

# Biblical role of a prophet

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In Christian religion a prophet is a person who has contacted God, who acts as a conveyor of a message from the supernatural world therefore being an intermediary between the creator and human beings. (Trevor 1971) states that the word prophet is an English word taken directly from an ancient Greek noun which literally meant “ to speak for” or “ on behalf of.” Thus the noun embraced the concept of speaking for someone, or a spokesman. In this case the prophet speaks for or on behalf of God.

The message a prophet delivers is called prophecy. In the Bible, prophecies’ nature could either be conditional as warning of punishment and forthcoming doom or restoration healing and goodwill for a nation; they could depict words direct from God or be described by Biblical authors’ words. Biblical prophecy on the other hand is a prediction of events to come with basis messages recorded in the Bible. Old Testament prophecies were not basically future predictions. God intertwined past, present and future events in relation to historical process.

They were prophecies to persuade rulers and leaders of that time to repent and turn back to God by obeying His commandments if they had gone astray. Because they were written for a nation, they tend to appear timeless and applicable even in the modern situations. Christians and believers of Biblical prophecies analyze global political happenings, natural disasters and associate Israel (today) among other things as the conditions that foretell the coming back of the Messiah and therefore these occurrences to believers are a fulfillment of a prophecy. Prophets in the Old Testament were inspired by God to convey messages with God’s intention being to shape the history of Israel the purported nation of God. Modes of prophecy There were various

modes that God used to speak to His prophets among them auditions visions, dreams and face to face like in the case of Moses (Deut. 34 NLT).

In the biblical history, prophecy was preceded by a divine call which was sometimes accompanied by unusual occurrences like visions. These visions that God sends to His prophets were distinctive in that they persuaded the prophet to accepting that it was not a mere hallucination but a contact with a Deity taking place. A call went hand in hand with a commission whose purpose was to allocate a duty or a mission to the prophet. (Jer. 1: 7 NLT) God says that for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you; bringing out clearly the role of a prophet as a messenger of God who must take direct orders without altering them.

A commission was followed by a message which a prophet needed to deliver mostly to the leaders and generally mankind. Sometimes a message could spell destruction and death while other times it could rebuild hope and bestow courage to face the future. Threats and warnings were major characteristics of prophecy normally on morality issues with a choice between life and death. Biblical Prophecies Major and Minor prophets Biblically prophecy began with Samuel and his group of followers in the eleventh century BC at the point of transition from the era of the judges to the beginnings of the monarchy with the installation of Saul as the head of Israel (Freedman 1992). Traditional classification of major prophetic books include Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel while minor prophetic books include Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Micah Malachi and Haggai.

Prophecies directed to the nation of Israel included, persecution, exile, destruction, re-gathering, restoration, preservation and nationhood while the rest spoke of need to embrace and lead messianic life, a call to live with other nations and mankind in relation to end times. All these prophets and their prophecies sought to address people urging them on Christianity themes of monotheism, morality messianism. Israelites were guided through the process of history with God wanting them to practice more repentance and redemption in order to streamline their relationship with Him. Biblical prophetic roles As stated earlier, a prophet is a messenger of God. In the Old Testament times, a true prophet sent by God would be known because s/he would be spoken unto through a distinctive way. God says that even with His prophets, He communicates through visions and dreams (Num.

12: 6 NLT). Therefore, anyone claiming to be a messenger of God needed to have evidence of how the creator conveyed this message. This was because there were tendencies of malicious and false prophets that were emerging at this era with an intention of instilling fear in people. A true prophet was also expected to speak that which was to pass. God says that if a prophet speaks and it does not happen, then s/he is not a messenger of God and people should not be afraid.

(Deut 18: 21-22 NTL). People had fear and reverence for God and whenever the Lord spoke, it was not to be taken lightly. Accuracy was a determining factor of God's message without a room for lies and lessening the weight of the message or the punishment that would befall people in case they disregarded the message. God in the Old Testament times was an instant punisher and nobody wanted to face His wrath. Therefore, a message

conveying warning or doom was greatly received and the messenger feared, hence the statement in Deuteronomy twenty one above. A true prophet could never interpret what the message said.

S/he would convey the message in a package as it was received. A prophet of God would not only convey a message verbally, sometimes it was through actions and miraculous happenings. For example, Moses, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha all had performances that were supernatural. Miracles performed by prophets included healing the sick like prophet Elisha healed Naaman, raising the dead like when prophet Elijah raised a son from death., feeding people miraculously, showing unusual power over nature like when Moses stroke a rock to provide water for the children of Israel. Samuel anointed Saul to be king of Israel.

True prophets were regarded as Israelites' God's prophets while false prophets were termed as belonging to other gods like Baal. It was therefore upon the prophets to uplift the name of their God by carrying out missions that were dangerous and sometimes could be met with rebellion from people, without looking to glorify themselves but for the same of God's glory. (Freedman 1992) says that prophets such as Samuel and Elisha are reported to have met with much success in carrying out their missions. With Elijah and perhaps Isaiah, the results are mixed, as also with Amos, Hosea, and Micah. God used prophets to bind the covenant He had with the community.

Throughout the biblical prophetic regime, emphasis was on idolatry with prophets urging people to turn back and worship God. Righteousness was focused on as a factor that would determine the survival of a nation. This

aspect was expected to be practiced by everyone in the community to avoid a downfall and for God to feel closer to his creation hence keeping the bond He intended to have right from the start of the world. Later on prophets spoke of brotherly love among people to unite the community and draw them towards God. Prophets were also sole conveyers of God's universalism.

When kingdoms like Assyria rose and became strong, the idea of one God ruling the whole universe and having close attachment to one nation as was overcome by the might and fame kingdoms had acquired leaving Israel and Judea at risk from other neighboring nations. However, God was orderly and brought back peace and unity among nations raising Israel high among these nations since it was His covenanted nation. As much as prophets were messengers of God, they also played a great role when it came to speaking to /god on behalf of His people, Samuel and Moses played the role of intercessors with the latter remaining a unique character who was not only inspirational in taking part on behalf of the people but also a great leader. Prophetic roles in the New Testament In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets while in the New Testament prophecy is seen as a gift of the spirit of God. The book of Acts of the Apostles marks the beginning of the church that was faced by many difficulties. It also highlights the beginning of prophetic work after the Holy Spirit was sent to believers.

Christian prophecy in Acts is represented as an eschatological power of the Holy Spirit from God (Ellis 1970). Prophecy is a possibility for every Christian even though it was mainly associated with leaders in Biblical times. The prophetic gift is listed second after the apostles and before the teachers of the law (Holbrook 1982). Prophets in this era designed where missionaries

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were to be taken. This was an era of establishing the church and deep intervention was needed. Without prophets to direct leaders it was hard to deliver.

Paul was accompanied by Silas who was a prophet when he set out on his missionary work (Acts 16: 40 NLT) is a clear indication of how spreading the gospel needed the guidance of prophets. The church in Antioch was new and there was always controversy between Jewish and Gentile Christians over different matters including doctrinal matters. Though councils could often settle these difficulties, believers still had doubts whether it was the right directive and at the end of it all Silas and Judas who were prophets talked to believers for long hours encouraging and strengthening them (Acts 15: 32 NLT). The church was built after Jesus' ministry on earth, therefore, believers often needed encouragement and comforting in matters relating to true doctrine and worship of Christ as well as faith that Christ is coming back again which was a role played by prophets. Prophets played this difficult role (1Cor.

14: 3 NLT) Prophetic gift was used to warn people of forthcoming disasters. Believers were told before hand of the famine that was to strike the nation resulting into a unity of brethren between Gentile and Jewish Christians in Antioch and Judea respectively (Acts 11 NLT). It should be noted that the intention of the Holy Spirit is to bestow this prophetic gift to whomever He sees until the end of time. It is a continuous process that happens even today for believers. However, with more conniving people, it becomes a hard task for anyone to tell between black magic and true prophecy.

This may be accelerated by lack of trust in the current leaders and their lack of commitment to believing in God as well as diversity in religious beliefs. Today, believers should look for a prophet who keeps their predictions to the testimony of God (Isaiah 18: 20 NLT), in other words, a prophet should emulate God's prophets of old who kept the Ten Commandments. Prophets are messengers of God with an intention of conveying divine message to mankind for the purposes that may differ but related to historical process of past present and future. God's intentions are pure, it is upon people to realize true or false prophecy and embrace the latter.