

A Tale Of Two Prophets
(1 Corinthians 12.4-11 Part 3 September 13, 2020)

A Tale Of Two Prophets

— 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 — Part 3 —



Until April 9, 1906 – prophecy and gifts such as the gift of tongues and the gift healing – were barely discussed in any mainline church.

On that night, an African American Pastor named William J. Seymour and seven men were praying and waiting on God in Los Angeles. They claim to have suddenly been filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues.

A revival broke out undergirded by tongues and healing. Some in the movement designated themselves as Prophets.

From this revival – the mainline Pentecostal denominations were birthed.

Pentecostals traditionally taught speaking in tongues was a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

They taught that healing was a common gift available to the churches.

They taught that Prophets were a leadership gift for today. Some even taught Apostles remained a leadership gift for today.

But Pentecostals were not considered mainstream and were an oddity on the Christian scene for many years.

However, over time the idea of miraculous spiritual gifts began to influence mainline denominations.

In 1960, an Episcopal minister in Los Angeles announced to his congregation that he had received a Pentecostal experience.

Over the next few years the charismatic experience moved into most denominations and then into Roman Catholicism and a number of Christian cults.

However, Charismatics generally did not hold that speaking in tongues was a sign of the baptism of the Spirit. They saw it as something after salvation – a filling of the Spirit.

Prophecy was in these churches but often it played a more minor role.

Then, in the 1980's what became known as The Third Wave developed.

First wave of the Spirit – Pentecostalism.

Second wave of the Spirit – Charismatics.

Third wave of the Spirit – imaginatively titled – Third Wave.

They believed that miraculous gifts were given by God to aid in evangelism and the proclamation of the gospel.

Prophecy was much more prominent among these churches.

In each of these movements – Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave – there were groups that were extreme. Some denied the Trinity. Some taught the prosperity gospel. Some taught what can only be called another gospel.

But within these movements some began to fight against these abuses – and over time moved from a reliance on experience to seeking to build a biblical case for the continuation of spiritual gifts on the Bible.

But the reality was – they had an experience and now sought to provide a biblical foundation for that experience.

And it pretty much came to centre around an answer to one question.

Is there a form of the gift of prophecy that was meant to continue for the whole church age?

It became clear that prophecy was the key to justifying gifts like tongues and healing.

All sides realised the miraculous gifts were associated with prophecy.

Andrew Wilson writing in *Themelios* in favour of *The Continuation of the Charismata* – continuing miraculous gifts wrote:

Prophecy ... is the most helpful focus for a concentrated discussion. ... Although we may disagree about the continuation of the gifts of languages,

interpretation, healings, miracles, and discerning spirits ... I think we would all agree that the key question concerns the continuation of prophecy. Should disciples 'earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy'?¹

If prophecy in some form continues – then very likely the miraculous gifts associated with it continue in some form.

If prophecy ceased – then very likely the miraculous gifts associated with it ceased.

We are in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul is answering a question the Corinthians asked him.

The question was something like this:

Paul, isn't it true that miraculous spiritual gifts were given to indicate who the more spiritual people were?

Jean-Jacques Suurmond sums up Paul's answer well: "It is not so much a matter of *having* a gift, as of *being* a gift"

In verses 8-10 of chapter 12 Paul gives a list of gifts.

Prophetic Revelation Gifts

A message of wisdom
A message of knowledge

Prophetic Confirmation Gifts

Faith
Gifts of healing
Performing of miracles
Foretelling Prophecy
Distinguishing of spirits

Prophetic Sign Gifts

Tongues
Interpretation of tongues



Prophetic Revelation Gifts

Prophetic Confirmation Gifts

Prophetic Sign Gifts

¹ Andrew Wilson, "The Continuation of the Charismata" *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (2019): 16–17.

We have seen that likely these nine gifts were all associated with prophecy.

So the question of whether *Grace Bible Church* should be pursuing and using these gifts or not centres around the gift of prophecy.

This message is not directly based on this passage – but it is certainly relevant to this passage. Did Paul intend these gifts to be in our church?

This morning I want to show you:

The only true prophecy was
inerrant and authoritative.

Trust nothing else!



The only true prophecy was inerrant and authoritative. Trust nothing else!

The only true prophecy was inerrant and authoritative. Trust nothing else!

You might be sitting there thinking – really – a whole sermon on prophecy? Let me out of here.

But it matters.

Often movements impact Christians without them understanding the basis on which those movements exist.

This morning, I want you to realise that what is called the gift of prophecy today – is something quite different from what the church has always considered to be biblical prophecy.

Things like impressions, feelings, promptings – are admittedly subjective and prone to error – are now classed as prophecy and said to be important for the church.

This is taught by men most of us respect. Many here read them and listen to them – and in most areas I say *amen*. But because they are tremendous in these other areas, many have just accepted their teaching on spiritual gifts.

That is fine – but I want you to understand what it is that you are accepting.

As well, realise that if you are putting gut feelings and impressions on the level of prophecy and valuing them as wisdom from God – it can lead to some very dangerous places.

Let me begin this overview by asking – when *you* hear **prophecy** – what do you think?

Do you think of Prophets like Isaiah rebuking Israel and foretelling of the coming of the Suffering Servant? Probably.

Or do you also think that if the person in front of you this morning came to you after the service and said – brother, sister – God put it on my heart to encourage you to persevere in these tough days – and something in your soul says – Yes – thank you Lord – I needed that – that this is *also* prophecy?

We are told by many today in no uncertain terms – yes – they are **both** prophecy.

Clearly, we need to talk about what prophecy is.

Before we look at the main views of prophecy – there is a view I should mention.

It became common in some circles to equate the prophecy of today with Spirit-empowered understanding and proclamation of the Bible. In other words – what I am doing now – preaching. A good preacher would be a modern day prophet.

While it is true that prophets did often teach, to redefine prophecy in the New Testament as *only* teaching – or preaching – is to restrict prophecy to something much narrower than the gift we find described.

Prophecy also involved revelation, exhortation and at times foretelling.

As well, in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 Paul lists prophecy and teaching as separate gifts.

This view really doesn't stack up so I won't spend more time on it.

What are the other main understandings of prophecy?

Prophecy As Foundational

Prophecy As Foundational

Old Testament	New Testament	Today
Prophets	Prophets	
P	P	

Old Testament	New Testament	Today
Prophets	Prophets	
P	P	

This is the traditional understanding and was the overwhelming view of the church until the 20th century.

And yes – no surprise – it is my view.

In the Old Testament there were authoritative, thus sayeth the Lord Prophets. They wrote Scripture, gave the Law, commanded the nation and prophesied about Messiah.

The main test of a genuine prophet was 100% accuracy – else their fate was to be killed as a false prophet.

The New Testament gift of prophecy was the same – authoritative and to be obeyed.

All the Apostles were Prophets but there were also other Prophets who spoke and wrote authoritative messages from God.

These Apostles and Prophets were foundational and when they had laid the foundation – the gift had done its job and they simply died out.

Today, in the church there is no continuing gift of prophecy.

Then the Pentecostal movement arrived. They taught:

Prophecy As Normative

Prophecy As Normative				
Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets		Prophets		Prophets
P		P		P

Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets		Prophets		Prophets
P		P		P

Prophecy is something that was present among the people of God in every age.

This is the classic Pentecostal position.

In this view the same gift of Prophecy was present in the Old Testament, the New Testament and in the church today.

Some Pentecostals saw Apostles as also continuing in the church age – some didn't – but **all** saw authoritative prophecy as being for every age.

This meant that they saw their pronouncements in their churches as binding because they came from God.

However, this teaching found little traction because it simply could not be substantiated from Scripture or experience.

As we saw last week the doctrines of Sola Scriptura and the completion of the canon meant the idea of continuing authoritative prophecy could not be sustained.

As well, many of their prophecies failed to come to pass. Many were simply contradictory.

It became clear you could not give their prophecies the same authority as Scripture.

Some fringe groups still hold this view but today, even most modern Pentecostals have abandoned this view.

What then replaced it is a more nuanced version of continuing prophecy.

What defines this newer view is that today authoritative prophecy has ceased – **but** there is a version of non-authoritative prophecy that still remains in the church today.

There are two main variations.

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative – Variation 1

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative #1				
Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets		Apostles and non-authoritative prophets		Non-authoritative prophets
P		A and p		p

Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets		Apostles and non-authoritative prophets		Non-authoritative prophets
P		A and p		p

In the Old Testament there were authoritative Prophets who spoke the true word of God.

However, when we come to the New Testament – this view says it is **only** the Apostles who spoke and wrote authoritative prophecy.

In other words – the true successors to the Old Testament Prophets like Elijah and Isaiah were the Apostles – like Peter and Paul.

However, crucially they teach that there was *also* a non-authoritative form of New Testament prophecy.

This is the form of prophecy that is said to continue after the time of the Apostles.

This other type of prophecy is in the church today.

This view had two main problems. The first is that it limits New Testament authoritative prophecy to Apostles – yet a number of books of the New Testament were written by those other than Apostles.

For example the books of Mark, Luke, Acts, James, Jude and Hebrews.

This view also rests on problematic translation of Ephesians 2:20.

They say this should be translated – the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles – *who are the Prophets*.

I looked at this last week – that translation just isn't what that verse means.

This led to a further refining of the view.

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative – Variation 2

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative #2				
Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets and non-authoritative prophets		Prophets and non-authoritative prophets		Non-authoritative prophets
P and p		P and p		p

Old Testament		New Testament		Today
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Prophets and non-authoritative prophets		Prophets and non-authoritative prophets	Non-authoritative prophets
P and p		P and p	p

This is probably the strongest continuationist view today.

They argue that in both Old Testament *and* New Testament times there was **both** authoritative prophecy *and* non-authoritative prophecy.

The gift of prophecy – had bits that were Thus says the Lord – and bits that were more impressions and feelings.

When Ephesians 2:20 says the church is:

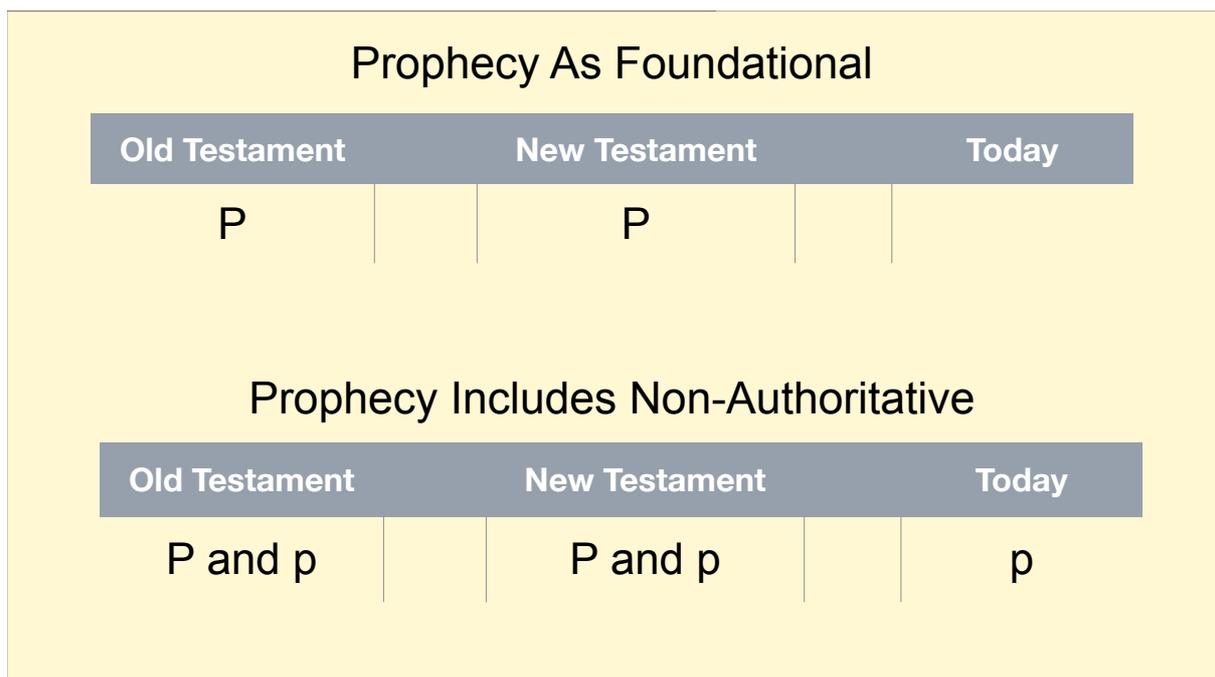
Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Paul means authoritative prophets only.

Authoritative prophecy is foundational and stopped after the time of the Apostles.

But non-authoritative prophecy continued.

If all of that confused you – let me simplify it. Here are the two views that most hold to today.



Prophecy As Foundational

Old Testament		New Testament		Today
P		P		

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative

Old Testament		New Testament		Today
P and p		P and p		p

The question is simple. Is there this second kind of prophecy – a non-authoritative kind of prophecy and does it continue today?

To help us clarify what we mean by these two kinds of prophecy, I want to look for a moment at two passages.

The first is Exodus 4:21–23:

Exodus 4:21–23:

The Lord instructed Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, make sure you do before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put within your power. But I will harden his heart so that he won’t let the people go. And you will say to Pharaoh: This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son. I told you: Let my son go so that he may worship me, but you refused to let him go. Look, I am about to kill your firstborn son!”



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This is the kind of prophecy most of us think of when we think of Prophets.

All sides agree that this type of **Authoritative Prophecy** was in the Old Testament and in the days of the Apostles. It has these elements:

Authoritative prophecy is:

1. A spontaneous, miraculous act
2. Empowered by the Holy Spirit
3. Resulting in a message that is intelligible and usually verbal or written
4. Delivered to the people of God, nations or significant individuals for kingdom purposes
5. Attributable to a member or members of the Godhead
6. Comes with implied divine authority and without error

1. A spontaneous, miraculous act

It is spontaneous – in other words God chooses to move a prophet when He so wills. It is not something the Prophet can decide – “I will now prophesy”. It is miraculous – not natural.

God told Moses to go. God supernaturally gave Him the message.

2. Empowered by the Holy Spirit

The Spirit generates the prophecy and authenticates the prophecy.

Moses was empowered with what to say and the miracles to back it up.

3. Resulting in a message that is intelligible and usually verbal or written

The people, the King – the recipients of the prophecy understood it. It was intelligible.

Usually it was delivered in verbal or written form. But, in the Old Testament at least sometimes the message was in another form. For example Ezekiel acted out the siege of Jerusalem with models and him lying there for weeks.

Here, Moses went with a verbal message to Pharaoh – and Pharaoh understood it.

4. Delivered to the people of God, nations or significant individuals for kingdom purposes.

Prophets spoke to the nation, to Kings, to significant individuals and it was delivered for kingdom purposes – the message was part of God’s plan.

Moses’ message was to the leader of Egypt – God says let My people go.

5. Attributable to a member or members of the Godhead

The message is said to be from the Father, the Son, the Spirit or the Trinity.

Moses told him – This is what the LORD says.

6. Comes with implied divine authority and without error

This came from God and Pharaoh was meant to obey it.

When Pharaoh did not let Israel go – his firstborn died. The prophecy was fulfilled without error.

Everyone agrees – **this** kind of prophecy is in the Bible.

And the Old Testament gave three tests to tell if a Prophet was genuine.

1. Did they speak the truth about God?
2. Did they strive for holy lives?
3. Did everything they say come to pass?

It is that third test that became the stumbling block.

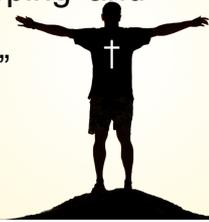
What you have is people who are convinced the gift of prophecy remains – but realized the gift today contains error. It did not meet the ‘without error’ standard.

They came to believe that there is *another* kind of prophecy that is profoundly different to the Moses, Elijah, Apostle Paul kind of prophecy?

Have a look with me at Acts 21:4–14.

Acts 21:4–14:

[Verse 4] We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. ... [Verse 10] After we had been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done."



This incident in Acts 21 is the key passage. It is cited as proof that there is a kind of prophecy that is not authoritative and does contain errors:

[Verse 4] We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. ... [Verse 10] After we had been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done."

It is said that this kind of prophecy differs at four points.

Authoritative prophecy is:

1. A spontaneous, miraculous act
2. Empowered by the Holy Spirit
3. Resulting in a message that is intelligible and usually verbal or written
4. Delivered to the people of God, nations or significant individuals for kingdom purposes
5. Attributable to a member or members of the Godhead
6. Comes with implied divine authority and without error

Non-authoritative prophecy differs:

1. May be under the prophet's control
2. May be delivered to individual Christians for their edification
3. May not result in an intelligible message
4. May be delivered to individual Christians for their edification
5. Comes without implied divine authority and with errors

First. This kind of prophecy – may be under the prophet's control.

This kind of prophecy can at times be initiated by the prophet – for example some say they say they can choose when to speak in tongues or to prophesy.

Second. This kind of prophecy – may not result in an intelligible message.

This prophecy might be angelic tongues – a flow of words no one understands.

It might simply be an impression, a feeling of guidance, an inner voice, an event in everyday life, an internal prompting – a feeling rather than a specific message.

Third. This kind of prophecy – may be delivered to individual Christians for their edification.

Authoritative prophets were sent with a message for the nation, the church, a King, a leader.

But this kind of prophecy can come to ordinary Christians for no reason other than to edify or encourage that person.

The example given is tongues – which can edify an individual Christian. When we get to 1 Corinthians 14 – I want to show you that this is not a proper use of the gift – true gifts edify the church not individuals.

Fourth. This kind of prophecy – comes without implied divine authority and with errors.

This is the **key** change. It all hinges on this.

Sam Storms defines prophecy like this, “Prophecy is the human *report* of a divine *revelation*.”²

The divine revelation was perfect.

In one form of prophecy – authoritative prophecy – the report is without error.

But today, we only have the form that after it passes through the filter of our flawed, fallen humanity it that leads to a message that is flawed.

We can get it wrong.

Wayne Grudem says in his book *The Gift of Prophecy* says that “There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the Charismatic Movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted.”

John Piper agrees that modern prophecy is **not** “infallible, Scripture-level, authoritative speaking,” but he says it is rather “something that God spontaneously brings to mind in the moment, and—because we are fallible in the way we perceive it, and the way we think about it, and the way we speak it—it does not carry that same level of infallible, Scripture-level authority.”³

Our fallibility leads to fallible prophecy.

This is a **huge** change.

Think about it. The **very** test of a true prophet is altered.

The definitive way to tell if a Prophet was from God was this – is it infallible – did it come true 100%?

If you are going to redefine the very nature of prophecy you need some significant proof.

The incident in Acts 21 is held up as proof that there is another kind of prophecy – fallible prophecy.

First, it is said this kind of prophecy comes without divine authority. It is not always to be obeyed.

They say Paul disobeyed a direct prophetic command.

Through the Spirit they told Paul **not** to go to Jerusalem – but Paul went anyway.

Sam Storms – who holds to this new form of prophecy – says this, “So here is speech given ‘through the Spirit’ that Paul disobeys! This fits well with a view of prophecy that

² Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.207

³ *Ask Pastor John*, Episode 215, 0:51–1:28.

... is given in merely human words, words that the Holy Spirit does not superintend or claim as his own, **words that can have a mixture of truth and error in them.**"⁴

That is stunning. Listen to that again. This kind of prophecy **is given in merely human words**, words that the Holy Spirit **does not superintend or claim as his own, words that can have a mixture of truth and error in them.**"

I want to suggest that this denies every test of prophecy in the Bible.

Second, it is said this kind of prophecy contains error.

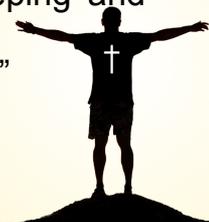
The claim is that Agabus' prophecy failed to come to pass.

Storms adds, "the prophetic warning of Agabus ... was wrong on two points: (a) it was the Romans who bound Paul, not the Jews and (b) far from the Jews delivering Paul into the hands of the Gentiles, he had to be forcibly rescued from them. [This prophecy is a] mixture of truth and error."

Since this passage has become the centrepiece – the example passage proving this new form of prophecy – we need to look at it.

Acts 21:4–14:

[Verse 4] We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. ... [Verse 10] After we had been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done."



First, did Paul actually disobey a direct prophetic command?

It depends on what the actual prophecy was. What did the Spirit tell the disciples?

Did the Spirit say – Tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem!

⁴ <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/why-nt-prophecy-does-not-result-in--scripture-quality--revelatory-words--a-response-to-the-most-frequently-cited-cessationist-argument-against-the-contemporary-validity-of-spiritual-gifts->

That is one possible way to understand verse 4.

However, Agabus seems to have received the same message that the disciples did and in his prophecy we have more details about what the Spirit said.

Here is the issue – was the prophecy:

“This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews ... will bind [him] ... and deliver him over to the Gentiles.’

OR

“This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘Because the Jews ... will bind [him] ... and deliver him over to the Gentiles, tell Paul not to go.’ ”

Agabus’ prophecy said nothing about telling Paul not to go.

It seems much more likely – or is at least a very possible interpretation – that both the disciples and Agabus were shown by the Holy Spirit that when Paul went to Jerusalem he would suffer and be handed over to the Gentiles.

It was their love for Paul – not a message from the Spirit – that led them to beg him not to go.

It is a bit like Peter saying to Jesus I won’t let You go to the cross to the cross – it will never happen (Matthew 16).

Paul’s response was to say – no – I have to go – and if I die I die.

It is a long bow to suggest Paul heard a direct command and said – I don’t think this is authoritative – I won’t go.

Second, did Agabus’ prophecy not come to pass?

The argument is that Agabus said the Jews would bind Paul but when you read on in Acts 21 it seems the Romans bound Paul.

In this passage – it actually seems pretty clear that the Jews bound him first and then the Romans bound him after that. Agabus got it right.

The passage says the Jews “seized him” (v. 27), “dragged” him out of the temple (v. 30), “tried to kill” him (v. 31), and “were beating” him when the Roman soldiers finally arrived (v. 32).

A number of these words could include binding.

In Acts 26 Paul tells Agrippa he was “seized” and “dragged” by the Jews which probably means he was bound and restrained.

They also say Agabus was wrong in that far from the Jews delivering Paul into the hands of the Gentiles, he supposedly had to be rescued from the Jews by the Romans.

No. In Acts 28:17 Paul says:

I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

He uses the very word Agabus used (*paradidomi*) to describe being handed over by the Jews to the Romans – the Gentiles.

It is clear that Paul believed this prophecy was fulfilled perfectly.

It is also clear Luke sees Agabus as a Prophet in the line of the Old Testament Prophets.

In Acts 11:28 Agabus predicted a famine in the Roman world which Luke says was fulfilled in the reign of Claudius.

He describes him as using prophetic symbolism in binding his own hands and feet, similar to what the Old Testament Prophets did.

He used a prophetic formula, “This what the Holy Spirit says.”

Throughout church history nobody thought there was an issue with this Prophet or his prophecy until recently.

The fact Paul doesn’t have an issue with it and Luke doesn’t have an issue with it and those in church history didn’t have an issue with it – should make us realise – there is no issue.

But, Agabus is absolutely central to their case. Without Agabus, continuationists have precisely **no** specific examples of non-authoritative, fallible prophecy in the New Testament.

Look Agabus is the big bullet in their gun, but not their only bullet.

I want to give their side a fair hearing.

What are the other reasons they say there is this different form of prophecy?

Sam Storms in a blog post entitled *Why NT Prophecy does not result in “Scripture-Quality” revelatory words* – gives a number of reasons why he believes this new non-authoritative prophecy is biblical.⁵

Let me summarise his stronger arguments.

1. If all prophecy is authoritative – it should have all been preserved.

⁵ <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/why-nt-prophecy-does-not-result-in--scripture-quality--revelatory-words--a-response-to-the-most-frequently-cited-cessationist-argument-against-the-contemporary-validity-of-spiritual-gifts->

If all the words of all the Prophets were Scripture quality – surely they would have been written down and kept.

The fact much was not written down indicates they are not the same quality as Scripture.

That is simply untrue.

Listen to how John ends his Gospel. John 21:25:

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

Jesus did a lot more and said a lot more than what we have. There are many times where we read of Jesus teaching – without any record of what He taught. Matthew 4:23:

Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.

Surely no one questions the authority and quality of this unrecorded teaching of Jesus.

Similarly the Apostles and Prophets did have more prophecies than what we have in Scripture.

God inspired many prophecies. He superintended the formation of Scripture – from the ones He sovereignly chose.

2. Since prophecies were to be tested – they have to contain error.

They saying the testing is dividing truth from error.

1 Thessalonians 5:20–21 says:

Don't despise prophecies, but test all things.

Storms argues that the Thessalonians despised these prophecies because, “they knew that such “words” were a mixture of divine revelation and fallible human interpretation and application.”

They despised them because they were now getting the inferior erroneous kind of prophecies.

He argues if all prophecy was authoritative – why would they ever despise them and surely Paul would simply say just submit to them. Instead, he said test them.

Storms says this meant they were to test each prophecy to “see what is in them that is good and what is in them that is bad.”

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 14:29 says:

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate.

Storms argues that means we are to “sift the word and identify what is of God and what is the human”.

How do you do you decide that?

Wayne Grudem in His book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* tells us how:

Did the revelation seem like something from the Holy Spirit? ... Over time, a congregation would probably become more adept at making evaluations and become more adept at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit and distinguishing it from their own thoughts.

Grudem says, “Pastorally if someone is in charge of a home fellowship group, or if a pastor is in charge of a prayer meeting, you call it as you see it.”

You call it as you see it?

Really! That sounds good, that sounds bad!

That is so subjective. Does it seem like something the Holy Spirit might say?

I want to argue strongly that testing the prophecies does **not** mean – test it to work out which bit is from God and which bit is human.

You test the whole thing to work out if the entire prophecy is genuine or not.

Either this is from God or it is false.

When we get to chapter 14 – I want to argue strongly that the problem is not that the prophecies had error – the problem is that there were true and false prophets in that church.

You test the prophet and you reject them and their entire prophecy. You don’t sift through it and say – yeah that might have merit – no that bit sounds off.

Those are the main arguments for accepting there is a non-authoritative prophecy.

You can look at the arguments and decide for yourself.

Now you might be sitting there thinking – but Craig is this really that big a deal?

Yes it is.

I need you to understand what is being proposed.

Sam Storms, says today these prophecies come in all forms: “dreams, visions, impressions, internal audible voice, symbols, sympathetic pains, providential occurrences, etc.”

Bridgeway Church where Storms is the pastor has published many articles on this.

One of them is entitled – HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US – which elaborates on these forms of prophetic communication.

They list them and describe them.

How God Speaks To Us

Scripture
Quickening portions of Scripture
Internal Promptings – the gut language of God
Dreams – the sleep language of God
Visions – the picture language of God
Everyday Life
Nature – the earthly language of God
Inner Voice/Audible Voice
Books, Movies, Songs, Art – the creative language of God
Angels – messengers of God’s language
Repetition – the language of God’s echo
Sentence Fragments – the short language of God
Physical Manifestations in Our Bodies – the body language of God
Other People



Scripture – the written language of God: God revealed His nature and character to us in the Bible. (Ps. 19; 119:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)

Great. We all agree with this one. Then they list the kind of things that fall under this non-authoritative prophecy.

Quickening portions of Scripture: The Holy Spirit may quicken portion of Scripture to us by making it come suddenly alive and giving us an understanding of what it means. There are times when the Bible does not deal with a particular situation, but the Holy Spirit gives us certain scriptures to apply to our situation to help guide us. (Heb. 4:12)

Internal Promptings – the gut language of God: Sometimes we strongly feel we should or should not do something. Usually we can’t explain why we feel that way, but it may be God who has dropped that feeling in our spirit. (Neh. 7:5; Mark 2:6-8; Luke 5:22; Acts 14:9)

Dreams – the sleep language of God: The dream may be literal, but most of the time it is symbolic. He may or may not give us an immediate understanding of

what the dream means. Take your dreams back to God and ask Him about them. (Gen. 40-41; Num. 12:6; Jer. 23:28; Joel 2:28; Matt. 2:13, 19)

Visions – the picture language of God: Visions are similar to dreams. They normally occur while we are awake. It is a supernatural picture of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person. (Gen. 15:3-5; Isa. 6:1-8; Ezek. 40:3; Dan. 10:5-6; Acts 10:9-14)

Everyday Life: God will sometimes speak to us from our everyday life experiences to give us an understanding of spiritual reality. For instance, God may speak to us about His love for us as we are loving our children. (Jer. 18:1-6 – potter, Prov. 24:30-34 – field, 1 Sam. 15:27-28 – torn robe)

Nature – the earthly language of God: “All nature seems to speak. As for me, I cannot understand why everybody does not see it or feel it, nature of God does it for everyone who has eyes and ears and a heart to understand.” – Van Gogh. (Job 38:8-11; Ps. 8:3-4; Isa. 40:12; Matt. 6:26, 28; Rom. 1:20)

Inner Voice/Audible Voice: The voice of the Lord comes to Christians in two forms: inward and audible. Audible is with your natural ears. Inward is an inner sense or permission that you receive in your spirit. (Gen. 22:1-2; Num. 12:6-8; John 16:13; Acts 9:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:17-18; 2 John 10:16)

Books, Movies, Songs, Art – the creative language of God: God can quicken things to us as we read a book, watch a movie, listen to a song, or see a piece of art. The parables of Jesus are stories; the Psalms are songs!

Angels – messengers of God’s language: Angels may appear in their glory or in human form. (Ps. 34:11; Matt. 2:13; Luke 1:30; Heb. 1:14)

Repetition – the language of God’s echo: Repetition is where God brings the same thing at you over and over again until you “get it”

Sentence Fragments – the short language of God: Sometimes God may only speak a single word. While the word may be clear, the interpretation may not be. Our glory is to search out meaning. (Prov. 25:2; Isa. 8:1)

Physical Manifestations in Our Bodies – the body language of God: We use our bodies to communicate love and do many other things. God also will use your body to tell you things. For example: you may feel a chill when the presence of God is strong. Jesus felt healing power leave His body. (Luke 8:45-46)

Other People: God sometimes speaks to us through other people and then gives us a ‘yes’ deep in our own spirit. (2 Sam. 12)

Really – are these things actually prophecy?

And what is the proof to broaden prophecy to include these?

They argue that prophecy in Scripture is actually a very broad term.

For example often quoted is 1 Chronicles 25 where Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun *prophesied* with musical instruments.

If a musical tune is prophecy – then a gut feeling or a movie can be prophecy.

However:

Chronicles 25:1-3:

David and the officers of the army also set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, who were to **prophecy accompanied by** lyres, harps, and cymbals. ... From Jeduthun: Jeduthun's sons: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah—six—under the authority of their father Jeduthun, **prophesying to the accompaniment of** lyres, giving thanks and praise to the Lord.



Translations like the CSB make it clear that they were **to prophecy accompanied by lyres, harps, and cymbals**. ... they were **prophesying to the accompaniment of lyres, giving thanks and praise to the LORD**.

The prophecy was in words not music – they gave thanks in words – but like the Psalms – they did it to music.

Other texts that are often referenced.

Philippians 3:15:

Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.

Ephesians 1:17:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.



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Ephesians 1:17:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

They say these are indirect revelations.

Look, I would be the first to say God reveals, leads and prompts us in many ways.

But this is **not** prophecy.

God works in providence and the words of a brother and in many ways.

But to call a gut-feeling – prophecy, being moved by a painting – prophecy, a feeling of chill – prophecy – No! I am sorry – but no!

Seriously, these kind of promptings of God are not what you build your life and church on.

You build it on the Word, on the teaching and counsel of gifted men and women in history and in your church, on prayer – and way down the end comes promptings and feelings – because so often they are wrong.

They are simply **not** prophecy.

I mean seriously – did you get a chill because God is trying to validate some feeling or because you had bad chicken for dinner?

If you see the word – France on a billboard and a bus – is that God telling you to go plant a church in France or just that the French tourism board is spending big?

I have seen too many people honestly believe that God was leading them – it all comes unstuck – and then they are angry at God?

Yet, in his book *Practicing the Power*, Sam Storms asserts, “**The most important** (and most challenging) spiritual gift to practice and employ in the local church today for the edification of all in the body is prophecy.” And a few pages later: “The body of Christ today **urgently** needs prophetic ministry.”

Really!

Not this stuff. No!

I want to close by asking two questions:

1. Is this prophecy?

That is the key question.

The Bible is very clear about prophecy and how you tell the genuine.

Deuteronomy 18:20–22:

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But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet must die.’ You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a message the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the Lord’s name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.



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the LORD has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the LORD’s name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.

That was **the** test – what he says comes to pass. It was without error.

Nowhere is there one mention that there is another form of prophecy exempt from this test.

If the penalty is death – surely if there was another form of errant prophecy we would be warned – this only applies to certain types of Prophets.

As well, this idea that our humanity leads to merely human words that are in error is expressly denied in Scripture.

2 Peter 1:20–21:

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Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



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No prophecy of Scripture.

There are not some other kinds of prophecy that is open to subjective interpretation.

God moved prophets and they spoke the very words of God.

I really don’t know how much clearer the Bible can be.

Look, if you lived in the days of the Apostles and a prophet spoke – how would you know – Oh this is authoritative – I need to obey – but this is subjective – see what my gut says?

The New Testament just speaks of prophecy. Nothing says – Oh – Ephesians 2:20 that is the prophecy that ceases – 1 Corinthians 12-14 – that is the subjective kind that is still here.

I want to suggest that subjective, erroneous, non-authoritative mixed prophecies simply never existed.

How could they? God doesn't change. How could God could move men in the days of Moses and Paul – such their prophecies were without error – but today – our kind of prophecy has errors?

They got – Thus says the Lord – we get – here is a chill – see where it leads you.

Surely if something as significant as a form of prophecy existed that is so radically different – that fails the very tests of prophecy – if it existed – surely we would have some word of warning in the Scriptures.

Is this really what you want to be guided by?

Sam Storms understands this is **the** big issue. He says, "Prophecy [that] is occasionally fallible ... poses **the greatest obstacle** to the acceptance of the prophetic gift in the church today."⁶

Yes – in my opinion it is an *insurmountable* obstacle.

2. What is the use of this fallible, flawed prophecy?

Prophecy was meant to convey the message of God. It was so key God gave tests – including total 100% accuracy – so we could trust the message. He authenticated it with simply stunning miracles.

Why would God gift His church with something that you have to weigh, evaluate, might get wrong and is so subjective you don't know whether to trust it or not?

Even in his book *Practicing the Power*, Sam Storms says, "Revelatory gifts are inescapably subjective, and the people through whom they operate are unavoidably prone to error."

Is this really something that glorifies Christ and edifies the church?

How does a gift like this authenticate a prophet and lead to true revelation?

I'm sorry but this is flat out dangerous.

⁶ Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.207

Jeremiah 23:16 and Ezekiel 13:2-3 specifically say that those who have prophecies that come from their own minds and imaginations are false prophets.

I want to say clearly – a prophecy that has truth and error is a false prophecy. Reject it.

A bit of truth and a bit of error – that is what Satan fed Eve in the garden.

Even Joseph Smith got some things right in the Book of Mormon.

I am convinced most who claim the gift of prophecy today do so in all sincerity – are seeking to glorify God and would be crushed if they thought what they were saying was false prophecy.

But I am sorry – we must not have Scripture plus impressions and promptings to build our church and life on.

The only true prophecy was inerrant and authoritative. Trust nothing else!

The Bible is sufficient.

The Bible is all you need for life and godliness.

It is tested, proven and without error.

Trust nothing else!

A Tale Of Two Prophets (1 Corinthians 12.4-11 Part 3 September 13, 2020)

Main Point: The only true prophecy was inerrant and authoritative. Trust nothing else!

General Questions:

1. Read 1 Cor 12:1-11.
2. What are the three waves that defined the movement of the Holy Spirit in churches beginning in the early 20th century?

What characterised each movement?

3. Why did prophecy become the main focus of the argument between cessationists and continuationists?
4. What do you think of the view that prophesy today is basically teaching?
5. Discuss each of these views:

Prophecy As Foundational

Prophecy As Foundational				
Old Testament		New Testament		Today
Prophets		Prophets		
P		P		

Prophecy As Normative

Prophecy As Normative

Old Testament	New Testament	Today
Prophets	Prophets	Prophets
P	P	P

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative – Variation 1

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative #1

Old Testament	New Testament	Today
Prophets	Apostles and non-authoritative prophets	Non-authoritative prophets
P	A and p	p

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative – Variation 2

Prophecy Includes Non-Authoritative #2

Old Testament	New Testament	Today
Prophets and non-authoritative prophets	Prophets and non-authoritative prophets	Non-authoritative prophets
P and p	P and p	p

6. Do you agree that **Authoritative Prophecy** has these elements:

- a) **A spontaneous, miraculous act**
- b) **Empowered by the Holy Spirit**
- c) **Resulting in a message that is intelligible and usually verbal or written**
- d) **Delivered to the people of God, nations or significant individuals for kingdom purposes.**
- e) **Attributable to a member or members of the Godhead**
- f) **Comes with implied divine authority and without error**

7. Acts 21:4–14 is the key passage to prove there is a non-authoritative, fallible kind of prophecy?

Discuss whether this passage actually is evidence for this type of prophecy.

8. Does the fact that not every word uttered by a Prophet was kept prove what they said was non-authoritative?

9. Is it more likely in 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21 and 1 Corinthians 14:29 Paul is urging the testing of the Prophet (and entire prophecy) or the testing of each part of a prophecy? Do these passages prove there is inerrant prophecy?

10. Discuss Sam Storms contention that today prophecies come in all forms: “dreams, visions, impressions, internal audible voice, symbols, sympathetic pains, providential occurrences, etc.”

Are these prophecies or not?

11. Do modern day prophecies fit the tests of Deuteronomy 18:20–22 and 2 Peter 1:20–21? Is there any room for types of prophecy other than those covered by these passages?

12. What is the use of this fallible, flawed prophecy?

Application Questions:

1. What should you base your life on? What should you trust to make decisions?
2. Where do feelings, promptings, impressions fit in how you make decisions?
3. How would you answer someone who says – God gave me a prophesy for you ... here it is?
4. Have you met someone who claimed to be a prophet? What did you think of their claim?
5. What practical difference would it make to you if prophesy is here – or if prophesy has ceased?