

Prophecy in Action

Hearing from Heaven, Part 2

Summary for Teachers

Theme

Get your guidance and inspiration from the Lord through prophecy!—More prophecy pointers. Judging and interpreting prophecies.

Aim

To teach basic guidelines for interpreting and understanding prophecies. To give the students more pointers on how to receive prophecies. To give them a basic idea of how to judge whether prophecies are from the Lord or not. To help them see that they can use the gift of prophecy, along with other ways to find the will of God, in their decision-making and for their encouragement.

Roundup

Prayer and Opening Activity (15 minutes)

- Prayer
- Songs
- Skit or discussion

Class Section 1: Prophecy Pointers (25 minutes)

- Why get prophecies?
- Keys for hearing from the Lord
- Earnest desire
- Concentration
- Have an open heart
- Carefully word your questions
- More tips
- Review

Class Section 2: Judging Prophecies (25 minutes)

- How can you tell if a prophecy is truly inspired by God?
- “The voice that tells me to do something good”
- Jesus told us to judge prophecies by their fruit
- How to tell the difference between a prophecy that is from God and one that is not
- Warnings about false prophecy
- Review

Class Section 3: Interpreting Prophecy (25 minutes)

- Interpreting prophecy
- The gifts of wisdom, understanding, and discernment
- Seek the counsel of others
- Choose the right counselors
- Be guided by the Word

Be open to the Lord
When you do not understand
Review

Class Section 4: Prophecy in Perspective (25 minutes)

Is prophecy infallible? What if a prophecy does not come true?
Other ways to find God's will
Prophecy: Not only for instruction, but also for encouragement
Learning to use the gift
Review

Closing Activity and Prayer (5 minutes)

Praise time

Get Prepared

- Sections 2 and 3 on judging and interpreting prophecy are probably the most important sections in this class. Take as much time as you need to get these points across, as it is vital that your students can discern between true and false prophecies, especially in the dark days of the Endtime in which false prophets abound.
- If you did not have prayer with your students during the last meeting ("Prophecy, Class 1") to receive the gift of prophecy and to hear from the Lord, in place of teaching "Prophecy Pointers" (Section 1), you should instead have a prayer meeting with them. Please see the previous class for advice on how to do this.
- Each section concludes with a "Review." The review is a quick outline of the points you have just covered. Each review is also included in the Study Notes book. You don't have to do every review but if you want to then try to use a variety of methods. You could write up the points; you could ask the students to read them from the Study Notes book; you could call out a point, just saying half a sentence and letting the students "fill in the blanks" verbally as to what you mean; or you could ask who remembers.
- Please see the "Get Prepared" tips in the previous class for more advice on teaching this class, such as preparing your own testimonies, not needing to read all of the verses, etc.
- Try to have prepared a set of "praise" verses. (You may want to use the Teacher's Aid "Praise Verse Sets.")
- Related material in *Activated* magazines:
See list in previous class.

Student Reading Material

None

Prayer and Opening Activity

20 minutes

► Prayer

① *Have a short prayer for the meeting. Encourage one of the students to lead the prayer.*

► [Optional] Songs

① *Select and sing two or three songs from the "Inspiration Song Sheet."*

► Skit or discussion

- ① Choose one of two activities: Either perform the skit and have the discussion or read and discuss the optional anecdote on “Make Cars!”
- ① Whichever activity you choose, you may need to limit the time of discussion so that it does not take too long. You may want to assure the attendees that their questions will be answered later if they bring up points that you know are covered in the class.

📖 [Optional Activity 1]

Skit: Nothing Short of Right Is Right—And to Get It Right, Ask the Boss!

See skit text at the end of this class.

- ☞ To discuss after the skit: *The relationship Joe has with his employer is often the way we are with the Lord. We want to please the Lord, but sometimes because of over-confidence or pride or a host of other reasons, we don't ask the Lord for His advice and then we end up failing. How does this relate to you? Have you been asking the Lord for His instructions?*

📖 [Optional Activity 2]

“Make Cars!”

What would happen if you'd take a large number of unskilled laborers, suddenly place them in an automobile factory, and say: “Make cars!” Without training, experience, guidance, or instructions this would be impossible! It would be nothing but chaos, every man with his own ideas, going his own way and doing his own thing, and you'd probably end up with a crazy contraption. It might even be a very elaborate, intricate, and complicated machine, but without coordination, purpose, or guidance, it would get nowhere.

But if you would tell these factory workers: “Now, see here! You don't know anything and you never made a car before, but if you'll just listen to the instructions from our central computer through your earphones on your little radio sets, each one of you will know exactly what to do and when and how to do it! Just listen and obey instructions!”—And they might actually be able to make a car with a little time, patience, and experience!—For the computer knows how!

But if the workers decided they didn't need the computer, they'd rather figure it out for themselves, and they turned off their radios and laid aside their headsets, because they were so busy and didn't want to be bothered with having to listen, they would soon have nothing but confusion, frustration, and failure.

- ☞ To discuss: *Have you been going to the Lord for His instructions? Have you heard from the Lord since our last class? Do you have any questions about what we have discussed on this subject so far?*

Class Section 1: Prophecy Pointers

20 minutes

- ① Teachers: *If you did not have the time of prayer and hearing from the Lord in the first class (Class 1, Section 5), you could do that now instead of teaching this section. Please see the “Get Prepared” comments in Class 1.*

► 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.

① *If possible, share some examples of when you have needed and received the Lord's guidance for a specific question. In addition, you may like to read either of the following examples.*

[Optional] Examples of prophecy giving specific guidance

Example 1: Witnessing

We know from the Word that we're supposed to witness (share our faith).

Mark 16:15—And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

But to whom are you supposed to witness? Where should you witness? Should you give out literature? Should you try to talk to strangers on the street or should you knock on people's doors or should you talk just to your colleagues and relatives? There is a whole range of ways to fulfill what Jesus told us about witnessing. But to find God's specific plan for you, you might need to hear from the Lord about it.

Example 2: The Cookie Story

By Aaron

It was near Christmastime in Belgium. We had a few orphanages that we were bringing supplies to. We wanted to bring cookies and snacks for the children but didn't have the money to buy them, so we prayed asking Jesus to show us what to do and what He would do to supply this need. In prophecy He told us to follow the first truck that we would see and that that would lead us to where we needed to go.

We opened our eyes and looked. A truck pulled up right in front of our car. We started the engine and we followed by faith, having no idea what the truck did or where it went or anything. We followed it and followed it for about 20 minutes around different areas of town until it finally arrived in front of a factory.

By faith we went into the factory, and lo and behold, it was a cookie factory! When we asked to see the director and told him why we came, he immediately said, "Who told you to come here?"

We said, "Well, we prayed and we asked the Lord to direct our path and He told us to follow the first truck we saw." He was in shock.

He said, "This is a miracle! Saint Nicholas' Day is past and I have about 50 boxes of cookies from the holiday that I don't know what to do with and it's my pleasure to be able to give them to you."—And off we went with a car loaded down with boxes and boxes of cookies for our Christmas gift to the orphans and other needy families in Belgium.

■ How wonderful to have the Lord's help!

It's often the case that when things seem difficult and muddled and we can't seem to find any kind of solution, or when things look complicated, if we'll just go to the Lord and desperately seek Him, He gives us the simplest answer. We may look at it in amazement and say, "Why in the world didn't I ever see that? Of course I should have seen that!—How dumb of me!"

The Lord often allows this to happen just to show that no matter how clear things should be, if we don't seek Him for the answers, and if we try to do things in the "arm of the flesh," which means without relying on His help, we can't really do anything.

John 15:5—I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

► 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.

[Optional] 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.

► More tips!

Be sure to study over *Hearing from Heaven (Get Activated!)* booklet for more keys. The chapters "Basic Operating Instructions" and "General Maintenance" are very useful.

[Optional] God speaks at any time

Many of us find that we occasionally wake up in the night, unable to sleep. During such sleepless hours, it is a good time to pray and think about the Lord and commune with Him within your heart.

► Review

① *Review the main points you just went over. Encourage the students to try to remember what they are. See if they can call out the answers. (The following outline is also in the Study Notes book.)*

- Why get prophecies?—For specific guidance, for encouragement.
- Keys for hearing from the Lord: Earnest desire, concentration, an open heart, questions that are specific.

Class Section 2: Judging Prophecies

25 minutes

■ Two terms to understand:

Judging prophecy is the act of discerning if a prophecy was given by the Spirit of God.

Interpreting prophecy is the act of coming to an understanding of what a prophecy means, and knowing how to apply it

► 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. It is our prayer that the guidance we share and our own experiences in hearing from the Lord will be a help to you.

► “The voice that tells me to do something good”

① *This can be acted.*

Prophecy is one of the ways that you can find the will of God, one of the ways that He can speak to you. But how can you tell if what you have received is really from the Lord? Let's take a look at this question.

There's a story told of a young boy who accepted the Lord. The old elders of the church seemed skeptical about his conversion and asked him, “How do you know you're saved? How can you tell? How are you going to know what to do when the Devil comes and tells you to do something bad? 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 to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (16) You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? (17) Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

► How to tell the difference between a prophecy that is from God and one that is not

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.

① *You can recommend they read page 53 of Hearing from Heaven for more on judging prophecy.*

- Is it *helpful*?

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

Matthew 7:20—Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Galatians 5:22–23—But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) 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, as in all the churches of the saints.

- 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.

① *You can recommend they read pages 51–52 of Hearing from Heaven for more on this.*

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

Revelations 12:10b—Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

- 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, because fear involves torment.

- Does it provide helpful *instruction*?

Proverbs 9:9—Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

► Warnings about false prophecy

We’ve talked about being able to judge whether the things you personally are receiving are from the Lord or not. What about other people? How can you tell if somebody is a true prophet of God? The same criteria apply (as explained above), and here are a few additional points to ponder:

- A false prophet *leads you away* from God.

Deuteronomy 13:1–3—If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, (2) and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods” — which you have not known—“and let us serve them,” (3) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet

or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

- A false prophet will not lift up Jesus as the only begotten Son of God

1 John 4:1–2—Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

- False prophets claim greatness for themselves; some even claim to be the Messiah

Matthew 24:4–5, 11—And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. ... (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”

- A false prophet may perform “great signs,” but not by the Lord’s power.

Matthew 24:23–24—Then if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There!” do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

► Review

① Review the main points you just went over. Encourage the students to try to remember what they are. See if they can call out the answers. The following outline is also in the Study Notes book.

- Judging prophecy is the act of discerning if a prophecy was given by the Spirit of God.
- Interpreting prophecy is the act of coming to an understanding of what a prophecy means.
- How can you tell if a prophecy is truly inspired by God?—“The voice that tells me to do something good”; Jesus told us, judge by their fruits.
- How to tell the difference between a prophecy from God and one that is not:
Is it in harmony with the Bible? Is it helpful? Does it bring peace and unity with your fellow-believers? Does it bring humility and not pride? Does it encourage you? Does it bring faith to your heart? Does it provide helpful instruction?
- Warnings about false prophecy: A false prophet leads you away from God; a false prophet will not lift up Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. False prophets claim greatness for themselves. A false prophet may perform “great signs,” but not by the Lord’s power.

Class Section 3: Interpreting Prophecy

25 minutes

► Interpreting prophecy

There are many reasons to ask the Lord to speak to us in prophecy. Some of these include a need for encouragement, direction, instruction, help in decision-making, insight into problems, finding the Lord’s will in a matter, etc.

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.

In order to fully benefit from the gift of prophecy, we must learn to properly interpret the prophecy, as it doesn’t help much to get a message from the Lord if you don’t understand the meaning of what He’s telling you!

► 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.

Daniel 8:15—Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man.

Daniel prayed for understanding when he had seen a vision and “sought for the meaning.” The Hebrew word translated in that verse as “meaning” is generally translated throughout the Old Testament as “understanding,” so he sought for understanding of the vision, which we must often do with prophecy as well.

► 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. The Lord doesn’t necessarily give any one person the full interpretation to every 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. (21) There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.

Proverbs 27:9—Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel.

► 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.

Psalms 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.

In order to understand and accept the Words the Lord gives, we must be of a believing heart and an open mind and of pure intentions. If you already have your mind made up about the matter, it will be difficult to be open to what the Lord may be trying to show you through prophecy.

- 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; (6) 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.

- Even prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel did not always understand what the Lord gave to them.

Daniel 12:8a—Although I heard, I did not understand.

Ezekiel 3:14–15—So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. (15) Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

- Wrap it up in a “bundle of faith.”

Don't be worried if you cannot always interpret everything that the Lord gives. The Lord may reveal His meaning to you at a later time. If you don't understand something, wrap it up in a “bundle of faith” and put it on the shelf. Trust the Lord that He will show it to you in His own time.

[Optional] 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. They could have accused Jesus of giving false or inaccurate statements at the time He made them, but because they had faith in the Words that He had spoken, they could trust what He said even though they didn't understand it:

John 11:1–15—Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. (3) Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” (4) 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.” (5) Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. (7) Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” (8) The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” (9) Jesus answered,

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. (10) "But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (11) These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." (12) Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." (13) However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. (14) Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. (15) And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

► Review

- ① *Review the main points you just went over. Encourage the students to try to remember what they are. See if they can call out the answers. The following outline is also in the Study Notes book.*
- Keys to interpreting prophecy: the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and discernment. Seek the counsel of others. Be guided by the Word. Be open to the Lord.
- When you do not understand, wrap it up in a bundle of faith!

Class Section 4: Prophecy in Perspective

25 minutes

► 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. (9) 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.

Just because you or someone else receives a prophecy that indicates something will happen or should be this or that way, we shouldn't get locked into taking it as, "Thus saith the Lord, this is how it will be, this is exactly how it will happen," or "This is exactly what you must do!"

- The future is somewhat dependent on the choices that we and others make.

It is important to understand that our own decisions and choices, based often on the knowledge and wisdom that He gives us (which, of course, are also "gifts of the Spirit"), are still very instrumental in our determining God's will, even after specific prophecies may have been received.

- The Lord often leads us one step at a time on the path of His will.

The Lord apparently knows that it's best that we don't always know all the details of the future, at least not very often. He usually hides the future from us and makes us take things one step at a time.

2 Corinthians 5:7—For we walk by faith, not by sight.

He likes to see us exercise our faith. We learn a lot from following step by step, going along on just the little bit at a time that the Lord reveals to us. We follow Him from point "a" to point

“b,” and then from there we have to make another decision, “Where do we go from here?” We desperately pray and ask the Lord and He shows us a little more, how to get from point “b” to point “c,” and we then go on and on to the next steps. But the Lord doesn’t usually show us the whole picture “a” to “z” in advance.

■ Depending on our decisions...

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.

[Optional] 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.

Had this been a false prophecy? Why did God say that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days, knowing that it wasn’t going to be? Some people might even say that God lied to them. The Word says,

Romans 3:4—Let God be true but every man a liar.

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. We will learn more about these other ways in a later class, but in brief, 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.

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

We have discussed the benefits of prophecy as far as guidance and instruction. 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, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.

Psalm 144:15b—Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!

[Optional] What if you feel incapable, discouraged, or that God can't speak to you?

If you feel discouraged and like you can't do it—that you can't be good enough to receive something as wonderful as His messages from Heaven—all you have to do is ask the Lord to override all of those feelings and replace them with a gift of faith.

You don't have to have "great faith." Just ask Him for the faith of a child who reaches up and receives her father's gifts. She doesn't think about it and analyze the message, because she has child-like faith and trusts that her father knows what he's doing and he knows what's best, and all she has to do is trust.

The Lord delights in using men or women who don't think much of themselves and are little in their own eyes.

1 Corinthians 1:26–29—For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Don't worry if you feel incapable, because if that's how you feel, you will stay humble and more dependent on the Lord.—And that's how He wants you to be!

► Learning to use the gift

There is a lot to learn about prophecy. Just like any talent or tool, as we start using it and keep using it, we gradually learn more and more.

Be sure to study the *Hearing from Heaven* booklet, as there are many more lessons on prophecy than we have had time to discuss in these two classes.

► Review

- ① *Review the main points you just went over. Encourage the students to try to remember what those are. See if they can call out the answers. The following outline is also in the Study Notes book.*
- Why a prophecy may not seem to come true: Prophecies can “fail.” The future is somewhat dependent on the choices that we and others make. The Lord often leads us one step at a time on the path of His will.
- Other ways to find God’s will, besides prophecy: (1) the written Word; (2) the “voice of the Word”; (3) direct revelations such as dreams, visions, or impressions; (4) seeking counsel from faithful and wise fellow-believers; (5) circumstances; (6) personal concern or conviction; (7) receiving specific, predetermined signs in answer to your requests.
- Why prophecy? It’s not only for instruction, but also for encouragement.

Closing Activity and Prayer

5 minutes

► Praise time

- ① *Have a round of Praise Time, with verses and one or two songs. (See Praise Verses and use the “Praise Song Sheet.”)*
- ① *Finish with a prayer for the Lord’s protection before everyone departs.*

Skits and Songs

Skit: Nothing Short of Right Is Right

Characters: Narrator, Boss, Joe

Narrator: “Nothing Short of Right Is Right”—that’s what the giant sign said on the wall of a very large airplane factory back in the 1940s. The letters were 10 feet tall on a wall 10 blocks long to remind the men that when they were building airplanes, only what’s done right is right. And if it’s not just right, then it’s wrong!

(Noise and sounds of factory machinery.)

Boss: Joe. Joe!!

Joe: Yes, Boss. Coming!

Boss: Come over ‘ere!

Joe: Yes, Boss.

Boss: Joe, now you've been doing a good job, and I've chosen you to run the new machine. Come with me.

(Sound of smoother running, less noisy machine.)

Boss: Alright, Joe, here she is. Now, this machine's going help us to build a lot more airplanes. I'm going to show you how it works. This here is the control panel, and here's how you switch it on.

Joe: Oh, it sure is a nice machine, Boss!

Boss: Now Joe, I know you're a good machinist—you're one of the best—but if the machine should go wrong, don't try to fix it yourself. It's too new and hard to fix. So if you have any trouble, the best thing you can do, Joe, is to call me. Do you understand?

Joe: Yes. OK, Boss, I will.

Boss: Alright. Best of luck with the machine, Joe.

Joe: Thank you, Boss.

Narrator: Joe smiled. He was sure he would have no trouble with the machine. But later...

(Joe whistling merrily, then suddenly the new machine starts making a little funny knocking noise.)

Joe: Hey, wait a minute. It's not running right. (Noise from machine gets louder and faster.) Hey, what's happening? Should I call the Boss? No, I can fix it myself. I'll shut it off. (Shuts machine off.) OK, just tighten this here, just adjust that .. there, that should do it! Now, let's see if she runs.

(Sound of machine going on, but then the machine starts clanging and running furiously and going haywire!)

Joe: Oh, no!!! The whole machine is breaking up!! Uh oh, here comes the Boss.

Boss: Joe, Joe!! Goodness, man, what's going on here. Watch out!!

(Alarm goes off and machine explodes, and sound of clattering and clanking rubbish as machine breaks into bits.)

Boss: The machine, the machine!! Joe, you totally wrecked the machine!!

Joe: But, Boss, it started going wrong and I tried to fix it. I did the best I could, I did the very best I could!

Boss: Your very best was to call me!! You've wrecked a 100,000-dollar machine and you lost your job!!

Joe: But, Boss!

Boss: I'm sorry, but I can't have men working for me who won't obey orders!!

Joe: But I did what I thought was right!

Boss: Haven't you read what the sign says? "Nothing short of right is right!" Joe, you're fired!

Joe: But, Boss...

Boss: Out!

Narrator: So Joe lost his job because he thought he was too smart to need anyone else's help. Sometimes we get a little bit like Joe and think we're pretty smart. But may we never make a move without hearing from God. Those who win are those who wait upon His Word and those who fail are those, like Joe, who go on without it.