

Hearing from Heaven

Prophecy in Action



12 Foundation Stones Class 4B

Class Section 1: Prophecy Pointers

* Why get prophecies?

Prophecy gives you guidance for specific questions.

Psalm 73:24a—You will guide me with Your counsel.

Psalm 143:10—Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.

You should let the principles in the written Word of God guide you as much as you can, but there are things that the written Word doesn't tell us about some situations that we need to know specifics about. The printed Word gives you the fundamentals, the basics, but often the Lord wants to give you specifics for your particular situation through speaking to you directly in prophecy.

* Prophecy: Not only for instruction, but also for encouragement

Another very important benefit we can receive through prophecy is encouragement. It is a very precious gift to receive the Lord's personal words for us.

Psalm 85:8a—I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints.

Psalm 119:50—This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your Word has given me life.

Psalm 27:14—Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!

Proverbs 16:20—He who heeds the Word wisely will find good.

* Keys for hearing from the Lord

We've established that prophecy is helpful. It's encouraging. It's a gift that we want to have and use. Now let's look at some keys for receiving prophecies:

* Earnest desire

Psalm 119:2—Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

Jeremiah 29:13—And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

If you're seeking with your whole heart and are asking Him, He'll answer!

* Concentration

As we discussed in our earlier classes on prayer, concentration is important. Try to focus on the Lord and clear your mind from other thoughts.

Look at the map

Taking time to hear from the Lord about your direction is like using a map in order to find the easiest, safest, and smoothest route to your destination. But you can't look at the map while you go speeding down the road. You've got to stop and study the map, just like you have to stop and get quiet and listen in order to have close communion with the Lord and get your directions from Him.



*** Have an open heart**

Ask the Lord to help you have an open mind and heart, to be ready to accept whatever He gives, even if it is not what you were expecting, or completely to your liking, or you don't understand it fully.

*** Carefully word your questions**

The answers you receive will depend on the questions you ask. Be sure it is clear in your mind what you are asking the Lord, so that when you get the answer, you'll know what He is referring to. Sometimes it helps to write out your question.

*** Keep a record**

Recording the questions and messages makes it possible for you to review and study them later. Often people who hear from God don't remember the message clearly afterward, especially if it was a long or detailed one. Or even if they do remember the gist of what the Lord said, they can't remember exactly how He expressed it. So sometimes only if you recorded it will you know what the answer was.

*** Don't analyze**

It's only natural to start thinking about what the Lord is saying once He starts—after all, that's why you asked Him to speak, so you could find out what He has to say. But if you start pondering on or analyzing the message before He's finished, that will make it harder for you to keep receiving more. Your thoughts can drown out the Lord's voice. If you miss even a part of what the Lord has to say to you, you may miss something important.

* Look it up

Often the Lord speaks to us by bringing to mind a verse or passage from the written Word. If you haven't experienced this already, you will be surprised to discover how alive Scripture can be when the Lord applies it to you personally. Have a Bible handy, so you can look up the verse or story the Lord gave for your situation, if it's one you're not very familiar with.

Class Section 2: Judging Prophecies

* How can you tell if a prophecy is truly inspired by God?

Over the centuries, many people have claimed to hear from God. In some cases, their lives bore good testimony through their deeds of love and righteousness. But in other cases, the fruit it bore in their lives or their subsequent actions makes you wonder, were they really being inspired by God, or were the ideas their own, or even worse, were they deceived by the Devil?

Perhaps you too are wondering how you can know whether a prophecy you receive is from God, whether you've received it directly through your own prayers or through another source.

Or perhaps you have prayed and it seems the Lord has given you His Words, but you do not understand how to apply what He has said or even what He means.

We'll look at these questions now.



* "The voice that tells me to do something good"

There's a story told of a young boy who accepted the Lord. The old elders of the church asked him, "How are you going to know the difference between the voice of God and the voice of the Devil?"

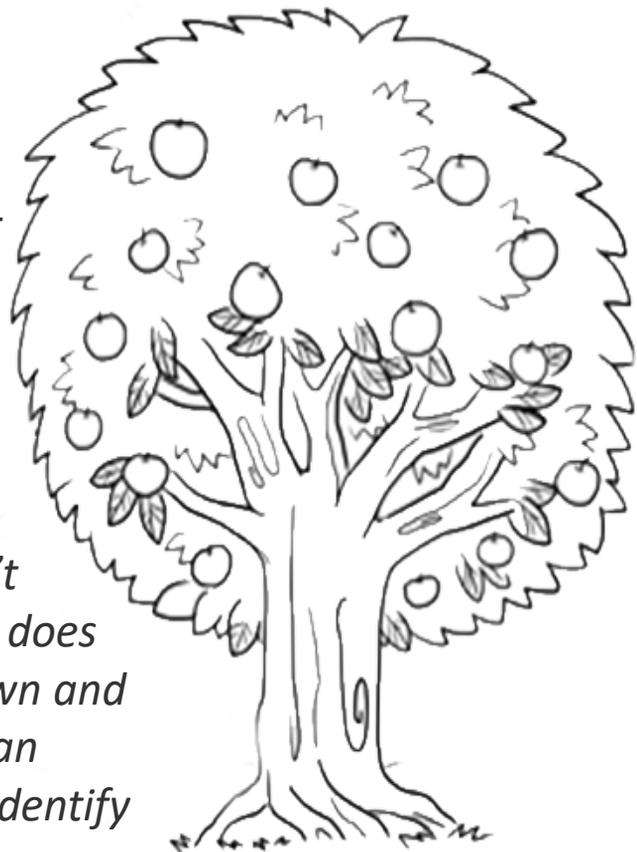
The little boy had a very simple answer. He said, "If the voice tells me to do something bad, I'll know it's the Devil! If it tells me to do something good, I'll know it's God!"

It's that simple! If you love the Lord, what you receive from Him is good and ministers faith, joy, hope, love, and praise.

* Jesus told us to judge prophecies by their fruit

Jesus gave the basic criteria for judging a prophet or a prophecy when He told us to look at the fruits:

Matthew 7:15-20—“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.



To judge a prophecy, check these points:

- Is it in harmony with the Bible?

It should not contradict the written recorded Word of God, though it may fill in "gaps" in our understanding. Is it according to the written Word in the Bible? The Word is the measurement, the standard by which prophecy should be judged.

Isaiah 8:20b—If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

- Is it helpful?

Does it motivate you to do good? Does it encourage you to follow God's way? What are its fruits?

Galatians 5:22-23—But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

- Does it bring peace and unity with your fellow-believers?

A godly prophecy usually flows with and confirms what God has already said. It brings unity and peace, never confusion.

1 Corinthians 14:33—For God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

- Does it result in humility? It should not lift you up in pride.

1 Corinthians 1:29—That no flesh should glory in His presence.

- Does it encourage you? It should not condemn you or others.

Romans 8:1—There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

- Does it bring faith to your heart? It should not bring fear.

2 Timothy 1:7—For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

1 John 4:18a—There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.

Class Section 3: Interpreting Prophecy

Once the Lord has spoken on a matter, we must prayerfully look at what He has said and determine what instruction or answer He is giving us. To do this, we must interpret the prophecy; we must find the meaning of what He has said to us.

*** The gifts of wisdom, understanding, and discernment**

There are a number of factors for properly interpreting prophecy. The gifts of wisdom, understanding, and discernment help us to interpret. These are spiritual gifts, which can be prayed for.

1 Corinthians 12:7,8,10 - A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom. And the same Spirit gives another person the ability to speak with knowledge. ...To another the ability to prophesy, and to another the ability to judge what is from the Spirit and what is not.

* Seek the counsel of others

Prayerful counsel with faithful and wise fellow-believers will help you determine exactly what the Lord has told you in prophecy. Counsel in these matters is so important, because sometimes what may be very unclear to you might be very clear to someone else, through the discernment the Lord has given them.

1 Corinthians 14:29—Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

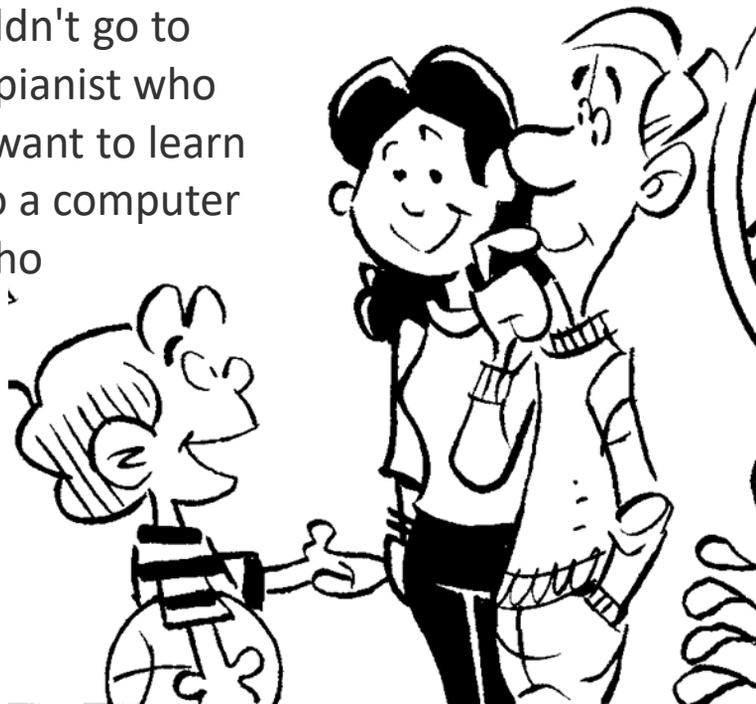
Proverbs 11:14—Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Proverbs 15:22—Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.

Proverbs 19:20-21—Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.

* Choose the right counselors!

A godly counselor is someone who loves the Lord, and whose life shows the good fruit of living close to Him. If you want to learn how to play the piano you wouldn't go to business college; you'd go to a pianist who knows how to play well. If you want to learn how to cook you wouldn't go to a computer technician, but to somebody who knows how to cook, whose meals you've enjoyed. So godly counselors are people whom you can trust because they bear good spiritual fruit.



* **Be guided by the Word**

A prophecy should be interpreted in light of the Word. As mentioned earlier, true prophecy should not contradict the recorded Word of God in the Bible, but it may fill in gaps in our understanding. Let the Word be the standard by which you measure and interpret the prophecies you receive.

Psalm 119:105—Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

* **Be open to the Lord**

Another major factor in interpreting prophecy is the need to be open to all the Lord may be saying. To understand what the Lord is telling you in a prophecy, faith, yieldedness, and humility are the keys.

- Pray with an open heart and be earnest in your desire to hear the Lord clearly.
- Receive His Words with praise and thanksgiving.
- Ask the Lord to clear your mind of your own thoughts.
- Be yielded to what He shows you.
- Believe that what you receive is from Him.
- Have the faith to act upon it.
- We shouldn't interpret prophecy according to what we want it to say. Nor should we be pulled by our desires or preconceived ideas.
- Prophecy cannot be interpreted just by using carnal reasoning, logic, or analytical study. It requires the wisdom of God and the leading and the discernment of God's Spirit. We cannot just assume in our own pride that we know what the Lord is saying.

Proverbs 3:5-6—Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

2 Peter 1:20—Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

*** When you do not understand**

Isaiah 55:9—For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

We don't always understand what the Lord is telling us. Some of what He says might be very clear; some might be shrouded in mystery. Sometimes part of what He tells us might be for now; sometimes it might be for the future.

The Story of Lazarus—and how the Lord's meaning is not always clear

It's a bit like when the Lord told His disciples that Lazarus' sickness was "not unto death." He later said that Lazarus was sleeping, and eventually He told them "Lazarus is dead." This might have seemed a bit contradictory to them. His disciples could have asked how Jesus could say the sickness was not unto death, yet Lazarus was dead; in fact, he was in the grave for four days! Yet Jesus eventually raised him from the dead, so even though the disciples didn't understand it at the time, they eventually did, after Lazarus was raised up.

John 11 (excerpts) —Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

[Jesus] stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, ... "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

Jesus came to the tomb. It was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. He said, "Move the stone away."

Martha said, "But, Lord, it has been four days since Lazarus died. There will be a bad smell." Then Jesus said to her, "Remember what I told you? I said that if you believed, you would see God's divine greatness."

So they moved the stone away from the entrance. Then Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with pieces of cloth. He had a handkerchief covering his face. Jesus said to the people, "Take off the cloth and let him go."



Class Section 4: Prophecy in Perspective

* Is prophecy infallible? What if a prophecy does not come true?

Sometimes things do not seem to work out as it seems God said in prophecy. Was the prophecy really inspired by God in the first place? There are a few points to understand.

- Prophecies can "fail."

1 Corinthians 13:8-9—Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

Even though prophecy is a wonderful means by which the Lord speaks to us and encourages us, it is not necessarily a "written in stone" unalterable means of discerning God's will.

In many ways, the Lord confines Himself to operating within our frame of reference, within our circumstances. He does "go along with us" a good deal of the time, and when we decide something, He acts or reacts accordingly.

It's like He says "Well, you have now decided to do this, so I have promised to do such-and-such, in light of your decision." But if we later change our mind and decide to do something else so that our previous plans are no longer in effect, then His promises or His instructions for our former plans are no longer in effect either.

Jonah and the story of how prophecies are fulfilled



Jonah was a prophet of God who lived in ancient Israel hundreds of years before Jesus. God told him to go to the city of Nineveh and warn the people that because of their great wickedness, within 40 days their city was going to be destroyed. Jonah didn't even want to obey this prophecy at first and tried to run away from God but finally decided to go to Nineveh and obey God's commandment to him to "*preach unto it the preaching that I bid you*" (Jonah 3:2).

Upon hearing Jonah's words of coming doom, the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast throughout the land, dressed in sackcloth, and truly repented.

Jonah 3:10—Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Because the people had repented, God did not (at that time) destroy Nineveh. But Jonah didn't seem to grasp the point of God's forgiveness. He sat a short distance from the city, waiting for God's judgments to come down. When the judgments did not arrive, he was dismayed.

God said it: Nineveh was going to be destroyed in 40 days! According to their circumstances at the time, that was what was going to happen. God was just warning them about what was actually going to occur; that was what they were headed for. But when Jonah went and preached to them, they had a wonderful repentance, and their change caused God to change! He went along with them. The circumstances changed, so what God originally said was no longer applicable.

God gives us the majesty of choice, and then He goes along with our decisions and gives us what we need or tells us what to do according to what we have decided.

So instead of automatically concluding that a prophecy was not from God if it doesn't come to pass exactly as expected, we might consider that maybe somebody here on earth changed their mind, and as a result God changed His.

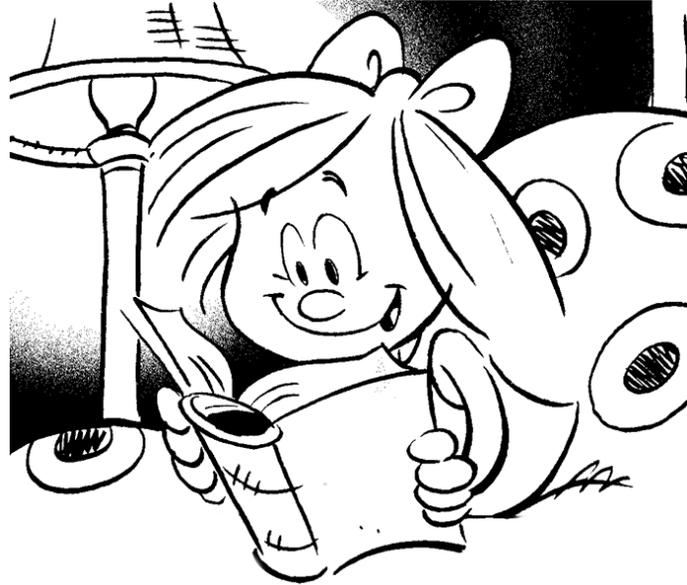
- **Matters of misunderstanding**

Something to keep in mind is that sometimes we think that a prophecy didn't come true either because we don't remember correctly what the prophecy said, or we didn't interpret it properly. Sometimes, when encountering a situation where things seemed to turn out differently than a prophecy said they would, if you'll go back and study that prophecy, you'll see things in a different light. So before you presume that a prophecy "went wrong" somehow, go back and re-read it, and you may find that what the Lord said was just what happened—you just didn't understand it clearly the first time, or you didn't remember correctly what it said.

* Other ways to find God's will

Prophecy is not the only way of finding God's will. You can also find God's will through ...

1. Applying the written Word to your situation.
2. The "voice of the Word"—which is when you're reading the Word and suddenly something stands out to you and really speaks to your heart concerning the Lord's will, or gives the answer to a question you had.
3. Receiving direct revelations in ways other than prophecy, such as dreams, visions, or impressions.
4. Seeking counsel from others who are strong in faith and knowledge of the Word.
5. Circumstances that you believe to be engineered by the Lord—also known as "open and closed doors."
6. Personal concern or conviction.
7. Specific, predetermined signs received in answer to your prayers.



When you face an important decision, or one that will affect other people, it's wise to find and confirm God's will through more than one means. Ask God to use His Word or one or more of the other ways listed here to confirm what He's told you in prophecy.

Up close and personal

From Jesus with love

You are special. You're not just one in a crowd—you're special to Me! I know your every thought. I know you personally, and I am speaking to you personally now. Ask Me to speak to you whenever you want, when you're up or when you're down, or even when you just want some good company. I'm happy to speak to you on any subject, whenever you need it.

You can come to Me anytime, wherever you happen to be. You don't have to worry that I'll be too busy or that I won't want to be with you. I always want to spend time with you. I love to spend time with you, and I'd love to spend more time with you. Whenever you take a moment with Me, I'll make things better. If we could, I'd stay in this quiet place with you day and night forever!

