

I. THE NEED TO DEFINE “PROPHET”

- In modern church language, **PROPHET** has become a slippery term—used for preachers, fortune tellers, mystics, or anyone with strong opinions.
- Scripture, however, is far more precise. Before studying thirty prophets, we must know what a prophet **IS** and **IS NOT**.
- Deuteronomy 18:15-22 gives one of the clearest definitions, while passages throughout the OT and NT fill in the picture.

II. WHAT A PROPHET IS

1. A PROPHET IS ONE WHO SPEAKS THE WORDS OF GOD

- Deut. 18:18 — “I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”
- The prophet’s defining characteristic is not personal insight or holiness, but **verbal communication from God**.
- Prophets were **mouthpieces** of God—whether through spoken oracle, written message, or enacted sign.

2. A PROPHET IS AN AUTHORIZED MESSENGER

- Jeremiah 1:7–9 — God sends Jeremiah and puts His words in Jeremiah’s mouth.
- Prophets were **commissioned**, not self-appointed.
- Their authority rested on **God’s call**, not popular recognition or personal gifting.

3. A PROPHET IS SOMETIMES, BUT NOT ALWAYS, A PREDICTOR

- Prediction is **part** of prophecy but not its essence.
- Moses, Samuel, and John the Baptist gave relatively little predictive content compared to their role as **spokesmen for God’s will**. They reveal the Word from God, whether it be present or future.
- When they did predict, accuracy was absolute (Deut. 18:22).

4. A PROPHET IS DISTINCT FROM OTHER ROLES

- Not the same as priest (who represents the people before God).
- Not the same as king (who rules with delegated authority).
- The prophet delivers **God’s word into time**, often confronting kings and priests alike (e.g., Nathan before David, Elijah before Ahab).

III. WHAT A PROPHET IS NOT

1. A PROPHET IS NOT A MERE PREACHER

- While preaching may **apply** God’s Word, the prophet **receives direct revelation**.
- Many modern evangelicals use “prophet” loosely for bold preachers. That’s not biblical usage.

- Example: Amos was “no prophet, neither a prophet’s son” (Amos 7:14), yet when God called, he delivered new revelation—not simply exposition.

2. A PROPHET IS NOT A FORTUNE TELLER OR MYSTIC

- Biblical prophets didn’t gaze into crystal balls, study patterns, or deliver vague “words.”
- Their authority came from **God’s direct speech**, not subjective impressions or riddles.
- Balaam illustrates that even a pagan seer can utter true prophecy **only when God puts words in his mouth** (Num. 23:5).

3. A PROPHET IS NOT INFALLIBLE IN CHARACTER

- Their **message** was inspired; their lives were not perfect.
- Jonah ran away. Balaam was greedy. Samuel misjudged Eliab.
- The test of a prophet is not moral perfection but **faithfulness to deliver God’s Word accurately**.

4. A PROPHET IS NOT A PERMANENT OFFICE FOR TODAY

- Ephesians 2:20 — the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”
- Prophets were part of God’s revelatory foundation, not an ongoing pipeline of new revelation.
- Modern “prophetic movements” often confuse spiritual insight with prophetic office.

IV. TESTS OF A TRUE PROPHET (DEUT. 18:20–22)

- **Source Test** – Is the message from the LORD or from another source?
- **Accuracy Test** – Does the prediction come to pass? If not, the prophet spoke presumptuously.
- **Doctrinal Test** – Deut. 13:1–5: Even accurate predictions are rejected if they lead people to other gods or false worship.

V. WHY THIS DEFINITION MATTERS FOR THE SERIES

- If we don’t define the term carefully, we’ll read modern notions back into ancient texts.
- The **30 prophets** we’ll study function within this biblical framework—not as mere teachers or moral voices, but as **instruments of revelation** in specific times and places.
- Their roles, messages, and contexts will make more sense once “prophet” is clearly defined.
- Hebrews 1:1–2 “God... spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...”