

Recommended books and sermons

Spiritual Gifts—5 sermons by Pastor Alan Hill
<http://www.lausanne-english-church.com/sermons.html>

The Prophets of Israel by Leon Wood,
published by Baker Book House

The Charismatic Phenomenon by Dr. Peter Masters & John Whitcomb,
published by The Wakeman Trust

The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism by Michael John Beasley,
published by The Armoury Ministries

The Final Word by O. Palmer Robertson,
published by Banner of Truth



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Are there prophets today?

An examination of what the Bible teaches



Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
1) What is a prophet?	4
2) What is the role of a prophet?	5
3) What is the test of a true prophet?	5
4) Are there false prophets?	6
5) Are there prophets today like Elisha, Isaiah or Paul?	8
6) Are there apostles today?	9
7) Conclusion	10
Appendix - The teaching of 1 Corinthians 13	11
Recommended books and sermons	16

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Prophecies and words of knowledge will be abolished or stopped dead. Tongues on the other hand will peter out or gradually die out.

As prophecy and tongues end in two different ways it means that they cannot end at precisely the same time.

This is what happened. The gift of prophecy and words of knowledge were abolished by God when the Word of God was complete. That happened around 100 AD when God gave the last prophecy to the last prophet, John – what we know as the book of Revelation.

What about the gift of tongues (the ability to speak a foreign language)? When did that gift end? This was a new gift given for the first time on the Day of Pentecost in 33 AD.

What was the purpose of the gift of tongues? 1 Corinthians 14:22 tells us. They were **a sign not to those who believe but to unbelievers.** The gift of tongues was a sign to unbelieving Jews that the Gospel was going to the Gentiles.

For 2,000 years the Jews had had the Word of God given in their own language. But now they had rejected their promised Messiah. So on the day of Pentecost something new happened. The Word of God was given in all the languages of the world! Tongues therefore were a sign to the Jews that the Gospel was now going to the Gentiles.

How long was that sign needed? The answer is not long. It is significant that the gift of tongues is only mentioned in Acts and 1 Corinthians. None of Paul's later letters, and none of the letters of Peter and John mention the gift of tongues. It seems therefore that the gift of tongues died out by 70 AD at the latest. Their job was done.

1 Corinthians 13 therefore clearly teaches that the gift of prophecy will end when prophecy is complete. God's Word *is* complete, so prophecy has ended. This was the mainstream view taken by nearly all Bible-believing Christians until the 20th century. Is it likely and feasible that for 2,000 years the church was wrong on this fundamental issue?

Third, Paul is here making a contrast between what is in part and what is complete. All three gifts listed – prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge occur when a man or woman declares, “Thus says the Lord.”

Prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge are partial revelation. No one prophet or tongue speaker declares everything God wants to say. They only declare a part. Genesis is only partial revelation. Isaiah is only partial revelation. Paul’s letters are only a partial revelation.

God is saying that when the complete prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge are received then the gifts of prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge will end.

Here is the key question: what is the complete prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge? What is the complete revelation? The Bible! All 66 books!

Paul is saying that when God’s revelation is complete then the gifts giving that revelation will end. That is obvious. The gift of declaring God’s Word was given so we can know God’s Word. Once God’s Word is complete, we no longer need the gift!

The fourth reason that these three gifts will not carry on to the end of the world is that Paul tells us the gifts of prophecy and knowledge will end in a different way to the gift of tongues.

Did you notice that different words are used to describe the temporary nature of these three gifts?

- prophecies, **they will fail** (katargeō)
- tongues, **they will cease** (pauō)
- knowledge, **it will vanish away** (katargeō)

Katargeō means to be abolished. So prophecy and words of knowledge will be abolished. **Pauō** means to come to an end.

In other words, Paul is saying that prophecy and tongues will not end in the same way at the same time.

Introduction

Since the completion of the Bible in around 100 AD, evangelical Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions on a number of matters, such as church government, baptism and communion. However on one subject there was almost complete agreement—the Word of God was complete and the age of the prophets was over.

This was true right up until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1900, nearly all evangelical churches believed there were no new prophets and apostles, but by the end of the century a dramatic change had taken place. Today, the majority of evangelical churches believe that there are still prophets and even apostles.

The change began with the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement. However it was with the advent of the Charismatic and Restoration Movement of the 1960s that this new teaching about prophets (and other supernatural spiritual gifts) swept into evangelical churches. Today there are thousands who claim to be prophets and apostles.

This is no minor matter. If there are prophets today then we should listen to them and place their teaching on an equal footing with the Bible. In fact, we should be writing down what they say and adding it to our Bibles after Revelation.

On the other hand, if there are no prophets today then we should reject those who claim to have such a position and ignore what they say.

What unites (or should unite) evangelical churches is the fact that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. So the question that this booklet seeks to answer is this: What does God’s Word have to say on the subject of prophets today? Does the Bible teach that there are prophets today like Isaiah and Paul?

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1) What is a prophet?

We begin by asking, what is a prophet? All agree that he or she is someone who is God's chosen spokesperson. For instance, we read that the LORD came to Zechariah (1:1). Zechariah did not wake up one morning and think: "I am a prophet." God called him, as he did all prophets.

Look at the calling of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:16. God is speaking and says to Elijah: **"Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."**

Another example is Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1:4-10: **Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."**

Then said I: "Ah, LORD God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD.

Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."

From this text we also see that God gave the words to Jeremiah to speak. So it was with every true prophet.

All this is confirmed by 2 Peter 1: 20-21. **Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**

Sometimes a person was called to be a prophet for the rest of his life, like Jeremiah. At other times a person was given the gift of prophecy for only one occasion, as with the 70 elders of Israel in Numbers 11:25.

Paul is telling us that the prophetic gifts that God gave the church were only temporary.

- Will there be prophets in heaven? No.
- Will there be tongue speakers in heaven? No.
- Will there be those with the gift of knowledge? No.

All these prophetic gifts are only temporary. But will there be love in heaven? Therefore give priority to what is permanent! This is the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31).

So prophetic gifts are only temporary. But we are not yet in heaven, so should we not obey Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:1 and seek the gifts of prophecy today?

That is a good point which Paul answers. Paul tells us when these sign gifts will end, and it is not at the end of the world!

1 Corinthians 13: 8 and 9. **Love never fails. But whether *there are prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.***

Paul is saying that the prophetic gifts will end when **that which is perfect** comes.

Many think that **perfect** refers to heaven or when Christ comes. In that case these gifts will continue until the end of the world.

This cannot be a right interpretation for 4 reasons.

First, the Greek word *telios* means mature or complete. It is used 19 times in the New Testament and never refers to heaven or Christ.

Second, *telios* is a neuter adjective used here in place of a noun. Heaven and Christ are masculine nouns so Paul cannot have heaven or Christ in mind.

Appendix

An extra proof that there are no prophets today.

There is another proof that there are no prophets today. It is based on what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14.

Interestingly those who believe in prophets today use the very same passage to prove there are prophets today by quoting 1 Corinthians 14.1-5 **Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.**

When Paul was writing there were still prophets. Paul was still alive, as were John and others. The New Testament was not complete and would not be complete for another 40 years. Therefore Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14 are not proof that there are prophets today, only that there were prophets in *his* day.

However, what is often overlooked is that in the previous few verses Paul expressly tells us that the gift of prophecy will end. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 **Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

2) What is the role of a prophet?

There are two: First to tell forth (proclaim, explain) the Word of God and second to foretell (predict future events) the Word of God.

Look again at the book of Zechariah. The first part of the book is largely Zechariah telling forth or proclaiming God's Word to the people. The second part is largely Zechariah foretelling or prophesying the future.

Every writer of a book of the Bible was a prophet. Some only fall under the first category – to tell forth or proclaim the Word of God. Examples are Ezra and Nehemiah. Most however fall under both categories.

Some prophets only *spoke* their prophetic words and did not record them – King Saul, for instance (1 Samuel 10:10).

3) What is the test that a person is a true prophet?

It is twofold. *First, they proclaim and point people to the one true God.*

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

This passage also shows that just because a person can perform signs and wonders it does NOT mean that they have been sent by God.

Second when they prophecy about the future events, their words always come true, 100% of the time.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 **‘But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you 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 happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.**

Based on this text alone, modern-day prophets fall. By their own admission they do not have a 100% success rate.

This has led to a new teaching that Gospel age prophets are fallible. The leading proponent of this is Dr Wayne Grudem. The main text he uses to support this is the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21:11. Dr Grudem argues that Agabus was right in the general idea of what would happen to Paul but wrong in the details. However, a careful reading of the subsequent events shows this is not true. Agabus’s prophecy was 100% accurate.

The most comprehensive rebuttal of Dr Grudem’s view is found in *The fallible Prophets of New Calvinism* by Michael Beasley.

4) Are their false prophets?

Yes! There always have been and always will be, especially in this Gospel age. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus says: **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”**

How do we recognise false prophets? They don’t have a label that says, “I am a false prophet.” False prophets claim to be true prophets.

to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Finally, remember the Scriptures warn us that there will be false apostles. So beware! Do not be taken in! 2 Corinthians 11:13 **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**

7) Conclusion

There are no prophets today like Elisha and Paul. The Scriptures are complete. God has said everything that we need to know. We don’t need prophets today.

This Gospel age is not the only time in history when there were no prophets. During the period between the Old and New Testament there were 400 years of silence.

So far, there has been 2,000 years of silence since John received the book of Revelation. It will end in one sense in the same way—with the coming of Christ.

Let us thank God that we live in an age when we have the complete revelation of God; we have all God wants to say to mankind. Let us not go looking for more. Let us instead study what we have and look for the return of our Lord and Saviour. His final word to mankind is this:

Revelation 22:20-21 **He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**

strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

Who were the apostles? Men who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, an apostle by definition can only be someone who was alive when Jesus rose from the dead.

This is clear from the account of the meeting of the remaining 11 apostles to decide on who should replace Judas. Note the qualifications needed.

Acts 1:15-26. **Peter stood up... and said...“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”**

And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The apostles were able to perform signs and wonders to authenticate their ministry. 2 Corinthians 12:12 **Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.**

It is clear from the Scriptures that the Lord himself appointed all the apostles. He chose the original 12 (Matthew 10:1-4), he chose Matthias by directing which way the lot fell (Proverbs 16:33) and he chose Paul (Acts 9:15).

Paul was the last apostle appointed. There are no more after him. This is clear in 1 Corinthians 15:3-9. **For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according**

They will appear as kind, nice and gentle like a sheep. But underneath they are wolves. Their aim is to make you trust them and not the Word of God.

They will say to you things like: “The Lord has said to me, the Lord has shown me, the Lord is telling me. The Lord spoke to me in a dream.”

The apostle John says: Don’t you dare believe them! Don’t be taken in! 1 John 4:1 **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

A sign that the end of the world is approaching will be an increase in the numbers of false prophets. They will be very believable!

Matthew 24:24 **For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.**

The final and greatest of false prophets will be the anti-Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 **Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**

Verses 9-12: **The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

We must therefore be on our guard so that we are not taken in by false prophets. They begin with the Word of God but they will lead us away from the Word of God. Their aim will be that we trust what they say rather than what God says in his Word.

5) Are there any prophets today like Elisha, Isaiah or Paul?

This is the heart of the matter. The answer is no. The age of prophets has ended. There are no more. Why do we know this? Because the Bible tells us this. God's Word is complete.

Revelation 22:18-19. **For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.**

If there are still prophets today we should be adding what they say to the end of our Bible. But it is an interesting fact that few do this.

There are other texts that tell us that the age of prophets has ended.

i) God's Word contains everything God wants us to know.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

The Bible tells us everything we need to know about how to be a complete Christian to do any work for God. We don't need any new revelation!

ii) The prophets are a foundation that is finished.

Ephesians 2:19-22 **Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the**

household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul tells us the foundation is finished. Now the building (the church) is being built on that foundation. How many foundations does a building need?

iii) The faith has been delivered

Jude writes in the last but one book: Jude 1:3 **Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**

The faith was once for all delivered. Once a letter is delivered it is delivered! Once the Word of God was delivered it was delivered! God has nothing new to say to the human race.

iv) The New Testament gives no guidance how to identify a prophet

The New Testament only tells us the qualifications for two offices in the church – elders (or in some translations bishops) and deacons. See 1 Timothy 3.

When Paul was instructing Titus in how to set up churches, he talked about appointing elders but nothing about prophets. He also went on to talk about the qualities of a sound church but there is no reference to prophets (Titus chapters 1 and 2).

6) Are there apostles today?

No. As with prophets, the church is built on the foundation of the apostles. Ephesians 2:19-20 **Now, therefore, you are no longer**