Discussion Leader Notes

Lesson 4 New Testament Prophets

While Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God, the Holy Spirit continued to pour out the prophetic gift in the early church. This week, we explore how apostles and prophets worked together, the vital role of female prophets, and the serious danger of spiritual counterfeits that threaten our faith.

Opening Poll:
What do you think is the primary purpose of a New Testament prophet?
A. Predicting future events.
B. Performing miracles and healings.
C. Building up and encouraging the church.
D. Writing new books for the Bible.
E. Leading the church administration.

Opening Engagement Story A father showed his son his new car alongside his very first car. The modern features had changed, the exterior looked entirely different, but when they looked under the hood, the engine was exactly the same. In the same way, while New Testament prophets might operate a little differently from Old Testament ones, the "Engine" of their inspiration—the Holy Spirit—remains exactly the same.

Day 1: New Testament Prophets

The Holy Spirit empowers true prophets in both the Old and New Testaments, placing Jesus Christ at the center of their messages.

Poll:
What is your favorite way that the Holy Spirit works in the church today?
A. Through dynamic preaching and teaching.
B. Through acts of service and ministry.
C. By bringing comfort in times of sorrow.
D. Through the deep study of the Bible.
E. By creating unity among diverse people.

Opening Illustration A perfectly synchronized orchestra has many different instruments playing different parts, but they all follow the same conductor. The church operates the same way under the Holy Spirit.

Set the Scene Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to explain that while believers have widely different gifts and ministries, they are all empowered by the exact same God.

Read the Text "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

There are diversities and differences in gifts and ministries.

It is the "same Spirit" and "same Lord" behind them all.

God works "all in all" despite the varied activities.

Guided Discussion

Why is it important that God gives a "diversity" of gifts rather than making us all the same? (Allow discussion)

How does the Holy Spirit act as the "engine" connecting the Old and New Testaments? (Ask follow-up)

Why do we sometimes struggle to appreciate people whose spiritual gifts look very different from ours? (Invite multiple responses)

How can we ensure our varied gifts work together in unity? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight God spoke through prophets in both testaments, and the continuity in their messages exists because the Holy Spirit has remained the same. The Spirit always places Christ at the absolute center of the prophets' messages.

Christ Connection Jesus is the Lord who orchestrates all the diverse ministries of the church to perfectly reflect His love, grace, and truth to the world.

Life Response Identify one spiritual gift you see in someone else in your group and thank them today for how they use it to bless the church.

Encouragement Bridge You don't have to be everything; God has given you a specific gift that the body of Christ desperately needs.

Day 2: Jesus as Prophet

Jesus is the ultimate Prophet predicted by Moses, serving not just as a messenger, but as the Creator and the Word made flesh.

Poll:
Which aspect of Jesus' identity brings you the most awe?
A. He is the Creator of the vast universe.
B. He is the humble Prophet who taught us truth.
C. He is the Savior who died on the cross.
D. He is the Word made flesh.
E. He is our coming King.

Opening Illustration An ambassador can deliver a message from the king, but it changes everything when the king himself shows up at your door to speak to you directly.

Set the Scene When Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was, they mentioned various great prophets. But Peter recognized that Jesus was something far greater.

Read the Text "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Matthew 16:15-16, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

Jesus makes the question deeply personal: "who do you say that I am?"

Peter identifies Him as the Christ (the Messiah).

He recognizes Him as the Son of the living God, elevating Him above mere human prophets.

Guided Discussion

Why wasn't it enough for people to just see Jesus as a good prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah? (Allow discussion)

How does knowing Jesus is the Creator of the cosmos change the way you view His death on the cross? (Ask follow-up)

What does it mean for your daily life that the "Word became flesh"? (Invite multiple responses)

How do we answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am," in our actions today? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight Jesus, as the Christ, is the One to whom all the Old Testament prophets pointed. He was not a mere human prophet, but the Creator of the entire cosmos and the ultimate revelation of the Father's heart.

Christ Connection Jesus didn't just deliver a message about salvation; He became our salvation, offering us eternal life through His death and resurrection.

Life Response Take five minutes of quiet time today to dwell on the fact that the Creator of the billions of galaxies knows your name and died for your sins.

Encouragement Bridge The voice that spoke the universe into existence is the same voice whispering peace to your heart today.

Day 3: Apostles and Prophets

The early church was built on the teachings of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ holding everything together as the chief cornerstone.

Poll:
What is the most important part of a building's structure?
A. The solid foundation beneath the surface.
B. The protective roof overhead.
C. The strong walls that provide shelter.
D. The cornerstone that aligns everything perfectly.
E. The doors that let people in.

Opening Illustration In ancient architecture, the cornerstone was the massive, perfectly straight stone that set the alignment, stability, and direction for every other stone in the building. Without it, the walls would eventually collapse.

Set the Scene Paul uses the imagery of a building to describe how God designed the church, showing the vital relationship between its leaders and its Savior.

Read the Text "...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

The church is compared to a building.

The apostles and prophets form the foundation.

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone aligning the foundation.

Guided Discussion

Why do you think Paul specifically pairs "apostles" and "prophets" together as the foundation of the church? (Allow discussion)

If Jesus is the cornerstone, what happens when a church or a believer becomes misaligned with Him? (Ask follow-up)

Why must the Bible have the final authority over what we believe today? (Invite multiple responses)

How can we ensure our personal lives are built squarely on Christ and not human traditions? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight Unlike the priests who followed a familial line, God appointed apostles and prophets according to His will to serve as the foundation of the church. They possessed the same level of inspiration, always anchoring their teachings in Jesus.

Christ Connection Every teaching, prophecy, and doctrine must perfectly align with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our chief cornerstone.

Life Response Evaluate your current spiritual habits. Are they building your life on the shifting sands of culture, or the solid rock of Jesus?

Encouragement Bridge When your life is aligned with Jesus Christ, no storm can shake the foundation He has built in you.

Day 4: Functions of New Testament Prophets

New Testament prophets were gifted by the Holy Spirit to build up, encourage, and comfort the church during trying times.

Poll:
When you are going through a difficult time, what kind of support do you need most?
A. Someone to just listen to me.
B. A word of deep encouragement.
C. Practical advice on what to do next.
D. Someone to pray over me.
E. A comforting hug.

Opening Illustration A coach doesn't just call the plays; a good coach builds up the team, comforts them after a loss, and exhorts them to play their best. This was the pastoral role of a New Testament prophet.

Set the Scene While many associate prophecy exclusively with predicting the future, Paul reveals the deeply pastoral purpose of this spiritual gift in the early church.

Read the Text "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men." (1 Corinthians 14:3, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

Prophecy involves speaking to men (people).

It is for edification (building up).

It brings exhortation (encouragement) and comfort.

Guided Discussion

Why was "comfort and edification" so crucial for the early Christian church? (Allow discussion)

How does this description of prophecy change your view of what a prophet does? (Ask follow-up)

How can our words be used prophetically today to build up rather than tear down? (Invite multiple responses)

Who in your life acts as a source of spiritual encouragement for you? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight The prophetic gift in the New Testament was primarily for equipping the saints, edifying the body of Christ, and bringing unity to the faith. They uttered warnings, but also offered great words of encouragement, especially in trying times.

Christ Connection Jesus is the ultimate source of our comfort, and He sent the Holy Spirit to breathe that same comforting grace through the members of His church.

Life Response Send a text message or make a phone call today to intentionally speak a word of "edification and comfort" to someone who is struggling.

Encouragement Bridge God sees your burdens, and He loves to send a word of encouragement right when you need it most.

Day 5: Female Prophets and Young Pastoral Associates

The Holy Spirit transcends human norms, pouring out the prophetic gift upon both men and women, young and old, to proclaim God's truth.

Poll:
What helps you the most when learning from someone of a different generation or background?
A. Keeping an open mind.
B. Focusing on our shared love for Jesus.
C. Asking good questions.
D. Recognizing that God uses everyone differently.
E. Being willing to listen more than I speak.

Opening Illustration When an important message needs to be delivered, you don't judge the messenger's age or gender; you listen to the truth they carry. God freely gives His truth to sons and daughters alike.

Set the Scene In the New Testament, we see clear evidence of the Holy Spirit falling upon diverse groups of people, including devoted women who served as prophetic messengers.

Read the Text "Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess... And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (Luke 2:36, 38, NKJV). "Now this man [Philip] had four virgin daughters who prophesied." (Acts 21:9, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

Anna is explicitly called a prophetess.

Her immediate response to seeing Jesus was to speak of Him to others.

Philip had four daughters who also prophesied.

Guided Discussion

What does the ministry of Anna and Philip's daughters teach us about how God distributes His Spirit? (Allow discussion)

Why is it significant that Anna's immediate response to seeing Jesus was to point others to Him? (Ask follow-up)

How can we better encourage the spiritual leadership and gifts of women in our local church today? (Invite multiple responses)

How can older, experienced believers effectively mentor younger believers, as Paul did with Timothy? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight In both the Old and New Testaments, there is clear evidence of female prophets. The Holy Spirit imparts gifts to men and women, young and old, to fulfill God's mission without partiality.

Christ Connection Jesus broke through the cultural barriers of His day, uplifting women and entrusting them with profound spiritual truths, including the first announcement of His resurrection.

Life Response Ask God to show you someone younger in the faith whom you can gently encourage or mentor this week.

Encouragement Bridge Whether you are young or old, male or female, the Holy Spirit has a vital role for you to play in God's kingdom.

Day 6: False Prophets in the New Testament

We must stay anchored in the Bible and covered in the armor of God to protect ourselves from the deceptive signs of false prophets.

Poll:
What do you think makes a spiritual counterfeit so dangerous?
A. It looks almost exactly like the truth.
B. It appeals to our emotions and desires.
C. It is often accompanied by signs or wonders.
D. It offers an easier path than true discipleship.
E. It slowly draws us away from Jesus.

Opening Illustration An experienced bank teller doesn't learn to spot counterfeit bills by studying fakes; they study the real thing so closely that a fake is instantly obvious.

Set the Scene Jesus warned His followers that the days leading up to His return would be filled with spiritual deception, requiring extreme vigilance.

Read the Text "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:24, NKJV). (Ask someone to read.)

What Do You Notice?

False christs and false prophets will arise.

They will use great signs and wonders.

Their goal is to deceive even the faithful (the elect).

Guided Discussion

Why does Jesus warn us that these deceptions will be accompanied by "signs and wonders"? (Allow discussion)

How do the pieces of the "armor of God" in Ephesians 6 protect us from spiritual deception? (Ask follow-up)

If someone performs a miracle but teaches something contrary to the Bible, how should we respond? (Invite multiple responses)

How can we ensure we are so familiar with the truth that we cannot be deceived? (Allow discussion)

Discovery Insight Satan always attempts to counterfeit the divine. Supernatural events and miracles are not, in and of themselves, evidence of God's working. We must shield ourselves by being grounded in God's Word and the righteousness of Christ.

Christ Connection Jesus is the Truth, and when we put on the armor of God, we are essentially putting on Christ Himself, our ultimate protection.

Life Response Review Ephesians 6:10-18 today and ask God to help you put on every piece of His spiritual armor.

Encouragement Bridge The enemy's deceptions may be strong, but they shatter against the solid rock of God's eternal Word.

Day 7 Summary

The true prophetic gift—in any era—always functions to lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and to point them back to the absolute authority of the Bible.

Poll:
What is your biggest takeaway from this week's study on New Testament prophets?
A. That Jesus is the ultimate Prophet and Creator.
B. That the church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets.
C. That prophecy is meant to comfort and build up the church.
D. That God uses both men and women as prophetic voices.
E. That we must be vigilant against false prophets and signs.

5 Weekly Takeaways

Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, the Creator, and the Word made flesh, to whom all other prophets point.

The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

New Testament prophecy served a deeply pastoral role, providing edification, exhortation, and comfort to believers.

The Holy Spirit empowers a diversity of people, including devoted women like Anna, to serve as prophetic messengers.

Because false prophets will use signs and wonders to deceive, we must test all things by the Word of God and wear His spiritual armor.

Final Reflection Question: How will you use the spiritual gifts God has given you to point others to the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, this week? (Pause for responses.)

Closing Appeal The same Holy Spirit that empowered the apostles, inspired the prophets, and comforted the early church is alive and active today. He has given each of us a gift, not to elevate ourselves, but to build up the body of Christ. Let us stay firmly anchored on the cornerstone of Jesus, deeply rooted in the truth of the Bible, and willing to be used by God to bring comfort and light to a world in darkness.

Closing Prayer Father in Heaven, thank You for the incredible gifts You pour out upon Your church through the Holy Spirit. Thank You for Jesus, our chief cornerstone and our ultimate Savior. Help us to test the spirits, cling to Your Word, and use our diverse gifts to build one another up in love. Protect us from deception, and use our lives to point others to the cross. In Jesus' name, Amen.