discerning prophecy, it is important to consider the time period in which the prophecy was given and the time of its fulfillment. Think of it as a pregnant woman; she does not give birth at the moment she is conceived but must go through the gestational period before birth can occur. That is why the Lord told the prophet Habakkuk that the vision is for an appointed time, and though it lingers, wait for it to be fulfilled (Hab 2:2-3). When contemporary prophecies are given, they are also for an appointed time, and if they are authentic, they will materialize.

¹⁷⁷ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 287.

¹⁷⁸ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 33.

The fifth criterion for prophetic discernment is the channel and method of delivery of the prophetic message. In other words, how did the prophet receive the message? Was it a dream, a vision, a trance, a word of knowledge, or an impression? The channel or method of delivery lends credibility to the message and assists with its discernment. For example, a dream is not something that a person made up; it either happened or did not. However, a person can prophesy from their mind when expressing a word of knowledge. When Pharoah dreamt a dream that troubled him, he sought interpretation. However, he was not a prophet, but Joseph functioned as a prophet to interpret the dream. It was not difficult to see that the Lord had spoken. Similarly, when Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue of gold, bronze, silver, iron, and clay, the dream troubled him so much that he had to seek interpretation (Dan.2). Daniel prayed for the interpretation. Based on how events transpired around the dream, no one could doubt that God had spoken through Daniel's interpretation.

The sixth criterion for prophetic discernment is the dimensions of prophecy. In other words, who are the intended audience? Is the prophecy global, congregational, national, or individual? Just because a prophetic word was given for a specific nation or individual does not mean that it applies to another nation or person. According to Bandy and Merkel, "Locating prophecy within the historical, sociological, cultural, and religious context of its origin is an essential component for proper understanding."¹⁷⁹ For example, Jesus told Peter that when you are old, someone else will put on your clothes for you and take you to places that you do not wish to go (John 21:18). That prophecy was not meant for the other disciples; only for Peter. Likewise, when contemporary prophecy is given, the target audience must be considered to

¹⁷⁹ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 33.

accurately discern the authenticity of the message. Who are the messages intended for? What issues or situations is the message addressing?

The seventh criterion for discerning prophetic messages is prayer. Prayer is communication with God; anyone can talk to God anytime about anything. The prophet should pray before giving his messages; likewise, the receiver should pray before accepting the message. Prayer is partnering with the Holy Spirit to enable God's will to be done on the earth through human beings. One way to think of prayer is that it is God's briefing room, where humanity meets with God to discuss his will for their lives. Instead of worrying if a prophecy is true or not, pray about it because apostle Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-8). Furthermore, Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call unto me, and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." God wants to reveal his plans to his people, and when they pray, he reveals things that they could not know any other way.

Spending time in prayer causes a person to become sensitive to the Spirit and quickly recognize when the Spirit is speaking. This means one should not believe every prophecy but pray to the Holy Spirit for discernment and weigh the utterance against the canonized prophecy. Discussing the prophecy and praying with other wise persons is also prudent because wisdom is found in many counsels (Prov. 11:14). Before making life-altering decisions based on a prophetic message, seeking counsel from another wise individual is detrimental. For example, if a person is saving money to buy a house, and a prophet tells them that God said to give him the money, and he will bless them with the home of their dreams. It would be unwise for anyone to empty their bank account simply because a prophet told them to do so. However, there are times

when God makes sacrificial requests from individuals such as the prophet Elijah and the widow in 1 Kings 17, but this must be confirmed before any such actions are taken.

To sum up the tools for prophetic discernment, the first response to prophecy is to examine the prophet's moral life, assess whether the prophet is collecting bribes, analyze the content of the message against Scripture, assess whether or not the message is a confirmation of something the Lord already revealed, the epoch of the prophecy, the dimension of the prophecy, the channel of the prophecy, pray and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Once it is determined that the prophetic message is an authentic message from the Lord, the next step is to interpret the message.

Prophetic Interpretation

Prophetic language can sometimes be challenging to interpret because it is often filled with symbols and allegories. This is where the prophetic Ministry gets messy, and people reject it because they do not understand what is being communicated. However, understanding how to interpret prophetic messages is of utmost importance to the body of Christ because authentic prophetic messages provide information and instructions from God. According to Aquinas, once the prophet receives the messages they must interpret and announce it and orient the community to the direction that God indicated.¹⁸⁰ After all, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to search it out" (Prov. 25:2, BSB). Therefore, one must embrace the challenge of prophetic interpretation and search out the matter. Some people believe Scripture is the only way to communicate with God; however, God gave the Holy Spirit to humanity to communicate with them. Apart from scripture, prophecy is one of God's primary methods to communicate to his

¹⁸⁰ Oliva, *The Experience of Prophecy*, 4.

people at the end of this age because much spiritual guidance is needed.¹⁸¹ Therefore, prophetic messages are worth the challenge to interpret and extrapolate their meaning.

However, interpreting contemporary prophetic messages is challenging for the modern-day church because prophetic languages employ poetry, figures of speech, parallelism, metaphors, and symbolism. According to Bandy and Merkle, “While we have Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles’ teachings to guide us in our interpretation of biblical prophecy, there are several interpretive challenges that we need to consider for a careful balance and informed understanding of the prophetic text.”¹⁸² The same challenges apply to contemporary prophecies. For example, the prophetic language includes symbolism, allegories, metaphors, typology, etc. What do they mean? How can one be sure that the interpretative meaning is correct?

According to Bandy and Merkle, when interpreting biblical prophecy, it is essential to determine if the prophet uses poetic language or figures of speech to communicate the message concepts through figurative imagery.¹⁸³ The same goes for contemporary prophecies. What kind of language is used to deliver the message? Are there any allegories or figures of speech? “A figurative speech is a language in which there is a comparison, either stated or implied, between two terms.”¹⁸⁴ For example, the prophet Joel used figurative language to describe his vision of a swarm of locusts invading the nation. “They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like chariots, they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle” (Joel 2:4-5). Some scholars say that

¹⁸¹ Rick Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 8.

¹⁸² Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 60.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Joel was describing a literal swarm of locusts invading the land, while others believe Joel's vision symbolized an invading army. Sometimes, figures of speech can be easy to grasp, while others can be challenging to discern.¹⁸⁵ It is often difficult to describe what is seen in the realm of the spirit; therefore, it is necessary to liken the vision to something relatable in the natural world. The prophet and the listener must also depend on the Holy Spirit to interpret the message because there are no set criteria for interpreting symbolic languages of prophecy.

According to Bandy and Merkle, another tool that prophets often use to their advantage is parallelism. This means saying the same thing more than once using different images and emphasis, enabling the listener or reader to see the relationship between ideas and concepts.¹⁸⁶ The idea behind this type of message is to reinforce the messages so that the receiver can understand clearly what the message is about. According to Bandy and Merkle, "The visual mode of prophecy through a dream or vision transcends the boundaries of normal experience by transporting the reader into the realm of the supernatural, strange creatures, and cryptic messages of events and situations and is often difficult to describe."¹⁸⁷ The difficulty lies in describing things that cannot be seen with the naked eye; therefore, the prophet must draw parallels with what can be seen so that the receiver can make sense of the messages. For example, the Psalmist wrote, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God" (Psalm 42:1). No one can see the soul with the naked eye or hear its panting with the natural ear but drawing a parallel with a thirsty deer gives the reader an idea of how desperately the psalmist desired God. In some cases, prophetic parallels accentuate the message and provide multiple meanings;

¹⁸⁵ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 53.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

therefore, Holy Spirit assistance is still needed to interpret its meaning because spiritual things can only be understood with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Criteria for Interpreting Prophecy

As with discernment, there are no set guidelines for interpreting a prophetic message, but a working one can also be derived based on the biblical interpretation of prophecy. According to Grabbe, “When engaged in interpretation, much depends upon context and what we know of the history.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, the content of the contemporary prophetic message must be weighed against biblical knowledge, history, and the contemporary. Question the prophecy: What is known about the utterance? Is there a precedent for the message’s contents? What can be derived? Is it a warning message or a word of instruction?

Most biblical prophecies are embedded in symbolism. However, the problem with symbolism is that a symbol can have multiple meanings. Theologians typically exercise two main approaches: (1) primarily literal and secondarily symbolic or (2) primarily symbolic and secondarily literal.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, some scholars view the Book of Revelation as primarily literal, while others see it as secondarily literal, which means to take prophecy literally unless the facts indicate otherwise.¹⁹⁰ However, there is still quite a bit of symbolism in prophecy that must be filtered through the lenses of current events if they are to apply to the modern world. Therefore, Bandy and Merkle argued, “A more profitable hermeneutical approach is to reverse

¹⁸⁸ Lester L Grabbe and Martti Nissinen. *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2011). 199. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb31335.0001.001>. PDF.

¹⁸⁹ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 57

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

the interpretive order by placing the symbolic in the foreground while shifting the literal into the background.”

¹⁹¹ This is a more logical approach because the symbolic can have multiple meanings; however, the literal is tied to one possible meaning, which could be entirely false if not interpreted correctly. It is, therefore, more beneficial to view the symbolism in prophecy as primary while trying to extract the literal meaning. For example, Amos saw a vision of the Lord measuring a wall with a plumb line. The Lord then asked, “Amos, what do you see?” He answered, “A plumb line” (Amos 7:7-8). Amos could not understand what the Lord was showing him without interpretation. Before Amos could ask what this all means, the Lord replied, “I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore all their sins. The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be ruined, and the temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end” (Amos 7:8-9). If Amos had interpreted the prophetic image as a literal plumb line, he would have missed its meaning because, to the natural mind, a plumb line assists with building, not destruction. However, the Lord gave him the interpretation of the vision, again demonstrating the need to depend on God for prophetic interpretation.

Goll states, “One important point to remember in trying to understand dream language is that God is consistent with His symbolic language. How He speaks in Genesis is similar to how He speaks in Revelation. Throughout the Bible, the types and symbols remain very much alike. This same consistency of symbolism also holds true in our lives.” ¹⁹² These symbolic languages are sometimes challenging to interpret, which causes one to lose the essence of the message God is communicating. Furthermore, Cahn added, “The Bible uses stories, pictures, and parables to

¹⁹¹ Bandy and Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy*, 59.

¹⁹² Goll, *The Seer Expanded Edition*, 105.

communicate messages of divine truth; the goal is to get the message out to as many people as possible.”¹⁹³

Just as with discernment, one must also rely on the Holy Spirit to interpret the message, especially if the message is comprised of symbolic imagery. A classic example of this dream language and prophetic interpretation is Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams in Genesis 41. Pharaoh dreamt of seven meager cows devouring seven well-fed cows and seven heads of whither grain devouring seven plumb grains. The dream troubled Pharaoh, but all his wise men could not help him to interpret the dream. However, Joseph, who was in prison then, was called to interpret these dreams. Joseph responded, “It is beyond my power to do this, but God can tell you what it means and set you at ease” (Gen. 41:16 NLT). Joseph did not rely on his abilities to interpret the dream; he relied on the Lord to reveal the meaning of the dream. Considering Joseph’s interpretation, who could accurately interpret that seven fat cows and seven plumb grains mean seven years of plenty and that the seven meager cows and the seven whither grains mean seven years of famine? (Gen. 41: 26-27). Joseph accurately interpreted the dreams and wisely instructed Pharaoh to prepare for the years of famine (Gen. 41:33-36). Neither Pharaoh’s wise men could interpret the dreams together, nor could Pharaoh himself, but Joseph did with the guidance of the Lord. So, dream interpretations require one to seek the Lord for divine interpretations.

Another prime example of prophetic symbolism is Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream, which was full of symbolic imagery. King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue with the head of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs bronze, its legs iron, and its feet part iron and part clay, that was shattered by a single stone that was not cut out by human hands

¹⁹³ Cahn, *The Harbinger*, 186.

(Dan. 2: 31-35). There was a significant prophetic revelation wrapped up in this dream, but none of the king's wise men and astrologers could even take a potshot at it because the interesting twist was that the king did not tell them the dream. He wanted the wise men to tell him what he dreamt and what it meant. When they protested that this was an unreasonable request, the king ordered that they be killed. Daniel, however, decided to gather his friends and pray for God to give him the dream and the interpretation of the dream (Dan. 2:17-18).

Joyner stated, "We must prayerfully seek the Lord for understanding regardless of how obvious an interpretation may seem. True interpretations must come by revelation of the Holy Spirit."¹⁹⁴ Daniel did not try to interpret the dream without first consulting the Lord in prayer. It is interesting also to note that God gave Daniel the revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious dream in a vision (Dan. 2:19). Usually, visions themselves need interpretation; however, Daniel not only revealed the king's dream but also told him what he was thinking of before he had the dream and what the dream means. He told him that God had revealed to him future events, and the statue represents the rise and fall of kingdoms, including his own, which was the head of gold on the statue and the final kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:35-46). It is impossible to interpret such a dream with so much symbolism and allegories without the help of God. As Bookstien says, "The symbolic language of the prophets can be challenging, but rather than being a hurdle, it can be a great gift. Symbolic language engages our interest and stirs our imagination."¹⁹⁵ Observe that, at first, both Joseph and Daniel could not interpret the two dreams until they prayed to God, and received the interpretation. So, although it is important to review

¹⁹⁴ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry* (Fort Mill, SC: Morningstar Publications. 1997). 114.

¹⁹⁵ Boekestein, *The Future of Everything*, 18.

the parallelism and symbolism of prophecy, the more prudent method of interpretation is seeking interpretation through prayer.

To summarize the criteria for interpretation, as with biblical prophecy, contemporary prophecy should be treated as primarily symbolic if symbolic languages are used and secondarily literal. Question the prophecy: What symbolic languages are used? Are there any allegories? What do they represent? Do they have multiple meanings? How does it apply to the given situation? Most importantly, pray and ask the Lord to reveal the interpretation of the message, whether it's a dream, vision, or impression.

Conclusion

To summarize and conclude this chapter, prophecy, in layman's terms, prophecy is communication with God. A prophet is a person, male or female, whom God chose and authorized to speak on his behalf. The Old Testament prophetic culture is considerably distinct from the New Testament prophetic culture; however, prophecy serves the same purpose in both eras: drawing people back to a right relationship with God. Although many scholars have argued that prophecy ceased with the apostles, no scriptural evidence supports such claims. However, overwhelming biblical evidence supports the notion that prophecy and the other gifts of the spirit will continue until Christ's return and completeness are achieved in him.

Discerning and interpreting contemporary prophetic messages is crucial, especially since Jesus warns that false prophets will arise and deceive many. As such, this study suggests seven criteria to discern prophecy: the life of the prophet, the content of the message, prophetic epoch, channel or method of delivery, the dimension of prophecy, confirmation Scripture, and prayer.

Pinning down interpretive criteria proves to be quite elusive; however, one primary method is to analyze prophecy by its symbolic meaning before applying any literal meaning and,

most importantly, pray for the Holy Spirit to provide the interpretation. The critical thing to remember here is that prophets know in part, so they prophesy in part. Therefore, one must depend on the Holy Spirit to reveal the spiritual part that the natural senses cannot perceive.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The problem presented in chapter one is that many Christians do not understand how to discern and interpret prophetic messages, which causes some to be deceived by false prophecy. While multiple causes lead to this deficiency, the lack of prophetic teaching within the church, Bible Schools, and Seminaries is the main contributor. This action research project proposes that if Christians learn to discern and interpret prophetic messages, they will respond well to contemporary prophetic messages and are less likely to be deceived by false prophetic messages.

Since the pandemic, the prophetic ministry has taken center stage in the Christian community. However, most Christians are not equipped to discern whether a message is from God or other sources. The critical issue that most Christians face with prophetic discernment and interpretation is that there are no criteria for discerning when God is speaking or interpreting an authentic prophetic message; in other words, they do not know what to look for, how to recognize it, or how to make sense of it, so most avoid prophecy altogether.¹ Moberly observed, “One looks in vain for ‘discernment’ in the indices of major Old and New Testament theologies. ‘True and false prophecy’ is an optional item in standard textbook treatments of prophecy: sometimes a section or chapter is devoted to it, sometimes not, and overall, it is marginal rather than prominent.”² It is also true that prophetic discernment and interpretation are not taught in most churches or seminaries; therefore, pastors and congregants remain ignorant of these skills. The researcher proposes that teaching people to discern and interpret prophecy will protect them from deception.

¹ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 14.

² Ibid.

Since the false election prophecies directly impacted the members of Jesus Strong Ministries, the researcher selectively chose thirty-two Christians who are members and affiliates of Jesus Strong Ministries predisposed to prophecy to determine their level of understanding and then took them through an eight-week prophetic training course to learn how to recognize and interpret authentic prophecy. The curriculum is designed to focus on eight core research questions that will provide insight into prophetic understanding by analyzing various biblical prophecies and how people respond or react to them. This chapter will detail the intervention design, recruiting and screening, course design, measuring tools, and anticipated outcomes.

Intervention Design

The research project utilizes a triangulation method of qualitative surveys, interviews, and focus groups to investigate how people discern and respond to contemporary prophetic messages. The recent pandemic created a flurry of interest in the prophetic ministry due to the millions of people who died, empty food shelves in supermarkets, limited access to healthcare, empty city streets, and an overall sense of impending doom. Many people in the Christian community prophesied that the pandemic was God's judgment upon humanity, while others prophesied it was man-made. The crisis of the pandemic and the American general election was underway, which further fueled the fires of both trustworthy and false prophecy within the Christian community, mostly because people were looking for a president who could provide solutions to the crisis at hand. However, many prophecies were false because people prophesied out of their desires, which caused no small stir in the Christian community.

Therefore, this intervention was designed to help Christians discern and interpret true and false prophecies. The intervention utilizes triangulation methods to gather data and screen

participants to discover what people understand or believe about modern prophetic messages before and after the course.

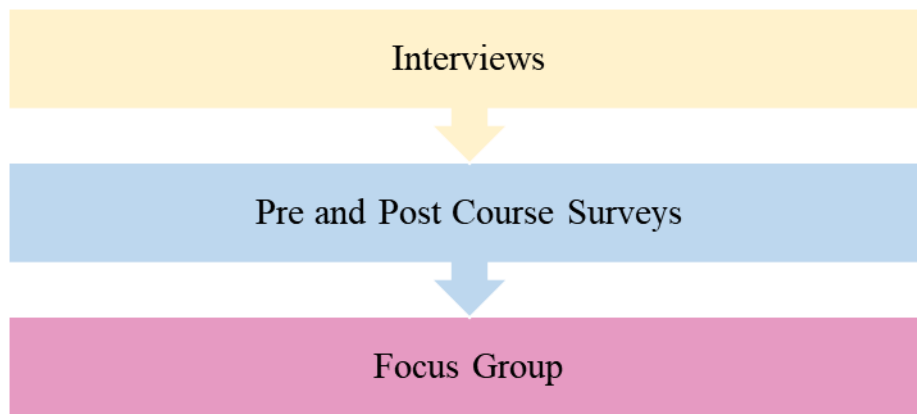


Fig. 3.1 Methodological Approach

Each method is relevant to the study because it contributes a different view of the problem and fosters the solution of educating the participants about their need to understand prophetic messages.

Recruiting and Screening

The first step was to send out invitations via email or text messages to fifty members of Jesus Strong Ministries who meet the qualifications for participation. The second step was to interview participants and set the expectations for the study. The third step was to gather consent from those who agreed to participate in the research. The fourth step is to complete a pre-course survey to measure participants' understanding of contemporary prophetic messages. The fifth step was for the participants to attend an eight-week virtual workshop on discerning and interpreting contemporary prophecy via Zoom. The sixth step was to administer a post-course survey to determine the impact of the study by measuring how much the participants' contemporary prophetic views changed regarding discerning and interpreting prophetic messages

after the study. The seventh step was to collect and analyze the results of the surveys, and the final step was to present the findings.

Intervention Design	
Step 1	Initiate contact with participants via phone calls or text messages two weeks before the start of the study.
Step 2	Interview participants to determine if they meet the criteria and collect consent.
Step 3	Email consent forms to qualifying participants
Step 4	Conduct pre-study surveys
Step 5	Participants attend weekly Zoom courses for eight weeks.
Step 6	Conduct post-surveys and interviews at the end of the study.
Step 7	Collect and analyze data and synthesize visible trends.
Step 8	Presents findings and results.

Table 3.1 Intervention Design

The demographics required for participation in the study are that the participants must meet three criteria: they must be members of Jesus Strong Ministries, believe in prophetic ministry, and are between the ages of 18 and 80, both male and female. The study is geared toward prophetically inclined people, and as such, no participant will be accepted if they do not believe in modern-day prophetic messages. After the interview, if the participants were qualified, they were moved to the survey stage.

Since the topic of study is sensitive, the demographic parameters were necessary to avoid ethical issues, such as discrimination associated with people's religious affiliations. Only adults were chosen to avoid ethical issues arising from non-consenting parents for minors. The members of Jesus Strong were chosen because they were directly impacted by the problem stated.

Recruiting Email

Once the IRB approval was obtained, the researcher composed and sent the recruiting emails, inviting the members and affiliates of Jesus Strong Ministries to participate in the study.

The recruiting email provides an overview of the study and the rationale behind the study. Some participants did not respond to the emails; however, they expressed interest in the study when contacted by text messages or phone calls. Only eleven out of fifty people responded to the emails, while thirty-two responded to text messages and phone calls. Five persons could not participate in the study because they could not commit to the eight weeks of class time.

Measuring Tools

One essential qualification in the interview stages is their experience and outlook on modern-day prophecy. If the participant is not concerned with modern-day prophecy, they were eliminated in the interview stage. If the participants had experiences with modern-day prophecy and were interested in learning more, they were advanced to the survey stage. The pre-course survey gathers participants' prior understanding of discerning and interpreting prophetic messages. The participants then advanced to the course stage, where they remained in one group and met weekly via Zoom as the study progressed. Once the participants had completed the course, another survey was conducted to determine its effectiveness.

Initial Interview Questions

The initial interview began with the researcher introducing and explaining the action research project and allowing participants to ask questions or comment on the research. Then, the interview was woven into the conversation while letting the participant know there were no wrong or right answers; it was just assessing their prophetic beliefs. The initial screening interview consisted of five open-ended questions geared toward fostering an interest in the course and weeding out those not open to the prophetic ministry. Some of the questions are icebreakers and are not a part of the primary survey. The interviews were conducted by phone randomly based on the participant's availability. The questions below serve as the interviewer

guideline; however, the conversation ranges from end-time biblical prophecy in the Bible to what is happening in America and Israel.

1. Do you believe in contemporary prophetic messages? If so, what role do they play in a believer's life?
2. Do you believe that all prophetic messages originate with God? If so, why?
3. Have you ever had a personal experience with prophetic ministry? If so, how did it impact your life or ministry?
4. Given the pandemic and the recent uptick in contemporary prophetic messages, do you believe prophecy is relevant?
5. With the end-time prophecy in view, what role does contemporary prophecy play in a believer's life?

The interview was kept simple and more relaxed to ensure participants knew they were not being tested and that there was no right or wrong answer; it was simply a discussion of their prophetic views. If the participant and interviewer agreed they were a good fit for the course, they were emailed the consent form, which was also discussed during the initial interview.

Consent Forms

The consent form comprised a Microsoft Word document sent via email only to participants who agreed to participate in the study. It advised participants of the study's nature and duration. The nature of the study was geared toward understanding how to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages. The duration of the study was one hour each Thursday at 7:00 pm for eight weeks. It also advised the participants that the study was not intended to replace the biblical understanding of prophetic messages but to enhance it.

The consent also requests a commitment to the full eight weeks of study and an agreement to complete pre- and post-course surveys. It advises the participants that they are not forced to participate in this study but requests their willing participation and full attention to garner the expected results.

The consent also advised that there would be no monetary compensation for the time set aside to attend the classes, that they would not be charged a fee to participate in this class, and that no course material other than a journal and pen is required to be purchased for this class. The consent also advises them that it is valid for six months or until the duration of the course, although not a legally binding contract but more of a commitment or promise to complete the course. The consent is necessary because it lends a sense of importance to the nature of the study.

Pre and Post Course Surveys

The pre-course survey consisted of twelve questions fundamental to the course development and deemed appropriate for the course's direction. The surveys were administered using Microsoft Forms, making quantifying results easier and providing a visual graphic representation of the data presented in chapter four. Thirty-two people participated in the survey, with an average response time of 12:09 minutes.

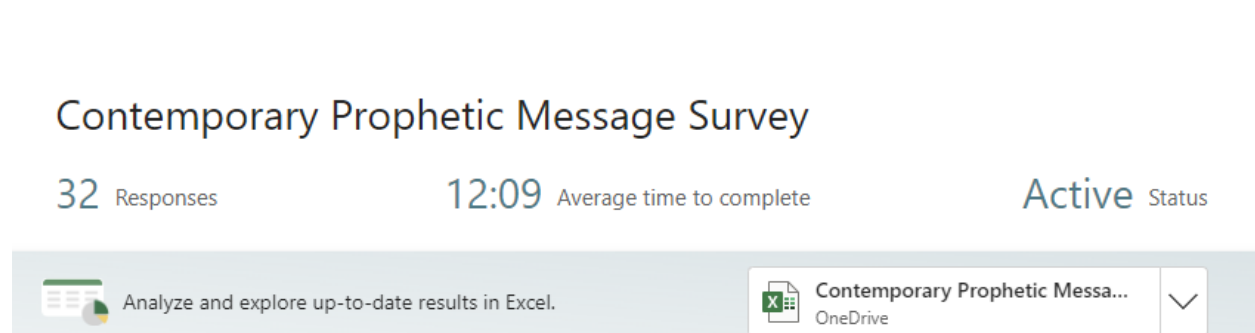


Fig. 3.2 Post-Survey Average Responses

The presurvey was only necessary as a measuring tool as a point of reference to measure the participants' growth after the eight-week course. Pre-course surveys were collected one week before the start of the course. The questions below comprised the pre-course survey.

1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?
2. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages have significance?
3. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?
4. Do you agree that prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic?
5. Do you agree that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God?
6. Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets?
7. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?
8. Do you agree that discerning true and false prophecy is important?
9. Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?
10. Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?
11. Do you agree that prophetic messages require Holy Spirit discernment?
12. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

A post-survey was administered once the participants completed the eight courses of study. The post-survey consisted of twenty-five questions; however, only twelve were relevant to the study. Some of the questions on the post-survey remained the same as the pre-survey to observe changes from previous answers.

The post-survey was divided into five parts. Part one focuses on understanding the nature and purpose of prophecy. Part two focuses on what true prophecy looks like and the proper responses to it. Part three focuses on bringing awareness to false prophets and false prophecies. Part four is a brief theological survey on testing the spirit behind prophecy to help participants understand that prophecy is more than just words; there is always a spirit behind prophecy.

The last part of the survey encourages participants to foster a desire to interpret prophetic messages. These five parts are laid out similarly to the course outline. However, the survey does not follow the course outline because the researcher desired organic results rather than a controlled response. The survey answer was recorded using a five-point Likert Scale.

Likert Scale

A five-point Likert Scale measures the survey results with responses ranging from “strongly agree to strongly disagree.” The instructions provide: Please answer the following questions on the scale of:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree.

Table 3.2 Likert Scale

The Likert Scale survey measurements were used to collect the data and to measure how people's understanding of prophetic discernment and interpretation may or may not change based on their answers to the post-survey questions. Are they less likely to accept prophetic messages at face value? Will they pray or fast over a prophetic message? Will they mock or ignore prophetic messages after having learned of their purpose? Five categories of questions were designed to measure participants' understanding before and after the study based on categories. Once participants had completed the post-survey, the data was collected and analyzed; quantitative and qualitative measures were utilized to measure how much change had occurred, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Course Design

The course focused on eight core questions: What is prophecy, why is it relevant, who are considered prophets, where prophetic utterances come from, and how does prophecy affect the church and culture? What is a false prophet vs. a false prophecy? How should people respond to prophetic messages? What does it mean to mock or scorn prophecy? How can we test or discern the spirit behind prophetic messages? It is also important to note that the study outline does not

follow the survey questions strictly; however, all concepts behind each research question were covered in the course.

<p>Unit 1: Defining Prophecy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 – What is prophecy 1.2 – Relevance of Prophecy 1.3 – Who can prophesy 1.4 – Types of prophets 1.5 – Prophetic Authority <p>Unit 2: Dimensions of Prophecy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 – Personal Prophecy 2.2 – Ecclesia Prophecy 2.3 – National Prophecy 2.4 – Global Prophecy <p>Unit 3: Prophecy and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 – Truth to Power 3.2 – End Time signs 3.3 – Cultural expectation 3.4 – Effects of Prophecy <p>Unit 4: False VS True Prophecy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 – What the Bible says 4.2 – Sources of prophecy 4.3 – Why false prophets exist 4.4 – Characteristics of False Prophets 4.5 – Characteristics of True Prophet 	<p>Unit 5: Prophetic Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 – Office of a Prophet 5.2 – Prophetic Anointing 5.3 – The gift of Prophecy 5.4 – The gift of Prophecy <p>Unit 6: Spirit of Prophecy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 – Test the Spirit 6.2 – Who is the Holy Spirit 6.3 – Roles of the Holy Spirit 6.4 – Filled with the Spirit 6.4 – Led by the Spirit <p>Unit 7: Criteria for Discernment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 – The Prophet 7.2 – The Message 7.3 – The effects 7.4 – Barriers to Discernment <p>Unit 8: Criteria for Interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1 – Prophetic Languages 8.2 – Symbolic languages 8.3 – Allegorical Languages 8.4 – Systems of interpretation 8.5 – Holy Spirit Interpretation
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Fig. 3.3 Course Design Outline

The prophetic course also compares how people received prophetic messages in biblical times and the type and purpose of the biblical prophetic messages. It is important to note that prophecy is a vast topic that this study cannot exhaust in eight weeks. However, the research is concerned with bringing awareness that not all prophetic messages come from God and that not everyone who prophesies in the name of the Lord is a real prophet. With those fundamentals in mind, the researcher hopes to motivate Christians to become more intentional about studying the word of God concerning prophetic messages.

	Topic	Weekly Schedule	Virtual Platform
Lesson 1	Defining Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 2	Dimensions of Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 3	Prophecy and Culture	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 4	False Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 5	Responding to Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 6	Spirit of Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 7	Prophetic Discernment	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 8	Prophetic Interpretation	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom

Table 3.3 Weekly Schedule

The participants meet weekly on Thursday at 7:00 pm via Zoom. Each participant was encouraged to keep a reflection journal for each week's lesson. Each lesson will be approximately forty-five minutes, leaving fifteen minutes for open discussions. The total time each week of teaching was approximately one hour. There are also question-and-answer sessions at the end of each lesson to keep participants engaged in the course and to observe active listening in participants. A WhatsApp group chat was also created for participants to discuss lessons, ask questions, and build morale in the group. This schedule was chosen because most participants agreed it fit their schedules.

Primary Outcomes

The primary goal of this study is to examine the extent of people's understanding of contemporary prophetic discernment and interpretation. Another primary goal is to develop and teach a prophetic discernment and interpretation course to equip people to discern between true and false prophecy. Secondary goals involved understanding the nature of biblical prophecy regarding testing the spirit and understanding the purpose of prophetic ministry throughout the Bible and in the present age.

The primary outcome expected in this study is for participants to understand how to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages. Before attempting to interpret a

prophetic message, one must first be able to discern whether the message is a genuine prophetic message from God or a false prophecy. As noted in chapter two, not all prophetic messages come from God. False prophetic messages bear no merit and, therefore, are not worth the time and effort to interpret them. Discernment, as defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary, is the ability to grasp or understand obscure or to judge with wisdom. Most people refer to this as a gut feeling or intuition. Interpretation, conversely, is to explain the meaning of the obscure using factual statements and opinions related to the natural or physical world. Both interpretation and discernment are necessary to relate to genuine prophetic messages correctly. Once the message has been deemed an authentic prophetic message from God, it is crucial to understand its interpretation to apply to one's life or ministry. Be aware that discernment and interpretation can occur simultaneously.

Implementation of Intervention Design

Participants provided qualitative and quantitative feedback on the course and its components, including interviews, surveys, and group activities to measure discernment and interpretation, focusing on how participants' opinions change regarding the prophetic messages. Participants used six Likert Scales to provide quantitative data and open-ended questions to capture qualitative comments on areas that need improvement. The six Likert scales measured participants' experiences understanding of the Scriptures, prayer, Holy Spirit, and nature of prophecy; the ratings on the Likert scales captured responses in terms of the assessment of the participant's experience/agreement with each component, ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. As a sample, one question read: Should all prophecy be perceived as messages from God? And the related choices were "strongly

disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.” The means and standard deviations of these Likert Scales were examined, and changes in participation were reported.

Interpretation Tool

Similar questions were asked to measure or analyze discernment and interpretation, paying close attention to the meaning ascribed through qualitative responses to primarily open-ended questions. Interpretation can be difficult because prophecy often has multiple meanings and can span decades or centuries. To measure the accuracy of interpretation, one must consider the biblical interpretation of prophecy versus the current interpretation of prophetic messages, the time and location of the prophecy and what kind of language was used, parallelism, allegorical or symbolic, who is prophesying, a proven prophet of God or a non-believer, and what or who is the intended audience, was the prophecy only intended for a targeted group of people, the public or individual? Were there any preconceived expectations that could skew the meaning of the prophecy? How did the prophet receive the message? Was it an authentic message from the Lord? Do the messages edify the receiver?

Prophetic Languages

Prophetic messages are full of symbolic languages and allegories, so how does one even begin to make sense of a prophetic dream, vision, or impression? A quick review of prophetic literature reveals that this has been the bane of understanding prophecy because there is much symbolism to analyze; sometimes, symbolic meanings are misinterpreted, and prophetic languages are misunderstood. Joyner observed that “most of the symbolism used in visions is established in Scripture, but not all. The symbolism not derived from biblical usage is usually

relevant to the person or situation for whom the revelation is meant.”³ Since most prophetic messages contain symbolism and allegories, they must be analyzed and interpreted correctly to extrapolate their meaning. Herein lies the dilemma with prophetic messages, which is why many people reject prophetic ministry. People tend to avoid things that they do not understand. For example, a person who does not understand Math would not major in it. However, that does not make math irrelevant in our times.

One of the main reasons that Christian readers typically misunderstand prophecy is because they assume its primary intent is to foretell the future.”⁴ Most of the time, people fail to grasp the true meaning of the prophetic message because they interpret it based on their own biases or agendas. However, things are improving because God is already doing housecleaning in this regard. According to Maas, God is “clearing the debris from prophetic ministry because, in the next few years, prophecy will regain its prominence and significance in the Body of Christ for effective global ministry inside and outside the Church. He is awakening people everywhere to hear His voice.”⁵ A prominent modern-day prophet, Rick Joyner, wrote, “If the church is going to move with the kind of strategy and vision that the times demand, we must know how to receive, interpret, and judge prophetic revelations.”⁶ If people fail to understand prophecies, they will fail to understand the signs of the times. Therefore, it is essential to understand prophecy to appropriate it for one’s sense of understanding, which is more than a rational analysis and interpretation of prophecy. Remember, “Interpretation and understanding prophecy involve

³ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 99-100.

⁴ McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*, 68.

⁵ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 48.

⁶ Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 22.

sensing conditions regarding perception, feeling, and insight, which must then be conceptualized in language.”⁷ This means translating what was seen or heard in the spirit realm into a language the natural human mind can comprehend and apply to their everyday lives.

Prophetic language can be difficult to understand unless God gives the interpretation to the prophet or the one receiving it. “The biblical prophets employ language used by ancient royal messengers as they introduce the Lord’s message, “This is what the Lord says,” and they deliver their message in the first person as if the originator of the message were speaking.”⁸ According to Wegner, “Prophetic material can be a mixture of poetic material interspersed with narrative material and often includes direct discourse from God through the prophet. It is sometimes difficult to know exactly who is speaking, God or Isaiah, but in one sense, the result is the same: God’s message is declared.”⁹ “The interpreter of the prophets must be sensitive to the historical context, language, and literary imagery. The prophets were real human beings who shared their lives with their contemporaries in a cultural context. They receive a vision of God but spoke of it in a language that people could understand.”¹⁰

The checklist below was used in lesson one as a class activity to engage participation and assess personal beliefs about prophetic messages. This activity fosters a desire for better understanding, leading to a more favorable desire for participation in the study. This activity also helps to build participants' morale regarding the study. Participants must see the course as

⁷ Wessels, *Prophetic Sensing of Yahweh’s Word*, 1-9.

⁸ Timothy R. Gaines, *Following Jesus: Prophet, Priest, King* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2018). 33.

⁹ Paul D. Wegner, et al. *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (IVP Academic, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2021). 7.

¹⁰ VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 74.

beneficial because it will keep them engaged throughout the process. Studies have shown that when people perceive personal benefit, they are more likely to remain engaged.

Absolutely True	Mostly True	Somewhat True	Neither True nor False	Mostly Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Absolutely Untrue
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ____						
2. ____						
3. ____						
4. ____						
5. ____						
6. ____						
7. ____						
8. ____						
9. ____						
10. ____						

1. ____ I understand prophetic messages
2. ____ I can discern when a prophetic message is true or false
3. ____ I understand what it means to test the spirit.
4. ____ I believe all prophetic messages originate with God.
5. ____ I understand the meaning of symbolic languages
6. ____ I can interpret dreams and revelations
7. ____ I believe that there are no false prophets
8. ____ I believe that prophecy is not relevant for today
9. ____ I believe that prophecy ends with the disciples and apostles
10. ____ I believe Scripture is the only way God communicates in this era

Secondary Outcomes

The secondary outcome of this study is the purpose of prophecy; a similar scale was used to assess the purpose of the progress of prophecy. The purpose of something reveals meaning and adds value to it. After participants discover how to discern and interpret prophetic messages, the next logical question is: now what? What should I do with this message? Why was it given? How should the prophecy be treated? These and other questions were included in the post-survey to measure quantitatively and qualitatively the purpose and progress of contemporary prophetic messages. Measured results will be discussed in chapter four.

Course Core

The researcher designed and facilitated a course that teaches people to discern and interpret prophetic messages. Therefore, the course focuses on teaching discernment and interpretation practices and providing criteria for discerning and interpreting prophecy. It is divided into eight lessons designed to be taught in forty-five minutes to an hour.

The first lesson focuses on defining prophecy and covering the relevance or importance of modern-day prophecy. It also examines why some people say that prophecy ends with the disciples; however, there is evidence that prophecy continues today. It also examines scriptures that support the continuationism of prophecy. The course went on to examine who is considered prophets of God. It also discusses the types of prophets, such as seer (*Chozeh*), Hearer (*Nabi*), and Discerner. For people who are otherwise by God, the prophecy manifests in three different ways: the office of a prophet, the anointing to prophesy, and the gift of prophecy.

The second lesson focuses on the dimensions of prophecy, which delineates different target audiences for prophecies in different genres. Firstly, there are personal prophecies, such as Elijah prophesying to Ahab regarding his part in Naboth's demise (1 King 21). Nathan prophesied to King David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12: 11). Jesus prophesied to Peter that he would betray him three times (Matt. 26:34). Finally, one of the most famous ones was Agabus prophesied to Paul about his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11). Secondly, some prophecies are specific to the churches, such as the prophecies in Revelation 1 when Jesus told John to write this message to the seven churches. Similarly, today, prophecies are given to present-day churches specific to that congregation. Thirdly, national prophecies specific to a nation, such as in Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, prophesied explicitly to Israel. However, there are modern-day prophecies that prophesy even events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall. Nevertheless, many are prophesying that there will be catastrophic changes in America. Lastly, global prophecies, such as Daniel Chapter 7, span decades and centuries and affect all nations. John's prophecy in the Book of Revelation speaks of the apocalyptic events of the entire world. Then there are modern-day prophets who are prophesying that apocalyptic events will happen in the near future.

Lesson three focuses on prophecy and modern-day culture. As in the Bible days, modern-day prophets are tasked with speaking truth to power, which requires boldness and confidence. The prophetic announcement needs a certain boldness that empowers the prophet to speak even though they might be persecuted by opponents of the truth.¹¹ A prophet must know that God is with them to deliver a message that could cause them to die or be imprisoned. Prophecy is supposed to affect culture positively; however, it can cause harm to the prophet depending on the content of the prophecy because there will always be mixed responses to the subject or the message of the prophecy. For example, in the 2020 election, great prophetic controversy arose when one prophet prophesied that President Trump was a modern-day Cyrus call to bring back order into America. Another prophesied that a red wave was coming, which meant that the Republican Party was going to win, and another prophesied that President Trump was a modern-day Nebuchadnezzar and God was going to put him to sit down for a season. Then, another prophesied that President Trump was a wrecking ball for America. It is not difficult to see how such conflicting prophecies could negatively impact the nation and the church. Those least concerned did not believe any prophetic messages; however, some proved accurate, and some proved false.

Lesson four focuses on false prophecy because it is essential to learn what the Bible says about false prophecy and how to discern when a message is true or false. The lesson also covers the sources of prophecy because they originate in three primary places: God's people's minds and the demonic. A true prophet of God receives his message from God, while false prophets receive messages from their minds or use divination to prophesy. It is vital to study false prophecy

¹¹ Oliva, *The Experience of Prophecy*, 9.

because Jesus said in Matt. 24:11, false prophets will arise and deceive many people. If people do not understand the nature of false prophecy, they will be deceived.

This lesson also covers the characteristics of false prophets, such as presumption, pride, prestige, power, conformity to culture, and Doctrines of Demons. The characteristics of true prophets were also examined. First, a prophet must be called and authorized by God. They must demonstrate humility, for most prophets never seek to prophesy or be in the limelight. They would prefer that God use someone else. For example, Moses and Jeremiah both wanted God to use someone else instead of them. A true prophet must also demonstrate a love for God's people and be concerned with repentance and returning to God, and they must never seek monetary gains from their prophecies.

Lesson five focuses on testing the spirit; it supports that the first response to prophecy should be to test the spirit because before accepting a prophecy as authentic, John 4:1 says do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the spirit but test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God for many false prophets is in the world. However, testing the spirit requires understanding this period of prophecy, the Holy Spirit. therefore,

Lesson six focuses on the *Spirit of Prophecy*. The lesson discusses the person of the Holy Spirit, the roles of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, how to be led by the Spirit, and what it means to be filled with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy; no other Spirit knows the mind of God and can reveal spiritual truth to His people. The same Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus tabernacle with man. The Holy Spirit plays several vital roles in the believer's life, the greatest of which is the seal of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22 and Eph. 1:13).

Lesson seven focuses on the criteria for prophetic discernment. Although there are no set criteria for interpreting prophetic messages, that does not mean it cannot be done. It must be

done because it is the only way to make sense of the message. One of the ways that this can be accomplished is to analyze three main aspects of prophetic discernment, analyzing the message and its effects. This lesson also speaks about barriers to discernment, such as mocking prophecy, which could lead to quenching the Holy Spirit's workings within the believer's life. They must display the characteristics of a true prophet for the message to be valid. The message should lead to a deeper relationship with God, and its effect on the individual or nation should be positive; even if it is a message convicting of sin, it should somehow lead to repentance. Lesson seven also discusses prophetic contempt because it is unfortunate that people in the body of Christ despise prophecy but say that they love God. Jesus said if you love me, obey the words, including modern-day prophecy, if the message is truly from God. The last observation is the effects of the message and how it affects the audience. Are there any redemptive qualities to the message, or is it just a message of doom and gloom? In other words, what is the purpose of the message? Who the target audience of the message is.

The last topic explored in this lesson is barriers to discernment. There can be many barriers to discernment; however, the lesson taught about quenching the Spirit, prophetic contempt, and unforgiveness. Just like the prophet's heart must be right before the Lord, the receiver's heart must be conditioned to receive the messages. Some people are living sinful lives by desiring a 'good' prophetic message from God, as was the case of Ahab and Micaiah. Ahab did not despise Micaiah. He despised the message from God because they were not what he wanted to hear. Likewise, Christians today only embrace prophecy and want to hear their opinions.

The final lesson of the series focuses on interpreting prophetic languages. There are no set criteria for interpreting prophetic languages, but that does not mean it is impossible. Prophetic

messages are often filled with poetry parallelism, symbolism, and allegories because they often have more than one meaning and serve several generations or individuals in various situations.

Symbolic languages use symbols to represent a particular idea or feeling. For example, the clay in the Potter's hands was a symbol used to describe Israel's nation in the Lord's hands. The same symbolism is allegorical because morals and spiritual messages hide behind the surface of seemingly clay and Potter. It is up to the receiver and the giver of this message to discern what these mean and how to apply them to their everyday lives. The action of the Potter on the clay reveals the meaning of the message that God wanted to reshape Israel because they had become broken on the Potter's wheel. This lesson also explores interpretation systems such as symbolic before literal or literal before symbolic. Some have contended that it is better to place the symbolic before the literal so that multiple meanings can be derived from the message, while others have contended that the literal should be before the symbolic.

Data Collection

Once the course was complete, the post surveys were sent via emails and text messages via Microsoft Forms. The data was gathered from the Microsoft forms to percentages, tallied, and converted. Microsoft Forms provides a graphic, detailed representation of the responses, simplifying the quantifying and collection process. This survey section is designed for the age group selected 18-80 and includes ten items with a five-point Likert-type response scale. Possible responses range from "strongly agree to strongly disagree" and were designed to capture participants' perceptions of the purpose of contemporary prophetic messages to infer qualitative results.

The researcher extracts and analyzes the twelve main research questions by comparing them with answers from the pre-course survey. The remaining thirteen questions on the post-

survey were analyzed qualitatively to observe the effects of the lessons on the participants. Some qualities that were observed were how much people read the Bible and the effects it had on their prophetic perceptions. One observation was that the people who read their Bibles developed a better understanding of the prophetic. While those who do not tend to have a sketchy understanding of the prophetic.

While measuring participants' understanding of the purpose of prophetic messages, it is also essential to understand the progress made over the centuries. While many participants were exposed to prophetic messages, some were not. Some may have a basic understanding of prophetic messages but fail to grasp their intended purpose: to edify and equip them. Therefore, this lack of understanding leads to a prophetic kaleidoscope, in which people view prophetic messages through the proverbial stained-glass window, which then creates dysfunction in the body of believers.

Prophetic Observation

Some of the facets of prophetic interpretation include observation, what the participant has observed over the years regarding prophecy; describing situations that were positive or adverse reactions to prophetic messages; responding with awareness; what were some things that the participants were aware of as they responded to prophecy reliability, how reliable is the contemporary prophetic message? How has the message on the method changed over time? Do they have the same relevance as biblical prophecy? This is important to measure because the message and audience have changed; however, the end goal of prophecy is the same: leading people back to God. Ardener stated, "Often the voice of prophecy is not heard; it seems incomprehensible beforehand; afterward it may seem trivial: when the new world has become

commonplace, the prophet's voice cannot be distinguished from general speech."¹² The authentic prophecy must be revered since Christianity rests upon biblical prophecy.

Appendices

Appendix A through F includes a copy of the consent form, recruitment email, surveys, interview, and course outline. Appendix A is the consent form that was sent to the participants. It informs them that this is not a binding contract but a commitment to complete the course. Appendix B is a copy of the recruiting email sent to the participants. Appendix C is the pre-survey, which was administered to the participants.

Appendix D is the post-survey administered where the class was conducted. Appendix E is a sample of the interview questions. Appendix F is the course curriculum outline. These questions were revised and edited to ensure the information gleaned from them aided the participants' selection process and provided some understanding of what they believed concerning contemporary prophecy. Appendix H is a copy of the IRB approval letter.

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Table 3.4 List of Appendices

This intervention demonstrated the benefits of learning to discern and interpret a prophetic message. Every step was intentionally designed to bring awareness to the plague of false prophecy among Christians and educate them to discern and interpret prophetic messages.

¹² Edwin Ardener, and Malcolm Chapman. *The Voice of Prophecy: And Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2016). 312.

The researcher carefully chose the participants who were predisposed to prophesy because she wanted them to understand that not even people who call themselves prophets are authorized by God. The intervention is designed to foster growth without causing the participants to feel insufficient because they do not know how to discern or interpret prophetic messages. It was also designed to help participants embrace prophetic messages with the understanding that God still speaks to believers; however, they should exercise caution when receiving or giving prophetic messages. The intervention demonstrates the value of learning to discern between true and false prophecies, extracting meaning from accurate prophecies, and applying them to live a life of faith. The impact of true prophecy cannot be overstated because it is through prophecy that believers come to know the Lord of the universe, and it is through prophecy that they maintain their faith in him. However, the impact of false prophecies can have lasting consequences because it can cause people to fall away from faith in God. Another word for false prophecy is deception, which can lead to strong delusions (2 Thess. 2:11-12).and cause people to live a life separated from God while believing that they are living holy lives unto him.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this DMIN action research project was to examine the extent to which the members of Jesus Strong Ministries discern and interpret the authenticity of contemporary prophetic messages. For years, false prophecy has wreaked havoc in the church and the lives of individuals. Prophetic messages will increase in the last days before Jesus's return. Therefore, prophetic deception will only worsen if people are not equipped to discern and interpret modern-day prophecy. Therefore, this research was conducted based on the premise that people will be less susceptible to prophetic deception if they can discern and interpret prophetic messages. Discernment has to do with recognizing the source of the prophetic messages, while interpretation has to do with understanding its meaning.

A six-week prophetic training course was conducted to train people to discern between true and false prophecy and interpret prophetic languages. A post-course survey was conducted to measure participants' growth. This chapter presents the results and is organized into four main sections: the research questions, the collective results, the data analysis, and the result summary.

Collective Results

The expected results from this study are that people will learn how to discern if a prophetic message is from God, people's minds, or the Devil. Once the message is discerned or accepted as authentic, it must be interpreted, especially since some prophetic messages are symbolic and use allegorical language. Often, the prophet gets the message right, but the interpretation is incorrect.

The Holy Spirit is the key component in prophetic discernment, but most people do not know how to hear His voice. The Holy Spirit gives the prophetic messages and provides the interpretation. Therefore, believers must hear and understand the Holy Spirit's voice to discern

true and false prophetic messages. When a prophetic message is uttered, the correct response is to fast and pray, especially if the message is one of impending disaster. When the message is one of hope and blessing, the people respond with worship and praise to God as they joyfully await the manifestation of God's words through the prophets. As the results will show, the survey responses vary because not everyone understands giving and receiving prophetic messages. However, the goal is for at least 90 percent of the participants to develop and embrace a keen understanding of discerning and interpreting prophetic messages.

This study was limited to people who are Christians and affiliated with Jesus Strong Ministries to observe the extent of their understanding of prophetic discernment and interpretation. This survey sample consisted of 32 people between the ages of 18 and 80 who were predisposed to prophetic ministry and participated in the course and survey for this study. The survey sample was comprised of 70% females and 30% males. The average years of church experience for this group of people range from 1 to 60 years, with the median at 27 years. 30% of the participants were somewhat less exposed to prophetic ministry. In comparison, the remaining 70% were more familiar with the prophetic ministry, thereby giving a more objective observation of the lack of understanding of prophetic ministry in various stages of Christianity. The results are broken up into pre-survey and post-survey to better observe the changes in participants' responses.

Research Questions

The prophetic course followed an eight-lesson outline to help participants understand the relevant research questions concerning prophetic messages. (See Appendix D). The post-course survey comprised twenty-five questions, but only twelve were relevant to the study. This was done to objectively capture any changes after the course was administered. Although other

questions were asked in the survey, the questions below drove the direction of the survey results.

1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?
2. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages have significance?
3. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?
4. Do you agree that prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic?
5. Do you agree that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God?
6. Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets?
7. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?
8. Do you agree that discerning true and false prophecy is important?
9. Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?
10. Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?
11. Do you agree that prophetic messages require Holy Spirit discernment?
12. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

The basic assumption or hypothesis is that many people in the body of Christ do not know how to discern if a prophetic message is from God because they do not understand that many voices have gone out into the world (1 Cor. 14:10) and that not everyone who prophesies in the name of the Lord is truly authorized by God to do so.

Secondly, once the message is discerned as authentic from God, people do not know how to interpret prophetic language to decode its meaning and are, therefore, unable to apply it relevantly to their lives and ministries.

Thirdly, if people learn to discern between true and false prophets, they will be less likely to be deceived by false prophecies and will respond to contemporary prophecy in the correct manner rather than allowing it to ruin their relationships.

Fourthly, if people learn how to interpret prophetic messages correctly, they can apply them appropriately rather than treating them with contempt.

Presurvey Results

The pre-course survey revealed that 40% of respondents agree that all prophetic messages come from God, 10% neither agree nor disagree, and 50% disagree. While 70% agree that

prophetic messages are significant for the current era, 20% neither agree nor disagree, and 10% disagree. While 40% agree that contemporary prophecy has the same relevance as biblical prophecy, another 40% are unsure, and 20% disagree. Results show that 75% agree that prophetic utterances have increased since the pandemic, 20% agree that they have remained the same, and 10% are unsure. The results also indicate that 60% believe contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God, while 20% disagree and 20% remain unsure. While 90% agree that the Bible warns about false prophecy, 10% are unsure. While 100% agree that it is important to discern between true and false prophets. While 80% agree that all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation, 20% neither agree nor disagree. While 70% agree that studying the word of God affects prophetic discernment between true and false prophecy, 20% neither agree nor disagree, and 10% disagree. While 80% agree that prophetic messages require Holy Spirit discernment, 20% are unsure. While 90% agree that testing the spirit requires a person to be filled with the Holy Spirit, 10% neither agree nor disagree.

Post Survey Results

After the eight-week prophetic discernment course was conducted, a post-survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the study. After the study, only 10% believed that all prophetic messages are from God. After the course, 95% believe that contemporary prophetic messages are significant for this era, while 5% neither agree nor disagree. While 50% agree that contemporary prophecy has the same relevance as biblical prophecy, 20% disagree, and 30% remain unsure. While 90% believe prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic, 10% remain unsure. While 94% agree that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God, 3% remain unsure, and 3% disagree.

After the course of study, 100% of respondents believe that the Bible does warn about false prophecy. While 97% believe it is vital to discern between true and false prophecy, 3% neither agree nor disagree. While 97% believe that studying the word of God significantly impacts discerning between true and false prophecy, 3% remain unsure. While 94% agree that false prophecy has a negative impact on the church, 6% neither agree nor disagree. 97% agree that it is vital to discern between true and false prophecy, while 3% remain unsure. While 95% believe contemporary prophetic messages should be evaluated based on scripture, 5% remain unsure. While 94% agree that all contemporary prophetic messages should be subjected to discernment and interpretation, 6% neither agree nor disagree. While 94% agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment, 3% remain unsure, and 3% disagree. While 94% agree that prophetic messages require the help of the Holy Spirit to discern and interpret them accurately, 6% are unsure. While 94% also believe that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Spirit of God, 3% disagree, and 3% remain unsure.

Data Analysis

This study aimed to examine the prophetic understanding of the members of Jesus Strong Ministries when discerning and interpreting prophetic messages and to ascertain if they can discern and interpret prophetic messages if they are equipped with proper prophetic training. False prophecy is a vice that the enemy uses to create confusion in the body of Christ. Therefore, people must be equipped to discern false prophecies while embracing and interpreting true prophecies. Therefore, the course was conducted along these guidelines, and the pre-and post-course survey results confirmed the hypotheses that many Christians do not know how to discern if a prophetic message is from God or how to interpret the prophetic language to decode its meaning. The post results also confirmed the hypotheses that if people learn to discern between

true and false prophets, they will be less likely to be deceived by false prophecies and that they can learn how to interpret prophetic messages correctly. As Hays pointed out, “We must not forget the connection between figurative language and literal reality. Figures of speech use figurative language to express literal realities.”¹ Herein lies most of the confusion surrounding contemporary prophecy because some view prophecy as literal while others view it as figurative.

RQ 1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?

1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?

[More Details](#)

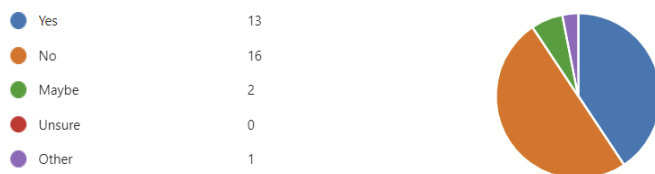


Fig. 4.1 Post Survey Results: Question 1

The pre-course results indicate that the contemporary prophetic understanding of Jesus Strong Ministries affiliates varies widely. This is unsurprising, considering people’s reactions to the pandemic and the 2020 election prophecies. The pre-course survey revealed that 40% of respondents believed that all prophetic messages come from God, which leaves another 60% floundering between beliefs; some say maybe, while others say no. This mixed result demonstrates the lack of understanding because all prophetic utterances do not come from God.

A quick read through the book of Jeremiah or the book of Acts would inform believers that not all prophecies come from God. 60% believe that all prophecy is from God before the course. In comparison, only 10% believe after the course, which confirms this assumption that there is a dire need for prophetic training and demonstrates that people can make better choices when responding to prophetic messages with the right information. However, it is a case for

¹ Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 53.

making better choices and being on guard against prophetic deceptions. There is coming a time when everything that can be shaken will be shaken (Heb 12:27). People's faith will begin to waver if they do not know what to believe because Jesus also said, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matt 24:24).

RQ2. *Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages are relevant?*

15. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages are relevant?

[More Details](#)

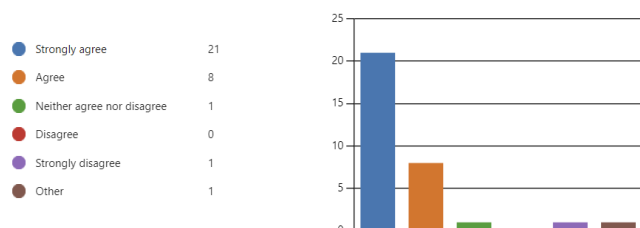


Fig. 4.2 Post Survey Results: Question 15

Contemporary prophecy has increased; 90% of the respondents believe that contemporary prophecy is relevant for the current era. Contemporary prophecy is relevant for this era; however, as authentic prophecies increased during the pandemic, there were many false ones. Contrary to what many scholars believe, prophecy did not cease with the disciples; God intends to communicate with His people throughout the ages. However, its methods and purposes change with the first advent of Jesus Christ because it changes how God speaks to His people. The primary way that God speaks to people today is through His Spirit living in them. However, the scripture says that everything should be established out of the mouths of two or three witnesses (2 Cor 13:1). Therefore, God will always use prophets to confirm His messages to individuals and nations, even if the Holy Spirit is living within them. Also, remember that "God does not only want to impart information through the gift of prophecy but rather the goal of all prophetic

ministry is to draw us into a deeper relationship with Jesus and his body.”² Therefore, one could conclude that the purpose of modern-day prophecy is to draw people into a deeper relationship with the Lord and each other. Modern-day prophets, however, have deviated from this purpose tremendously, considering that most prophecies today are merely concerned with what will happen in politics or the financial sphere. Political prophecies often cast a shadow on the prophetic ministry because most political prophecies are fortune telling of one party’s victory over another without any desire to lead people into a deeper walk with God.

Political prophecies are a beast by themselves and are beyond the scope of this study. However, modern prophecy tends to take on a more political role and, as such, earn a bad reputation. According to Bowling, “Another part of the difficulty for modern scholars in coming to grips with political prophecy, I submit, is the social fluidity of the genre. Some studies of political prophecy describe it as a vehicle of propaganda, others as a tool of social protest.”³ It is easy to see why political prophecies are so problematic because there are always conflicting prophetic views, and sometimes, none of the so-called prophetic views are from God. Often, the true prophet of God is ignored for a more ‘favorable’ prophetic message, even if it is false, as was the case when the Pastor of Jesus Strong Ministries prophesied that Donald Trump would not win the 2020 election. Most people rejected that message and embraced false prophetic messages in favor of Donald Trump winning a second term. Unfortunately, these are not new responses to political prophecy. King Ahab in 1 Kings 22 was contemplating going out to war against Aram, and all the false prophets, about 400 of them, were telling him that he would win

² Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*, 19.

³ Bowling, *Prophetic Futures*, 12.

the war; however, the prophet of the Micaiah prophesied that the King would die in battle, and he did.

Another reason that contemporary prophecy remains relevant is that God will do nothing on Earth without revealing it to His prophets (Amos 3:7). He also said out of the mouth of two or three witnesses, let everything be established (2 Cor 13:1). If God is still working in the Earth and He is, then, He will keep speaking through people; therefore, contemporary prophetic message is relevant and should be regarded as genuine messages from the Lord. However, one must still be aware of false prophecies and false prophets while embracing genuine prophetic utterances from the Lord. However, one should remember that although contemporary prophecy is relevant for this era, it does not equal biblical prophecy, and one cannot disagree.

RQ3. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?

3. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?

[More Details](#)

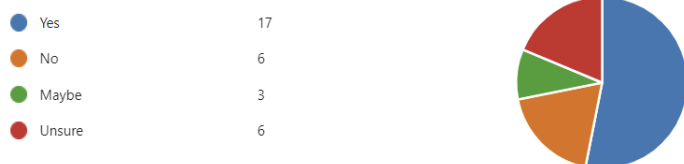


Fig. 4.3 Presurvey Results: Question 3

When asked if contemporary prophecy has the same relevance as biblical prophecy, 54% agreed before the course, 18% disagreed after the course, and 28% neither agreed nor disagreed. This mixed result could indicate that more research is needed in this area. However, it could also mean that some believe in biblical prophecy but not contemporary prophecy and that some are conflicted regarding contemporary versus biblical prophecy. Contemporary prophecy does not have the same relevance as biblical prophecy. Some biblical prophecies are already fulfilled,

while others are pending fulfillment. Contemporary prophecies serve a different purpose from biblical prophecies: to encourage believers and strengthen their faith.

Another reason the results varied could be that participants did not understand biblical and contemporary prophecy. Contemporary prophecy is more fluid than biblical prophecy because what is written and canonized can be changed, while contemporary is not and therefore needs more scrutiny. “Even as God's spoken word, however, prophecy does not equal Scripture in authority. It must always be tested by and found to agree with Scripture. In other words, prophetic words spoken to you by persons inside or outside the Church do not share equal right with Scripture to direct your life.”⁴ Contemporary prophecies do not have the same relevance as biblical prophecies because they both serve different purposes in different eras, and biblical prophecies were written for a specific group of people. With the end-time prophecies being fulfilled, it is difficult to ignore biblical prophecy, which then gives rise to a need for contemporary prophecy, as was the case on the day of Pentecost when Peter stood up to the crowd and declared, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” (Acts 2:16 BSB). Peter reached back centuries before his era and connected his current generation with biblical prophecy. However, Peter did not just connect his contemporary period with biblical prophecy but added, “The promise is for you and your children and for *all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*” (Acts 2:39 NLT). Peter was referring to a distant future generation of people that God would call, thereby connecting biblical prophecy to the current contemporary and future generations. So likewise, when things begin to heat up on the world stages, making it evident that supernatural happenings are taking place, people will begin to inquire about world events and apocalyptic-like happenings, and again, biblical prophecy will meet contemporary

⁴ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 82.

prophecy. People view the “end-times signs, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, financial and health crises, wars, and forms of stigmatized sexual behavior like homosexuality. These signs are offered as evidence that humanity has entered the final age of history, creating a feeling of imminent catastrophe.”⁵ Therefore, contemporary prophecies are relevant in explaining biblical prophecy and helping people become followers of Christ.

RQ4. *Do you agree that prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic?*

2. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages have increased since the Pandemic?

[More Details](#)

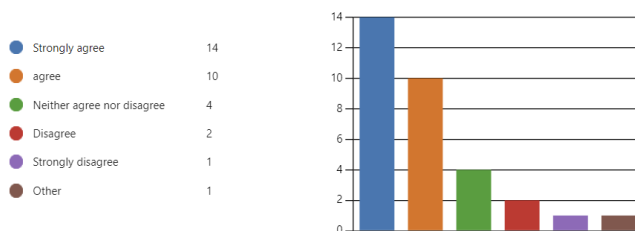


Fig. 4.4 Presurvey Results: Question 2

During the pandemic, prophetic messages increased significantly. However, only 75% of pre-course respondents believe that prophetic utterances have increased since the pandemic, and only 90% of post-course respondents agree that prophetic utterances have increased. This could indicate that those predisposed to prophecy have observed the prophetic uptick during the pandemic, while those who believe it remains the same may not have observed prophetic activities before the pandemic. According to Kessareas, prophecies have now become news because many of the things that were prophesied, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, financial and health crises, wars, and forms of stigmatized sexual behavior like homosexuality, are evidence that humanity has entered the final age of history.⁶ When such things happen, it

⁵ Efstathios Kessareas, ‘Signs of the times’: Prophecy belief in contemporary Greek Orthodox contexts. *Social Compass*, (2023). 70(1), 73-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231154110>

⁶ Kessareas, *Signs of the Times*, 73-90.

creates uncertainty in people's hearts, which becomes the breeding ground for false prophecy, leading to deception and strong delusions. This potential for deception and strong delusions should make us cautious and vigilant in our approach to prophecy.

There was a notable increase in both genuine and false contemporary prophecy during the pandemic and the 2020 election. Many people were deceived by false election predictions, which caused no small stir in the church at large. When genuine prophecy increases, false prophecy also increase, which results in a negative response to prophecy. Jesus shared a parable of the Sower who sowed good wheat seeds, but his enemy came and sowed false seeds of tares (Matt. 13:24-30). The farmer allows both the good and the bad seeds to continue growing until the day of harvest. If the farmer uprooted the whole field because bad seeds were sown, he would never reap the harvest. Likewise, Christians should not disregard prophecies but learn to discern between the two to reap the genuine benefits of prophecy while rejecting the false.

RQ5. *Do you agree that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God*

16. Do you agree that false prophecy has a negative impact on the church?

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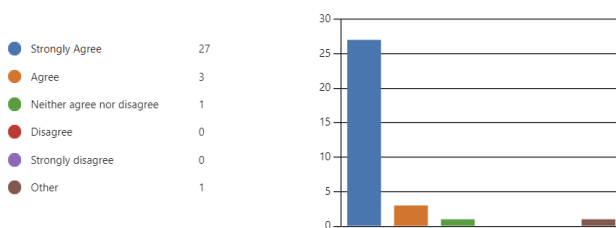


Fig. 4.5 Post Survey Results: Question 16

Contemporary prophetic messages can negatively or positively impact people's faith, depending on whether the message is true or false. While 60% of the pre-course respondents believed contemporary prophecy affected believers' faith in God, 94% post-course agreed that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God. The pre-course survey represents an objective view of what the body of Christ believes concerning prophecy because contemporary

prophecy may or may not affect people's belief in God. Some people never hear a word of contemporary prophecy; they base their faith on what the Bible says and have closed their minds to the fact that God still speaks to humanity today.

While it is imperative to have faith in God's word, that's not the only way God communicates with this current generation. Maas stated it perfectly when she said, "It is of critical importance that the Body of Christ become a people known for hearing the voice of God and speaking His words."⁷ God is still communicating with this generation, and people will miss out on genuine directions from the Lord when they discard contemporary prophecy. If people can hear the voice of God for their generation, they can change their lives and culture. On the other hand, believers must be able to discern when the message is authentic or when it originates from people's minds because the impact could be positive or negative, depending on the source of the message. Therefore, while embracing prophecy, if God is speaking through an individual is important, it is equally important to guard against false prophecy. Joyner states, "If the enemy can persuade us that the word spoken was not God, then we are robbed of the benefit! The value we place on the word will determine the power we will receive from it."⁸ A genuine prophetic word from God's heart has incredible, valuable, life-changing benefits. As Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold set in silver."

People who doubt that contemporary prophetic messages have relevance today are negatively affected by their lack of understanding because their doubts only leave them vulnerable to deception. People are spiritual beings created with a spiritual appetite for the supernatural. If they are not being fed from the proper source, it is only a matter of time before

⁷ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 2019.

⁸ Joyner, *Prophetic Ministry*, 55.

they begin to feed on the wrong diet to satisfy that spiritual hunger. It only takes one time to hear one persuasive prophetic message, and without the ability to discern the source of the message, they could become victims of deception.

RQ6. *Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets*

4. Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets?

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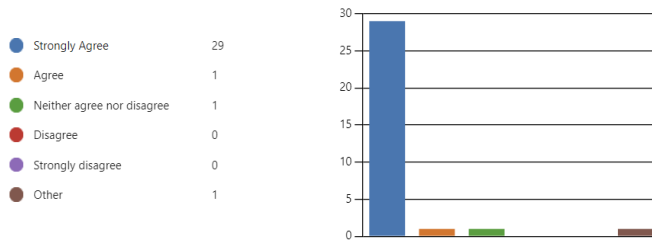


Fig. 4.6 Post Survey Results: Question 4

A whopping 94% of respondents believe that the Bible warns about false prophecy, which indicates that they believe in prophetic messages but remain guarded against false prophecy because 100% of the same respondents believe it is important to discern between true and false prophets. False prophets had been around long before the Israelites entered the promised land, and while they lived in the promised land, they participated in false prophecy, although it was forbidden. “According to Hays, the Old Testament prophets, however, the backsliding king of Israel and Judah often strove to emulate their Pagan neighbors, and they established their core prophets rather than listening to and obeying the prophets that Yahweh ordained.” This was also the case when Elijah confronted Jezebel’s false prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). The Israelites had turned away from Yahweh’s prophet, and the Baal and Asherah prophets were advising the king on political matters. Such actions caused God to punish the nation of Israel because God, through Moses, specifically warned them against such evil

practices (Deut. 18). However, this practice continued for centuries in Israel and various parts of the world up until today.

Another thing to observe about false prophecy is that although Jesus came as the Son of God and a true prophet (Deut. 18:18), He did not get rid of false prophets but warned his followers to be on guard against false prophecy (Matt. 24:11). The Apostles also warned the early Gentile church that there will be false prophets and false teachers among them who will secretly introduce destructive doctrines, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them and bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2 Peter 2:1). The Bible warns about false prophecy in both the Old and the New Testament, which is also pervasive in the church today. Therefore, people need to be aware of false prophecies and learn to discern if the prophecy is true or false.

RQ7. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?

20. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?

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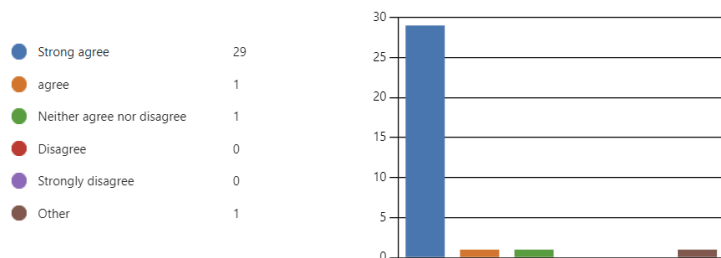


Fig. 4.7 Post Survey Results: Question 20.

Another significant observation from the post-course survey was that 94% agree that false prophecy negatively impacts the church, while 6% neither agree nor disagree. This is a great starting point from which believers can analyze the effects of false prophecy on the church. With this observation in mind, the church will see the importance of training and equipping believers to discern between true and false prophecies. One cannot simply ignore contemporary

prophecy and expect it to evaporate. If it is false, it will negatively affect the church if it is not handled correctly, and if it is true, it will positively affect the church if embraced.

Interestingly, after the study, 100% of respondents believed that the Bible warned about false prophecies, meaning they would be less likely to believe that all prophecies come from God. They will be less susceptible to the deception that results from false prophecy. Secondly, it would urge them to read their Bible more, thereby educating themselves in the Word of God.

Another significant finding in the post-survey is that 97% believe false prophecy can ruin lives, while 3% neither agree nor disagree. False prophecy has created much trouble for the church in recent years because people were not trained to discern it; however, if people are armed with the fact that false prophets and false prophecy do exist in the church, this will provide a launch pad from which the church can begin to teach how to discern between true and false prophecy. In the past, some denominational churches have proposed discarding prophecy because of the falsehood that they have observed. Still, Rick Joyner argues that false prophecy only exists because true prophecy does exist. He argues that no one creates counterfeit three-dollar bills because real ones do not exist. The only way to successfully counterfeit anything is to copy the genuine ones.⁹ Remember, Jesus warns in Matthew 24:11 that false prophets will arise and deceive many. This means that the end product of false prophecy is deception, which leads people away from God. Therefore, the topic of prophetic discernment and interpretation is paramount in the contemporary church

⁹ Joyner, *Prophetic Ministry*, 25.

RQ8. *Do you agree that it is important for Christians to discern true and false prophecies?*

5. Do you agree that it is important for contemporary Christians to discern between true and false prophecy?

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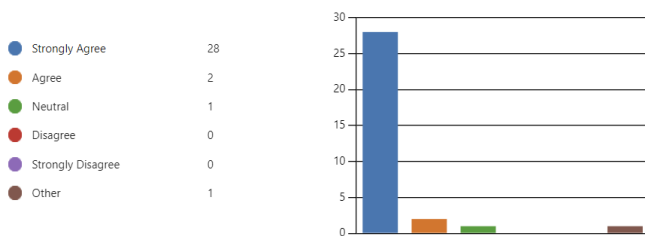


Fig. 4.8 Post Survey Results: Question 5

When asked if it was important to discern between true and false prophecy, 94% of post-course respondents believed it was important, while 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. So, while people understand that the Bible warns against false prophecy, a small segment of the respondents are unsure if it is important to discern true and false prophecy. Their uncertainty could arise from not knowing how to discern true and false prophecies. Some may not see the need for discernment because they believe that the inevitable will happen. Maas said, “Many of the abuses and misuses of the gift of prophecy could be avoided if those receiving a word were able to test the word for its validity of the word.”¹⁰ The results also demonstrate that if people are effectively educated, they will make better choices regarding prophetic ministry.

RQ 9. *Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?*

8. Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?

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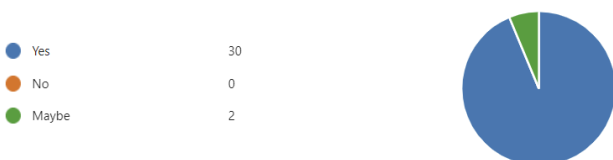


Fig. 4.9 Post Survey Results: Question 8

¹⁰ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 55.

Another observation from the post-survey is that 90% believe that all prophecies should be subjected to discernment and interpretation, while 10% responded maybe. Again, this result supports the hypothesis that if people understand that prophecy comes from people's minds, divination, and God, then it should all be subjected to discernment and interpretation. However, the problem is that people do not know how to discern whether a prophetic message is from God. Maas rightly stated that "Discernment is the ability to distinguish between different types of spirits (angelic, human, demonic) and motivations (evil, good)."¹¹ She also provides some guidelines to help her readers discern prophecy: "Does the prophecy agree with God's revealed character and nature? Does it build up, encourage, comfort, control, accuse, or criticize? Does it lead to greater dependence on God? What is the character of the person giving it?"¹²

In essence, the prophecy must agree with the character and nature of God revealed in his word, and it should build, encourage, and comfort the listener. Even if the prophet is a seasoned prophet, all prophecy requires that it lines up with the litmus test of the Word and the Spirit before applying it to people's lives.

Discernment is not a naturally occurring phenomenon; it requires one to actively seek spiritual understanding, that is, to reach into the spiritual and make sense of what was revealed to the natural senses. People need the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit to help them with their discernment because physical knowledge alone cannot discern spiritual things.

¹¹ Maas, *Prophetic Community*, 54.

¹² Ibid.

RQ10. *Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?*

13. Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?

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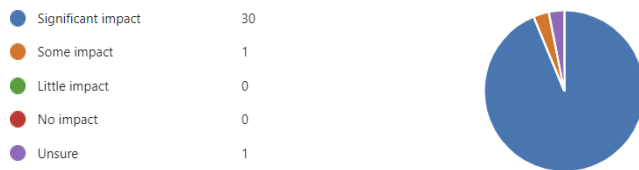


Fig. 4.10 Post-survey results: Question 13

When asked if studying the word of God affects prophetic discernment before the course, 60% believe that it does, while the post-survey response was that 97% believe that studying the word of God significantly impacts prophetic discernment. Again, this demonstrates that 40% of the respondents did not understand prophecy or its purpose because 100 % should have agreed that the word of God affects prophetic discernment and interpretation because it is the only measuring tool to judge prophecy. The pre-course result could also indicate the need for more teaching on the general word of God among believers. Many believers who attend church regularly do not attend Bible Study, which could also contribute to a deficit in their understanding of the word of God and how it relates to prophecy.

However, as the post-study survey results demonstrated, many of these respondents changed their beliefs, confirming the assumption that there is a tremendous need for church prophetic training. There was a significant increase from 60% in the pre-course survey to 97% in the post-course survey. Again, this proves the hypothesis that people can learn to discern and interpret between true and false prophecy and can also significantly impact reading and understanding the word of God. All prophecy should be evaluated based on scriptures since the goal of prophecy is to lead people to the Lord. According to Rick Joyner, the primary function of the New Testament prophet is to open the church to the ministry of Jesus the Prophet so that He

can flow freely among His people.”¹³ The goal of prophecy should lead people to Jesus just like the angel told John, “Worship God only for the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.” (Rev. 19:10). Therefore, the next question that the post-survey explored is what people believe concerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prophetic discernment.

RQ11. Do you agree that prophetic discernment requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

10. Do you agree that prophetic discernment requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

[More Details](#)



Fig. 4.11 Post Survey Results: Question 10

When asked if prophetic messages require the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern whether they are true or false, 80% agreed with the pre-course survey, while 95% agreed post-survey. The great apostle Paul wrote, “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might understand the things freely given to us by God. (1Cor. 2:10-12 ESV). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy; he reveals the secret things of God to His people; he knows the hearts of man and the heart of God. Discerning God's prophetic messages is impossible without the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Apostle Paul said, “And we impart this in

¹³ Joyner, *Prophetic Ministry*, 55.

words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:13 ESV).

True Prophecy can often be a stumbling block to carnally minded people because the natural mind cannot comprehend the things of God because they must be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). Another way to think of Prophecy is that it is speaking the heart of the Father to His children. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal those spiritual truths to God's people and apply them to their natural lives. As Apostle Paul says, "No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:11).

If prophecy is speaking the heart of God to his children, the Holy Spirit is the only one that can reveal the true meaning of any prophetic message from the Lord. Prophecy, as such, may have a fatal flaw. According to Moberly, "Prophecy can work well if one prophet speaks to somebody who will take that prophet seriously; however, the situation becomes problematic when two prophets deliver contradictory messages, especially if both prophets use the standard language of an Israelite prophet.¹⁴ That is when Holy Spirit discernment is most needed because false prophecy can strongly resemble the real in terms of the languages used. When there are conflicting claims, the Deuteronomy 18 text advises that one should wait to see which prophecy comes through, but sometimes that is not possible because the prophecy could be such that one has to choose at the moment. For example, if presenting the gospel and one prophet says to wait and see if Jesus really comes at the end of the age, that would be too late for a person to choose salvation. Therefore, it is critically important to learn how to discern prophecies because conflicting prophecies can result, even among seasoned prophets, and the Holy Spirit's help is needed to guide the person into discerning what is true or not. Remember, Jesus said, "When the

¹⁴ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 2006.

Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.” (John 16:13).

Even a simple task, such as reading and understanding the scripture, requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading the scrolls of the prophet Isaiah, he had no idea what he was reading until Phillip appeared and explained it to him (Acts 8:26-40). This was a plain prophecy for those who understood the Bible, but the Eunuch had no idea what he was reading; it took Phillip under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to explain it to him because spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned. According to Apostle Paul, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, the guidance of The Holy Spirit is vital to discerning prophetic messages.

RQ12. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

14. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

[More Details](#)

Yes	26
No	2
Maybe	1
Sometimes	2
Other	1



Fig. 4.12 Post Survey Results: Question 14

Another significant result from the post-survey was that 94% agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Spirit of God, while 3% disagree and 3% remain unsure.

Testing the spirit behind prophecy is paramount in discerning prophecy because the source of the prophecy matters. 1 John 4:1 Says, “Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are

many false prophets in the world.” Remember that there are three primary sources from which people receive their prophecies: their minds, evil influences, and God.

When Jeremiah was faced with a false prophecy conflicting with the prophecy that he received from God, he questioned the Lord about it, and the Lord told him, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them, appointed them, or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries, and the delusions of *their minds*. (Jer. 14:14). So, people can and do prophesy out of their minds.

False prophets can also prophesy through divination; Apostle Paul was confronted with such a spirit through a slave girl in Phillipi, “One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination that enabled her to tell the future.” (Acts 16:16 ESV). The slave girl was prophesying correctly because what she was saying was accurate; however, the spirit behind the prophecy was not God, and it was not even the girl's mind but a spirit of divination. Another example of this kind of divination prophecy was the witch of Endor, whom Saul consulted. (1 Sam. 28). The woman was able to perform a seance that revealed that King Saul and the Israelites would suffer defeat the next day, and although the prophecy proved to be accurate, it did not come from God or even the spirit of the woman who performed the séance.

To be a true prophet of God, to hear and see in the spirit realm, one must be filled with the Spirit of God. The real prophets or people who hear from God through His Spirit declare what the Lord told them to say rather than what their minds tell them. The Bible contains examples of such prophets, from Major prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to minor prophets such as Amos or Micaiah. Those men did not speak from their minds or through divination. According to Apostle Peter, no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's interpretation

of things. Prophecy never had its origin in human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as the Holy Spirit inspired them. (1Pet. 1:20-21)

Therefore, reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reading the word, and prayer is the only way to test the Spirit to determine the source of prophecy through reading the word, prayer, and fasting. All three tools require one to be filled with the Holy Spirit to understand what God is saying.

Summary of Results

To summarize the findings of this study, it is essential to understand its purpose. The study aimed to demonstrate that prophetic discernment and interpretation are vital when responding to contemporary prophetic messages. After the course was taught and the respondent gained clarity on the prophetic ministry, most of the answers to the survey questions were flipped entirely. For example, only 10% believed that all prophetic messages are from God compared to the 50% from the presurvey. This is quite a contrast and indicates that it is essential to conduct more teaching to educate believers regarding prophetic messages.

After the course, 95% believe that contemporary prophetic messages are significant for this era because they were taught during the course that the Bible warns against discarding or scoffing against prophecy because it can be seen as quenching The Holy Spirit according to 1Thessalonians 5:19-22.

There was a slight increase in those who believe that prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic from 70% to 90%, while 10% remain unsure. This indicates that there is still room for growth, and further education is necessary for people to understand the historical progression of prophecy. However, it could be that people compare the prophetic activities of the Bible only to what they experience currently and determine that there were many more prophetic

activities during Bible days. Whatever the reasoning behind the answers, further research could provide those answers.

The pre-survey results demonstrated a significant lack of understanding of prophetic discernment and interpretation, which aligns with the Hypothesis. Before the course, most participants believed that all prophetic messages came from God. After the course, almost all participants changed their beliefs to say that all prophetic messages do not come from God. Again, this demonstrates that the problem is a lack of knowledge concerning contemporary prophetic messages. Pre-survey results demonstrate that 70% of participants believe prophetic messages are relevant for the current era, and 97% believe that the Bible does warn about false prophecy. This means that there is a need for the body of Christ to discern between true and false prophecy because prophecy is undoubtedly relevant for this era. Still, there are true and false prophets, so a person must be able to discern between the true and the false.

Armed with the understanding that contemporary prophetic messages are relevant for today and that discernment and interpretation are necessary, one can then turn their attention to understanding what discernment means, what interpretation means, and how to apply it. 97% agreed that discernment and interpretation are important, which is a significant step in the right direction because those who agree will no longer accept prophecy at face value but will diligently search out the matter with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, 95% of respondents agree that the guidance of discernment can only come through the guidance of the Holy Spirit because prophecy is a spiritual matter and, therefore, needs Spiritual guidance.

This research demonstrates a dire need among Christians to discern and interpret prophecy. One of the greatest takeaways from this study is that prophecy can be accurately discerned only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. No amount of Philosophy or Theology will

be sufficient to discern and interpret prophecy accurately. This is a time and season when prophetic messages are increasing, and it is critical that Christians and non-Christians alike learn how to discern prophetic messages accurately because, in some cases, they could mean life or death.

This research differs from most prophetic research because most scholarly and popular material on prophecy focuses very little on discernment and interpretation. Most prophetic researchers focus instead on understanding biblical prophecy. Very little attention is given to contemporary prophetic messages, yet Jesus warned that false prophets would arise and deceive many. Therefore, since Jesus warns people to be on guard against false prophecy, it stands to reason that people should prioritize learning to discern and interpret prophetic messages.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this action research project was to evaluate the prophetic understanding of the members of Jesus Strong Ministries and to evaluate how their perspectives change after taking an eight-week prophetic course. This study's need arises from the church's ill response to contemporary prophecy during the pandemic and the 2020 election. This study was created and conducted on the premise that there is a need for the members of Jesus Strong Ministries and Christians, in general, to learn how to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that if people are provided with the tools to discern and interpret prophetic messages, they will be less likely to be deceived by false prophecy. As reviewed in the previous chapter, the results of this project support this hypothesis because significant changes were observed among participants' responses in the pre-and post-survey. After reviewing the results, it is evident that further implications can be extracted; however, reviewing the original problem presented, the basic assumptions, the literature review, and the results obtained to derive those implications are necessary.

Research Implications

The recent pandemic, political unrest, wars, and economic declines have increased prophetic activities; however, there are conflicting prophecies within the prophetic communities. Jesus Strong Ministries, like many other churches during the pandemic and the 2020 election, underwent a church split because of conflicting prophetic messages. The Pastor of Jesus Strong Ministries shared a prophetic vision concerning the 2020 election, in which President Trump did not win the election, and it caused a significant rift in the ministry because other prominent prophets were all prophesying that President Trump would win the election. Needless to say, he did not win. However, many still contended that he won and that the election was stolen. It is,

therefore, safe to conclude that the prophetic community is facing many challenges that should be proactively addressed because they will only escalate as uncertainties continue to mount.

Therefore, this research study examined contemporary prophetic ministry and its relevance to the church, emphasizing discernment and interpretation against the prevalent contemporary issues of false prophetic messages affecting Jesus Strong Ministries and the church.

These issues and the resulting consequences of deception were discussed proactively to encourage action on the path of those involved. The basic assumption is that if people understand what authentic or genuine prophecy is, they can discern when a prophetic message is false. Secondly, if they learn how to interpret the message, they will be able to understand the true meaning of prophecy because people generally perceive prophecy as foretelling the future rather than God communicating with humanity. These basic assumptions were supported by the results of the study, which suggest that there is a great need for the body of Christ to learn the true nature of the prophetic ministry.

Prophetic interpretation is as critically important as discernment because people can receive a valid prophetic message and discern that it is a message from the Lord but misinterpret it, which could cause them to miss out on the intended benefits of the prophecy. One way people identify counterfeit money is to compare it to real money; therefore, the research focuses on helping people understand the nature and characteristics of true prophets and prophecy.

The literature review and the theoretical and theological reviews in chapter two all examined the prophetic on various levels, focusing on discerning and interpreting prophetic messages. Some topics examined and discussed were defining prophecy, types of prophets or prophetic authority, the relevance or purpose of prophecy, sources of prophecy, dimension of prophecy, Spirit of Prophecy, and discerning or testing the spirit.

There are varying definitions of prophecy. When most people hear the word prophecy, they immediately think only of biblical prophecies; however, prophecy is not just the written word; it is a divinely inspired utterance of a person that declares God's divine will. Hvidt provides one of the best definitions of prophecy: "The message of a prophetic experience is unique in being a symbiosis of divine inspiration and human expression."¹ This can include predicting future events or edifying someone about a particular situation that reveals God's transcendence. Therefore, prophecy is a continuum in the body of Christ and will not end until Jesus returns.

Various kinds of prophets are authorized to minister in different dimensions, such as national, regional, personal, or congregational. Even Biblical prophets were given specific assignments; some prophesied to the northern kingdom, while others prophesied to the south. Then there are those who prophesied about specific situations and individuals like the prophet Nathan to King David or Micaiah to King Ahab. Likewise, modern-day prophets cannot prophesy to everyone in every situation because their assignment is specific to the will of the Lord. Also, remember that all prophets do not receive their messages the same way; some are seers or *Chozeh* who can see dreams or visions of the Spirit realm, while others are auditory; they primarily hear in the Spirit, *Nabi*. Some prophets' job is to discern and interpret the signs of the time, while others hear and see in the spirit realm.

Some scholars have contended that prophecy ended with the death of the Apostles and is, therefore, no longer relevant today. However, God is still speaking through modern-day prophets. As the results of the study suggest, Christians believe that God is speaking to them, and there is a strong gravitational pull toward prophetic ministry because they desire to hear from

¹ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 2007.

God. With so many uncertainties in the world and people prophesying doom and gloom, it is worth understanding true prophecy because that is the only way to prepare for the future, whether it be the end of the world or just knowing what the Lord requires of his people during this season of life.

Although prophecy is relevant to this current era, the study reveals that there are varying sources of prophecies. People sometimes prophesy out of their own minds and by demonic influence rather than waiting on the Lord to divinely reveal His will. Also, keep in mind that prophecy must filter through the imperfection of the human mind; therefore, there is always a margin of error. As the Apostle Paul says, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” (1 Cor. 13:9). This was also the case in the early church; that is why Apostle Paul exhorted them to test the spirit behind prophecy rather than accepting all prophecies as divine messages from God. So, although prophecy is intrinsic to the nature of the church, it should be tested for authenticity.

The real Spirit of prophecy is the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was about to be crucified, he gave his disciples a farewell speech, telling them, “I still have much to tell you, but you cannot yet bear to hear it. However, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come.” (John 16:12-13 BSB). In other words, the Holy Spirit will reveal God's divine will to those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ through prophecy. There are varying ways that the Holy Spirit leads and guides believers into the truth of God, through scriptures and hearing the voice of God. However, there is only one expressed purpose: to reveal Jesus (Rev. 19:10). That is why discernment and interpretation of prophecy are critically important.

Discerning prophetic messages can be challenging if people do not understand the nature and characteristics of prophecy; therefore, Christians must learn how to recognize true prophecy because they will have a canon of sorts to judge the spirit behind contemporary prophetic messages. Remember that there are no biblically set criteria to test the spirit; however, Jesus said by their fruits, you shall know them. (Matt. 7:15-16). Hvidt rightly stated, “If the prophecy is truly from God, it must also have edifying fruits in the community. An evaluation of a given prophecy must focus on the fruits of the experience and ministry of the prophets.”² So, although there are no set criteria for evaluating prophecy, one can assess the prophecy's results and the prophet's character to determine whether the message is authentic.

Chapter Three details the intervention design and implementation, consisting of an initial survey, an eight-week prophetic course, and a post-survey. The course was conducted via Zoom weekly every Thursday and had 32 participants. Initially, fifty people were contacted; however, some could not set aside the time needed to give undivided attention to the course. The tools and implementation were kept simple so that anyone who wanted to learn about the prophetic ministry could easily do so, and the survey results obtained would accurately represent the respondents. First, a pre-course survey was administered via Microsoft Forms, and then the course was conducted virtually through Zoom. Then, a post-survey was conducted to measure changes in participants' perspectives.

Chapter Four reported on the intervention's results, and this chapter focuses on the conclusions that could be drawn from this study and its implications for future prophetic studies. The study results revealed that people are less likely to be led astray by false prophecy if they understand what true prophecy is. Whether Christians recognize it or not, a prophetic evolution is

² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition*, 293.

taking place, and it will only accelerate in the coming years. God has not changed, but how He communicates with his people has changed. The pandemic has created a desperate need for people to hear from God, and while many have embraced authentic prophetic messages, many are deceived by false prophets. However, the results from this study reveal that all hope is not lost because if people are taught the correct way to discern and interpret prophetic messages, they will be equipped to recognize false prophetic messages.

There are three main implications to be drawn from this study's results. First, contemporary prophetic messages are relevant today because, contrary to what some theologians believe, prophecy did not end with the disciples' deaths. "Some scholars have contended that prophecy died out in early Judaism, while others claim it ended with the coming of Christ, the death of the last apostle, the closure of the Christian canon, or the rise of Montanism."³ This study contends that prophecy did not die with the Apostles or the closure of the Christian canon because God is still speaking to His people through the Holy Spirit and modern-day prophets, and it is crucial not to quench the Spirit by mocking prophecy. However, "Prophecy has changed immensely throughout history, especially concerning its status within the institutional church, but prophecy has never ceased."⁴ Although prophecy can be confusing, it is still a method through which God frequently speaks to His people; therefore, it should not be discarded, mocked, or scorned.

Secondly, people should recognize that although God is still using modern-day prophets to communicate with humanity, it is imperative not to miss the message, as not all prophetic messages come from God. One must remember that while genuine modern-day prophets exist,

³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 36.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

others exploit the prophetic ministry for personal gains. Their intentions are impure, and they do not use the gift of prophecy to further the gospel but to build a brand or reputation. Although it is wrong, people can prophesy from their own minds, divination, or demonic influence; therefore, people should test the spirit behind the prophecy before embracing prophetic messages.

Thirdly, every word of prophecy should be tested because there are false prophecies among the true ones. While embracing the prophetic message, one must remember that Jesus warns that in the last days, false prophets will arise and deceive many. However, if people know that false prophecy does exist along with true prophecy, they will seek to understand the difference because nobody wants to be deceived by false prophecy. False prophecy is not going away any time soon; scripture implies that it will only increase as the end times progress. Therefore, people must understand how to discern and interpret prophetic messages. As the study results reveal, with the proper perspective on prophecy, people can rightly discern and interpret prophetic messages. The correct approach to contemporary prophecy is to discern if the message is from God and interpret its meaning before applying it to the church or the individual.

Some criteria or questions to consider when evaluating prophetic messages are: What is the goal of the prophetic utterance? How does it edify, exhort, or correct the body of Christ or the individual? Does it strengthen or encourage? Does the prophetic message lead to fear, confusion, and hopelessness? Does it lead to a stronger relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Ultimately, every prophetic message aims to reveal the Lordship of Jesus in a believer's life, for the Spirit of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.

Research Applications

The study results reveal that people are less likely to be deceived by false prophets' messages if they learn to recognize authentic prophetic messages. Prophetic messages are a critical component of the overall effectiveness of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, the crisis of false prophecy plaguing the contemporary church can be averted if the church leaders and seminaries incorporate prophetic discernment and interpretation in their teaching and Bible studies.

Prophetic discernment is marginally discussed or addressed in the pulpit and most seminaries. The overall reaction to prophetic discernment and interpretation in congregational and scholarly settings is negative. One reason for this negative reaction is that there are no solid criteria for discerning and interpreting prophecy; therefore, most people avoid the topic. According to Moberly, the crucial issue for discerning the word of God in human words is knowing what to look for and how to recognize it.⁵ This study was designed to teach people how to recognize true prophets and prophecies by examining biblical prophetic principles and glean information by which criteria could be set that will aid in prophetic discernment.

First, one must understand prophecy and its purpose. The purpose of prophecy, although predictive in most cases, is not to predict the future. Many people gravitate to prophecy because they want to know the future, which is also the driving force behind people going to psychics and mediums. People do not like uncertainty; they want to know what will happen and how it will happen. However, Revelation 19:10 says that prophecy's purpose is to give a clear witness for Jesus. Prophecy should evoke the worship of Jesus even if the prophecy is not about Him; it should cause the person receiving the message to desire a closer relationship with Jesus.

⁵ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 222.

Authentic prophecy does not originate out of the heart of man, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet.1:21). According to Hvidt, “The message of a prophetic experience is unique in being a symbiosis of divine inspiration and human expression.”⁶ In other words, the human expressions of prophetic messages are fused with the words of God.

Real prophets are those whom God authorizes to speak on His behalf as the Holy Spirit moves them. However, the moral character of the prophet should also be evaluated when trying to discern prophecy because a true prophet of God should display the character of and concerns of God.⁷ As Hvidt rightly observes, prophecy always passes through the “filter “of the prophet's mind. Therefore, it becomes essential to study the prophet's life based on physiology, psychology, and spiritual life when judging its authenticity.⁸

Apostle Paul provides some criteria for people who desire to be a leader in the church, and they can easily be applied to those who are considered prophets of God. He said, “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task. An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not dependent on wine, not violent but gentle, peaceable, and free of the love of money.” (1 Tim. 1-3 BSB).

Jesus also taught his disciples how to recognize false prophets; he told them, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit, you will recognize them.” (Matt. 7:15). Jesus went on to say that a good

⁶ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 289.

⁷ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 228.

⁸ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 289.

tree does not produce bad fruit, and a thornbush does not grow grapes, which means that you can discern a false prophet by their actions. Apostle Paul supported Jesus' message when he taught the Galatians that acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like (Gal. 5:19-21). People who claim to be prophets but display fleshly immoral characteristics are not operating in submission to the Holy Spirit and, therefore, cannot display the characteristics of the Spirit because "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). Those led by God's Spirit will display the fruit of the Spirit, for no true prophet can prophesy without being moved by the Spirit of God.

Not everyone who prophesies in the name of the Lord is led by the Spirit of God, for Jesus also said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt. 7: 22-23). Again, Jesus said false prophets will arise and deceive many because they will use various signs and wonders. Remember, the diviners in Egypt were able to perform some of the signs that Moses did under the directions of God; however, their power did not come from God, but from an evil source, and likewise, modern-day false prophets and diviners can and do use magical powers to perform signs that can deceive people. According to Moberly, Prophecy "can be a means to validate human self-will and imposition upon others, with endless subtle variations upon the theme of 'You must do what I say, because what I say is what God says', where the appeal to divine authority can serve to prevent or override legitimate question or objection."⁹

⁹ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 12.

While true prophets are to be honored, false prophets manipulate and monetize their gifts because they force people to fear them and to do whatever they say under the guise that God is speaking through them.

One of the characteristics of biblical prophets is that they never benefit from their role as prophets at the expense of others. “Claims to speak for God can be meaningfully tested both in terms of the moral character, disposition, and behavior of the speaker and the moral and theological content of the message.”¹⁰ For example, suppose a prophet comes into town and prophesies that God says to give ten thousand dollars to his ministry and that God will bless them. In that case, it is easy to discern that the prophet is prophesying for monetary gain, and the spirit behind that prophecy is not the Holy Spirit. However, if a prophet comes to town with a message that leads people to follow Jesus and their character displays the fruit of the Spirit, and there is nothing for them to gain, the average person can easily discern if the prophet's message is authentic. For example, when Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be overturned in forty days, he had nothing to gain from such a prophecy. He delivers a message to Nineveh from the Lord; however, Jonah is not eager to give this prophetic message because he knows God will forgive Nineveh if they repent. True contemporary prophets are seldom eager to prophesy for various reasons, such as fear of the Lord or, like Jeremiah, they do not like the message. (Jer. 20:8-9).

The main problem with prophetic discernment is setting criteria for discerning the word of God in human words; however, those criteria cannot be developed unless people know what to look for and how to recognize it.”¹¹ Discernment is necessary because prophetic utterances

¹⁰ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 225.

¹¹ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 222.

cannot bear fruit unless adapted to the human experience. Since it is impossible to verify every word of prophecy empirically, it must be verified by its effects and against the biblical standards of prophecy. In other words, prophecy is judged by its fruits.¹²

When applying prophetic messages, the fruit of the message should be used as a criterion for judging the prophecy. According to Hvidt, “The fruits of the experience are studied under three different aspects: the content of the revelations, the personality of the prophet, and the effects of the revelations in religious life.”¹³ People often look for the wrong thing to discern between true and false prophecies. Most people spend their time proving that a prophecy is false rather than learning about authentic prophecy. If people learn more about authentic prophetic messages' nature and characteristics, they will quickly recognize the false ones. Some general criteria are as follows: What is the message? Does it edify the listener? Is this person authorized to speak on God's behalf? In other words, are they filled with the Spirit of God? Does the message agree with the Bible? How does it affect the listeners?

Remember that the nature of true prophecy imposes moral truth and integrity, even if it is a complex message that aims to turn people's hearts to God. True prophets resist selfish ambitions, practice and declare justice, and embrace humility in the cruciform pattern of power in weakness.¹⁴ The effect that such a message has on its listeners is either to encourage them to repent and return to the Lord or to strengthen their faith; however, such messages, although authentic, can be challenging to receive.

¹² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, 286.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁴ Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 226.

Research Limitations

Overall, it is beyond the scope of this research to address all the problems affecting the prophetic ministry. As with every research study, there are limitations. Firstly, the participants chosen for this study were limited to Christians who were either members or affiliates of Jesus Strong Ministries; therefore, the survey sample did not represent the general population. Limiting the study to this group was necessary because they were directly affected by the conflicting pandemic and election prophecies. Their leader prophesied in opposition to what major prophets were prophesying, and it caused some to walk away from the ministry. However, the prophecy proved accurate, and some people apologized while others kept their distance.

Another limitation was that the group was predisposed to prophetic ministry, although they varied in age and their understanding of the ministry. This limitation was also intentional because the research aimed to evaluate Christian's current perspective of prophetic ministry and evaluate their growth after gaining insights into the prophetic ministry. Therefore, this limitation could produce skewed results when compared to the general population of the larger body of Christ.

Another limitation was that the research focuses on the prophetic messages given during the pandemic and regarding the 2020 election. This could negatively impact the study because the reaction to the varying election and pandemic prophecies is not typical of the prophetic community. However, these limitations were necessary because the researchers wanted to highlight the cause of such adverse reactions to conflicting prophecies and to provide tools to prevent such reactions.

Another limitation of the study was that not all churches were affected by the pandemic and election prophecies in the same way, and there is no data to compare how other churches

handled the various conflicting prophecies during the pandemic and the 2020 election. Some of the people who prophesied falsely have repented and recanted their messages. Those who repented should be commended for doing so, for it takes humility and genuine repentance to correct the damage done; however, churches, whole groups, and organizations still firmly believe in the false prophetic messages. One of the reasons for this is pride will prevent them from admitting that they were wrong; in those cases, the remedy is not to confront their wrong beliefs but to teach them how to recognize the truth.

Further Research

This study thoroughly examined the prophetic ministries, focusing on discernment and interpretation. However, the researcher recognizes that further research is needed to establish solid criteria for discerning and interpreting modern prophetic messages. The church could benefit from simple criteria developed through further research and testing that could provide tools for analyzing and assessing prophetic messages.

Another possibility for future study is to evaluate how a seminary course on prophetic theology impacts the minister's ability to rightly divide the word of God as a worker who needs not to be ashamed. (2 Tim. 2:15). Until this point, the treatment of prophecy in most seminaries is only concerned with biblical prophecy. As such, very little attention is given to modern-day prophecy and how to manage or interpret it. Some have completely avoided prophecy altogether, but this is a huge mistake because God still speaks to individuals through His Spirit. Therefore, modern-day prophets need to be trained in discernment and interpretation.

Another area of future study is determining how this curriculum can be adopted through systematic bible study in the general church setting. Many Churches teach Bible study in a different setting than the main Sunday service, and often, most of the people who attend Sunday

services do not attend Bible Study. Therefore, further research is needed on how best to fit this curriculum in the church's main educational endeavors.

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Appendix A

RECRUITING EMAIL

Hi [first name],

Considering the recent uptick in prophetic messages, the Bible says false prophets will arise in the last days and deceive many (Matt. 24:11). Jesus Strong Ministries is conducting a doctoral-level study on discerning and interpreting prophetic messages.

This study is vital to surviving the end times without being deceived by false prophets and messages. Since the Bible also says that we should not mock prophecy (1 Thess. 5:20-21). Understanding how to discern between the true and the false prophecy is essential.

As a member of Jesus Strong Ministries, you are invited to participate in this free eight-week study that will help you understand how to discern and interpret authentic prophetic messages. You will learn what prophecy is, who can prophesy, how to test the spirit behind prophetic utterances, and much more. This is an exciting and relevant study for the times we live in.

If you are interested in participating in this exciting prophetic study, please respond with your availability for a 15-minute interview.

Blessings,

Charmain Jarrett

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

I consent to participate in Jesus Strong Ministries' Studies of prophetic ministry. I understand that this study is a Christian study geared toward understanding how to discern and interpret contemporary prophetic messages. It is not intended to replace the biblical understanding of prophetic messages.

I also agree to commit to the full eight weeks of study in addition to completing pre- and post-surveys and interviews.

I also agree to keep a weekly reflective Journal on what new insights are derived from the study.

I also understand that I chose to participate in this study without bribes or duress, willingly giving my full attention to the lessons that will be presented. I understand there will be no monetary compensation for the time I set aside to attend the classes.

I also understand that I will not be charged a fee to participate in this class now or in the future and that no course material other than a journal and pen is required to be purchased for this class.

This consent is valid for six months or until the duration of the course.

This is not a legally binding contract but more of a commitment or promise to complete the course.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Appendix C

INTERVIEW QUESTION

1. Do you believe in contemporary prophetic messages?
2. Do you believe that all prophetic messages originate with God?
3. What purpose do you believe contemporary prophecy serves?
4. Given the pandemic and the recent uptick in contemporary prophetic messages, do you believe prophecy is relevant?
5. With the end-time prophecy in view, what role does contemporary prophecy play in a believer's life

Appendix D

PRE-COURSE PROPHETIC SURVEY

Instructions: Please answer the following questions on the scale of

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree.

1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?
2. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages have significance?
3. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?
4. Do you agree that prophetic messages have increased since the pandemic?
5. Do you agree that contemporary prophecy affects believers' faith in God?
6. Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets?
7. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?
8. Do you agree that discerning true and false prophecy is important?
9. Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?
10. Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?
11. Do you agree that prophetic messages require Holy Spirit discernment?
12. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Appendix E

POST-COURSE PROPHETIC SURVEY

Instructions: Please answer the following questions on the scale of

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree.

Defining Prophecy?

Part 1: Prophecy is an inspired utterance of a prophet that declares God's divine will, predicts future events, or edifies someone about a particular situation.

1. Should all prophetic messages be perceived as messages from God?
2. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages have increased since the Pandemic?
3. Do you agree that contemporary prophetic messages are relevant?
4. Does contemporary prophecy have the same relevance as biblical prophecy?
5. Do you agree that it is essential for contemporary Christians to discern between true and false prophecy?
6. Do you agree that believers do not understand the purpose of contemporary prophecy?

Discernment and Interpretation

Part 2: When considering discernment and interpretation, all discernment and understanding should be done through prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1. Do you understand the difference between prophetic discernment and interpretation?
2. Should all prophetic messages be subjected to discernment and interpretation?
3. Can prophetic language, i.e., dreams and visions, be interpreted through natural objects or circumstances?
4. Do you agree that prophetic discernment requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
5. Can prophetic language, i.e., dreams and visions, be interpreted through natural objects or circumstances?
6. Do you agree that only people full of the Holy Spirit discern true prophecy?

Testing the Spirit

Part 3: 1 John 4:1 admonishes the believer not to believe every spirit but to test every spirit. Testing the spirit requires becoming a student of the word; you must understand biblical prophecies to test or discern the spirit behind prophecy.

1. Does *testing the Spirit* agree with the word of God?
2. Do you agree that studying the word of God impacts prophetic discernment?
3. Do you agree that testing the spirit requires one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
4. Does testing the spirit require one to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
5. How often do people compare prophetic messages with Scripture?

False Prophets vs False Prophecy

Part 4: False prophecy can and does significantly impact the church; therefore, learning to discern whether a message is authentic is essential.

1. Do you agree that the Bible warns about false prophets?
2. Do you agree that false prophecy has a negative impact on the church?
3. Do you agree that a true prophet of God can prophesy incorrectly?
4. Do you agree that true prophets can misinterpret their prophetic messages?
5. Do you agree that prophetic understanding leads to *responding* instead of *reacting* to prophecy?
6. Do you agree that false prophecy can negatively impact people's lives?

True Prophecy

Part 5: True prophetic messages are to be discerning, interpreted, and applied to our lives with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1. Do you agree that not all prophetic messages are favorable?
2. Do you agree that people reject unfavorable contemporary prophecies?
3. Do you agree that prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit?
4. Do you agree that all believers in Christ prophesy?
5. Do you agree that it is essential for people to be led by the Spirit to be considered prophets of God?

Appendix F

Course Design

8 Week lesson plan – Once per week

Average class time – Approximately 1 hour

	Topic	Weekly Schedule	Virtual Platform
Lesson 1	Defining Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 2	Dimensions of Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 3	Prophecy and Culture	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 4	False Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 5	Responding to Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 6	Spirit of Prophecy	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 7	Prophetic Discernment	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom
Lesson 8	Prophetic Interpretation	Thursdays @ 7:00 pm	Zoom

Unit 1: Defining Prophecy

- 1.1 – What is prophecy
- 1.2 – Relevance of Prophecy
- 1.3 – Who can prophesy
- 1.4 – Types of prophets
- 1.5 – Prophetic Authority

Unit 2: Dimensions of Prophecy

- 2.1 – Personal Prophecy
- 2.2 – Ecclesia Prophecy
- 2.3 – National Prophecy
- 2.4 – Global Prophecy

Unit 3: Prophecy and Culture

- 3.1 – Truth to Power
- 3.2 – End Time signs
- 3.3 – Cultural expectation
- 3.4 – Effects of Prophecy

Unit 4: False VS True Prophecy

- 4.1 – What the Bible says

Unit 5: Prophetic Authority

- 5.1 – Office of a Prophet
- 5.2 – Prophetic Anointing
- 5.3 – The gift of Prophecy
- 5.4 – The gift of Prophecy

Unit 6: Spirit of Prophecy

- 6.1 – Test the Spirit
- 6.2 – Who is the Holy Spirit
- 6.3 – Roles of the Holy Spirit
- 6.4 – Filled with the Spirit
- 6.4 – Led by the Spirit

Unit 7: Criteria for Discernment

- 7.1 – The Prophet
- 7.2 – The Message
- 7.3 – The effects
- 7.4 – Barriers to Discernment

Unit 8: Criteria for Interpretation

- 8.1 – Prophetic Languages

Appendix G

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 26, 2023

Charmain Jarrett
Seth Bible

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-895 The Essence of Prophecy

Dear Charmain Jarrett and Seth Bible,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office