



Rick Joyner:

Prophet of the New Christianity

By Peter C Glover

'They have caused themselves to stumble in their paths... from the ancient paths' (Jeremiah 18:15)

The rise of the modern prophetic movement in the last century of the second millennium can rightly be described as meteoric. Such is the prominence of this latter-day movement within the church that it claims influential friends in high places¹, dominates the Christian media, and its leaders head the wealthiest ministries the church has ever seen. The political power and influence of a movement able to organise the Million-men March in Washington DC in 1998² and to amass sufficient funds to buy into the massively expensive world of television³, should not be underestimated.

But all movements, even prophetic movements, need their visionaries - those individuals who provide insight and a strategic course for the future. If the new prophetic movement today were to form a global board of directors, then the vision and nature of Rick Joyner's prophetic utterances would surely place him among its elite. And as we assess the theology, strategies and visionary claims of Joyner, the true nature and character of his teaching comes into sharp focus. Joyner is one of a new breed of 'super-prophet' in our day, a breed which desires nothing less than to redefine biblical Christianity in these last days of the church.

Who is Rick Joyner?

Joyner variously states he was converted to Christianity in 1971⁴ and 1972⁵. From the time of his conversion (Acts 2), Joyner claims he began receiving prophetic 'impressions'. He maintains he had 'the ability to foresee future events accurately, but usually in a very general sense'⁶.

After several years in the 'full-time ministry' he decided to quit, perceiving his relationship with the Lord and his ministry as 'shallow'. After working for a while as a pilot he claims he rebuffed a call back into ministry in 1982⁷, only, he alleges, for him to be given a divine ultimatum which insisted he return or his 'commission would be given to another'⁸. Joyner duly decided to comply, though he decided not to return as a pastor.

It was, according to Joyner, during this period that he began receiving much longer periods of prophetic revelation. These personal revelations were to define and form the basis of Joyner's entire speaking and writing ministry from that time on. Joyner's books during the 80s and 90s are largely a detailed transcription of those incredible visions and dreams. Though

many were initially serialised in his own Morning Star publications, they were eventually published in book form including: *The Harvest* (1987), *The Final Quest* (1996) and *The Call* (1998). This has culminated in Joyner's latest offering, *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century: A Spiritual Map to Help you Navigate into the Future* - effectively a collective summary and update of all his previous writings.

In many ways Joyner's books are remarkably similar in character and style to those penned by spiritual warfare novelist Frank Perretti, though with one vital difference. Whereas Perretti has always insisted his work is purely non-theological and fictional, Joyner claims his writings are revelation truth, direct from the Throne of Grace.

Throughout all of these works, however, Joyner returns to another theme - that of sparing no effort to vilify anyone who might disagree with, or question, any of his teachings and visions. Unfortunately for Joyner, however, the Lord has not left us as spiritual orphans. He has equipped all Christians with the ability to test all the spirits by the written Word, as the apostle Peter has reminded us, 'prophecy made more sure' (2 Peter 1:19). Thus we are *never* to be disarmed purely by the arguments of men, perhaps especially those men who would claim greater divine privilege. Not even the apostle Paul's teachings were above being tested by Scripture (see Acts 17:11). And it is by applying such tests to Joyner's ministry that he, like so many claimants to divine favour before him, comes badly unstuck.

Joyner as hero

Joyner's ministry is defined by his status as a prophetic visionary. So incredible are his ecstatic revelations that their import appears to elevate his status to one of 'super-prophet', above and beyond both OT and NT prophet or apostle. Indeed Joyner claims as much, as we shall see. However, when we examine Joyner's prophetic credentials against those of others who also claim heavenly sojourns, we find that one who was 'caught up in a third heaven' and 'taken up into paradise' (2 Cor.12:2, 4) was instructed *not* to speak of such things. If anyone in the early church had the right to boast of divine revelations, it would be the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul. Immediately then we become aware of a gulf of difference between the retelling of experiences of the apostle Paul and of the new prophet Joyner. Far from glorying in his own personal revelations and experiences, Paul refused to relate 'inexpressible words, *which it is not lawful for a man to utter*' (v.4 - italics added). Paul explains in his humility, '...though I might desire to *boast*, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I forbear, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me (v.5). Paul considered repeating *his* heavenly experiences as 'boasting' and that he would be a 'fool' to boost his own status and credibility in the eyes of others by doing so. He knew well that it would lead to many Christians thinking of him more highly than they ought - it is human nature. Paul would not take any of the glory away from his Lord. What then would Paul make of Rick Joyner's ministry, built, as it is, *solely* on a bedrock of personal visions? And what should we make of it?

It is clear that Paul's inspired epistles and teachings are irrefutably concerned with the central character of Jesus Christ, and Christ alone. But what do we find in Joyner's books? It is Joyner who is placed at the head of the 'army of the Lord' in the final battle for truth⁹ and Joyner who finds sufficient divine favour that he is ushered to very pinnacle of spiritual levels on the 'holy mountain'¹⁰. It is Joyner who finds himself wearing a spiritual 'mantle', given him by a spirit called 'Wisdom'¹¹. And it is Joyner alone to whom is revealed the truth that the 'last-days church' will be given more of God's power and accomplish more for him than all previous generations of Christians¹². How different it is in the Scriptures, which record a church in great apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3) in the end-times, and not a church redolent with God's 'power' and populated by Christians 'accomplishing' great things for him.

In his visions Joyner is personally led by angels, has private conversations with Lot, Jonah and, of course, speaks directly with the Lord himself¹³. And the chief purpose of all these extraordinary private visions? It appears to be the urgent need for our hero, together with

fellow 'Eagles' (Joyner's name for the most anointed of the new prophetic leaders), to deliver detailed apocalyptic prophecies which the church and the world urgently need to hear. During the course of the retelling of which, however, it becomes plain that Joyner spares no effort to glorify himself, whereas Paul had spared no effort to glorify Christ. One reviewer of *The Final Quest* even observed, 'I found this book to be one of the most self-aggrandising pieces of literature that I have ever read'.¹⁴ A sentiment with which we could not disagree.

Joyner's 'New Christianity'

Building on the foundation of these private visions, Joyner states that the church should expect major upheavals in their understanding of their faith. He states, 'There will be an entirely new definition of Christianity, which the Lord Himself has already written'¹⁵ (though the Lord, it seems, did not see fit to 'write it' in the prophetic Scriptures). Those divinely chosen to bring this news and lead accordingly, Joyner identifies as 'Eagles'. They are 'hidden prophets who have been kept for this hour'.¹⁶ He sees the 'Eagles' as leading the coming final battle for truth in the church and who will set up this new order of Christianity. And here is the real rub for all *Bible-believing* Christians: it is Joyner's identification of *who* the enemy is in the coming battle - literally a Civil War in the church - which should be of major interest to us (see the box-out: *The Prophecy of the Blues and the Greys*). The theme of a coming civil war between two wings of the church runs through most of Joyner's visions and teachings. It is after this civil war has been waged and won by the new prophetic movement, that a 'New Christianity' will be established. Through the images of the 'civil war' prophecy, we are able to determine the real source of Joyner's alleged visions and impressions, etc., and the future strategy of the new prophetic movement. The violent images Joyner adopts are, it seems, to be directed, *not* against liberals in the church, as we might suppose, but *against* those who are 'not open' to the new visions and prophecies - those who 'religiously' stand on the *written* Word alone. Neither is Joyner alone in portraying this brutal end-time scenario. Allusions to a civil war in the church have also been made by other 'Eagles', including new prophets Bob Jones, Paul Cain and James Ryle (a director of Promise Keepers men's movement) for almost two decades.

Joyner's theology

We do not have time here to highlight more than the basics of Joyner's theology. But observing his pronouncements side by side with Scriptural statements proves highly illuminating.

Like almost every other new prophet today, Joyner makes the classic error of identifying Pharisees with today's Bible-believing Christians - those who believe the age of revelation is closed. This assertion is a recurring theme for Joyner. He states,

...the Pharisees, *who loved the word of God*...will attack any new movement that arises in the church. The more anointed a new movement is...the more they will vehemently attack it.¹⁷

But it is vital to note, for all who know the Word better than Joyner does, that far from being 'lovers of God's Word' as Joyner claims, the Pharisees hated God's Word. The Pharisees were lovers of money (Matt. 16:14) and were 'hypocrites' because they *added* teachings (i.e. traditions) to the written prophetic Scriptures and *insisted* upon the observance of these *unscriptural* additions. It was *this* practice which so angered our Lord. Bible-believers, or real lovers of the written Word, are those who insist on standing on the revelation of God as recorded in the Scriptures - *not on additions to them* - whether men's traditions or their new revelations.

When Joyner meets with the apostle Paul in one of his heavenly visions, he records Paul saying,

I so appreciate the grace of the Lord to use my letters as he has. But I am concerned with the way many of you are using them wrongly...The Lord did give me great stones to set into the structure of His eternal church, *but they are not the foundation stones*. The foundation stones were laid by Jesus, alone.¹⁸ (italics added)

The enormity of this assertion will not be lost on all who know that the Scriptures state something quite different:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having *been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.(Eph.2:19-20)

It would appear that Paul *and* the Holy Spirit, who inspired this passage, have changed their minds. Joyner's idea of worship and living the Christian life is no better:

The worship immediately hit a level that was as strong as we have ever experienced and immediately started pushing back the limits. There was no time left for a message or ministry...Experience is much better than words.¹⁹

And the Scriptures:

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. (John 8:31)

He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. (John 14:21)

Nowhere in Scripture is the path of personal spiritual *experiences* taught as the way of Christian spiritual maturity. It is obedience to the written Word, not experience, which is everywhere taught in Scripture as producing true Christian spiritual experience.

As regards prophecy itself, Joyner defines four levels which, in ascending order, include:

Level 1 - prophetic 'impressions'.

Level 2 - 'conscious illumination'

Level 3 - 'open visions'

Level 4 - the 'trance'²⁰

In his explanation of these levels, Joyner maintains that the apostolic writings were given to them at level 2, the level of 'conscious illumination'.²¹ However, Joyner maintains that his own prophetic visions, in the 'overwhelming majority was (*sic*) received in some level of a trance'²¹. In short, Joyner places his own prophecies on a much higher plain than the prophetic Scriptures of the apostles. Perhaps this is the reason why Joyner feels the paternal need to interpret his prophecies²². The apostle Peter, however, (remember, according to Joyner, Peter is delivering a much *lower* standard of prophecy!) stated that 'no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...for holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:20-21; also see Genesis 40:8). Much more could be said, but I think anyone with a modicum of Bible knowledge will have heard more than enough.

Conclusion

We might conclude that Joyner is merely a very sick individual, prone to flights of fancy, and leave it at that. But this would be to underestimate Joyner's widespread influence in the Christian world. He features regularly in the Christian media, at national conferences, and is one of the world's best-selling Christian authors. Remember also he is an 'Eagle', a prophet of

the New Christian order, who, as we see from the 'Blues and Greys' prophecy, foresees a time when men like him must collude to rid the world of those who will not join them and who stand against them. To allow the Rick Joyners of this 'Christian' world unopposed public platforms will expose innumerable immature and vulnerable believers to the dark mysticism that is his stock in trade.

If Joyner is sincere, and we have no reason to believe he is not, then who is it in reality that is showing him these visions? And who are these heavenly individuals with whom he meets? If he is not experiencing visitations by God's angels, the only alternative is that he is deluded and entertaining familiar spirits, literally emissaries of Satan.

Joyner leaves us no middle way. Either we treat him as God's chosen super-prophet for the end-times, or we treat him as a man in the grip of evil deceit and seek to expose him as such. If we believe him *not* to be, as he himself claims, the former, then his ability to influence large numbers of professing Christians, and a genuine love for those committed to our Christian care, should provide us with all the spiritual incentive we need to warn them. It is perhaps time to recognise something that many Christians today are loathe to consider. It is this: that far from being a leader of a 'New Christianity', men like Joyner have no claim to the title 'Christian' at all.

¹ A recent Word-Faith 'conference' attended by tens of thousands of Christians and televised internationally by the British-based God TV Channel (formerly the Christian Channel Europe) was given a 'special treat'. Chief speaker and host, the prophetic Pentecostal leader T.D. Jakes, announced a long-time personal friend wished to speak to them all personally, live via the massive TV screen lowered onto the enormous stage. That long-time friend of Jakes, who praised Jakes and his ministry extensively, was George W. Bush (son of former US President Bush), possibly the next US President.

² Though the Promise Keepers movement organised this event, PK itself was founded on prophecies. Its Board of Directors includes James Ryle, famous for his prophecy that the Beatles were sent by God to lead a global revival.

³ The British-based God TV Channel invested in its own expensive satellite 'up-link' in the summer of 1999. This device is not unimportant as it provides the channel with independence from the usual satellite providers, such as Rupert Murdoch's BSKyB. Reaching a global audience is now a realistic possibility. The prophetic movement has, therefore, an impressive global technical infrastructure mostly in place.

⁴ R. Joyner, *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century*, Nashville, 1999 (Thomas Nelson), p.3

⁵ R. Joyner, *The Final Quest*, New Kensington, 1996 (Whitaker House), p.9

⁶ R. Joyner, *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century*, p.3

⁷ *ibid.*, p.4

⁸ *ibid.*, p.4

⁹ *The Final Quest*, p.22

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.75f

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.51

¹² *ibid.*, p.137

¹³ R. Joyner, *The Harvest*, New Kensington, 1989 (Whitaker House) p.10

¹⁴ Richard Engstrom, review of *The Final Quest*, taken from the 'Apostasy Now' web-site.

¹⁵ R. Joyner, from 'Civil War in the Church', *The Morning Star Prophetic Bulletin*, May 1996

¹⁶ *The Final Quest*, p.58

¹⁷ 'Civil War in the Church', as above

¹⁸ *The Final Quest*, p.133

¹⁹ 'Civil War in the Church', as above

²⁰ *The Final Quest*, pp.9-11

²¹ *ibid.*, p.10

²¹ *ibid.*, p.11

²² *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century*, p.21