



"God is not a symbol of goodness. Goodness is a symbol of God."
—G.K. Chesterton

08-May-20

The Purpose of Prophecy

What is a prophet? At its most basic, a prophet is an assistant who speaks for the leader. We have the perfect explanation of this in [Exodus 7:1-2](#), where [God](#) tells [Moses](#) that his elder brother, Aaron, would be *his* (Moses') prophet, even as Moses was God's prophet:

So the Lord said to Moses: "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land."

Even without getting into a proper study of prophecy, we can think of several reasons for prophecy. Most prominently, and probably of most interest to us, prophecy allows us a glimpse into the future. Perhaps it makes us feel secure because it shows that God is still involved in human affairs—that He is not dead, as so many secularists declare. No, He is not even asleep, nor is He too busy elsewhere. Prophecy reveals that God is on His throne and working to bring about His purposes.

Prophecy can galvanize us into action, causing us to believe that we are living in the "gun lap," the time right before Christ's return. This belief may

stir some people to hoard guns, ammunition, and food. More positively, it could spur a person into spending more time in prayer, Bible study, and overcoming.

Depending on our particular focus, we might come up with many purposes of prophecy. But such suppositions may not bring us to the actual reason that prophets prophesy. Scripturally, there is only one ultimate reason or purpose for their preaching. Notice [II Kings 17:13](#):

Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets."

God sent *all* the prophets and seers to Israel and Judah to do one thing: to tell His people to return to keeping His commandments. While some of them foretold events, all of them had the job of preaching [repentance](#) from [sin](#) and obedience to God's laws.

Sometimes, a prophecy does not state this purpose plainly and concisely, as in [Zephaniah 3:9](#): "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord." *The Good News Bible* makes it a little more understandable: "Then I will change the people of the nations, and they will pray to me alone and not to other gods. They will all obey me." Zephaniah's prophecy makes the point, albeit in a left-handed way, that unless one keeps the commandments, they cannot serve God, call on Him, or even speak a pure language. [I John 2:4](#) makes this perfectly understandable: "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." No liar can speak God's pure language.

Commandment-keeping, then, is of paramount importance to God, and prophets are the tip of the spear, as it were, in urging God's people to obey Him (see also [Isaiah 8:20](#)).

[Deuteronomy 29:29](#) runs in tandem with [II Kings 17:13](#): "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us

and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." So, commandment-keeping should be of paramount importance to us too. God intends that the things He reveals to us, including the prophecies of His Word, will keep us firmly within the parameters of His righteous government.

Occasionally, a prophet does not even utter a prophecy, as we expect, but the prophet's actions serve the same purpose. The story in [1 Kings 18:17-18](#), 36-39 illustrates that Elijah's purpose is to return the people's hearts to God and to keeping His commandments:

Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. . . .

And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, [Isaac](#), and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

Commandment-keeping was virtually impossible then, and still is today, without the Holy Spirit. Moses writes about Israel's condition in [Deuteronomy 29:4](#), "Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day." Yet, in prophesying a new relationship with Israel, God says: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" ([Ezekiel 36:27](#)).

We have the great blessing of the Holy Spirit residing within us: "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" ([I John 3: 24](#)). Why does God give us His Holy Spirit and commandments to keep? We can find the answer in [Romans 16:25-26](#):

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of [Jesus Christ](#), according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since [the world](#) began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—

According to the apostle Paul, God reveals mysteries to motivate us to obey Him, providing an incentive. He wants us to become righteous people, with character like His, which is reflected in His commandments. And so, He gives us insight into some of the prophecies, and they play a part in motivating us to do what is good.

God has entrusted a rare and precious privilege to us. Let us endeavor to be found worthy of it.

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Prophets and Prophecy \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Through Biblical contexts, we learn that a prophet is one who speaks for God, expressing His will and purpose in words and signs. The office of a prophet is to forth-tell God's purpose through His Law and tell people God's words. A true prophet, never losing sight of the law of God, deals with local situations, events of the Messiah, events of the future, and events that are dual in application. The prophet, described as coming from outside the system (who brings new truth building it upon the foundation of old truth) is

contrasted with the priest who conserves old truth (given to them by a prophet). A prophet goads people to urgently commit themselves to a righteous course of action, forcing them to make clear and often painful choices. Elijah and John the Baptist clearly fulfilled the role of prophet.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Prophecy's Place](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Similar to the old E.F. Hutton commercial, when the preacher speaks on prophecy, everyone listens. Studying prophecy is good, argues Richard Ritenbaugh, but doctrine and Christian living are far more necessary and helpful to our practicing and growing in God's way of life right now.

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