

Grace OPC High School Sunday Class Teaching Notes			
Year:	1 of 4		Date: Week 4
Quarter:	4 of 4	Biblical Thinking	
Lesson Title:	The Gift of Prophecy		
Lesson Purpose:	To look at the gifts of Prophecy to see if we should expect to see it in the church today.		

## 1. Introduction

Last week we saw:

- The gift of tongues was the ability to speak an earthly language with no prior knowledge of it.
- It was given as a sign of judgement to unbelieving Jews and to a limited extent for edification of the church.
- Since God's judgment on Jerusalem was completed in AD 70 and the canon of Scripture was completed in 397, there is no further purpose for the gift.
- This understanding fits the accounts from early church history
- With this background, we can evaluate the alleged manifestations of tongue-speaking in the church today as being erroneous

This week we will look at the gift of prophecy

## 2. The gift of Prophecy

We have seen that prophecy was a gift to the early church:

The Gift	Scriptures
Apostles, Prophets Helps, Administrations	<b>1 Corinthians 12:27</b> Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. <b>28</b> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, <i>various</i> kinds of tongues.

### 2.1. ***What was the gift of prophecy and what was its purpose?***

“Prophet” and “Prophecy” have a variety of meanings in Scripture:

**1** in Greek writings, an interpreter of oracles or of other hidden things. **2** one who, moved by the Spirit of God and hence his organ or spokesman, solemnly declares to men what he has received by inspiration, especially concerning future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation. **2A** the OT prophets, having foretold the kingdom, deeds and death, of Jesus the Messiah. **2B** of John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus the Messiah. **2C** of the illustrious prophet, the Jews expected before the advent of the Messiah. **2D** the Messiah. **2E** of men filled with the Spirit of God, who by God's authority and command in words of weight pleads the cause of God and urges salvation of men. **2F** of prophets that appeared in the apostolic age among Christians. **2F1** they are associated with the apostles. **2F2** they discerned and did what is best for the Christian cause, foretelling certain future events. (Acts 11:27). **2F3** in the religious assemblies of the Christians, they were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak, having power to instruct, comfort, encourage, rebuke, convict, and stimulate, their hearers. **3** a poet (because poets were believed to sing under divine inspiration). **3A** of Epimenides (Tit. 1:12).

In the context of the NT gift of the Spirit, we mean particularly number 2 above – a gift through which God gave new and inspired revelation to His infant church before the NT Scriptures were completed. We will call this “revelatory prophecy” for the purposes of this lesson. This gift had two purposes – to edify the church of the day and to give the church in all ages the completed and inspired Word of God. God revealed Himself to His early church through His Word as He does now but as we have seen, they had a severe disadvantage over us - they only had the OT Scriptures and perhaps a few early Gospels and letters. This deficiency had to be made good if the church was to be fully instructed in The Way. Thus we see prophecy being used to edify the church:

**1 Corinthians 14:5** Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

**1 Corinthians 14:26** What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.** **27** If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; **28** but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

The Scriptures also had to be completed and we have already seen that it was through apostles and prophets that this was done.

## 2.2. *Why is there no longer revelatory prophecy in the Church today?*

As soon as the Scriptures were completed, it is clear that there would be no further need of the gift through which they were given to the church and through which the church had been sustained pending their completion. We saw in earlier lessons that the Bible is fully sufficient and authoritative for every matter of faith and practice. It is complete and there is nothing more to be added to it in the way of new revelation. That's why the last living apostle, John, wrote the following in the last words of the last book that was included in Scripture:

**Revelation 22:18-19** I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book;<sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Once again, we have seen that the apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church (the Word) and once that was laid, it was time to move on and not keep laying the foundation:

**Ephesians 2:19-22** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,<sup>20</sup> **having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

As we saw with tongues last week, this position is also supported by 1 Corinthians 13:8, if we understand the "perfect" to be God's Word:

**1 Corinthians 13:8-13** Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.<sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;<sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.<sup>13</sup> But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The famous prophecy in Daniel also implies that gifts such as vision and prophecy would not continue long after Messiah was cut off:

**Daniel 9:24-27** "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, **to seal up vision and prophecy**, and to anoint the most holy place.<sup>25</sup> "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.<sup>26</sup> "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.<sup>27</sup> "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

For these reasons, we understand that the gift of prophecy (in the sense of a gift through which new revelation is given to the church) has passed out of the church and has no modern-day purpose that might lead us to expect it to be present.

## 2.3. *What is the evidence from church history?*

The testimonies we examined in relation to tongues are generally relevant here also:

**Justin Martyr (110-165)** "For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that the gifts formerly among your nation have been transferred to us"

**Montanus (126-180)** Eusebius wrote this of him: "a recent convert, Montanus by name, through his unquenchable desire for leadership, gave the adversary opportunity against him. And he became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the church handed down by tradition from the beginning." He regarded himself as the inspired organ of the Holy Spirit and had an influence on others (such as Tertullian and Irenaeus) – but not a positive one. It is clear that whatever he did was not regarded as an orthodox expression of spiritual gifts.

**Irenaeus (120- 202)** "...termining those persons "perfect" who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God" This seems to indicate a second-hand acquaintance with the phenomenon. He may have been referring to the Montanists who were influential at the time.

**Origen (185-254)** *“Moreover, The Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ’s ministry, and after His ascension He gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in the few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence.”*

3rd council of Carthage in 397 closed the canon and declared that only these scriptures were to be read in the churches.

**Chrysostom (345-407)** – in his commentary on 1 Cor 12:1-2 *“This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place”*

Even if we accept that the events described by Irenaeus and others of his day, including Montanus, were genuine, it is clear that when the canon of Scripture was completed it was acknowledged that the revelatory gifts as described in the Bible had served their purpose and passed away.

#### **2.4. How shall we evaluate the claimed manifestation of prophecy in the church today?**

What often is called prophecy in fellowships today is not the same thing at all, but often takes a form closer to preaching, where existing scripture is applied to a fellowship by one of its members.

In other places, whilst new revelation is claimed, the contents do not amount to that at all, containing on examination nothing that is not already found in the canon of Scripture. Furthermore, except in some extreme examples, we rarely hear of these utterances being written down and studied or of church discipline being brought to bear on people who do not obey them. In other words, they are not treated as being fully equivalent to the Word of God, even where they are claimed to constitute new revelation. They seem to be placed as some sort of secondary, non-binding revelation to the church.

#### **2.5. Is there any form of prophecy still in the church today?**

We do maintain that there is a prophetic element today in true preaching – not of course in the sense that new revelation is being given to the church but rather that God has given the preacher relevant applications of the Scriptures to the situation facing the church today. It is Christ who speaks in true preaching, which constitutes an authoritative declaration of God’s Word to His church by His spokesman. It is applied by the Spirit to the hearts of the people to meet their current needs for spiritual nourishment (see 2F3 above). This is clearly not the same thing as the revelatory prophetic gift that was in the early church.

### **3. Conclusions**

We have seen:

- ❑ Prophet and Prophecy are used in a variety of ways in the Scriptures. The one we have been concerned with is the gift through which new revelation was given from God to His church
- ❑ This gift of prophecy has ceased, becoming unnecessary once the canon of Scripture was completed
- ❑ The testimony from church history agrees with this.
- ❑ Whilst there have been many claims for revelatory prophecy still being in the church, on examination these are not the same as the gift through which God gave us His Word in the early church.
- ❑ Nevertheless, true preaching, through which God speaks to His church today and addresses her needs and problems, does contain prophetic elements but without new revelation being conveyed.