

What does the Bible teach about prophets and prophecy today? Are all of the prognosticating televangelists sincere? How should one deal with a person who claims to have received a message from God? Is God still speaking through certain individuals whom He selects to represent Him? How can one be sure that what a person claims to be a prophetic word, is in fact from God? Or has God declared an end to prophecy?

First, we must define “prophets” and “prophecy.” A prophet is a person who is a channel of direct, divine revelation. The message that he brings is known as a prophecy. God has chosen to reveal His mind through the use of language in verbal and written form (this is special revelation, apart from God’s witness through His creation). A prophet is one through whom this revelation comes. Both Old and New Testament prophets had the ability to foretell the future as well as forth-tell the mind of God for the present. While the Old Testament prophets appear to have been more predictive, this characteristic trait was also evident in New Testament prophets, as well. The ability to foretell the future seems to be the distinguishing characteristic between one who has the gift of prophecy and one who has the gift of exhortation (Rom. 12:8).

In the New Testament, there were two foundational gifts (offices) given by God to the church for its establishment and for its

edification – Apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11ff). It appears that all of the Apostles had the gift of prophecy but that the New Testament prophets lacked the necessary credentials to be considered prophets. In addition, the prophets were under the authority of the Apostles (1 Cor. 14:37) and the scrutiny of other prophets (1 Cor. 14:29). It also appears that most of the prophecies of the New Testament prophets were for the immediate needs of the church, as few are recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. Nonetheless, when they spoke, they spoke with the authority of one speaking on behalf of Almighty God.

From this brief description, one might surmise that New Testament prophets are no longer necessary, seeing as how they were foundational to the church. Ephesians 2:20 seems to indicate this (Although some do not agree that this passage supports a separation between Apostles and prophets. They understand the meaning of the passage to be, “the Apostles who are prophets.” However, this interpretation is arrived at by the violation of a basic Greek grammatical rule). Once a foundation is laid, it no longer needs to be laid again. This is often an argument that is used to support the cessation of Apostles, a fact in which even most Charismatics agree.

Some argue that the Bible does not indicate that any gifts will cease or, if acknowledging it, they do not agree as to when they might have ceased.

In response, there are certain spiritual gifts that are no longer extant. For example,

the gift of apostleship (Eph. 4:11) has ceased. There were certain qualifications that were required to be an apostle, one of which was that they had to have seen the risen Lord. This eliminates apostles outside the first century. So, there is biblical support for the cessation of some gifts.

The book of 1 Corinthians does indicate that prophecies will cease at some unspecified point in time. This eliminates the theory that certain gifts cannot have ceased. But when? That is not clearly understood from verse 8 of this chapter.

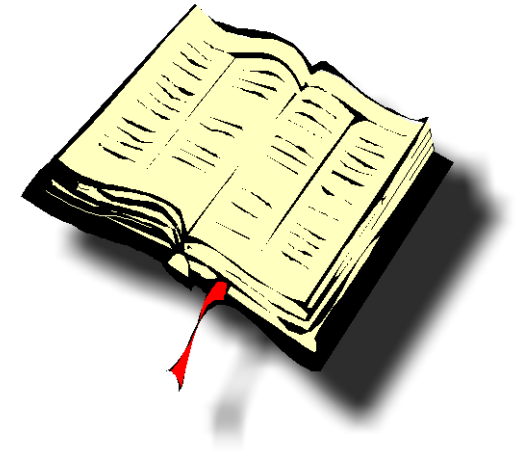
For the strongest evidence in favor of the cessation of prophets and the gift of prophecy, one must look to the Apostle John. It is apparent that false prophets were abounding in the first century. Paul wrote against them in 55 AD (1 Cor. 12:3). They were still a problem when John wrote against them in around 90 AD (1 John 4:1-3). By the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, around 95 AD, it appears that they had not subsided.

First, note that John writes the letter on the authority of a prophet, not an apostle. The letter is called a prophecy (1:3, 22:18-19) and nowhere does John assert his apostleship.

Second, John makes two strong assertions at the end of the letter (some believe that it is Christ Himself that makes the assertions). If anyone *adds to the words* of the prophecy of the book, then he is to be accursed (v.18). He also says that if anyone

takes away from the *prophecy* of the book, then he is eternally damned (v. 19). The latter is different than the former. This is a warning not to alter the contents of the letter.

However, in v. 18, the emphasis is upon the *words* and adding to them. What is being decried here is any further prophecy. John, as the last Apostle, is declaring an end to prophecy. He has tried to combat false prophecy in the church but to no avail (Rev. 2:20). The easiest way for him to help the church avoid false prophecy as he is passing off the scene is by bringing it to a close. In essence, he is saying, "Here is how you can tell if a prophet is false – if he claims to have a prophecy, then it is false because prophecy is over."



"Thy Word is Truth"
(John 17:17b)

What does the Bible Say About the Gift of Prophecy?

Is it for Today?

by

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