

What happens when a prophecy doesn't come true?

by Jim Driscoll at

http://www.stirthewater.com/blog/?p=1554&utm_source=MailingList&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=eNewsletter+November+2009

Have you ever been given a prophetic word that never came to pass? It can leave a lot of questions: Was the word false? Does God really speak this way? Can a word be accurate and from God — and yet not come to pass? How can we know when God has promised us something and when it was just the speaker's nice idea?

Here are four things I believe we need to keep in mind whenever someone gives us a revelatory or prophetic word.

Seek confirmation from God

First of all, we need to hear from God for ourselves on a consistent basis. Depending on what we're going through, this can be difficult. We can go through days or seasons of turmoil, when it's very difficult to hear from God because we don't have enough peace. But here's the reason this is important: If we're consistently hearing from God for ourselves, then what He has told us in our alone times with Him will confirm what we're hearing from other people.

This doesn't require high, clear, awesome revelation; we just need to go to God on a daily basis. Even if all we "hear" or sense is vague, and we're not quite sure what He said or if He said anything, over time this builds up within us a fairly high level of confirmation. We will sense our spirits bearing witness to the word. It isn't just our minds saying, *Oh, I like that. That would be nice.* Instead, it feels as if our spirits are saying, *Yes! Yes!*

Every time we receive a word, we should seek God for confirmation. Always. The confirmation may come beforehand, right afterward, in one clear moment or subtly over time. It may happen consecutively or be spread out over several days.

Distinguish between potential and established outcomes

Now, that being said, there may be times when we know a word has been confirmed, but it still doesn't come to pass. The probable reason for this is that the word was about a *potential* outcome and not an *established-by-God* outcome. There's a difference.

For example, let's say that Alice is called to live in Africa as a missionary, but she chooses not to go. The potential is there, but she doesn't step into it, so it doesn't happen. Or perhaps she wants to go, but her husband doesn't, and so the word doesn't come to pass because of someone else's choice. In some cases, a word that does or doesn't come to pass may not have anything to do with the person who received it. It may be solely dependent on outside sources.

Revelatory words can be about something that has potential and is later realized, or they can be about something that God has already established. The latter is a high-level revelation about

what God is going to do. He has *chosen* for such-and-such to happen. The choices involved have already been made; the cost has already been paid, and it's going to happen. A revelatory word about something with potential isn't a false word; it is simply an outcome that may or may not be realized.

This agrees with what Jesus said in Matthew 22:14: Many are called, but few are chosen. I think that statement is true of almost every potentiality in creation. Many things are called to come to pass, but few things are actually chosen to come to pass.

Distinguishing between a potential outcome and a chosen outcome can be difficult for revelatory people, especially if they don't understand the dynamic or don't have clarity or discernment. It can also be hard if they're trying to sound more certain than they feel. God could be saying, "I am calling this to happen," and the person assumes that means, "God says this is *going* to happen."

Again, connecting this with the previous point, we need to pray about every word we receive, from anyone. We need to ask God, "Is this established? Or is this still just a possibility?" That dynamic is huge.

Recognize issues of timing and metaphor

Long before they come to pass, many prophecies seem like they're never going to. Some of us wait months and years and then conclude all of those words must have been false. But then another 10 years go by, and we start realizing, "Wait a second. They're *all* happening."

Timing is vital. Revelatory words are often given without a clear sense of timing, and we tend to assume that if God said something today, it must be about today. But often, that is not the case. When we seek God for confirmation about a word, we should also seek confirmation about the timing.

Finally, a revelatory word can be so metaphoric that it seems to mean one thing but actually means something else. It was a good word, but we assumed it must have been false because the way it played out didn't look the way we expected. That is often the case as well.

What can we do?

All of the above can be issues. In summation, we first need to be in the habit of spending time with God, because then, when someone gives us a genuine word from Him, we will have an internal witness.

Second, we should ask God if the word is about an established or potential outcome. Maybe we need to pray into it. Maybe we need to wait. Maybe we just need to know that it *could* happen, but it's based on other people's faith and choices.

Finally, there is also the issue of waiting for God's perfect timing, as well as understanding the metaphor and being certain we really do know what He means.

At any given time, we could be dealing with one or several of these four issues. We could be in a season in which nothing seems to be working, and we're tempted to think all our revelatory words are false. But that may not be the case. It could be that they just didn't happen the way we expected them to happen. It could be that they haven't happened *yet*.

If you're in a season like that and feel discouraged, know that it won't last forever. You will also go through seasons in which all the words you receive are right on. All the timing is right. Your understanding is right, and the words aren't potential outcomes that *could* happen — they are established by God, and you are able to watch them unfold.

All these things require discernment, experience, patience and grace. We need to keep them in mind and seek God on them whenever we are given a prophetic word.