

# Gift of Prophecy --- 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

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*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

## Introduction

This morning our study focuses on the gifts of prophecy and the distinguishing of spirits. The real issue concerning prophecy is the completeness and sufficiency of the Word of God. God, in His perfect plan, has given to the church a priceless gift, namely His inspired Word of God which is all that we need in this life to live as He would have us to live. We no longer need prophets and apostles to convey the mind of God, because we have the final and complete Word of God.

Joseph Smith is founder of the cult, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints [Mormonism]. This organization was established on his claim of having visions and the gift of prophecy. In 1820, he had his first vision when he was 14 years old. He claimed that he saw the Father and Son coming to him. Their message was that all the churches during Smith's time were "all wrong; an abomination in God's sight and corrupt."

In 1830, the Mormon church was born. Smith set out to restore, what he thought were, all the missing parts of the Church: prophets, apostles, the priesthood, and the temple. What began as an organization of six men in a log cabin has grown to an empire of between 14-16 million people with assets that some say are around 100 billion dollars. So the claims of a man to have the gift of prophecy and to have visions coupled with the lack of discernment has led literally millions astray into rank heresy.

I want to read for you extensively from a book entitled Strange Fire written by John MacArthur. "Dry wells, fruitless trees, raging waves, wandering stars, brute beasts, hideous stains, vomit-eating dogs, mud-loving pigs, and ravenous

wolves—that is how the Bible describes false prophets in 2 Peter 2 and in Jude. The New Testament reserves its harshest words of condemnation for those who would falsely claim to speak revelation from God. And when the Bible condemns we must also condemn . . . .”

“But apply those same epithets to today's false teachers, and you're likely to be labeled as *uncharitable* or even *unchristian*. The ecumenical spirit of the age shrinks back in cowardice from the clear denunciation of error, even when Scripture explicitly warrants it. Faithful Christians desperately need to wake up and speak out against the free flow of false prophecies.

“The New Testament repeatedly warns that the false prophets who are most dangerous are the wolves who come in sheep's clothing or disguise themselves as angels of light in order to permeate their lives. They would never overtly deny Christ or oppose the Holy Spirit. Rather, they come in Christ's name and claim the Holy Spirit's authority. They infiltrate the Church by pretense and subterfuge [secrecy]. This is where they do the real damage.

“Speaking of the end of the age, the Lord Jesus explained, *'Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many . . . . For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect'* (Matthew 24:11, 24).

“The apostle Paul similarly warned the Ephesian elders, *'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock . . . . For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves'* (Acts 20:28-30).

“Peter, too, acknowledged that these counterfeits are embedded in the Church, falsely professing to have been redeemed by Christ. As he told his readers, *'But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], even as there will be false teachers among you, who bought them and bring on themselves swift destruction'* (2 Peter 2:1). Other passages could be added such as 1 John 4:1 and Jude 4.

“In spite of Scripture's clear warnings and the consequent dishonor to the Spirit of God, charismatics have made *presumptuous prophecy* a hallmark of their movement. They have created a fertile breeding ground for false prophets.”

We are studying spiritual gifts in the course of our study of Romans. We have encountered gifts that are at the forefront in many churches in the world today.

The subjects of healings, miracles, prophecy, and tongues are not just academic. It seems today the Church at large is living out the predicament that plagued the Corinthians. It is not the service gifts and teaching gifts that are in question today. It is the showy gifts—the gifts that call attention to self that are a source of much confusion.

We are taking our time studying these gifts because, like any other point of theology, what you believe will affect how you live out your Christian life on this earth. Your theology affects your actions. So we are in the classroom this morning, so to speak, studying these gifts.

God has communicated His manual for life in His Word and expects His children to grow in their knowledge and understanding of His manual. Theology is another word for the truths found in God's Word. I have heard people say, "Well I really don't care about theology and doctrine." What they are really saying is "I don't care about the Word of God." It is of utmost importance that we carefully study His Word so that we know how to live our lives and grow as believers.

There are some leaders in churches today who teach that God speaks directly to them without reference to the Scriptures. In extreme cases, some say they do not need the Bible because they can receive direct revelation from God. This is unbiblical thinking.

History is full of men and women who have claimed to hear the voice of God and receive direct communication from Him. For example, Mohammed believed that he was a special prophet sent from God. Joseph Smith claimed that he was a prophet with new revelation received directly from God. In more recent times, there is another who supposedly receives revelation by the name of Sun Myung Moon. His Unification Church considers him a modern day prophet. In today's charismatic movement, Benny Hinn has claimed to be a modern-day prophet even though numerous of his so-called prophetic utterances are flat out false.

All of these considerations make our study of these gifts particularly practical to the Christian church. In the modern Church, it has become somewhat common for people to claim they have received visions and revelations directly from God.

## Review

In our last study, I gave four categories of spiritual gifts. One group is the revelatory gifts. These gifts were the avenue of revelation during the

establishment of the Church for the purpose of speaking and writing revelation, i.e. the gift of prophecy. Revelatory gifts were ultimately given so that the Church may have the inspired, finished New Testament. The Bible is a final, fixed body of revelation that God wanted for the Church for all time. We no longer need revelatory gifts that operated to give us this information. We have it written down. For example, we do not need the gift of an apostle in the Church today.

A second group is the confirmatory gifts. Confirmatory gifts are miraculous gifts given to confirm the messenger and the message. Hebrews 2:3-4 "*. . . how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard (apostles), God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*"

Teaching gifts are the third group. Teaching gifts are given to instruct the body that the Church may grow in understanding and sanctification.

The fourth and final group is the service gifts. Service gifts are given for heightened abilities energized by the Holy Spirit to take care of the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the body.

Briefly listed, there are the revelatory, confirmatory, service, and teaching gifts.

A couple of weeks ago, we studied the spiritual gifts of healings and miracles. We left off labeling these two gifts as confirmatory gifts. These confirmatory gifts were given to confirm the messengers who were disseminating the revealed message from God. The role of miracles to confirm the messenger is true even in the Old Testament. For example, Moses was given miraculous abilities to confirm that he spoke from God. In the New Testament, Jesus told the messengers sent by John the Baptist to go back and report the miracles and healings that He performed as proof that He was indeed God's Messiah.

In John 5:36, Jesus answered the religious leaders of His day when they asked Him who He was, he said, "*. . . the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.*"

In Acts 2:22 Peter says, "*Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—*

*this man . . . you nailed to a cross . . . . “*

I gave you many examples of miracles wrought at the hands of the apostles and those associated with them. For example, consider Paul and Barnabas in Iconium as reported in Acts 14:3. *“Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”*

So the Bible is clear on the confirmatory role that the gift of healing and miracles played in the early Church. Furthermore, we considered the nature of healing ministries of Jesus, the apostles and those associated with them. They healed: with a word or a touch, instantly, and totally. Everyone who came to Jesus for healing was healed; no one was turned away. Those with organic diseases, i.e. quadriplegic, deaf ears, blind eyes, . . . were also healed.

These biblical definitions of the ability to heal are far from what is being pawned off as healing today. We also considered the miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles and found vivid examples of: exorcising of demons, healings, raising the dead, and performing miracles of nature (calming a storm, feeding the five thousand, walking on water, etc.).

Again these biblical definitions of miracles are far from what is called miracles today. So we saw that miracles and the gifts of healings confirmed the messenger and the message of Jesus and His apostles and those associated with them. They established their authenticity to the Church.

Because the gifts of healings and the gift of effecting of miracles are confirmatory gifts, they are no longer operative today because the messengers and the message are forever recorded in the Bible. The Bible is the self-authenticating Word of God [meaning there is nothing outside of the Bible to appeal to for proof]. With the coming of the Word of God, confirmatory gifts are no longer needed.

We do affirm that God does still miraculously heal today in response to the prayers of His people. However, the time of divine healers has past. We will have more to say about this at a later time when we look at the whole topic of when supernatural gifts ended.

So that brings us to the next set of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12—the gifts of Prophecy and Distinguishing of Spirits.

## The Gift of Prophecy

As I said at the beginning, the real issue concerning prophecy is the completeness and sufficiency of the Word of God. God, in His perfect plan, has given to the church a priceless gift, namely His inspired Word which is all that we need in this life to live as He would have us to live. We no longer need prophets and apostles to convey the mind of God, because we have the final and complete Word of God.

### Prophecy

the Holy Spirit gave *“to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits”*  
1 Corinthians 12:10b

As I said before, these two gifts are coupled together just like the gifts of healings and miracles. So, in similar fashion to our last study, I want to consider some basic elements concerning the gift of prophecy.

The Greek word, προφητεία, translated prophecy may refer to: 1) the utterance of a prophet (i.e. prophetic words, inspired sayings, the very words spoken); 2) foretelling of future events/making predictions; 3) the work of a prophet—preaching/exhortative proclamations.

The gift of prophecy was more than just foretelling the future. It included the receiving and speaking new revelation and truths from God, and foretelling future events. Examples of these characteristics can be found throughout Scripture.

For example, Peter writes the following in 2 Peter 1:20,21, *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture [inspired sayings] is a matter of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup>for no prophecy [not just future events, but revelation] was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

Another example of these characteristics of prophecy can be seen in Revelation 1:3, *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”* The book of Revelation contains more than just foretelling future events. It contains exhortative messages to existing churches and foretelling what will happen in the future.

There is more to prophecy than just foretelling future events. The gift of prophecy is comprised of four elements. The first element is a prophet foretold

the future; second, a prophet knew things about people without previous knowledge; a third element is a prophet encouraged and exhorted with a strong message; the final element is a prophet received and spoke truth from God that had not been revealed.

Let's consider together these four elements of prophets in the Old Testament; then we will compare the Old Testament prophets to the prophets in the New Testament. Although the New Testament prophets were like prophets in that both the Old and New Testament prophets spoke for God, warned of judgment and delivered the message from God (whether contemporary or predictive), the Old Testament prophet, however, was more of a national leader—a reformer and patriot. Along with him being a national leader, his message usually was to Israel alone. On the other hand, the prophet in the New Testament principally ministered to the Church and did not have national Jewish characteristics.

Second Chronicles 18 gives us an example of how a prophet foretold the future in the Old Testament.

*Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab. <sup>2</sup>Some years later he went down to visit Ahab at Samaria. And Ahab slaughtered many sheep and oxen for him and the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. <sup>3</sup>Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth-gilead?" And he said to him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people, and we will be with you in the battle."*

*<sup>4</sup>Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the LORD." <sup>5</sup>Then the king of Israel assembled the prophets, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king." <sup>6</sup>But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?" <sup>7</sup>The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."*

*<sup>8</sup>Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah, Imla's son." <sup>9</sup>Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, and they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. <sup>10</sup>Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are consumed.'" <sup>11</sup>All the prophets were prophesying thus,*

saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and succeed, for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

<sup>12</sup>Then the messenger who went to summon Micaiah spoke to him saying, "Behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. So please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably." <sup>13</sup>But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak."

<sup>14</sup>When he came to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" He said, "Go up and succeed, for they will be given into your hand." <sup>15</sup>Then the king said to him, "How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" <sup>16</sup>So he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd; And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace.' "

<sup>17</sup>Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

<sup>18</sup>Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right and on His left.

<sup>19</sup>The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. <sup>20</sup>Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'How?' <sup>21</sup>He said, 'I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and prevail also. Go and do so.' <sup>22</sup>Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets, for the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you."

<sup>23</sup>Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?"

<sup>24</sup>Micaiah said, "Behold, you will see on that day when you enter an inner room to hide yourself." <sup>25</sup>Then the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; <sup>26</sup>and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this man in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until I return safely." ' " <sup>27</sup>Micaiah said, "If you indeed return safely, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Listen, all you people."

<sup>28</sup>So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead. <sup>29</sup>The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. <sup>30</sup>Now the king of Aram had commanded the captains of his chariots, saying, "Do not fight with small or great, but with the king of Israel alone." <sup>31</sup>So when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of Israel," and they turned aside to fight against him. But

*Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God diverted them from him. <sup>32</sup>When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. <sup>33</sup>A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of the chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the fight, for I am severely wounded."<sup>34</sup>The battle raged that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot in front of the Arameans until the evening; and at sunset he died.*

Second Chronicles 18 shows how Micah clearly foretold the future concerning Ahab; he also knew things about people without previous knowledge. Second Kings 6 provides another Old Testament example of this. This interesting story tells about the prophet Elisha when Syria was warring against the nation of Israel. Elisha was informing the king of Israel of the movements of the opposing army. Verses 11 and 12 state, "*Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" <sup>12</sup>One of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."*

Old Testament prophets encouraged and exhorted with a strong message. Judges 6:7-10 records this for us when the prophet of Lord exhorted the nation of Israel to serve the Lord. *Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. <sup>9</sup>I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, <sup>10</sup>and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me." ' "*

Another element of prophecy seen in the Old Testament is how prophets received and spoke revelation from God that had not been revealed. A passage in Deuteronomy gives us an example of this. Chapter 18 and verses 18-22 are as follows: "*God said concerning prophets, 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'* You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' "*When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which*

*the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” ”*

Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:10-11 concerning Old Testament prophets, *“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He (the Holy Spirit) predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”*

The Old Testament prophets spoke and wrote new Revelation from God whether it was doctrine or future events. Then they would study their own writings to understand what the Holy Spirit was saying.

Thus we see how in the Old Testament, a prophet foretold the future, knew information about people without previous knowledge, encouraged and exhorted, and received revelation from the Lord. When you study the New Testament, we find the same things are true about a New Testament prophet.

A prophet in the New Testament also foretold the future. In Acts 11:27-28, Agabus a prophet foretold of a future famine, *“Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.”*

In Acts 21:10-11, Agabus foretold what would happen to Paul when he went to Jerusalem, *“As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” ’ ”*

Just as an Old Testament prophet knew things about people without knowing them so also did a New Testament prophet. Recall Jesus' dialogues with the woman at the well in John 4:16-19, *“Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband and come here.’ The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have correctly said, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.’ ”*

New Testament prophets also encouraged and exhorted with a strong message. It says in Acts 15:32, *“Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.”*

They also received and spoke truth from God that had not been revealed. Compare Ephesians 2:19-22 with Ephesians 3:4-6. Speaking to Gentiles, Paul writes, “<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household (the church), <sup>20</sup>having been built on 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.”

Ephesians 3:4-6 <sup>4</sup>By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; <sup>6</sup>to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, . . . .

So the Church is built on the revelations made to the apostles and the prophets. Paul makes clear that the revelation given to the apostles and prophets had not been revealed previously, it was new revelation.

A prophet in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament foretold the future; knew things about people without previous knowledge of them; encouraged and exhorted with a strong message; received and spoke truth from God that had not been revealed.

Read closely this important footnote. The gift of prophecy is different from the gift of teaching in that the authority related to the gift of teaching is based upon the Word of God. But the gift of prophecy had its authority in the experience of divine reception and communication of truth. Therefore, there are no prophets today. When preachers and pastors preach and teach the Word of God, they are exercising the gift of teaching, not the gift of prophecy. The authority by which they teach is the Word of God itself.

Robert Thomas wrote this concerning prophecy, “In the early Church, the gift of prophecy was very important and was considered one of the principal gifts, and given more prominence than other gifts. Because no one today has the same authority or the experience of receiving normative truth [truth on par with the Bible], no one has come forward to add even one verse of normative truth to the Bible. While individuals can have specific guidance and be given insight to the meaning of Scripture, no one is given truth that is not already contained in the Bible itself.”

The book of Acts is filled with many examples of New Testament prophets. For example, among the prophets and teachers at Antioch according to Acts 13:1 were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Paul. There were women who were prophetesses as illustrated in the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).

Paul clearly manifested the prophetic gift as recorded in Acts 27:21-25. When Paul had been put on a ship bound for Rome and the ship was in danger of sinking while in a storm, *“When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, ‘Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss (in other words, “I told you so”).* <sup>22</sup>*Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.* <sup>23</sup>*For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,* <sup>24</sup>*saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’* <sup>25</sup>*Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.”* And that is exactly what happened.

Prophecy is a combination of the categories of gifts. It was a confirmatory gift because a prophet could foretell the future with 100% accuracy thus confirming that he spoke from God. It was a revelatory gift because they received new truth that had not been known until then.

So we find that prophets in both the Old and New Testament have identical abilities. What about the test of a prophet? There are two important tests: was the prophet’s message true? And was the prophet’s foretelling true?

The test of a prophet has always been his message. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 speaks into this, *“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,* <sup>2</sup>*and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’* <sup>3</sup>*you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* <sup>4</sup>*You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.* <sup>5</sup>*But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.”*

Even if his foretelling is accurate, but his message is against the truth, he is to be put to death. In such cases, the Lord was testing His people.

The following passages speak to the test of foretelling.

*Deuteronomy 18:20-22 But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And you may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

I believe if we applied this scriptural standard, that a so-called prophet whose prophecy did not come about would be stoned, we would see this practice today dry up real fast.

There are some today that teach that a prophet in the New Testament was not always 100% true. Wayne Grudem [who I respect] is one who teaches that New Testament prophets were not always correct and at times would speak that which was false. He uses this to justify how the prophecy of men today can be in error. Grudem's argument breaks down at numerous points; however, most glaringly he denies these clear teachings that pertained to both Old and New Testament prophets.

One who had the gift of prophecy could foretell the future, knew things about people without previous knowledge, encouraged and exhorted with a strong message, and received and spoke truth from God that had not been revealed,

Their message was always consistent with revealed truth and their foretelling the future was 100% accurate. They were the truth standard in the local church which takes us to the corresponding gift distinguishing [passing judgment] of spirits.

### Distinguishing [Passing judgment] of Spirits

the Holy Spirit gave *"to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits"*

1 Corinthians 12:10b

Robert Plummer says this, "The gift of discerning spirits enabled its possessor to discriminate true prophets from false, and judge whether what was announced was from God or was an illusion. Such a gift was indispensable to the Church at a time when false prophets abounded, forced their way into congregations, and

increased every year in numbers and audacity.”

Let's focus on each part of this gift—

Distinguishing or passing judgment – διακρίσεις defined is the ability to evaluate and decide, to pass judgment, discernment, differentiation. This refers chiefly to the prophetic gift, which might easily be claimed by prideful persons or by those who made a trade of religion.

Romans 14:1 *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment (verb form of our word) on his opinions.*

1 Corinthians 14:29 *And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment (verb form of diakrisis).*

So the word used here refers to the process of prophets passing judgment concerning what was said by other prophets.

Spirits – Prophecy from God came through the spirit of a true prophet. False prophecy was understood as primarily coming through the vehicle of the demonic or a false spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:32 . . . *and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets . . . .*

John wrote in Revelation 22:6, *“These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.*

1 John 4:1-3 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; (again, the test is a doctrinal test concerning the person of Christ) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*

1 Timothy 4:1-3 *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron . . . .*

2 Thessalonians 2:2 . . . *that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from*

*us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.*

So you find reference to the spirits of prophets in regard to prophecy. This is consistent with the fact that false prophecy was linked to evil spirits or demonic activity. For example in Acts 16:16-18 a girl was pretending to be a prophetess of God but was not. Paul, exercising the gift of passing judgment or distinguishing of spirits, cast out the spirit.

Charles Hodge provides us with a conclusive thought concerning the significance of this gift by commenting, "It was therefore of importance to have a class of men with the gift of discernment, who could determine whether a man was really inspired, or spoke only from the impulse of his own mind, or from the dictation of some evil spirit."

Again we have two complimentary gifts: the gift of prophecy and the gift of distinguishing of spirits. These gifts were critical for the establishment of the truth in the early Church.

We will look further into the purpose of prophecy and when it came to an end when we study the ceasing of certain gifts.

## Conclusion

John MacArthur accurately addresses our concerns with these revelatory gifts in his closing thoughts to *Does God Still Give Revelation*, a chapter in his book entitled Charismatic Chaos. I quote him here at length.

"It has always been important to be able to separate God's Word from that which is false. God worked through a historical process to establish the authenticity of the canon so that the whole Church might have a clear standard. If we now throw out that historical standard and redefine inspiration and revelation, we undermine our own ability to receive God's truth. If we subvert the uniqueness of the Bible, we will have no way of distinguishing God's voice from man's. Eventually, anyone could say anything and claim it is God's Word, and no one would have the right to deny it. We are perilously close to that situation even now.

"The Holy Spirit *is* working mightily in the Church today, but not in the way most charismatics think. The Holy Spirit's role is to empower us as we preach, teach, write, talk, witness, think, serve, and live. He *does* lead us into God's truth and direct us into God's will for our lives. But He does it *through* God's Word, never apart from it. To refer to the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering ministry as

inspiration or revelation is a mistake. To use phrases such as 'God spoke to me,' or 'This wasn't my idea; the Lord gave it to me,' or 'These aren't my words, but a message I received from the Lord' confuses the issue of the Spirit's direction in believers' lives today. Inviting that kind of confusion plays into the hands of the error that denies the uniqueness and absolute authority of Scripture.”

In conclusion, we as Christians must not play fast and loose with the issues of inspiration and revelation; these issues directly deal with our view of the gifts of prophecy and distinguishing of spirits. A correct understanding is essential for correctly using the gifts God has given His church for His glory.