

6. The Prophetic Writings (4Q 2026 Gift of Prophecy)

Biblical material: Exod. 17:14; Isa. 13:1; Jer. 36:17, 18; Rom. 16:22; Luke 1:1-4; Jude 14, 15; 2 Cor. 4:7; Romans 15:4.

Quotes

- In the Bible itself, the two authors, human and divine, do not simply stand side by side. Rather, each points to the other and affirms the presence and operation of the other...God Himself points out the importance of the human authors...God Himself requires us to interpret the words of Scripture against the background of what we know about the human author. We cannot simply ignore the human author, when we concentrate on what God is saying... (The human author) is not just any human author. He is the one through whom God speaks. His own intentions are that we should reckon with this. It is not a denial of human authorship, but an affirmation of it, when we pay attention to God speaking...Hence there is a unity of meaning and a unity of application. *Vern Poythress*
- The prophetic word was never meant to be a trophy. It was meant to be a weapon. *Jacob Peterson*
- For if the mystery concealed of old is made manifest to the Apostles through the prophetic writings, and if the prophets, being wise men, understood what proceeded from their own mouths, then the prophets knew what was made manifest to the Apostles. *Origen*
- If someone considers the prophetic writings with all the diligence and reverence they are worth, while he reads and examines with great care, it is certain that in that very act he will be struck in his mind and senses by some more divine breath and will recognize that the books he reads have not been produced in a human way, but are words of God. *Origen*
- The doctrine of Scripture teaches us about the authority of God's Word. Scripture must be the final rule of faith and practice for our lives. Not our feelings or emotions. Not signs or prophetic words or hunches. *Joshua Harris*

Questions

Why are prophetic *writings* especially important? How do we relate to the written word when the person is no longer present to explain? What are the implications for understanding prophecy as we realize that God's message is modulated through human agents? How effective would prophecy be if it was not written down? How do we relate to past prophecies?

Bible summary

God orders Moses to write down what he has said so it can be remembered in Exodus 17:14. Isaiah 13:1 states that Isaiah "saw" a prophecy. Baruch confirms that he wrote down what Jeremiah dictated to him (Jeremiah 36:17, 18). Tertius wrote down Paul's letter (Romans 16:22). Luke decided to write down an accurate account regarding Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). Jude says Enoch spoke prophetically (Jude 14, 15). This is not of ourselves (2 Corinthians 4:7). "These Scriptures were written down in the past to help us understand, and to encourage us so that we could wait patiently in hope." Romans 15:4.

Comment

In Jeremiah 36 we have a recorded instance of "prophetic writing" in that Jeremiah dictated what God had told him to Baruch, who then wrote this down on a scroll. While some may see this as evidence of "divine dictation" it is still clear that the message came through a human "interface." 1 Thess. 2:13 counters the charge that the word of God is in fact the word of man, while 2 Timothy 3:16 is the usual verse used regarding the inspiration of the whole Bible. Titus 1:12 is an interesting verse since it is a quotation, and a not very flattering one at that. This helps us understand that

through the Bible is the word of God, it is still modulated through very human ideas and thoughts. 2 Peter makes it clear that prophecy does not come from the prophet, but from God.

So we have plenty of examples of prophetic writings. In fact we would not know what any of the Biblical prophets had said if their words had not been written down. Consequently the Bible is the written record of prophets and events, the way in which God has dealt with human beings. So this leads into a discussion of how we relate to the Bible being the Word of God.

It's essential to take the *whole* Bible and seek to understand it. The question therefore arises as to the responsibility of God, and what relationship he has to the actions of human beings. However some cautions are important to remember. Just because an event is recorded in the Bible does not mean that this is an example to follow, for instance. Nor is every word spoken, even by God's supposed followers, to be understood as the will and intention of God. In many cases there is no commentary and the reader is left to understand what is right and wrong, and what is to be learned.

Much of the Bible is story, and frequently told without comment. So often there are highly involved situations, yet we are not told who is right and who is wrong and what the right path to follow really is. The record provides the evidence of the way that God deals with humanity in all its complexity. And we have to determine what God is saying through all this.

So what about all the violence and death, the evil and wickedness that the Bible describes? It's a bit like a medical textbook that has plenty of graphic illustrations that are enough to upset even the strongest stomachs. Why? Because in order to treat disease, it has to be described and identified. Without knowing the problem it's hard to know the cure. And that's why even the "bad bits" of the Bible are important—because you see the sickness of sin in the light of God's cure. Recognizing your own deficiencies in Bible characters, you begin to see how God operates, and how he can help you too. For God is the doctor who can heal your disease of sin and its fatal consequences.

If the Bible is simply there to state God's nature and his salvation, then the Bible could be very brief. One could write a description of God ("God is love, God is righteous, God is the source of life" etc.) that would not need all the pages of the Bible's sixty-six books.

Similarly a list of commands to be followed would be much shorter and simpler. If the purpose of the Bible is simply to instruct and enforce behavior, then a sheet of rules and requirements would be sufficient. If the Bible was intended to be code book or recipe sheet, you wouldn't need all the stories either. The Bible is not intended as a set of magical instructions for guaranteed goodness, nor is it attempting to reveal some kind of secret knowledge that will provide illumination to some privileged elite.

So when the Bible is called the "word of God," it needs to be seen in this context—that God is simply presenting *all* the evidence, and invites us to make our decision as to what it means and what lessons are to be learned.

Ellen White Comments

The word and will of God are expressed in the Scriptures by inspired penmen... Every chapter and every verse is a communication of God to man. In studying the word, the soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be impressed by the divine utterances. Skepticism can have no power over a soul that with humility searches the Scriptures. {4T 449}

We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the word of God ourselves. If we allow others to do our thinking, we shall have crippled energies and contracted abilities. The noble powers of the mind may be so dwarfed by lack of exercise on themes worthy of their concentration as to lose their ability to grasp the deep meaning of the word of God. The mind will enlarge if it is employed in tracing out the subjects of the Bible, comparing scripture with scripture, and spiritual things with spiritual...

We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. {CE 58-9} Prepared