

“THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY IN ACTION” THE PROPHETS AND THE PROPHET

STUDY ONE THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

1. Introduction: What is Prophecy?

It is difficult to speak of prophecy apart from prophets who prophesied. Even so we can observe the nature of prophecy. It is simply a message of God given directly to a specific (human) situation by the medium of a prophet. Many times it is said, ‘The word of the Lord came to...’ How it came we will later see. The prophet could say, ‘Thus says the Lord...’ An example of prophecy is in Exodus 7:1-2.

2. The Content of Prophecy

Prophecy has been spoken of as ‘forthtelling and foretelling’. These two are in the one bundle. Any prediction was with a view to special immediate action. Prediction is never given simply to satisfy curiosity about the future. The following are some elements of prophecy:-

- (i) God’s plan, sometimes relating to the past (Isaiah 46:8-11), sometimes to the present (Isaiah 48:6-8) , sometimes to the future.
- (ii) God does nothing but what he first tells the prophets (Amos 3: 7-8). Prophecy covers all events which need to be known by man.
- (iii) Prophetic communication is in the light of man’s fall, his sin, his judgement. As in Amos 3:7-8 it has to do with God’s communication to His world.
- (iv) Prophecy is for the most part revelation since man’s and God’s ideas and understanding are different (cf. Isaiah 55 :10-11), i . e . prophecy is God’s effective word (Jeremiah 23:23-32) even though God’s thoughts may transcend man’s natural understanding.
- (v) God’s word is always creative, sustaining, dynamic, effective. Prophecy is not all that word, but that communication which is necessary for man to hear (a) at the time of utterance, and (b) for all time when it constitutes *revelation*.
- (vi) Prophecy constitutes *rebuke* which is intended to teach and evoke the response of repentance, faith and obedience. See Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah (etc.). The rebuke points towards judgement, and judgement towards grace, restoration (cf. Isaiah 30:18 *passim*). Thus prophecy is exhortation which brings encouragement (cf. Isaiah 1:31-2:5, 4:1-6, 42:24-43:lff., Micah 2:11-13, 3:12-4: 1).

Prophecy is often information given which will lead to certain desirable action, e.g. Exodus 16:4-33, 17:1-7, Numbers 11:16-23. Often God prophesies, 'If you do so-and-so then such-and-such will result, otherwise something bad will follow...',

- (viii) The substance of prophecy covers all God's dealings with Israel. Moses' prophetic declaration of Deuteronomy 28-31 laid down the manner of life for Israel. The books from Joshua to Nehemiah are known to the Jews as 'the Former Prophets' because they were, in fact, didactic (teaching) prophecy. They showed God was serious about, Israel as His covenant people. The latter prophets (Isaiah to Malachi) were from prophets who prophesied and whose prophecies were inscripturated.
- (ix) In the New Testament prophecy is really the same, except that Jesus' person as much as his words were God's communication, His message of truth to Israel and the world. ('He has spoken unto us by -a Son.') Even so Revelation 19:10 gives the supreme description of prophecy, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (Spirit?) of prophecy.' Simply this means that no prophecy has been given which does not - in the ultimate - relate to and concern Jesus.
- (x) Whilst prophecy was spoken directly to a specific situation and audience its purpose and impact were not always confined to that time, people and place. Even so the sum of all prophecies = prophecy = 'the prophetic deposit', i.e. we can grasp the principles, revelation and substance of all prophecy by listening to it now.

3. Conclusion

Prophecy then is not simply for examination and the gathering of information. It is for hearing, learning, responding, obedience and action. God has spoken: we must hear and obey.

STUDY TWO THE PROPHETS

1. Introduction The Scope of Prophets in Time

Jesus summed up the Old Testament prophets as being 'from Abel to Zechariah' (Luke 11: 50-51) . In Acts 3: 22-24 Peter speaks of Moses as a great prophet and then talks of ' . . . the prophets from Samuel and those who came afterwards... ' In Acts 13: 20 Paul gives Samuel prominence as a prophet (cf. Hebrews 11: 32) . All of this tells us of a stream of prophets. In the New Testament we have first John the Baptist and then Jesus as major prophets. Following Pentecost certain prophets are nominated (Agabus, Judas and Silas, cf. Acts 13:1) and finally John the writer of the Revelation is without doubt a significant prophet.

2. The Course of the Prophets

Hebrews 1:1 places the prophets well back in time, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets'. 'Our fathers were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and doubtless such as Joseph, Moses and others.

(i) The first course of prophets: antediluvian prophets

Abel is first, then Enoch (Genesis 5:24, Jude 14-15) . Noah (II Peter 2:5) seems to have been a warner-prophet.

(ii) The second course: the patriarchs

Who spoke to the fathers? Abraham was a prophet (Genesis 20:7) and we suppose Isaac in his prophetic blessing (Genesis 27:27-29, 39-40) and Jacob in his prophecies in Genesis 49 (especially verses 9 and 10) . Joseph was prophetic (Genesis 50:24) .

(iii) The third course: the exodus prophets

Moses is clearly a prophet (Numbers 12:6, Deuteronomy 18: 15f). The seventy elders prophesied (Numbers 11:25) and it may be Joshua, who received the Spirit and was later leader, was also a prophet. (At the time Baalam showed himself as a prophet - Numbers chs. 22-24 - but has always been looked upon as evil.)

(iv) The fourth course: Samuel and the following prophets

This fourth course really contains all the prophets from Samuel to Malachi, and even John the Baptist. Samuel - as we have seen - was an outstanding prophet.

In the time of the Judges ‘ . . . the word of the Lord was rare; there was no frequent vision’ (cf. Judges 6: 8) . We could, of course, divide them more finely , but there is no great point in doing so. We simply note that from Samuel there always seemed to be prophets. They have sometimes been called the non-writing and the writing prophets: All who prophesied and whose prophecies are not written (e.g. Elijah, Elisha, Nathan) fit into the first classification.

(v) The fifth course: John the Baptist, Jesus and the post-Pentecost prophets

This course is what concerns us mainly, in our course, but full understanding of it will not come without understanding prophetic ministry in general. It is important that we understand what prophecy is about, and are certain that this prophetic ministry is in action at the present time and will be until the eschaton (end age).

3.The Call of the Prophets

The priesthood and monarchy were such that only those born of priests could be priests and technically only those born of kings could be called to reign. Prophets were called by God personally and irrespective of origin or rank. Samuel was the child of the Levitical line (I Chronicles 6: 33f) . Jeremiah was the son of a priest (Jeremiah 1:1) - as was John the Baptist - but for the most part prophets were called from anywhere. Even so, prophets were clearly called (see Jeremiah 1: 5), and the call was first elective then practical.

Isaiah 6 must be the heart of Isaiah’s call. 7 The prophet was called *in* before he went out. He came to-know God before he spoke for God and from God. He knew the truth. Prophetic truth is the closest thing to knowing the truth of God: the prophet must know His nature, creation and his fellow man. In Israel he must know the covenant, in the church the new covenant.

4.The Authority of the Prophet

The prophet not being vocationally appointed had to be authoritative. He had to say ‘Thus says the Lord’ or ‘As the Lord liveth’: His calling was authoritative to him but shown in and by the word of God and the Spirit-of God. Ecstatic prophets were accepted only by the

superstitious: the word of truth would ring clear, the Spirit would empower and authenticate. These two facts are seen (a) in Isaiah ~55: 10-11, Isaiah 6: 9-10, Jeremiah 23:23-32, 5: i4 (cf. Revelation 11:5) , Jeremiah 20:9, (b) Numbers 24:2, 11:29, I Samuel 10:6, 10, (the activity of the Spirit); I Kings 22:24, Joel 2:28-29; Hosea 9: 7, Nehemiah 9: 9-30 (the Spirit's inspiration); Micah 3:8, I Chronicles 12:18, II Chronicles 15:1, 20:14, 24:20, Ezekiel 11:5. In Deuteronomy 18:15-22 -the message is that what God utters through His servantprophet must be heard - under pain of death. No-one must presume to take a prophet's authority.

4. The Action of the Prophet

(i) *The received message.* In Numbers 12:6 (cf. Jer. 23:23ff.), God gives His message through dreams and visions. See this also at Pentecost (Acts 2: 17-18) . Moses is an exceptional prophet because he sees God face to face (Numbers 12:7, cf. Isaiah in Isaiah 6) . The message was not cogitated but delivered directly (cf. Exodu, 7:1-2) . In practice the Spirit came upon the prophets, and being the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15, cf. I John 2: 18-27) , spoke through the prophets. Peter says it was the Spirit of Christ (I Peter 1:1bf) arid that prophets were moved by the Spirit, not their own wills (II Peter 1:20-21)

(ii) *The modes of communication.* Generally the prophet simply spoke the word. Sometimes they enacted the word, sometimes used the devices of parables and allegories (e. g. Isaiah 5:1-17, II Samuel 12:1-7, Ezekiel 16 and 23). See the interesting story of the dying Elisha and King Joash (II Kings 13:14ff.). Isaiah walked naked and barefoot (ch., 20). Jeremiah smashed a potter's vessel (ch. 19), Ahijah tore his new coat into 12 pieces and gave ten of them to Jeroboam (I Kings 11: 29ff.) Ezekiel brought siege to a model city (4: 1-3) , refused to mourn for his dead wife (24:15ff.) , and Hosea went through the tragedy of marrying an unfaithful prostitute. The action of Elijah on Mt. Carmel was powerful as the word of God enacted.

STUDY THREE: THE SUBSTANCE AND MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

The Prophetic Message of the Old Testament

We can say the substance of all prophecy is God Himself. Revelation 19:10 says that Jesus is the substance of the message, i.e. who he is, what he has done, is doing and will do, that is all his action. Even so, God is the prime mover in all prophecy.

(i) *The prophetic message can be said to be salvation history.* From Genesis 3: 10 - the proto-evangel - the lines are set. History is a battle between the seed of. '... the serpent and seed of woman, God's human against Satan's power. Evil must be defeated.

(ii) *In another sense then, the prophetic message is linked with covenant,* and mainly the Abrahamic covenant. This is seen clearly in Luke 1:68-79, where the Abrahamic covenant and Christ's coming are linked. In another sense the covenant is linked with Israel, Israel being the servant of the covenant. The prophets do not oppose law, but only the misuse and abuse of it. That is why they are always prophetic in relation to Israel and her life. They prophesy against the hypocritical use of the sacrificial cultus, the failures of the nation in social justice, the

greediness of the rich, the oppression of the poor, the dreadful use of idolatry, the failure of the leaders to trust God in the face of the invading nations. In this sense, prophecy becomes quite local, and if prediction is used it is to compel the nation to repent and to come before God. Israel is not selected for itself, but for God's purposes.

(iii) Prophecy is linked with God's general promises for the world as in particular for Israel. It is here we come to the matter of Christ (I Peter 1:10-11). In God's salvation history plan the Abrahamic covenant is to fill out. The Kingdom of God is to come. The people of God are to be formed fully and manifested to the world. In order to do this God raises up a special person. Sometimes he seems to be all Israel, sometimes Israel's remnant, sometimes a person in himself, but a special person.

This person is to be many things, and all brought together make him unique in the history and action of man. He is to be:

- (a) the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15), covenant seed (Genesis 12: 7), thus Isaiah 7:14 = Matthew 1:22, -2~, Micah 5:2;
- (b) Messiah, son of God (Psalm 2:2, 6-7, Isaiah 9:6-7), set on Zion as king (Psalm 110, 89: 20), 'great David's greater son';
- (c) the righteous branch (Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15 which links with Isaiah 11:1-3) who is the wise king;
- (d) the son of man of Daniel 7:13ff., to whom is given the kingdoms of the world and who relates to the Davidic King over the Kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7)
- (e) the meek and humble, but conquering king of Zechariah 9:9;
- (f) the suffering servant as seen in Isaiah chs. 40-66, who takes on him the iniquity of all and justifies them by his knowledge. Doubtless he is linked to the anointed one of Isaiah 61 who heals the oppressed. This one is 'a light to lighten the nations and (to be) the glory of his people Israel';
- (g) Son of David is a wide theme with the prophets, linking with that of Messiah, the King, the 'shoot of Jesse' (Isaiah 11: 1-5) and the 'righteous branch' (II Samuel 7:12-14, Psalm 132:11, I Kings 8:25, II Chronicles 6:16)

It is what is linked with this composite person which matters. Without him there is no future for Israel or the nations. Through him comes all that we see in the New Testament. He brings salvation to Israel and the nations. He defeats the powers of darkness, crushing evil under his heel. He heals the sicknesses of men and nations, and sets the captives free. It is no wonder the prophets are deeply concerned with him, for they have the sense of God's plan for history. Thus Peter's words make sense in I Peter 1: 10-11: 'The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory'. Now they make sense to us through the Gospel (I Peter 1:12), 'It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have

now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look’.

(iv) The prophetic word in the New Testament. This word comes through John the Baptist, Anna, Simeon and Jesus himself. We will be dealing with this in our next two studies. The prophetic word, the word of witness (Acts 1: 8, cf. Revelation 19:10), the witness of the apostolic church and the prophecy of the Book of the Revelation -all these are dealt with in other studies, but we need to see the continuity of the message and substance of the prophets, for this does not end even though the Canon of Scripture is filled up and closed. The Spirit of God works on. The prophetic elements continue to be fulfilled. We live in the prophetic community and need to know our place and function in it.

STUDY FOUR JOHN THE BAPTIST, GREAT PROPHET

1. Introduction: John the Baptist and his Importance

Jesus said no greater man was born of woman than John. This is a high saying. We take the case of John as a paradigm of the true prophet. He was immensely important. Also he is not a person back in the O. T. He emerges clearly in the N. T. writing and thinking. What then was his importance? Why did Jesus so highly regard him?

2. The Birth and Training of the Prophet

Like Jeremiah, John was chosen before conception. The angel prophesied his conception (Luke 1: 14-17) . Only the ‘great prophet’ (Deut. 18) had been prophesied prior to his birth, although the return of Elijah had also been prophesied (Malachi 4: 5) , and this had to do with John. In Luke 1:67-79, Zechariah himself prays over John’s birth. Prior to this, John - in his mother’s womb - is filled with the Holy Spirit. This had never been explicitly said of anyone else.

The prophecy of Luke 1: 16-17 links John with Elijah in Malachi 4: 5-6 - ‘And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to burn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared’. John would have known what his life was about, as also from his father’s prophecy.

In Luke 1:80 we have a rich biographical note: ‘And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel’. It is evident he was trained in the wilderness, or was trained at home, then went into the wilderness for further (adult) training.

3. The Ministry of the Prophet

We know from the prophecies of the angel -and Zechariah the priest what John’s ministry was to be.

In the early chapters of the synoptic Gospels we see it in action: it is in Jordan country, near the river. John proclaims

- (i) the Kingdom of God;
- (ii) demands repentance with a view to the remission of sins;
- (iii) promises the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel in accordance with the prophetic promises.

John warns Israel - or its hypocritical leaders of imminent judgement, and the destruction of its present system. The axe is laid at the tree, God will sift the chaff from the grain and burn up the chaff in fire unquenchable. It is no use fleeing from destruction, for none will escape. Better repent and do works that befit repentance.

John's great ministry is to be 'a burning and a shining light' and to bear witness to him who is to come - Messiah, the Spirit-Baptiser, the one who takes away the sin of the world. John 1:6-7 says, 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him'. This fits John 5:32ff: which also speaks of the witness to Christ by John

John's baptism was important. His followers were preparing for the coming of the Kingdom and its Messiah. Baptism was ineffectual without repentance. The Jewish leaders were incensed. John's message was virtually demanding all Israel to repent -as though it were not the true people of God, or, anyway, was in apostasy! Even so they could not shake John. He denied he was the Messiah, Elijah or 'that prophet'. He made claim to be the messenger of Isaiah 40:3-5 (cf. John 1:23, Luke 3:4-6, Mark 1: 2-3, Matt. 3: 3) . At the same time he was linked with Malachi 3:1 (Matthew 11:10, Luke 7:27) .

Not only did he witness to Christ, but he baptised him, albeit reluctantly, and as one who was a servant to him (Matthew 3: J.3-15) . He fulfilled the passage of Malachi 4: 5, for he 'prepared a people for the Lord' and turned the hearts of the children to the fathers and the hearts of the fathers to the children , which must have been a great need in Israel of those days.

In John 3:22-23 we read of John continuing his ministry, of baptism and witnessing to Messiah. In John 4:35-38 Jesus speaks of the great harvest in front of him. Doubtless he refers this ripe harvest to John's ministry.

John was also careful to scrutinise Jesus' ministry. Doubtless he was at one point disappointed, and sent to Jesus as one who doubted he was the Messiah. In Luke 7: 14i~ 23 Jesus relieves John's mind. John may have had an image which Jesus seemed not to fulfil, but the Messianic signs which Jesus gave (cf. Isaiah 35:5-7, 61:1-2) are enacted at that time by Jesus so that the news may be taken back to John to convince him that he (Jesus) is indeed 'the one who is [was] to come'. This one could be 'the prophet' of Deuteronomy 18 or of Malachi 3: 1, 4:5, or the Messianic figure of Habakkuk 2: 3, Daniel 7:13, Hebrews 10: 37 (Isaiah 26:20 LXX). John, it seems, was convinced, and so prepared for his martyrdom .

Part of John's ministry lies in his death, which caused Jesus' saying about the blood of the prophets always being shed (Luke 11: 50-51, Matthew 23: 35) . In Mark 6:17-29 John's martyrdom is described. John was imprisoned because of his statement to Herod that his marriage to his (Herod's brother's) wife was unlawful. He died for the proclamation of

righteousness, but so strong was Herod's opinion of John that he thought Jesus was John risen from the dead.

4. The Prophet Life and Stance of John

John was a truly remarkable figure. It is difficult to exhaust the material given us. We keep in mind that prophecy is the direct communication of truth from God (via the prophet) to man. In doing this, John was totally uncompromising. He gathered disciples but they were earnest, fasting and praying (Luke 5:33). It is true they resented the baptising that Jesus' disciples carried out (John 3:22-30, cf 4: 1), but John knew his ministry to be the forerunner to Christ's. His joy in (and at) Jesus' coming was intense. He called Jesus 'the bridegroom' and himself 'the bridegroom's friend'

John's dynamic ministry spread long beyond his death. He remained a subject of controversy and Jesus strongly commended him (Luke 7:24-35). He asked whether John's baptism was of God or man, and silenced his questioners, since the answer would be significant whichever way it was answered.

It is Christ's assessment of John and his ministry which is important. He said of him, '... a prophet and more than a prophet' (Matthew 11:9), '... among those born of woman there has risen no greater than John the Baptist' (Matthew 11:11), and, 'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of heaven is preached' (Luke 16:16); 'For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John...' (Matthew 11: 13). This emphasises the importance of John's ministry:

- (i) John was greatest of all, prophets because (a) his coming was prophesied, (b) he was the last prophet to prophesy Messiah's coming, (c) the Kingdom was coming with his prophecy.
- (ii) John's prophesying completed the prophesying of the law and all the prophets.

5. The Least in the Kingdom Greater than John

In regard to personal stature and significant ministry John may well tower over many others. His critical ministry is unsurpassable, and his personal integrity of a high order. However, it was of the Kingdom and Messiah that he prophesied, announcing their imminence. To be in the Kingdom, and not simply prophesying about it, is the fulfilment of that prophecy. One is great because one is in the Kingdom. The prophetic truth has reached its goal. God has spoken: the fulfilment has come.

STUDY FIVE: THE GREAT AND TRUE PROPHET

Introduction: Jesus is the True Everything

In the seven 'I am' sayings, Jesus is the true light bread, vine, shepherd, etc. In one sense Jesus is the archetypal, light, bread, vine (etc.), and they are ectypes. When it comes to the matter of prophet-being and vocation, Jesus must be the archetypal prophet, if indeed he is a prophet. That he should be called a prophet is strongly debated by many scholars who feel

that the vocation of a prophet is inferior to Messianic being and is therefore not contained within it. This is one way of arguing. It may well be, even so, that the True Prophet equals Messiah. That we must see.

2. The Special Prophet who was to Come

Moses speaks of the special prophet in Deuteronomy 18: 15-22. We have -already seen that the prophet is the living mouthpiece of God, voicing his word which is given directly from God, either (as in the case of Moses from an interview, face to face.)³ by dream and vision, or through face to face experience. The prophet communicates the truth which needs to be heard and known. The choice of response lies with the hearer who doubtless be accountable for his acceptance or non-acceptance of the truth.

In the case of this special prophet, non-acceptance of his word will be reprehensible, even to pain of death. A warning is also given against presumptuous prophets, the, test of whose prophecy is that it is false if not fulfilled. Was Christ then ‘that prophet’?

To answer this we must look at John 1:21-22, Acts 3:22 passim, and Acts 7:37 passim. Scholars come up with two ideas: either that the Jews expected ‘the prophet’ and the references in Acts are claiming Jesus was that prophet, or that the two Acts references are simply authenticating and describing the nature of Moses. It may well be that both ideas are present. Certainly Jesus must be ‘the prophet’ (John 1:21) , or Deuteronomy 18; 15f. lies unfulfilled. Certain scholars see John’s Gospel as indicating ‘the new Moses’ and some see Luke 9:51 - 18a4 (Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem) as on parallel lines with Deuteronomy. Hence Luke 24:19, ‘a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’.

If John was ‘a prophet, yes and more than a prophet’, then it could be said that Jesus was ‘a prophet, yes and more than more than a prophet’, i.e. the true prophet.

3. Was Jesus a Prophet?

There can be no question that people thought Jesus to be a prophet. Matthew 16: 16 shows they thought he was either Jeremiah, Elijah or John the Baptist. This tells us much about him. In John 4:19 the woman at the well said, ‘Sir, I perceive that you, are a prophet’. The blind man (healed) said, ‘He is a prophet...’ (John 9:17) . Simon, watching Jesus and the woman anointing him, said to himself, ‘If he were a prophet...’, thus confirming the general notion that he was. The Herodians were sure he was a prophet of some kind (Mark 6:14-16) , and at this trial the soldiers hit him and said ‘Prophecy!’ After the feeding of the 5, 000 they said, ‘This indeed is a great prophet who has come into the world!’ (John 6:14, cf. Mark 8: 28) . In Luke 7:16, following the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, they said, ‘A great prophet has risen amongst us’. ‘Great’ places him in a special category, perhaps that of ‘the prophet’. Incidentally the command of the Father at the transfiguration, ‘Hear him’, may well line up with Deuteronomy 18; 19. This would lend weight to Acts 3:22, 7:37.

In Luke 24:19 the two disciples speak of Jesus, ‘...a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’. More than this could not be said. Jesus says of himself, ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own country’ (Mark 6: 4f.) , and ‘It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem (Luke 13:33) . In Matthew 23:31 (passim) he saw himself among the rejected prophets.

We can conclude that Jesus saw himself as prophetic even if not ‘the prophet’. It may be that when John heard ‘a great prophet has risen amongst us’, that he was disappointed (Luke 7:16ff.). He may have expected ‘more than a prophet’, i.e. Messiah. Yet the Messianic acts Jesus did for their comfort are all prophetic, for every time he did miracles they saw them as signs of the prophet. Indeed when they asked for signs they demanded - in effect - that he should authenticate his prophetic claims.

4. The Marks of a Prophet - The Prophet

- (i) The true prophet was a man of the Spirit (see Study 2). Jesus was anointed with the Spirit, and ministered only by the Spirit - in all things.
- (ii) Jesus’ miracles (better understood as signs) were prophetic. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha had done miracles. Moses’ prophetic leadership lay in the same area.
- (iii) Jesus understood what was in men’s hearts (cf. **John 1:48, Luke 7:39**, John 4:16-19).
- (iv) His proclamation was prophetic both ‘in deed and word’. Cf. Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:18, Matthew 12:28, etc.
- (v) He prophesied. He not only teaches about the Kingdom but prophesies its manner of coming, fulfilment, and the things of the eschaton, even to using apocalyptic language.

We could add that he was martyred, but then his death was more than martyrdom.

In fact he not only prophesied it, but made use of the prophetic ‘must’ - (Greek *dei*), teaching its indispensability.

Being the true prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15 meant that all *things he had said would surely come to pass*. We conclude that in no way can we say he was not a prophet and also *the* prophet

5. Messiah-Prophet The Continuing Ministry

Our next study will deal with the impact of the prophetic ministry throughout history, but we ought to examine whether there is any conflict between him being both the Prophet, and the Messiah. It is interesting that the points immediately above are at one and the same time marks both of Messiah and of the true prophet.

In other words, what is Messianic is prophetic, and what is prophetic (in the case of Jesus) Messianic. If John thought prophetic ministry to be subsidiary to Messianic ministry then he seemed satisfied with the deeds which could be applied to both. It is best then for us to think that the True Prophet and Messiah are mutually inclusive and simultaneously the one. Jesus’ prophethood went beyond simple prediction and simple exhortation. Like Moses who was true priest to his people, true leader, and true prophet, so was Jesus - but then on the highest scale of all, the Messianic scale. He fulfilled what had been prophesied. It was ‘Christ in all the Scriptures’, and ‘Christ – the Spirit of Christ - in all the prophecies’.

STUDY SIX: PROPHECY TODAY - TS SUBJECT, SUBSTANCE AND ACTION

1. Introduction No Cessation to Prophecy and Prophetic Ministry

Because the canon of Scripture has been closed, and because the Book of the Revelation is complete in itself - i.e. we may neither take from, or add to it – does not mean that the prophetic word, deeds and action has necessarily ceased. Commonsense tells us there is much that has been prophesied with is now being fulfilled, and more fulfilment lies ahead of us. The prophetic deposit we have in the inscripturated word (of God) is not a static deposit but a most dynamic one. It is in fact the truth by which we live, but the truth as it has come to us through the prophets (and apostles), and is the truth which itself effects the will of God in his creation, and especially amongst his people.

Christ the True Prophet, Priest, and King

Not only do the Scriptures set forth Christ as prophet, priest and king, but it is upon this truth that traditional theology has worked since Pentecost. His priesthood especially as it is set out in Hebrews - gives substance to the *cultus* of the church and the salvation, sanctification and glorification of the believing people. His Kingship is very much to the fore as he is King of the Kingdom, and indeed 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. Even so, we might be excused for thinking his prophetic ministry was completed in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Not so. A simple way of seeing the correct and dynamic principle of his reigning life is to see that the gift of his fulness is given to the church (Eph. 1: 22, 23) . This fullness is his life (Romans 6: 23, I John 5:12). It comes to the church as gifts (Ephesians 4: 7-11). The church and its members are 'filled full in him' (Colossians 1: 19, 2:9).

His fulness is prophetic, priestly and kingly (royal). By means of this fulness, the Son is working out victory over all evil and taking the kingdom of this world, making it 'the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ' (I Corinthians 15:24-28, Revelation 11: 15, 12:10, etc.). The church is therefore the prophetic, priestly and royal community. It is Christ in action, in all *his* action.

3. Christ's Present Prophetic Ministry

(i) *The church has no action but Christ's action.* That its action is prophetic is in no doubt. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony (witness) of Jesus. This may be understood variously as the church's witness to Jesus, the witness to God (and the truth) by Jesus in what he has done, and is now doing in and through his church, i.e. his own action in which the church is involved. To say that Jesus is 'the true witness', 'the faithful witness', the true one', 'Faithful and True' (Revelation 3:14, 1: 5, 3: 7, 19:11) , is to say he is (and was) 'the Truth' (John 14:6) , the one 'who has told you the truth' (John 8:40) , and the one who has 'come to bear witness to the truth' (John 18:37) . He bore witness 'to the Father' who is 'the only true God', and he bears witness. How? By what he is and does. This is 'the witness of Jesus'. It never ceases to be by word and act. To bear witness to Jesus is to be, part of that action. As the Son witnesses to the Father, the sons witness to the Son, and so to the Father. That is why Jesus said, 'You shall receive power, the Spirit coming upon you, and you shall bear witness to me' (Acts 1: 8) .

We see through the Acts, epistles, and the Book of the Revelation that ‘witness’ (i.e. ‘testimony’) bulks largely in the life of the early church. This is the true prophetic ministry, but it is the sharing in and working out of Christ’s prophetic ministry. Acts 2:17-18 shows the necessity of the anointing of the Spirit for the work to be prophetic. The church is prophetic. *The prophetic power and action issues from the fulness of Christ.* It is Christ in action in and through his people.

(ii) *We see a paradigm of prophetic power in the two witnesses of Revelation 11.* Not only do they do prophetic signs, but they have great power to **exhort**, so much so that the world finds their words a **torment**. They face opposition by the fire (prophetic utterance) which comes out of their mouths. An example of this can be seen in’ Paul (cf. Romans 15:17-20). Doubtless this ministry is apostolic as also prophetic, but the two are the one (Ephesians 2: 20, 3: 5) . The constant statement in the Revelation, ‘the word [or commandments] of God and the testimony of Jesus’, reveals the prophetic action of the church.

(iii) *Christ’s prophetic action is operative, springing from the power of the Cross.* Revelation 5: 1ff. shows that the only one who can loose the seals and open the book is -the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He is the Lamb, slain at the Cross. He now has both power and authority to direct all history, including the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. These are virtually *the prophetic action of history*. All things are under his control. The O.T. prophecy arose from ‘the Spirit of Christ’ who moved the prophets They knew he was the Spirit of Christ (I Peter 1:10,11) . It is the same Spirit of Christ who moves with him in history to fulfil the plan of God. The vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation shows his great and powerful humanity. Chapters 5-22 show his work and his accomplishments as prophet, priest and king.

4. Prophetic Life Today

We saw in Acts 2:17-18 that the church has prophetic endowment and continuity of its action. In I Corinthians 14:1ff. Paul emphasises the prophetic gift above others: The life and action of witness - witness to **the truth** - involves living the truth (‘truthing it in love’) and proclaiming the truth. This prophetic ministry - as ever - draws out intense opposition and persecution. However, it effects God’s plan for history, and we are involved in it without relief. Christ is in us and we are in Christ, and so we are part of the process outlined in I Corinthians 15:24-28 and enlarged in Revelation chs. 5-22. This is what prophecy is all about. This is what we are all about.

© Geoffrey Bingham. October 1984