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## WOMEN, PROPHECY, & PREACHING

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of women in ministry remains a hot topic within various denominations. Where the Assemblies of God acknowledges the hand of God to be upon women just as strongly as men, the Southern Baptist Convention refuses to acknowledge that God uses a woman's voice in the same way that He uses a man's voice. How can there be two extreme views on this issue? Both views cannot be right. Does God use the voice of women today to proclaim His truth? The answer to that question must line-up with what God did during biblical times. By taking a close look at the Old Testament and the New Testament, the conclusion can be made that God does use the voices of women to proclaim the Gospel.

Close review of Joel 2, Acts 2, and many accounts throughout the Gospels, give clear testimony to the fact that God takes special interest in using women in the prophetic and the proclamation of His message. God used the voice of women to influence the world for His glory throughout history, and He desires to continue using them all over the world today. This paper will take a brief look at God's use of women in both the prophetic and the proclamation of the gospel in Scripture and in today's world in order to show that God's anointing is upon women to prophesy and preach.

#### **Prophetic Women in the Old Testament**

It is often assumed that only men were prophets in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Because only a few select men could function as priests, many mistakenly believe

that the same requirements for priests held true for prophets. Scripture clearly tells a different story. Women were used just as men were in the various prophetic functions. Loren Cunningham and David Hamilton believe that Scripture shows at least two roles for the prophet. They say, “A prophet can mean the same thing as preacher--one who speaks on God’s behalf concerning the present--or can mean one who foretells the future.”<sup>1</sup>

Where priest went before God to represent the people, it is the prophet who spoke to the people on God’s behalf. Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people through prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Elijah. God used these men in powerful ways to speak His truth to His people and to the pagans. It cannot be overlooked, however, that God used women in the role of the prophet, as well. Women such as Miriam and Deborah prophesied in a time when women were viewed as property for men to own for which to bear children. God alone selected and anointed certain individuals to prophesy. These key individuals were empowered by the Spirit to speak forth God’s word “and in most cases it ‘came upon’ them for a relatively brief period of time for a specific purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars argue that prophets like Miriam and Deborah are exceptions in the Old Testament and that they were not viewed in the same way as the male prophets. Some even suggest it is a mistake to label them a prophet. Thoughts like these diminish the view that God’s Word is truly inspired. It is because men functioned more often as prophets in the Old Testament that readers of Scripture should pay close attention when they read that a woman prophesied or is called a prophet. For the narrators of the Old Testament to use terms that usually described roles in which men functioned, they must have had good reason to refer to women, such as Miriam

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<sup>1</sup>Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton, *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 57-58.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne A. Gruden ed., *Are Miraculous Gift for Today?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 246.

and Deborah, as prophets. No doubt, these writers chose their words carefully when calling a person a prophet, especially since prophets spoke the words of God. One would assume that the writers would not just label anyone a prophet without solid evidence.

### **God's Plan for Women**

In Numbers 11:29, Moses, needing relief from fully carrying the burden as God's spokesman, declares that he desires all of God's people to receive the Spirit and prophesy. Moses made this statement to Joshua after Joshua became jealous of others who received the Spirit to prophesy. Joshua did not have a problem when the seventy elders whom Moses chose to be anointed by God began to prophesy, but the two additional men who received the Spirit were not among the seventy and Joshua became jealous for Moses. This did not bother Moses because his heart desired God's Spirit to be given liberty to others for empowerment; he longed to see the Spirit move through all of God's people. This cry of Moses', however, is more than a wish; it is revealed as the very heart and plan of God in Joel 2:28-32.

The prophet Joel proclaims a time of judgment, repentance, and restoration of Israel in Joel 2:28-32. This time of restoration will involve an extension of God's Spirit on all who call on his name, not just a select few. Joel specifically tells of a time when Israel's daughters will prophesy. This is not because God has not used women in the prophetic previously, but it will be released on all the daughters of Israel's future generations who call on God's name, not just a selected few individuals. Although God used prophets like Moses and Miriam, He desired to release his empowerment on all his children. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy is seen in its fullness at Pentecost in Acts 2, but signs of its coming can be seen and heard before that time with the arrival of the Messiah.

## **Jesus & Women Prophets in the Gospels**

It is amazing that when the time for the Messiah comes, the New Testament records the prophesying of women. Luke 1:41-45 tells the story of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, boldly proclaiming an oracle of God. The Spirit of God appears to be stirring with the excitement of the coming King and the prophetic starts to show up after a few hundred years of silence. In response to Elizabeth's oracle, Mary, the mother of Jesus, powerfully praises God when the Spirit of prophecy comes upon her. The next Spirit empowered woman that arrives on the scene is Anna in Luke 2:36-38. Luke tells that Anna recognized the Messiah and began to proclaim that the time of redemption for Jerusalem had arrived.

People offended with the thought of women publicly prophesying and proclaiming Jesus need to seriously contemplate these passages. If God does not use women to proclaim Him and His ways, why would He use women to help usher in the long awaited Messiah? It appears God revealed Himself and His plan to the very ones who suffered the most from the result of sinful humanity. He would use those who were viewed as the least and lift up the voice of the marginalized to proclaim the greatest message given to humankind. Those who refuse to listen to the prophetic voice of God's women are in danger of not understanding the inclusiveness of God's salvation, which is the very essence of the gospel message.

The use of women only increases after the birth of Jesus. In fact, Jesus intentionally engages women in the proclamation of who He is throughout His ministry and after His death and resurrection. The New Testament records a woman as the first evangelist. This evangelist was not only a woman, but a sinful Samaritan. Jesus dialogues with the Samaritan woman about theology and brings her to repentance. She then becomes an evangelist by returning to her town to spread the news of what Jesus did for her.

Women are also the first to preach the resurrection of Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus chooses to reveal himself first to the faithful women who ministered to him at the cross and the tomb. Why would Jesus choose not to approach the apostles first or send the angel with the news to them? Because this would not make since in His culture, such action is clearly intentional on Jesus' part. He knew that men did not receive teaching or information from women in His day, yet he purposefully decided to leave the spreading of his resurrection to them. How astonishing that God entrusted women with the privilege and responsibility of being the first to proclaim the resurrected Christ and to allow them the opportunity to preach it first to the apostles. May men today not miss out on the good news of Jesus and his resurrection because they are too prideful to receive from women!

### **Women and Pentecost**

Acts 2 tells of the day of Pentecost and Peter's response to the activity. When those waiting upon God's promise of the Spirit received fully from God, Peter boldly proclaims that Joel's prophecy found fulfillment in the Spirit's descent from that day forward. A new age had ushered in and God's people would now function as a new community where all members would function in the fullness of the Spirit. From that day until now, the role of women has never been the same.

“The promised fulfillment of Moses' desire stands in Joel 2, but the day of Pentecost potentially fulfilled that desire, for with the gift of the Spirit to the disciples the age of the prophethood of all believers has dawned.”<sup>3</sup> All believers in Jesus could now function equally as prophets of God. The exclusive ways of the Old Testament were gone, and women were complete participants in what God would do throughout the earth. “The women at Pentecost are pictured as full participants in the prophetic activities. The Joel text used for the sermon is

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<sup>3</sup> French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1988), 28.

gender inclusive. Peter's declaration 'this is what we as spoken by the prophet Joel' means that part of the fulfillment he recognized was that among those 120 prophesying persons on the day of Pentecost there were 'daughters' and 'maidservants,' i.e., female prophets."<sup>4</sup> Jesus' death and resurrection brought men and women on level ground and the Spirit's empowerment confirmed it. Women move forward in boldness prophesying and proclaiming the Word of God.

A sure sign that the Church has lost her prophetic voice is exclusivity. When individual churches and denominations are divided according to economic classes and ethnic groups, the Church has forsaken Pentecost. It can also be claimed that churches and denominations that exclude leaders because of gender have also lost the Spirit of Pentecost. May God help lead His Church back to her place of birth. Time and tradition has ushered back into existence the exclusive ways of humanity, but Pentecostal believers can stand as an example of an inclusive community for others to see and follow.

John V. York states, "The heart of Pentecostalism is the supernatural empowerment of believers so that they may, in word and deed, adequately bear witness of Christ to the nations of the world."<sup>5</sup> One could accurately state that this should be the very heart of Christianity, too. Pentecostalism was the norm to the Early Church. A segment of Pentecostals within Christianity did not exist at that time. As the Church moved away from the day of Pentecost, this mission got lost in the tradition and regulations of religion. This is also where women lost what Pentecost gave them--their prophetic voices. Christians must continue to live out Pentecost today. They must continually live out the Spirit's empowerment and call forth their daughters to prophesy.

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<sup>4</sup>Deborah Menken Gill, "The Female Prophets: Gender and Leadership in the Biblical Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1991), 164.

<sup>5</sup> John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2001), 185.

The issue of women ministering in the same roles as men is constantly in debate within the Church. Good intentioned Christians have sided with the agenda of tradition and culture and not the agenda of the Spirit. “The agenda of the Spirit is the agenda of the people of God moving in the power of God to accomplish the mission of God (*mission Dei*) among all made in the image of God.”<sup>6</sup> Men and Women must remember that God’s mission is the ultimate goal, not promoting women for the sake of gender equality. God pours out his Spirit upon both men and women for His purpose, so both must be released to accomplish God’s mission on the earth, or it will not come to completion.

### **Releasing of Women Today**

A modern day story exemplifying the blessing poured out on a church when women are released involves what is now the largest church in the world. Many pastors read books by Dr. Cho of Seoul, Korea to find out his secret to pastoring a church with such incredible growth. Many may be surprised to hear that his key to church growth involves the release of women into the ministry. This all started when Dr. Cho released his own mother behind the pulpit.

Dr. Cho knew that his mother was a gifted preacher and teacher of God’s word. He also knew that his people would not accept a woman preacher because of their culture’s limitation on women. Author and friend Loren Cunningham suggested that Dr. Cho put Cunningham’s mother, a good friend, before his congregation to preach and then immediately follow her with a sermon by Dr. Cho’s mother. Because Cunningham’s mother traveled from another country, the Koreans would show her grace and accept her ministry. Once they accepted Cunningham’s mother, it would allow them to see that they could also accept Dr. Cho’s mother. Everything went according to plan and Dr. Cho’s mother emerged in the church as an anointed and powerful leader, preacher, and teacher.

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<sup>6</sup> John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2001), 186.

Dr. Cho now “has seven hundred senior pastors on his staff, including many women. He also has thirty thousand cell groups; the vast majority of these are led by women.”<sup>7</sup> Dr. Cho believes that releasing women to minister provided the key to his church growth. When pastors of struggling churches seek Dr. Cho’s advice on church growth, He counsels these pastors to release their women in order to see the breakthrough they need.

With such an incredible story from a pastor of influence, it is amazing that more pastors and church leaders do not heed his wisdom. An army of believers has been released in Korea because women have been allowed to join the battle. Mike Bickle powerfully proclaims, “We will never be fully effective if one-half of God’s army is kept out of the battle against Satan’s onslaught. We need men and women both to take their place boldly before God’s throne and function together with confidence and security in the body of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> The Church needs the prophetic voices of both men and women proclaiming Christ to a lost and dying world.

## CONCLUSION

God called His daughters forth to prophesy and preach His message throughout history, and He continues to do so today. Regardless of the fact that some may not agree, God takes pleasure in using the voice of His daughters to powerfully proclaim the message of Jesus.

Women must not allow the critics to muffle their voices.

A result of sin is the devaluing of certain people groups, which includes women. Those who limit women by hiding behind church tradition and refer to it as God’s divine order for the genders are sincerely wrong; they embrace the oppression caused by sin, which is the purpose for

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<sup>7</sup> Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton, *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 67-68.

<sup>8</sup>Mike Bickle *Growing in the Prophetic* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1996), 61-62.

Jesus coming to earth. Jesus' life, behavior, actions, death, and resurrection proclaim freedom from the chains that a sinful world wrapped around women. As long as there are those who continue to diminish the value of women, children, the poor, and various ethnicities, women must continue to use their prophetic voices to cry out the message of Christ. Those who encourage anything less than full support of a woman's voice to proclaim God's message lessen the power of Christ and His resurrection.

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