

Prophets Come Down. An Exposition of Acts 11:27-30 **Desert Light Christian Church, July 7, 2013**

In today's non churched society, prophets and prophecy means predicting the future, often doomsday. Much was made of Mayan prophecies in 2012, In a world crisis, many look to the French occultist Nostradamus with his famous quatrains. In the 20th century, Edgar Cayce, known as the sleeping prophet had visions of the end of the world and spoke of Atlantis in a trance. The evil false prophet of Revelation will appear. Then there's the prophet who told the king his favorite mistress would soon die. When she did, the king was mad. He called the prophet into the throne room and asked, "Prophet, when will you die?" Sensing he was in deep trouble, the prophet said, "Your majesty, I am not sure of the date, but I can say that your death will come 1 day after my own." So three prophets walk into a bar, and the bartender says, "What'll you have?" One prophet looks at the others and says, "I knew he was going to ask that."

Others see prophets as those who receive revelation to found new religions and sects. Joseph Smith started Mormonism, Ellen White with 7th Day Adventists, and Mohammed with Islam set down their doctrines outside of Biblical teaching. The NT church, though a non-profit to the IRS, is very prophetic. As Christians we can understand the role of prophets in the early church and today, how to respond to and test prophets and prophecy.

Acts 11:26-30 is about how prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch to prepare them for a coming famine, and for the church to make a decision to invest money for the future that saved lives from starvation. ²⁷ *Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.* ²⁸ *And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).* ²⁹ *So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.* ³⁰ *And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*

This passage raises questions about prophets and prophecy. For those who believe in the scriptures, prophecy is, "The word of the Lord." It's scripture, it's an inspired word through spiritual gifts, and it's preaching the word of God. The church's attitude toward prophesying comes from 3 commands in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 "***Do not despise prophecies,*** ²¹ ***but test everything; hold fast what is good.***" So rather than despise, we're positive toward prophesying, though positive, test with utmost caution, whatever's comes good, we hold on to it.

1. Do not despise prophecies, God uses good prophecy for the larger church, the congregation, and the individual. When prophets predict, it's called foretelling-- Revelation is the greatest example of NT foretelling. When they speak God's word about the present situation, it's called *forthtelling*. Most of the New Testament letters are forthtelling prophecy. Some of my professors in Bible college were convinced that prophecy wasn't for today, the New Testament is enough prophecy till the Lord returns. They were partially correct. In the early church, the prophet and apostle who held the office and had the title had stronger impact than today because of their foundational role (Ephesians 2:20), where their words were unquestioned words of God, often becoming scripture. In Acts 11:26 when Agabus and the others came foretelling to Antioch from another town and congregation, their titles confirmed their prediction. They spoke clearly of what would happen and what the church should do. Today, though one may *be* a prophet, more important is proper and successful use of the gift to prophesy than the title. In the early church, Agabus and Philip's 4 daughters were the only ones named as prophets though

prophesying was happening everywhere among men and women (1 Corinthians 11:4-5) and the apostolic command was to desire to prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:39), as a gift to the whole church, a congregation, or individual.

2. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Jesus warned, "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*" (Matthew 7:15). When Agabus and the prophets came to Antioch, they spoke by the Spirit. The message raised lots of money but it was for God's purpose, not to make a person rich. We must test prophets today, to make sure their message is "by the Spirit" for God's purpose and not personal agenda, whether it be money, a need to feel important, or sometimes even a mix that is part from the Spirit and partly from the emotions or convictions of the one prophesying. **First**, we must make sure prophecies match up to the word of God (Isaiah 8:20). 2 Peter 1:20 says, ²⁰ "*knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*" **Second**, it must be about Jesus for, "*The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy*" (Revelation 19:10). **Third**, according to 1 Corinthians 14:3, we must see if they accomplish the prophetic goals of edifying, encouragement, and comfort. Tearing down, condemnation, or inducing fear in prophecy (terror is error) guarantee they aren't of God. **4th**, the life of the prophet must be consistent with his words, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits*" (Matthew 7:15), and **fifth**, if they are foretelling, it must come to pass. New Testament standards for testing, though not really different than Old (Deuteronomy 18:20-22), have a different outcome. The OT had a zero tolerance policy for prophetic error-- death was the sentence. New Testament practice throws out the bad to "hold fast to what is good." In church people's spiritual growth, sometimes there is error.

3. Do not despise prophecies, God uses good prophecy to prepare us for what's coming. Can you imagine the thankful heart of a believer in Jerusalem eating a piece of bread because the Antioch church acted upon a prophecy? Amos 3:7 says, "*For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.*" Luke the author of Acts confirmed the prophecy, declaring the famine was in Claudius' time (41-54 AD) of which there were 3 in Claudius' reign, but the one in Judea began in 44 AD according to the historians Josephus and Eusebius. God speaks by the Spirit, the church does according to its ability. We've had many prophecies regarding our missionary work. They were very helpful to confirm God's direction. When Desert Light was searching for a building in 2008, elder Dick Loidolt prophesied 2x that God would give us a building without charge.

As the NT church, we first accept the scriptures as prophecy that is without any error, true to act upon today, accurate in its predictions of the future and past history. But we also can welcome the gift of prophecy into the church testing it and holding to the good. As the prophets came down from Antioch, may we also be blessed by the words of God's prophetic voices.