



Bridges for Peace  
Your Israel Connection ®

- International Headquarters  
P.O. Box 1093  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Tel: (972) 2-624-5004  
intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com
- Australia  
P.O. Box 1785, Buderim  
Queensland 4556  
Tel: 07-5453-7988  
adminaust@bridgesforpeace.com.au
- Canada  
P.O. Box 21001, RPO Charleswood  
Winnipeg, MB R3R 3R2  
Tel: 204-489-3697, bfp@mts.net
- Japan  
Taihei Sakura Bldg. 5F  
4-13-2 Taihei, Sumida-Ku  
Tokyo 130 0012  
Tel: 03-5637-5333, bfp@bfpj.net
- New Zealand  
P.O. Box 10142  
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Tel: 09-434-6527  
bfpnz@paradise.net.nz
- South Africa  
P.O. Box 1848  
Durbanville 7551  
Tel: 021-975-1941  
info@bridgesforpeace.co.za
- United Kingdom  
11 Bethania Street, Maesteg  
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# BRIDGES FOR PEACE

## *Israel Teaching Letter*

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## *Hearing and Speaking* **the Words of God**



It seems as each day passes, there is increasing attention being given to the prophetic.

## IT IS DIFFICULT TO DENY

that we are living in a remarkable time in history, one during which God is fulfilling ancient prophecies at a staggering rate. Since the reestablishment of the state of Israel in 1948, we have seen many of God's promises to His people fulfilled, displaying His faithfulness but also legitimizing the concept of the prophetic for many in the Church who had previously doubted its viability in our modern world. Today, there is an emphasis, not just on the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, but on individual prophetic gifts as well; we have witnessed the advent of thousands, perhaps millions, of Web sites dedicated solely to the subject of prophecy.

As a matter of fact, just over the past few days, I have received literally dozens of prophecies in my e-mail: some for the world, some for individual nations, many for Israel, and even some for myself personally. Many have been filled with hope for peace and prosperity, while others predict doom and chaos. And if your inbox is like mine, this isn't unusual. It seems as each day passes, there is increasing attention being given to the prophetic and not just by Christians. Many Jewish teachers are also focusing on prophecy. Even in the secular world, we see the likes of Nostradamus (1503–1566) and others who claim to predict the future gaining in popularity.

I believe all of this interest carries a strong message for us, apart from the content of any individual prophecy. Scripture does not emphasize activity on the part of the prophets during times of peace and prosperity. It was just before or during times of crisis that their voices rang throughout Israel with the words of God Himself—times that are somewhat similar to the days in which we are living.

In addition to economic collapse, horrific natural disasters, moral decay, war and terror, we see growing apostasy in a sleeping Church and a world that calls good evil and evil good. Just as God moved in and through the nation of Israel throughout her history, so today, He is setting the stage for the redemption of all mankind. And just like Israel in her times of crisis, the Church and the world are in desperate need of divine guidance. God is on the move in our day, and when He moves, it is rarely comfortable for man. As humanity feels its very foundations being shaken, two things will assuredly happen: (1) Men will become desperate for direction and consolation, and (2) Satan will counterfeit and confuse.

*peace and prosperity*

*doom and chaos*

economic collapse  
horrific natural disasters  
moral decay  
war and terror



# Beware of False Prophets

As I speak with Christians around the world, they seem to fall into one of three camps with regard to the prophetic. Some are absolutely obsessed with prophecy, seeing some sort of foretelling in everything that happens. Others totally reject it, believing that there is no longer a prophetic voice to be heard in the Church. But most Christians fall somewhere in the middle. Many are confused, wondering if God is speaking today, and if so, through whom. They don't know who to believe. There are too many voices, and the question begs to be answered: Is this God or is it man? Many are apprehensive, remembering Yeshua's (Jesus's) own admonition in Matthew 7:15: "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*"

Certainly, that concern is wise and justified. Some of you may remember the prophetic fervor that surrounded the year 1988. Starting with a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988*, the Christian world was inundated with prophecies that 1988 would see the coming of the Messiah. We were even told that He would arrive somewhere between September 11–13, the dates of the Jewish holiday of *Rosh HaShanah* (Feast of Trumpets, the Jewish New Year) that year. Seven additional books were published on the topic, and four different people made international headlines, each claiming to be one of the two witnesses mentioned in the book of Revelation. When the year passed without incident, many in the Church were devastated, and the controversy was such that congregations even split as a result.

Today, if you Google "Obama and prophecy," you will get nearly two million hits prophesying that he is everything from the savior of the world to the anti-Christ himself. Similar searches regarding other world leaders, or even standard Christian phrases such as "signs of the times," "great revival," or "great falling away," will yield the same disparity of message. Based on the numbers, it is clear that people are searching for insight and solace during these troubled times, and it is no wonder that they are confused.

The purpose of this teaching letter is not to tell you who you should or shouldn't listen to or who the "real" prophets are. The goal is to examine our responsibilities as believers today and ask the questions that will help us discover the heart of God in this matter. In order to do that, I believe we need to look where it all began—the Hebrew Bible and a study of the ancient prophets. God's nature and His Word are unchanging, and the prophetic task that He assigned millennia ago is the same today.

## What Is a Prophet?

So what exactly is that task? Or better yet, just what is a prophet? Many people today think of a prophet as one who can foresee the future, the one who can tell us what is going to happen when. However, in the Hebraic paradigm in which the ancient prophets lived, it was much more than that. The Hebrew prophet was God's spokesperson, the one chosen to speak to the people on His behalf and convey His message, whatever it might be. The task then has always been to perceive the word of God, discern its contemporary relevance, and speak it forth in obedience.

It was never easy to be the one chosen to stand before the people and say, "Thus says the Lord to this generation..." The message often made the messenger very unpopular. The Scriptures make it clear, however, that the ancient prophets were men and women who lived with a constant awareness of the awesomeness of God, the power and majesty of the Creator of the universe, and the comparative nothingness of man. They knew what it meant to stand in the presence of the Great King, in holy reverence, and listen to His voice.

Much of today's Church has lost sight of the awesomeness of God, revering little and often fearing man rather than God. Frequently, our modern times of prayer and worship are filled with our own petitions and exclamations with very little silence in which God can be heard. The prophets, on the other hand, understood what Jeremiah meant when he spoke of standing in the counsel of the Lord to hear His word (Jer. 18:23).



Ballam, a prophet who denied a king's request (Num. 22-24)

Prophets knew what it meant to be in the presence of the Great King and listen to His voice.







# Moses: The First Prophet

According to Judaism, Moses was the first and greatest of all the prophets (Deut. 34:10). Jewish tradition teaches that he saw everything that would be seen by all of the other prophets and more. He saw the whole of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), including the Prophets and the Writings (the three sections that constitute the Hebrew Bible) that were yet to be written, and all subsequent prophecy was merely an expression of what Moses had already seen.

Exodus 7:1–12 tells us how the Lord used Moses to set the stage for all the prophets that would come after him: “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’” (vv. 1–2). *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* explains that the background for this statement is found in Exodus 4:10–16 where Moses argues with God that he is unable to speak clearly and therefore cannot go before Pharaoh to deliver God’s words. But God promised to appoint Aaron to be the speaker: “So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” (Exod. 4:16). Thus, it is undeniably clear that a “prophet” is one who speaks for another, or becomes his mouth.

The prophet would not be a fortune teller as were the seers found in Pharaoh’s court in Egypt; rather, he would be a mouthpiece. God would speak to Moses, who, in this unique situation, would convey the message to the people through his brother Aaron. But the message would be God’s and His alone. Moses certainly knew about standing in the presence of God more than most that would come after him, and through him, God defined the role of the prophet. Although that role evolved somewhat throughout the history of Israel, it never changed in essence.

## Characteristics of a Prophet

Moses set the standard, and all of the succeeding prophets shared characteristics that were critical to their ability to follow in his footsteps. In his book *Prophecy Past and Present*, author Clifford Hill delineates eight specific attributes of the prophet. An examination of each will help us understand what kind of men the prophets had to have been to be chosen to speak for God.

1. **They were sent**, and they knew it. They were messengers, not orators reciting God’s words and making up their own speeches. And each could point to a specific personal encounter whereby they were called into the ministry of the prophet. For Moses, it was the burning bush (Exod. 3); Isaiah stood in the presence of the Lord and faced his own uncleanness (6:1–8); Jeremiah traced his call to his birth (1:5). They knew that they were in God’s service and not man’s, and therefore, they were responsible to God and God alone for the message that they brought.

2. **They were under God’s authority.** Unlike the priests who oversaw religious ritual or the scribes who copied and interpreted the law, the prophets alone had the authority to cry, “Thus saith the Lord.” God gave them that authority because they were under authority. In Jeremiah 26:9, Jeremiah is asked why he is bringing a message of destruction. His response in verse 12 is simple but profound: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house...” In 2 Chronicles 18:12–13, we are told of Micaiah, who was being taken to speak to the king and, on the way, was cautioned to make sure he brought a “good” message. His response was, “Whatever my God says...” The prophets could not change the message for the convenience or comfort of men, no matter how powerful those men might be. For them, there was no authority greater than God’s.



They were **sent**.

They were  
**under God's authority.**

They were men of  
**absolute obedience.**

They were  
**totally committed.**

They had to be people of  
**tremendous faith.**

They were people of  
**great compassion.**

They were men of **prayer.**

They were **patriots.**



3. *They were men of absolute obedience.* Once they had received a message from the Lord, there was no room for discussion. The consequences for anything other than 100% obedience in delivering it were profound. 1 Kings 13 relates the story of an unnamed prophet who fearlessly confronts the king, proclaiming the word of the Lord and faithfully following God's instructions even down to the refusal of food or drink afterward. Yet on his way home, he strays from his instructions in one seemingly minor detail and the result is disaster and death.
4. *They were totally committed* and would not be silenced. Regardless of the opposition they faced—the threats, physical violence, intimidation, or even imprisonment—they were compelled to fulfill their calling. “The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8b).
5. *They had to be people of tremendous faith* to perform the tasks God gave them to do, and their faith was forged in the furnace of experience. They could trust the Lord because He had proved Himself faithful in every situation. They staked their lives on their understanding of His unchanging character. They had entered into the very throne room of God; they had heard His voice, and their faith could not be shaken.
6. *They were people of great compassion.* They spoke with tenderness of God's love for the nation of Israel and recognized that even in the harshest of His prophetic messages, it was because of His love that He spoke so urgently when Israel was headed for disaster. The prophets were mirrors of a God who always longed to save His people and not condemn them.
7. *They were men of prayer,* identifying with the sins of the people and pleading with God on their behalf. They wept over the sins of the nation, sometimes arguing with God in defense of the Israelites. They often reminded Him of His promises and pled with Him to deliver the

Prophets, like Elijah —  
who interceded for rain —  
were men of prayer.

Prophets were people of  
great compassion — mirrors of  
a God who longs to save and  
not condemn.







people, not because of their own merit, but for the sake of His name among the nations. They were the Lord's intercessors for His chosen nation.

8. *They were patriots*, defined in the dictionary as "a person who loves, supports, defends his country and its interests with devotion." Their patriotic actions, however, were inspired by the fact that God had inextricably linked Himself to the nation of Israel. Their relationship with God meant they had to love, support, and be devoted to His land as well. They recognized that God's reputation was at the heart of every controversy that He had with His people. His relationship with them was the movie screen on which He would reveal Himself to the entire world, and they knew their prophecies *would* see fulfillment. The people *would* be dispersed and then regathered. The nation of Israel *would* be reestablished. They staked their lives on it because they were patriots.

They were not leaders, in that they had no responsibility for Temple worship; they had no priestly or pastoral functions, no political power, and no party of followers. They were ordinary men and women, called to serve the Most High God by declaring what He was saying to the people. They were often lonely and on the run, sometimes afraid in the face of great danger, but they had no interest in the approval of men. They desired only to be God's voice to the world.

## A Contrast Develops

With the advent of Christianity, a contrast developed between two different types of prophecy: one being the ministry of the prophet as we see in the Old Testament, and the gift of prophecy that Paul said was available to all believers. However, the purpose of prophecy did not change. In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets in order to give guidance and direction to the nation of Israel. Particularly in times of crisis, they called the nation back to the center of His will so that Israel could fulfill her call as a light to the nations.

Similarly, the New Testament makes it clear that prophecy was the means through which God gave guidance and direction to the early believers in Yeshua (Jesus) as well, sometimes using a prophetic word to warn the young Church of impending danger or difficulty. Paul was warned prophetically more than once, receiving divine guidance as to what specific actions he should take to save his own life. As such, prophecy was an integral part of the everyday life of the early Church. As the Apostles spoke forth the Word of God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, they functioned in the role of the prophet.

But in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul also instructs the believers in Corinth to earnestly seek after the individual *gift* of prophecy and then spends a goodly amount of time in several of his epistles teaching the young church how to rightly use that gift. Clearly, the pattern God had set millennia before of using those in intimate relationship with Him as His spokespeople would continue.

As 21st-century Christians, we live as a part of a Church and in a world that are both desperate for true divine revelation. Unfortunately, much of what is being recognized as prophecy today may not be the expression of God's heart at all, but rather the ideas of men. A constant diet of time lines and conspiracy theories has left the Church undernourished and ill prepared for the days ahead. Many yearn to have their "ears tickled," when what is required is a true and powerful declaration of the heart of God.

Paul instructed the believers in Corinth how to use the gift of prophecy.

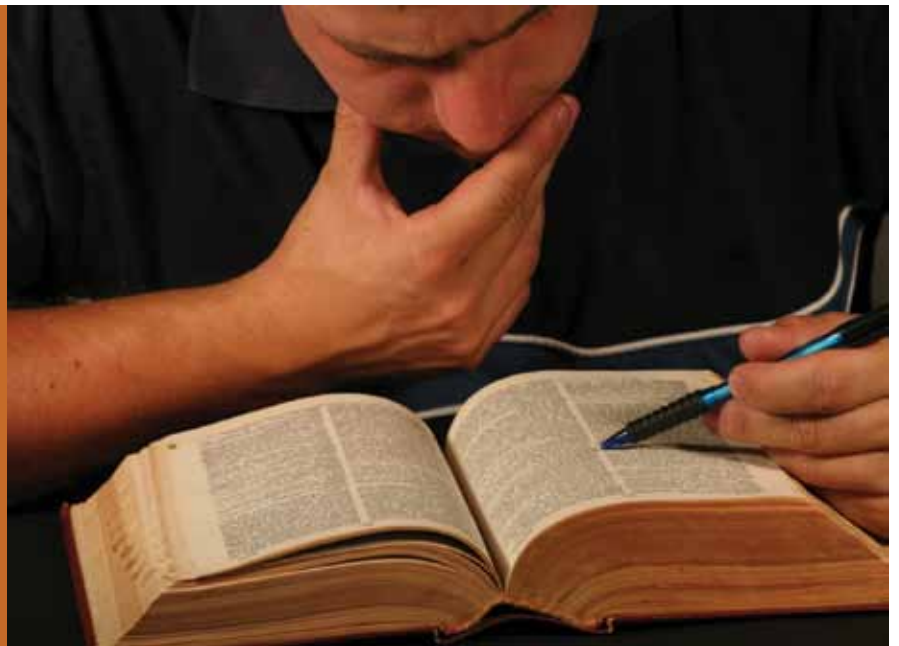




## And about That Inbox...

God has never stopped speaking to His children. His voice can be heard in the majesty of creation, in the laughter of a child, in the whisper of a loved one, the roar of thunder, and a still small voice. And just as He did millennia ago, He continues to speak to us through other believers. Clifford Hill gives the following list of tests to determine whether a message is from God or man.

1. Weigh each word against the Word of God. *Always* compare its content, its spirit and heart, to the revelation we already have. Any word of prophecy we might receive must line up with Scripture, or it is, indeed, a false prophecy.
2. Pray diligently that the Lord will give a witness of the Spirit, bearing testimony to the truth or falsity of a word.
3. Stand in the counsel of the Lord to hear His voice. Like Jeremiah, be willing to wait in silence, allowing Him to bring understanding.
4. Any legitimate word from the Lord will glorify Him. It will never be boastful, drawing attention to the messenger.
5. Remember, God's desire is always to save and not condemn. Our look at the Hebrew prophets shows us that God's words are conditional, allowing for repentance and returning to Him.
6. In ancient Israel, a prophet was judged by the fulfillment of the word he brought. If his prophecy was not fulfilled in the time frame he gave, it was clearly not from God, and he was a false prophet. That same criteria applies today.
7. Finally, the prophets of old were men of unquestionable integrity. As a matter of fact, the moral character of the prophet was a major test applied by the Israelites and the early Church as well. We should do the same.



# Our Responsibility Today

I believe part of the message the Lord would have us receive from all the attention being given to the prophetic is simple. He would have us look to the prophets of old as our true examples, standing in His counsel until we have heard His voice, listening rather than constantly petitioning, knowing Him so intimately that we will hear no other voice than His.

God would have us stand  
in His counsel, listening  
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than His.

**These are indeed amazing times, and in them, God is requiring an equally remarkable group of followers to be His expression to the world. He is looking for...**

- a listening people;
- an obedient people that will give 100%, 100% of the time;
- a courageous and faithful people who will not falter in their trust regardless of the circumstances that they encounter;
- a people filled with the fear of the Lord, recapturing the awesomeness of God and never fearing man;
- a people committed to Him at all costs, willing even to lay down their lives as were the prophets of old;
- a people under His authority, recognizing that they will answer to Him and Him alone for every word spoken in His name.

And so, our task is simple but not easy. We must love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies. The Christian Scriptures instruct us to discern the signs of the times and test every prophecy against the Bible (1 John 4:1). We must encourage and build up the body of believers and intercede for the saints and for the nations. We must recognize God's heart of love for His nation and people Israel. We must become patriots of the same order as the prophets: loving, supporting, interceding for, advocating for, and standing with those that God has chosen as the apple of His eye. As this becomes the reality in which we live, we will become the revelation of the nature and purpose of God to this generation, as we radiate His glory to the nations in this crucial period in history.

By Rev. Cheryl Hauer  
International Development Director

For more on this topic, see our Teaching Letter, "Signs of the Times" on our Web site under Publications/Teaching Letters.

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

**M**any pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

