

This article was written by P.J. Tobia with the Nashville Scene http://www.nashvillescene.com/Stories/Cover_Story/2006/07/06/Prophets_Rising/index.shtml and run on July 6th as the cover story. P.J. is a contributing writer for the Nashville Scene and has recently been exposed to the Prophetic stream. Much of what he states comes from one freshly exposed to this wonderful gift and expression of God in the earth. Not everything that P.J. expresses is endorsed by Encounters Network nor does his writing necessarily reflect the thoughts and feelings of Encounters Network. Please read this article with the understanding that it reflects P.J.'s perspective and slant.

However, with all of this in mind we do appreciate and applaud his desire to write an article like this and to share on a topic that many writers would shun and avoid. He, like the “Next Generation...” he speaks about, has a true hunger for the true and real manifestations of God in the earth and desires more. We bless his search and pray that the Lord will reveal Himself to P.J. and to all who would read this article in a ever increasing and deeper way.

Blessings,

The EN Staff

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Prophets Rising

**A new generation of prophets claims to hear the voice of the Lord.
Here's what He's saying.**

By P.J. Tobia

Sandy Powell is speaking in tongues.

“Shambala mana, la la la ohhhh,” she wails, her light brown tresses waving, her body moving in rapturous undulation. She’s seated at her kitchen table. “Yeah!” she ejaculates suddenly, her head swiveling to the side as if she’s just taken a shot on the jaw.

“I am really feeling the power of the Lord upon me right now!” Powell yelps, her pretty face twisting in a grimace of rapture. A friend and prayer partner, Debbie Barry, stands next to her, eyes closed, swaying to an unheard rhythm, her head slowly nodding as if in agreement. She isn’t so much speaking in tongues as mumbling in them.

Then, between rapturous grunts, Powell begins to prophesy.

“First of all, I see the nations at your disposal.... There’s...nations coming.”

“Ma-ma-ma-ma-ma, WHOOO!”

A trim, spunky and attractive woman with long, curly hair, Powell wears dangly earrings and bracelets with bright-colored stones. On this afternoon she sports jeans with a sewn flower pattern down the left leg. Taking a deep breath, head held high, shoulders back, she says finally, “I see you traveling to a country that starts with the letter P.”

Sandy Powell, along with a handful of other Tennessee religious leaders, is at the head of a movement called prophetic gifting. The core belief of the movement is that its leaders are prophets who are “gifted” with the ability to channel the voice and thoughts of the almighty.

These prophets say that God speaks to them as he spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus, in a human voice that is loud, clear and commanding. To these “gifted” individuals, He reveals world events and facts about people’s careers, love lives and health. Sometimes, they claim, the gift is so strong that they can heal the afflicted or raise the dead.

These modern day prophets have huge national followings and are sought the world over for the gifts of the spirit that they claim to possess. Many of them call the Nashville area home. They say that we are riding the crest of a prophetic wave and soon it will break and crash all over the land.

Powell doesn't look like a prophet of old. She's more like a cross between Stevie Nicks and Tammy Faye Bakker, without the clownish makeup of the latter or the eagle feather earrings of the former. She spent her teenage years and early 20s as a country music singer, eventually touring as a backup singer with Charley Pride's band. By then, she felt that she was well on her way to fulfilling a dream of country music superstardom. Powell had her own record deal on a small label and was touring county fairs and smaller venues. She felt that the big time was close at hand. But as she tells it, God had other ideas.

Powell says that the voice of the Lord spoke to her while she was sitting in a California hotel room with two country music tour promoters. The promoters were responsible for her upcoming tour and Powell was just getting to know them. She says that as the three of them sat watching TV, God spoke to her, saying, "I want you to tell this man [who's name was Wally] about Jesus."

"Tell him *what* about Jesus?" she thought at the time. "I'm a country music singer. I sing "Great Balls of Fire" and I wear knee skirts and I sing loud. I don't know how to tell anybody about Jesus."

She panicked, ushered the men out of the room and called her manager Jim Prater. (She and Prater had first become acquainted while he was managing Charley Pride. They would later be married.)

According to a short book that Powell published in 2004, that phone conversation went like this:

"Prater! God wants Wally!"

"Not the same Wally you are suppose (sic) to be showing hospitality to?"

"Yes!" I practically screamed.



Prophetae Endeavor “He’s called me to train an army of people that hear his voice,” Powell says of her experience with Jesus. photo: Eric England

Powell put off telling Wally the good news of Jesus Christ, and 48 hours later he had a massive heart attack and died.

His death changed her forever.

“Now I live a life for Jesus, and I do what he says.... He’s called me to train an army of people that hear his voice.”

And that’s just what she does.

Powell and her husband have almost completed construction on a brand-new, nearly 7,000-square-foot, nine-bedroom, log-cabin-style home on 24 acres in rural Bethpage, Tenn., that also serves as a retreat for ministers. Each room will eventually be themed around one aspect of Jesus or the Bible. The already completed kitchen has a “Fisher of men” decor. Fish netting hangs from the ceiling while rods, reels and various tackle adorn corners and walls. Above the sink, in handpainted letters, a sign reads, “The fish will be of many kinds.” A hallway in the basement has been painted to replicate the Western Wall in Israel. On it hang prayer requests for healings and pictures of soldiers away at war.

Powell has also struck up a relationship with Belmont Church on Music Row. She teaches a course there that she says allows her to share the gift of prophecy she's been given.

“The Lord has me equipping and training right now.... I have over 80 students for nine months. I'm teaching them the protocol on how you lay hands for healing, how you hear the voice of the Lord, how you respond—all the different protocols for ministry.”

Every other month, Powell also holds what she calls “Prophetic Activations,” where she says there'll be about 100 people praying. “You'd see a whole lot of people crying,” she says. “You'd see people getting healed.... It can get deep. Not weird deep like the exorcist, but you can begin to see people, like their voice changes or eyes begin to twitch.... That's usually something demonic.”

Powell says she and her prayer team get to the root of those demonic manifestations—which she claims cause back pain, depression, ear problems, etc.—and cast them out.

The service ends with attendees forming a line. “It often snakes out onto the street,” Powell says. She then spends a brief 10 minutes prophesying over each, predicting just a few tidbits of that individual's future before moving on to the next believer.

Powell has a deep passion for what she feels is her mission. More than a few times during an afternoon spent talking about her work and prophecies, she nearly broke into tears while recounting a particularly powerful dream, healing or prediction.

She says that one of the things from which she draws strength is the broader community of prophets in Middle Tennessee, not least of all, Jim Goll.

Goll—who, along with his wife Michal Ann, runs the Encounters Network ministry—is one of the most widely known prophets in the country.

At the Elijah List website—a hub for prophets the world over that serves as a meetinghouse, bookstore and newsroom of all things prophetic—The Golls are everywhere. Alongside some of the biggest evangelists in the world, dozens of essays, tapes and books by Jim and his wife are available both free and for purchase. Steve Shultz, who manages Elijah List, says Jim Goll is the Tennessee prophet who best represents the movement here.

Goll's written six books (including the curiously titled *Wasted on Jesus*), recorded hundreds of teaching CDs, taught dozens of classes and visited far-flung countries to prophesy and teach. He recently hosted “Adventures in the Prophetic,” a two-day seminar in Knoxville that involved prophetic activation, “soaking prayer” (in which believers become immersed in the Lord) and book signings. Three hundred people attended.

With his neatly trimmed beard, preference for sweaters, and wire-rimmed glasses, Goll looks more like a suburban dad or tweedy professor than a prophet of God. His office is in a small house in Franklin, tucked along the edge of a development, nearly surrounded by a growing klatch of McMansions. The living room, with a high peaked ceiling, serves as a worship center. Above the fireplace hangs a cross big enough to nail a large midget to. Beneath that is a menorah.

Goll has a deep knowledge of the history of modern prophecy. He describes tidal movements of prophecy that have swept the country throughout the 20th century, starting in 1906 with William Seymour, a one-eyed black man who started the Pentecostal revival.

“Those tide movements,” he says, “those are the times when it seems like God just seems to be more near...and all of these prophetic movements are, in a sense, restoring the presence, the voice of God.” Goll believes that a major prophetic tide is upon us now.

Like many of these new prophets, God seems to speak to Goll most clearly in dreams. When asked a question about world events, or his personal journey as a prophet, he'll often begin his response by saying, “You know, I had a dream just last week about that....”

One of the more significant dreams of Goll's life came after he and Michal Ann had been married for two years. In it, he says the Lord told him that he and his wife would have a son named Justin. He and Michal Ann assumed that they would have children, so though they were happy, they weren't surprised.

The surprise came six years later, when the couple was still childless.

In *God Encounters*, a book the Golls co-authored, Michal Ann says that she had a “very unusual condition [with] no medical solution.” After two surgeries and the “opinions of some of the best medical minds,” the couple was nearly resigned to being forever childless. Though they still prayed fervently, Michal Ann writes that for a time she even blamed God for her barrenness, “but the blame truly belonged on Satan.” Once she realized that, she and Jim became reinvigorated in their faith and, she writes, “God performed a restorative miracle.” Shortly thereafter, Justin was born.

It's generally expected that the main business of any prophet will be to speak the word of God in the form of predictions. This takes preparation. The new prophets say they need to “soak in the Lord” for a bit before they can begin to prophesy. For Kevin Frasure, a local prophet who posts his predictions on a blog, that means he'll “put on a CD that will bring in the presence of God” and “focus on the presence of God. I'll just focus on God and feel him inside me and I might have a vision.”

Once the prophet is soaked, the prophesying can begin. These new prophets have many different styles, from dream interpretation to speaking in tongues. Sometimes their predictions are spot-on. Sometimes they are more general.

When Sandy Powell prophesied that her listener would visit a country starting with the letter P, for instance, she couldn't possibly have known that he was an enthusiastic world traveler. On the other hand, there are 14 countries that start with the 16th letter of the alphabet, and that's not counting the ones in the Paracel Islands chain.

Jeff Jansen is another leading light among Middle Tennessee's new prophets. A fit, energetic man with dark, close-cropped hair, Jansen runs Global Fire Ministries in Murfreesboro. His style of prophecy is lower key, and his predictions are even less accurate than Powell's. But Jansen deserves a mulligan because, on this day, he's prophesying in the dining room of a Cracker Barrel off I-24 during the breakfast rush. The Oracle at Delphi herself would have had trouble working with a plate of biscuits and gravy in front of her and a waitress interrupting every five minutes asking if she'd like more coffee.

Anyway, predictions are not all that these new prophets claim to offer. Jansen says that, at his meetings, believers become covered in gold dust and discover gold teeth in their mouths. Angel sightings are routine. “We see signs and wonders regularly,” he says.

Sandy Powell tells a story of being at a worship event one weekend when God said to her, “See that woman standing over there? I want you to go over there and just pray for her healing.”

She went over to the woman and began to pray. Powell was so overcome that she began to cry—but soon became dismayed upon realizing that she didn’t have any anointing oil. God told her to keep praying anyway. “I was crying,” Powell remembers, “and my tears were hitting her feet, and the Lord said, ‘Your tears will do the work of the anointing oil.’ ”

Then she whispered in the woman’s ear, “The Lord says to tell you that you’re healed.”

Almost immediately, Powell remembers, the girl began to jump and scream, “I’m healed! Sandy, Sandy, Sandy! I’m healed!”

Powell says that this woman—whom she’d never before met—had been in a terrible car accident five years before. It had crushed her hip and she’d walked with a limp ever since. So great was the agony that she’d been taking pain medication daily just to bear it. After Powell’s anointing, the pain and the limp were gone.

Needless to say, people with powers such as these are highly sought after. Many of these prophetic gifters spend much of their time on the road speaking at conferences, presiding over activations, broadcasting on Christian radio and traveling overseas to bring their gifts to the prophetically starved people of Africa, Asia and South America.

They have created an entire culture and worldview around tuning into the voice of God. Much of it starts with language. People who follow these prophets and are trying to emulate them speak of “Walking in the prophetic.” They don’t travel the world to help people; they go “out into the nations.” They aren’t ardent Christian believers; they’re “sold out on Jesus.” They are not a church, they are “the body of Christ” and of course, they don’t die; they “graduate to heaven.”

A larger part of this culture—which seems mostly absent of the transparent greed of evangelists such as Benny Hinn—is a fascination with all things Jewish. Most of the prophets interviewed for this story have menorahs in their homes. They refer to Jesus and sometimes God by their Hebrew names, Yeshua and Yahweh, respectively. They sprinkle the word *shalom* around like so much matzo flour.

A book that Goll wrote last year, *Praying for Israel’s Destiny*, featured on the cover an old Hasidic man draped in a *tallit* while blasting a *shofar*. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the *Left Behind* series knows that some Christians believe that the second coming of Jesus and the elimination of sin (and pretty much everything else) from the face of the earth are tightly bound to the fate of Israel. According to scripture, Jesus won’t even think about making a return until every Jew returns to Israel and the holy temple is rebuilt on the site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—not a minor achievement, considering that the site is now home of one of the most sacred shrines in Islam, the Dome of the Rock. Some Christians outside of the movement even have attempted to hasten Jesus’ arrival by paying for planeloads of Jews to relocate to the Promised Land.

In another, almost more fundamental sense, though, grounding the prophetic movement in the ancient past of Judaic belief, language and ritual gives it an undeniable *gravitas* that such a movement might otherwise lack.

Many of these prophets have studied at small, relatively obscure Christian colleges—if they have degrees at all—so they don't have the kind of immediate legitimacy that comes with training at a traditional divinity school like those of Vanderbilt, Duke or Princeton. They often run their ministries from their homes. When they have large activations, they're held at convention centers to accommodate the crowds.

What's more, much of their worship happens in brand new, suburban venues or in communities that were farmland just a few years ago. By co-opting the trappings and beliefs of an ancient religion and culture like Judaism, these leaders have given authority, legitimacy and history to their movement.

Also driving this movement is a sense of historical urgency. These prophets implicitly warn that great global and spiritual conflict with dire stakes awaits right around the corner. This may be because the core of their prophetic mandate comes from a short chapter of the Old Testament called Joel. In this chapter, very bad things happen to the people of God all at once; locusts (“with teeth of a lion!”), drought (“the grain has dried up, how the cattle moan!”), even fire (“the flames have burned up all the trees of the field.”)

Amid this horror, God tells Joel of special times to come. “I will pour my spirit out on all people,” God says. “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those times.”

Which special times are these?

“The Bible calls it the last days,” Goll says. “In which the Lord says, ‘I’m going to pour out my spirit and I’m going to restore supernatural communications.’ ”

In short, these prophets believe that the spread of prophetic ability is just one of many harbingers that things are about to change in a big way. The new prophets also see certain recent geopolitical developments as further proof of shifting supernatural sands.

When Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad threatened to wipe Israel off the map, bells went off in the prophetic community.

“I absolutely believe that we’re headed into the fulfillment of Psalm 84,” Goll says, “where it says that there is a conspiracy among the nations to wipe out Israel, that she be remembered no more.”

He hastens to add that he doesn't think that the end of the world is at hand. The last days are not to be confused with the end times. The end times happen at the end of the Bible, when the four horsemen do their thing. The last days, on the other hand, are marked by the birth of the savior, so if you're a Christian, you've been living in the last days for just over 2,000 years.

Goll does think that we may be in the “latter end of the last days...approaching the end times...” but he realizes that speculation on such matters can seem silly. “There's a book called *88 Reasons Why Jesus is Returning in 1988*. Whatever those 88 reasons were, they apparently didn't work.”

Between the catastrophic pace of war, disaster and disease in today's world and the undeniable surge in religiosity in the U.S., it's not surprising these prophets believe that we are in the midst of a Joel-like era, with the promise of what that prophet called “The Day of the Lord” soon at hand.

Further fueling this is the movement's militant language and imagery. While violence isn't even in their lexicon, they speak like generals equipping an army for the ultimate conflict.

“The enemy,” Sandy Powell says, blond tresses shaking, “is like a roaring, prowling, lion, [searching for] who he can hurt, kill, steal from or destroy.... We as Christians must stand our guard.”

The chapter titles of James Goll’s book, *The Coming Prophetic Revolution*, ring with martial vigor: “Our Revelatory Arsenal” and “Surrendering to the Commander.” In *God Encounters*, the chapter titled “Spiritual Warfare Encounters” instructs the reader about how to prepare for “our battle in the heavenlies” and the “battlefield of the mind.”

To these prophets, the struggle between good and evil is visceral, both globally and emotionally, and Satan is, as intuition would have it, prophetic enemy No. 1. One of Satan’s manifestations that repeatedly surfaces in conversations with these prophets is psychics.

At first blush, it would seem as though psychics and prophets have much in common. Besides claiming the ability to foretell future events, psychics and New Agers often boast of having direct hotlines to angels, spirits and the deceased. More, these prophets’ focus on meditation, talk of spirituality and lack of dogma make it easy to picture crystals and dreamcatchers on their mantels instead of crosses and *shofars*.

As is often the case with spiritual matters, Satan and his minions make all the difference.

“Psychics move by demons, which are fallen angels,” says Jansen, over his breakfast at Cracker Barrel. He stresses that prophets get their information from God and angels, whereas Satan and demons are informing psychics and other New Age mediums.

“They don’t do it in the name of the holy spirit,” he says of psychics. He cites the example of John Edward, the popular TV clairvoyant who claims to speak to the dead loved ones of audience members on his show *Crossing Over*. “He contacts familiar spirits, but he doesn’t do it by the holy spirit. He calls them departed spirits,” Jansen says, leaning across the table and raising his eyebrows for emphasis. “Well, he’s got demons talking to him. He gets his information from demons.”

Jansen admits that Edward is “getting good information,” but he says, “it isn’t coming from God. It’s from demons. His gift from God is being used by a demon.”

The prophets interviewed for this article never dispute that psychics possess powerful gifts and the ability to predict the future. It’s the source of those powers that the prophets question.

As Powell says, “Jesus must be the source”—otherwise, you may be fooling with the dark lord.

In the face of this wave of prophecy, there’s at least one man who isn’t buying it. His name is Professor Volney P. Gay, chair of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University. He is a professor of religion, psychiatry and anthropology, the director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture and sits on the editorial board of *The Journal of Ritual Studies*.

Gay, who has done some research on the prophetic gifting movement, says that it’s “a kind of occult religion.... It sounds a lot like popular psychology,” he continues, voicing particular concern that these prophets are claiming they can tell the future.

“Jewish and Christian prophets do not tell people their fortunes—who will die and who will prosper, or which mutual fund to buy. Rather, they warn us about the consequences of our moral and ethical choices.... I’m not saying that there are no gifts of the spirit,” he says, citing the examples of Martin Luther King Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German and Lutheran minister who helped lead the resistance movement in Nazi Germany. “[They] did not predict future events.... In his great speeches, King did not predict when black and white children would join together. He predicted that the beloved community would emerge if we dedicated ourselves to the truths of the Christian witness: love, forgiveness, charity and hope. He did not say that he had magical powers.”

As for the theological Christian grounding of the movement, Gay is unimpressed. “The passages from Joel can be wrenched from their contexts and used to warrant any manner of claims. But these are not relevant to Biblical thought.... In Joel, you have a brilliant but very traditional anxiety about the future, about imminent collapse,” the professor says, his voice rising. “The reason those things are in there is because they did happen! In those days there were invasions, there were catastrophes and vastly larger states that could crush the Jews and make them slaves. [These] prophecies were driven by political realities of the period.”

Asked to explain the near-accurate predictions of some of these modern day prophets, Gay says, “A stopped clock is right twice a day.”

Sandy Powell is unmoved by Gay’s highfalutin opinions. “I can’t deny what I hear, who I am and what He’s called me to do.” She compares the professor to the Pharisees who mocked Jesus, adding “the skeptics and the stalkers that are within the church or outside of the church, you know, God will deal with us each in our own way.”

Jeff Jansen says that he’d been dealing with resistance to the prophetic movement for some time, though it came primarily from established church leaders. “Take the word ‘supernatural’ and try and put it in a church and people freak out, because people don’t understand it.”

Clearly, a big part of what has drawn these people to dramatic, “signs and wonders”-style worship is dissatisfaction with the restrictive nature of traditional church ritual.

Jansen was formerly a Catholic turned evangelical minister. In his many years of church service, he felt that he’d lost touch with the most important part of worship: God. “I was tired of ministry, tired of playing the church game,” he says. “If God was not gonna show up, than I wasn’t gonna show up.”

While accompanying a friend to a meeting, an “international prophet” called Jansen to the stage and told him “who I was, where I came from, what I was involved with and what occupation I was in.” The experience stunned him and reawakened the power of his faith. “From that time forward, the holy spirit came into my life.”

His story echoes those of other new prophets who had seminal moments that spurred them to find more exciting alternatives to the rigid, dogmatic church cultures that they grew up in. It’s no wonder that this new and vibrant way of worship is so popular with young people.

Every Tuesday night between the beginning of May and the middle of June, James Goll teaches an “Angelic Encounters” class. The class is kind of a how-to guide to contacting your guardian angels and getting the most out of the encounters. Goll is qualified to teach such a curriculum because he says that he’s “had the privilege of seeing into the angelic dimension.”

It's held in the Ecclesia Fellowship at The Factory in Franklin. The space is cool and dark with high ceilings, exposed brick and cement floors. It could easily be the location for a yuppie coffee bar instead of a suburban spiritual refuge. Inside, a mostly young crowd sits and chats while a singer and pianist plays "Lord Have Your Way With Me" on a low stage in the front. Toward the back of the audience, a group of white teens sat giggling and flirting.

A pair of a them, a girl who we'll call Neveah and her friend Isaac, hold hands while she scribbles with a ball point pen on one of her bare feet. They both voice a tremendous respect for Goll.

Isaac tells of how at a recent New Age convention Goll began prophesying over New Agers and other nonbelievers. He recounts with reverence how Goll spoke "into" the lives of some of these total strangers. "Many of them converted on the spot."

During the Angelic Encounters class, the couple and their friends laugh, chat and tease each other, but they are at times clearly enthralled by Goll's teaching, often shouting out in agreement or joy at his words.

Sandy Powell also has had great luck energizing youth with this brand of ministry. "The youth are coming more and more into the picture," she says. "They are touching this thing, they are getting a hold of it. We have a young man on our team that's been with me since he was 12." He is now 14.

Perhaps this new prophetic movement says less about the ability or powers of these particular prophets than it does about the limits and drawbacks of traditional worship. Who wants to sit in a pew when they can levitate with the power of God? Who wants to listen to a priest or minister when they can converse with the Almighty Himself? And who wants to fill the basket when all you get in return is confession and a guilty conscience?

"God, the power that created the universe, is living inside of all of us," Jeff Jansen says, poking himself in the belly, "and he's always talking. The only question is, are you going to listen?"

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