

–PROPHECY: ITS MEANING, SCOPE, AND SIGNIFICANCE–

1. Introduction: Prophecy In General

Is the Bible a static text–book for theologians? If so, is that its limit? Do the Scriptures disclose God as He is, and so confront man with Him, or does God Himself confront man, that is the same God as He Who is seen and known in and by the Scriptures? When the Canon of Scripture closed, did God give the Scriptures as the text–book for believers, but He Himself retire from the scene of action, so to speak?

To illustrate:– When in Acts 2:17 it was said, ‘...and in the last days it shall be, declares the Lord, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit and they will prophesy...’, did God mean that this would happen only in the days of the New Testament church, and not through all the last days, i.e. from Pentecost to the coming of Christ? Do we mean that the only authentic prophecies happened then? Do we mean that dreams and visions, which are ways in which God speaks to His prophets, were only for the New Testament days, or are they for all the last days? What we are really asking is, ‘Is God confined in these sorts of activities to the days of the Bible, and so in these post–Bible days works in a different way, or, even, not at all?’

Put that way, the question seems absurd, but even more absurd is the thought that God is confined to the way man now works, so that it must be through man that the Kingdom comes. No one would agree with this, but sometimes we come perilously close to so thinking. Whilst we agree that ultimately God will come upon the world with the apocalyptic events of the last Day, we neglect the thought that He is now working, as powerfully as ever, and that He is working prophetically through His entire church.

This study is an attempt to show the following:

- (i) *From Abel onwards God has ever communicated through the prophets.* There never has been a time when prophetic revelation was not made known to man. If at times, no prophet has appeared, yet the prophetic deposit, i.e. that which the prophets have already spoken, is available to man.
- (ii) *There have been eras of prophecy, as for example the prophets who spoke to the fathers* (cf. Heb. 1:1–2), the prophets in Israel, commencing with Moses, and in particular that line which began with Samuel (cf. Acts 3:24, 13:20, Heb. 11:32) and concluded with John the Baptist ‘for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John’ (Matt. 11:9–14). Jesus himself carried on and through the line of prophecy (cf. Acts 3:19–26), and then sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost with the promise that all His people (cf. Num. 11:24–29) would be in the prophetic ministry.

(iii) God has never failed to tell all His plan for history, through the prophets. Cf. Amos 3:7, Genesis 18:17, Jeremiah 23:22, Daniel 9:22, Acts 3:21, Revelation 10:7. The first prophet, Abel, began that revelatory ministry. Whilst all predictive prophecy has been communicated, yet hortatory prophecy, and necessary localised predictive prophecy will still continue. Hortatory prophecy is commended in I Corinthians 14:1f, and predictive elements are not only used in the New Testament but even in Scripture certain things are 'sealed' (cf. Dan. 8:26, Rev. 10:4, Cf. Ezek. 12:27, Rev. 22:10), and will be revealed at the correct time. That is, there will be further prophetic revelation (cf. Rev. 11: 1–13).

Whilst these three points (above) are most significant, the one which is even more to the truth of God's constant action is

(iv) The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. It will be seen that the testimony of Jesus, is in fact all he has ever been and done, and what he continues to be and to do. Prophecy then is not simply predictive, or hortatory ('fore-telling' and 'forth-telling'), but it is the very action of Christ himself. That is he works through his people, doing that which prophecy says he will and so making prophecy actualised. He does this, not merely to fulfil it (Ezek. 12:28) because God has promised to do so, but because this is the way God has planned to fulfil His purposes as the Creator, and God and Father of us all.

Rightly understood, all God's people are always involved in the prophetic ministry, i.e. the actual action of Jesus, or, the plan of God.

2. The Principle of Prophecy

At Pentecost when the mighty evidences of the Spirit's coming were undeniable, but not understood, Peter interpreted the events by saying (Acts 2:16), 'this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days
I will pour out My Spirit; and they shall prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heaven above,
and signs on the earth beneath,
blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;
the sun shall be turned into darkness
and the moon into blood,
before the day of the Lord comes,
the great and manifest day.
And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord
shall be saved.”

Thus Peter is saying that (a) These are the last days, and (b) The eschatological Spirit is being poured out universally. (c) He is the Spirit of prophecy (as ever, of course), and so (d) All His people will be prophets—remembering that 'dreams' and 'visions' were precisely forms by which prophets received their messages (Num. 12:6, I Sam. 3:15, Deut. 13:1ff, etc.), and as a result (e) Men will call upon the name of the Lord, through

the ministry of this prophecy and it will be a day of salvation for them. Finally we see that the entire age will be spent this way, until the actual Day of the Lord comes.

For the moment we will not consider this amazing statement, that in this age all shall be prophets, but turn to seeing what a prophet was and what prophecy constituted.

Whilst the fate of prophets and prophecies is clear enough in Scripture, the principle is not necessarily explicitly stated. It has to be sought out. Revelation 19:10 has an explicit statement: 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (or principle) of prophecy.' It could mean, 'The testimony of Jesus – i.e. what he is and does is what prophecy is concerned about,' and that would be true. It could, however, mean, 'The action of testifying to Jesus – i.e. what he is and has done and is doing – is the principle of prophecy.' What is involved here is the action of Jesus, as it is worked out through his people. As they obey him as Lord his life and action is in operation by means of them. They are testifying to him, whilst through them his testimony is actually seen.

Is it, then, true? We cannot immediately answer that until we recognise a general principle of Scriptures which is:– God the Father has initiated the plan of the world, man's redemption, and the final gathering up of all things in Christ, the completion of His family, and the total declaration of His glory. The Son has mediated (and is and will mediate) this entire plan. The Spirit is always the Agent in the work of the Father and the Son. Seeing that, we may say that the Spirit leads to the Son, who leads to the Father. Thus the Spirit of prophecy is testimony to Jesus who ultimately testifies to the Father (cf. I Cor. 15:24–28, Phil. 2:9–11, etc.).

3. Prophecy In The Various Ages

(i) Prophecy and the Old Testament

In Hebrews 1:1 it says, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to the fathers by the prophets.' That is, that dispensation (or epoch) received its communications through the prophets. The prophets first had various communications by dreams, visions, direct revelations, etc. and passed them on in various ways, telling the fathers the will of God.

Jesus nominates the first prophet as being Abel. See Luke 11:49–51. Amos 3:7 says, 'Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.' He adds, 'The lion has roared: who will not fear? The Lord has spoken: who can but prophesy?' i.e. the prophet is impelled to communicate once God has spoken. See also Jeremiah 23:16–18, and compare with Acts 3:21, Revelation 10:7, Ezekiel 12:27. It is indicated that in His total communications God has always used the prophets. Sometimes these concern the future actions of God, more often His immediate actions, so that God is dynamic through prophecies. His communications are not mere descriptions, but immediate moral demands upon the hearers, for the 'Thus saith the Lord,' or 'as the Lord liveth' of the prophets were God's immediate revelations of Himself by confrontation (through the prophets) which demanded a response from the hearers. These communications generally related to the required (covenant) obedience of His people. Cf. Jeremiah 25:1ff where God 'rises up early and sends His prophets' with warnings. Also Zechariah 1:6ff. In fact there is nothing man needs to know which is not communicated by the prophets although, in fact, the Law has already covered God's demands (and leading) for His people, in moral and covenantal obedience.

What interests us, however, is that the Old Testament prophecy is also ‘the testimony to Jesus’. This can be seen in various ways:

(a) The Prophets All Testify to Messiah.

This is clear from New Testament passages such as Luke 24:25-27, 44-47, Luke 1:70, et.al., that all the prophets testified to Messiah. This is emphasised by I Peter 1:10-11. However, passages such as Acts 13:27, 40, 24:14, and especially Acts 26:22 – ‘...I stand testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass’ – show that all the prophets said would be fulfilled, and what would be fulfilled related to Messiah.

(b) Actual Prophecies Testify to Christ’s Acts.

Matthew of all writers particularises these fulfilments. These can be seen in Matthew 2:5f, 2:15, 2:17f, 3:3, 4:14ff, 8:17, 12:17f, 13:35, 21:4f, 26:56, but see also Luke 18:31ff, Acts 2:30, Luke 24:25f, Acts 2:16, 15:15f, II Peter 3:2, Jude 14.

(c) The Scriptures of the Old Testament Must be Fulfilled.

There are too many Gospel statements, ‘that the Scripture might be fulfilled’ to include here, but the point is that having been prophesied these things must come to pass – and they do, as the writers see them. Indeed this is the whole point. They have a high view of prophecy which sees it as God’s way of communication, and as God’s revelation of His plan of action. These fulfilments all relate to Messiah. Note that they do not come to pass simply because they are inevitable, but because they are indispensable.

Thus we understand II Peter 1:20-21 – ‘First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.’ Also I Peter 1:10-12, ‘The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired about this salvation; they enquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory....’. These references show that prophecy was with a view to Christ, and that the Holy Spirit was the mover of them. That he should be called ‘the Spirit of Christ’ is most significant, supporting our point that ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ and here (we may add) ‘the Spirit of prophecy.’ Cf. Matthew 13:17.

(ii) Prophecy and the New Testament

The New Testament has three divisions of prophecy. (a) The prophecies given concerning Christ. (b) The prophetic ministry of Christ himself. (c) The prophecy which reaches from Pentecost to the Day of the Lord.

(a) The Prophecies Given Concerning Christ.

Luke chs. 1 and 2 is filled with action of the Holy Spirit, with a view to Messiah. Thus Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna all prophesy, and this concerning Christ. In one sense their prophecies also concern John the Baptist, particularly that of Zechariah, and they attest to his special calling and function. As we shall see this is most important.

John the Baptist was so outstanding that he was certainly mistaken for Messiah himself. See Matthew 11:9, John 1:20f. He was identified with Elijah *redivivus*, and was an exceptional figure (cf. Matt. 11:14). Even in Acts 19 we meet his followers. Jesus speaks of him as ‘more than a prophet’ (Matt. 11: 9), and says he is the greatest of all the prophets. This is primarily because John sees the whole stream of prophetic ministry headed up in his own, and fulfilled before his eyes. It may also relate to the fact that he is filled with the Spirit from his mother’s womb – a claim not made for any other prophet. John attests to Messiah as he comes, otherwise there is no prophetic continuity, nor national attestation. John can give this because his priest–father Zechariah is visited in the temple, in a supernatural way. John was accepted generally, although the official powers hedged concerning his authority.

(b) The Prophetic Ministry of Christ Himself.

Jesus is not less than a prophet, although he is more. Matthew 21:11, 46 (cf. Mark 6:15, 8:28, Mark 6:4, Luke 13:33) and other passages indicate that Jesus was thought of as a prophet, and did not deny the fact, thus affirming it. In Luke 7:18 John the Baptist, presumably hearing the report that Jesus was a (great) prophet (Luke 7:16), sends to see whether Jesus is the Messiah, as he must have understood the prophetic line, at least insofar as the coming of Messiah is concerned, to have finished with himself. However Acts 3:22f and 7:37 makes it clear that Jesus was a prophet, and if the prophet is one who gives testimony then this is what Jesus is doing constantly, in all the Gospels and most explicitly in the Gospel of John. His testimony is to many things, but most of all to the Father (John 14:6–10). Prophecy, then, is not so much a mediated one, in his case, as it is the direct prophetic action of testimony. If it still be called prophecy then it is the very highest form of prophecy.

(c) The Prophecy Reaching from Pentecost to the Last Day.

In Matthew 11:13 Jesus said that the law and the prophets prophesied until John. Then John prophesied. That is why he is greatest of the prophets, indeed of all men born of women. This is because he has seen his prophecy come to pass. However Jesus says that the least in the Kingdom is greater than John. This can mean either or both of the following points:– (i) He who is in the Kingdom is greater than he who prophesies concerning it. (ii) There is a prophetic ministry in or related to the Kingdom which is greater than the ministry predicting the same Kingdom.

Is there, in fact, such as (ii) suggests? The answer is, ‘Yes.’ This can be seen in Acts 2:17–21, where all those in the Kingdom are designated as prophets. Also in the Revelation the prophets testify in the process of the Kingdom coming to consummation, as well as of that consummation. This is an advance on John. Whereas all the prophets suffer (even death), the prophets of the last days are set for death. They are no whit behind the O.T. martyr–prophets, for they come under even more terrible days. We will deal with this era and aspect of prophecy in more detail below. See below ‘Witness in the Book of the Revelation – the Opposition by Evil Powers to the Prophets.’

(iii) Conclusion

We conclude in regard to prophecy in all ages that it is:

- (i) The testimony to Jesus – i.e. that it concerns God’s plan for Messiah, and so for His people, and His own glory in all ages.
- (ii) Prophecy is related to the action of Messiah, in all ages, and can thus be called ‘The Testimony of Jesus.’

- (iii) Prophecy foretells what will happen, must happen, and is necessary to happen. Apart from prophecy, God does not reveal any of His plan, but through prophecy He reveals all that man needs to know, and is required to know.

4. The Holy Spirit and Prophecy

(i) Introduction

There are a number of general ways in which we could show the Spirit is in all prophecy. For example, when in Matthew 11:13 both the law and the prophets are said to have prophesied, we could show the Holy Spirit is the one behind both the law (Heb. 9:8) and the prophets (I Peter 1:11, Heb. 10:15), and whilst this is true we need to see the entire action of the Spirit as he relates to prophecy and it to him.

(ii) The Spirit is the Spirit of Prophecy

(a) The Fact is Stated Explicitly.

The following Scriptures show this – among many more. I Peter 1:11, II Peter 1:21, Hebrews 3:7, 10:15, Acts 4:25, Micah 3:8, Luke 1:67, etc.

(b) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Prophecy in All Ages.

In all ages he has prophesied and will prophesy. (See immediately above for such references and add others that follow.) He prophesied in the O.T. He prophesied concerning Christ's coming in the N.T. He was the One Who enabled Christ in His own prophetic ministry and action. E.g. Matthew 12:28, cf. Isaiah 61:1f, 42:1, Luke 4:17f, Acts 10:38, Hebrews 9:14, Romans 8:11, cf. Ephesians 1:19f. Jesus said he would continue to so prophesy (John 16:12f). Titus he does (cf. I John 5:9–11). Also see the prophecies of many in the Acts and Epistles who have the gift of prophecy from the Spirit, e.g. Agabus (Acts 11:28), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8–9), Barnabas and others (Acts 13:1), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). See also Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 17:3, etc.

(c) He is the Spirit of the testimony of Jesus.

HE IS THE SPIRIT OF TESTIMONY TO JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. Of course there is no 'Jesus' as such in the O.T., for this one came only at Bethlehem. There was, however, the Word, the Son of God. The Spirit of God was with him in creation. The term 'Spirit of Christ' is used in I Peter 1:11, and we assume that this was the Spirit who was concerned with Christ, but in a real sense relating to him, then. The term 'Spirit of Christ' is also used in Romans 8:9–11 (cf. II Cor. 3:17–18). I Corinthians 10:1ff speaks of Christ being the life-giving Rock in the wilderness with Israel, and John 12:40–41 indicates it was Christ in the temple whom Isaiah saw. However, more than this we have seen clearly how the prophecies made in the O.T. were made by the 'Spirit of Christ' and referred totally – to Christ, and his events to come.

HE IS THE SPIRIT OF TESTIMONY TO JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. We have seen that he is in the pre-birth prophecies concerning Christ, as also in the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. We have seen that Christ himself was a prophet (and more than a prophet) through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Also we see that he became incarnate through the Spirit, was baptised in him, led

into the wilderness for testing by the devil, through the Spirit. He ministered in the power of the Spirit; offered himself in crucifixion through the Spirit, was raised from the dead, and ascended through the Spirit. The Spirit then, if we may speak humanly, is in a position to testify to Jesus for he has been with him in all his ministry.

This is what makes the term witness (whether as a noun or a verb) most significant. If nothing of the prophets' witness (in the past) is other than Christ-related, and if the Spirit is the Spirit of witness, then his ministry of the future (Pentecost and onwards) is likewise going to be witness-centred, and Christ-oriented. If that which the prophets predict must come to pass, and nothing but that, then all the prophecies as yet absolutely unfulfilled must be fulfilled by Christ, through the agency of the Spirit.

Thus when we come to chapters 14–16 of John's Gospel – our Lord's comprehensive statement concerning the Person and Work of the Spirit – we see the following points:

- (i) The Holy Spirit is another such as Jesus (John 14:16).
- (ii) He is the Spirit of truth to lead into truth (Christ is the truth.)
- (iii) He bears witness to Christ. This takes the following norms:
 - (a) He leads into the truth which is Christ (John 16:13).
 - (b) He has a universal witness to Christ as in John 16:7–11 where he convicts the world (concerning Christ) in the matter of sin (not believing on Christ), righteousness (Christ has been accepted by the Father), and judgement (the prince of this world – Satan has been judged, not Christ!)
 - (c) He relates the people of God to this witness (John 15:26, 27).
 - (d) He will positively glorify Christ (John 16:12, 15). At the same time his witness to Christ must necessarily be a witness to the Father John 16:12–15, cf. Matthew 10:20, Galatians 4:4–6.
 - (e) He will be the eschatological Spirit, i.e. he will testify (in and) of the 'things to come', i.e. Christ's future and final ministry and action.

These principles of witness obviously relate directly to Luke 24:48 – 'Ye are witnesses of these things' – and 24:49 where they are to wait for the Spirit to empower them for witness. This is patently clear in Acts 1:8 where they are told that they will witness when the Spirit comes on them, i.e. witness to Christ, through the Spirit, and this is no less maintained in the Book of the Revelation (cf. 1:2, 9, 12:17, 19:10, 22:6), although the Spirit is not mentioned specifically, at least in regard to witness, with the possible exception of Revelation 19:10. However, these verses relate clearly to testimony to Jesus, given by the witnesses who are also indicated to be martyrs, which word, in fact, is the exact word for 'witnesses'.

THE SPIRIT, SPIRIT-BAPTISM, AND WITNESS (TESTIMONY TO JESUS). John the Baptist related the Kingdom, Messiah, and the Baptism in (of) the Spirit, when he preached. Men had to repent, being baptised with a view to the remission of sins, for they desired to enter the Kingdom. The Messiah, who would bring in the Kingdom, would be the one who would baptise in (with) the Holy Spirit. See Matthew 3:1–12, John 1:19–34.

In fact in all his ministry Jesus did not (a) Baptise anyone in the Spirit, (b) Give the Kingdom to anyone, (c) Give universal forgiveness. He did, however, urge them to believe God would (eventually) give the Spirit (Luke 11:13, cf. John 3:3f), and the Kingdom (Luke 12:32, cf. 22:28–30), and forgiveness (Matt. 26:28).

When we read Acts 1:1–8 we discover the following:

- (a) He talked in the 40 days concerning the Kingdom.
- (b) He promised they would (soon) be baptised in the Spirit.
- (c) They immediately conclude that the Kingdom will be restored (to Israel). This is because in the O.T. the prophecies of the outpouring of the Spirit were (always) related to the restoration of the Kingdom (to Israel).
- (d) He says the times of restoration they need not worry about, but the task which is theirs is to witness to Christ to the ‘ends of the earth’, beginning at Jerusalem. ‘The ends of the earth’ is taken from Psalm 2:8 where the Son (Messiah) is promised that his Kingdom will reach to (and embrace) the ‘ends of the earth’.
- (e) Conclusion: The Holy Spirit will cause them to witness (in the matter of Christ’s Kingdom) to the ‘ends of the earth’. It is for this that they will be baptised in the Spirit.

Important Note:– If ‘the testimony of (to Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10))’, then the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for this, i.e. testimony, prophecy. When we say ‘prophecy’ we mean ‘the testimony of Jesus’. We would then expect to see some indication of this fact at Pentecost. If, as well, the ‘testimony of (to) Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy’, i.e. the Spirit’s special work) then his prophetic action will impress itself through all his actions.

When we come to Pentecost and the baptism in (of) the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:5, 2:4), we see that the manifestations of the Spirit (like wind, like fire) result in men and women being filled and immediately witnessing to Jesus. This is the significance of ‘telling the mighty works of God’ (v.11). The equivalent of this is seen in Acts 10:46, ‘extolling God’, and 19:6, ‘prophesied’. In these three cases the tongues relate to that prophesying. However, the key is given by Peter in Acts 2:17f. (Look again at our introduction to this passage.) This means that all God’s people will be prophets in this age.*1 In this sense they will be greater than the great John the Baptist, seeing they are in the active things of the Kingdom of God. Such things are to continue until the end (the great and notable day of the Lord).

THE WORKING OUT OF WITNESS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS. At Pentecost the Spirit’s work of witness to Christ commences. In accordance with John 16:7–11 a universal conviction (of the world) commences. At Pentecost Israel is convicted of sin, and righteousness, and judgement, so much so that they cry out, ‘What shall we do?’ This witness to Christ is through the Spirit–baptised believers.

The witness of the Spirit, through the believers (the church) continues. ‘Jerusalem and all Judea’ (Acts 1:8) has the witness to Jesus given to it (Acts chs. 1–7). This is a dynamic witness. If there is danger of it slowing down (cf. 4:23ff) then they pray and the prophetic Spirit comes upon all (4:31) and all have boldness in witness. That the events are moving towards the end–time is clear when they preach, ‘Repent therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven and earth must receive until the time for establishing all things spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old.’

The witness then spreads to ‘Samaria’, i.e. the Samaritans (Acts 1:8) as

in Acts 8, and on to ‘the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8), i.e. the Gentiles as in Acts chs. 10 and 11. The universal witness of the Spirit and his people thus continues. The references incorporating the word or thought of witness can be seen in 1:8, 22, 21:17f, 32, 3:15, 4:33, 5:32, 10:39, 41, 13:31, 22:15, 26:16. For prophets (as such) in Acts, that is to say, those who have the actual office of a prophet, see 11:27, 13:1–2, 15:32, cf. 21:9, 10.

THE WORKING OUT OF WITNESS IN THE EPISTLES. The Book of the Acts is the account of each church living in the power of the Spirit, and so growing as it witnessed. This is seen in I Thessalonians chapter 1. A clear example is the church at Antioch (Acts 11 and 13:1f). The Epistles then, are written to such churches. Thus a great deal is not said about witness as such. In I Corinthians 4:20 Paul scorns words without power (cf. I Cor. 2:5, I Thess. 1:5, 2:13, cf. I Peter 4:10, Heb. 2:2–4, etc.) for he has said the only means of saving persons is the Gospel proclamation (I Cor. 1:21).

In passages such as Ephesians 4:7–16, and I Corinthians 12:29f, 14:1ff (cf. Rom. 12:10), prophecy (as a gift or manifestation of the Spirit) ranks above all gifts, but yet seemingly available to all. However we have to rationalise the fact that all are not prophets, whilst all are, ostensibly, witnessing. The only way we can do this is to call the gift of prophecy one which is limited in the experience of believers more by lacking of seeking, than the Spirit’s reluctance to give.

Another way is to see the totality of the gifts which are sovereignly distributed by the Spirit as summing up, or making effective, the entire witness of the Body, that is, all are necessarily and functionally contributory to the whole witness of the church, and in that sense can be called ‘prophetic’. This should not, however, release any believer from the personal obligation (or opportunity) to exercise the ministry of prophecy (witness) even if any gift or ministry does not constitute the gift (as such) of prophecy.

THE WORKING OUT OF WITNESS IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION.

(i) *The Opposition by evil powers to the prophets.* We cannot understand the matter of witness and prophecy in this book unless we understand that prophecy presents an enormous threat to all that is Satanic. ‘The testimony of (to) Jesus’ is always, under the Spirit, dynamic. Christ once said, ‘The Father has always worked and I go on working’ (John 5:17). He meant that he never ceases to work. He is always working with his church – ‘to the end of the age’, therefore the witness is not simply (statically) to what he has done – as, say, an antiquarian might deliver it – but dynamically, to and of the One Who is ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever.’ Thus testimony must be to Whom and what he is at any given point in time. Indeed true testimony must bring through livingly, and actionally, that same Jesus. Hence prophecy relates to ‘yesterday, today, and forever’, as we have seen. Thus Christ comes through to persons and situations prophetically, in effective dynamic. This is why prophecy is dangerous to the powers of evil.

Satan erects counterfeits and counterparts to every work of God. This may arise from his perennial jealousy, but in practice it is to:– (a) Destroy the effect of prophecy, and (b) Extend the positive (or negative) evil of Satan. Hence we have warnings against false prophecy and prophets in many passages such as I John 4:1f, 2:18f, II John 7–11, II Peter 2:1f, cf. I Timothy 4:1f, II Corinthians 11:13f. In the Revelation we have foul spirits (doubtless the counterpart to the Holy Spirit) – Revelation 16:13–14 – and the false prophet. See 13: 11–17, 16:13, 19:20. This false prophet counterfeits Christ by working signs and wonders as Christ had predicted he would (see Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24f, cf. Luke 6:26). Thus we see not only the evil counterfeit, but the vicious action of evil against the prophets who are true. These they seek to destroy. And why not, since the whole plan of God has been indicated and carried forward by the

self-same prophets? Note also that in the O.T. the false prophets were often rampant in Israel, working evil against God's true prophets (Jer. 23:9–22).

(ii) *The Servants of God, the prophets – witnesses and martyrs.* Without doubt the term 'servants' is a technical or semitechnical term for the prophets. It is used this way in Jeremiah 25:4, 26:5, 29:19, 35:15, 44:4 – 'my servants the prophets'. It is similarly referred to in Matthew 21:23 (Luke 20:9–19) in the parable of the vineyard. The ones on whom the Spirit is poured out for prophecy are referred to as 'my menservants and my maidservants' in Acts 2:18 (and context), and again in Acts 4:29 the prayer is for God to give boldness to His servants, which He does by pouring out the Holy spirit. In all of these (N.T.) instances the term used is '*doulos*' or 'slave'. In Acts 16:17 the girl, at Philippi with the spirit of divination, calls Paul and Silas 'the servants (slaves) of the Most High God', and probably means prophets, as she herself has a similar, though evil, connotation.

In the Revelation the term is used freely. 10:7 speaks clearly of 'His servants the prophets', referring to the whole line of prophets. This is supported by 22:6, 'And the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets) has sent His angel to show His servants what must soon take place.' In 19:10 the angel says, 'I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus.' John adds, in this context, 'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Again in 1:1–2, 'The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending His angel to His servant John) who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus.' See also 2:9.

In chapter 7 the sealed ones are called the servants of God, i.e. the 144,000. In 14:1–5 they are spoken of as having been redeemed from mankind, and are, seemingly, not only from Israel, nor yet do they constitute Israel. The context says they are those who are chaste, which means they have rejected idolatry and follow God purely. Without doubt they are special. Why then the term 'servants'? It has to be admitted that the term 'servants' cannot be used exclusively for prophets. However, in 6:9–11 it is the martyrs who are the killed ones and they are called 'servants' (v.11). It is almost probable, then, that the 144,000 are the prophets, the martyr-prophets. The term 'martyr' comes from *marturios*, i. e. 'a witness'. In 2:13 Antipas is called God's witness, and he was killed. Keeping Revelation 19:10 in mind ('The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy') we see then that the martyrs may well be in mind in 12:10–11, for there Satan is thrown down, he who had accused them before God (i.e. in the presence of God), but they had overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (the Cross) and the word of their testimony (witness to Jesus), and had not loved their lives unto death (i.e. had willingly been killed for the sake of the testimony of Jesus).

It is true that the martyrs seek vindication of their death, and in 6:10 inquire of God as to when their blood is to be avenged. They are told to rest further, as they have already rested in patience, for God will vindicate them. That He does is shown in 15:5–7, 'Just art Thou in these Thy judgements...for men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due.' Again in 18:20–24 Babylon is fallen and the people of God rejoice, 'Rejoice....O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgement for you against her!' 'In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints...'. Again in 19:2 there is universal acclamation of the fact that God 'has avenged on her the blood of His servants.'

With this we may also see, as in Luke 11:45–51, that the prophets of God have always been killed. In the Old Testament time it was from 'Abel to Zechariah', and in the New Testament, John the Baptist. In Luke 18:1–8 believers are encouraged to have faith that God will vindicate His elect, and do it speedily.

5. Conclusion To “The Holy Spirit and Prophecy”

From the above points we have adduced:

- (a) To receive power from the Holy Spirit is to witness to Jesus (as in Acts 1: 8) .
- (b) This is related to the outworking of the Kingdom to ‘the ends of the earth.’
- (c) This prophetic ministry (Acts 2:17–21) is the ‘testimony to Jesus’ (cf. Rev. 19:10).
- (d) There may be a distinction between (general) prophetic ministry and an actual gift of prophecy, but prophecy is the one gift which all are urged to seek, if they do not have it.
- (e) Those who are committed to prophetic ministry will suffer deeply and their witness will lead them, generally speaking, to face death.
- (f) The prophets have always suffered. This is so because they are God’s special ones. He so works His history out that He deliberately vindicates the prophets, according to His own righteousness.
- (g) All their work is in the context of ‘the testimony of Jesus’.

In accordance with this conclusion we have a number of points to work out. They are:

(i) What Are All the Elements of the Testimony of Jesus?

In answer the following points need considering. The testimony to and of Jesus begins with, and concludes with the ministry of the prophets. From Abel to the last prophets Jesus is testified to as Messiah and Lord. This is, of course, not seen clearly in the beginning, but I Peter 1:10–11 makes it clear that it is so. However, the testimony of Jesus is also borne witness to by John (Rev. 1:1–2). This could mean the revelation God had given to Jesus (Rev. 1:1), or it could mean Jesus’ own testimony, i.e. the facts and events of his ministry. Whilst these testify to God his Father, they are nevertheless not merely events of, or for, chronicling. They are living, dynamic events and actions. In this sense the prophets bring these very events through, by their proclamation.

This principle is difficult to grasp unless we understand the nature of the church, and the nature of the people of God. The entire prophetic ministry is committed to all God ‘s people. Thus the ministry of the church is to proclaim God in and by His mighty acts – as in Acts 4:29–30 – ‘And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to Thy servants to speak Thy word with all boldness, while Thou stretchest out Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.’

Taking this further, we see that the totality of the gifts constitutes the total work of the Spirit in the Body of Christ (I Cor. chs. 12–14). At the same time these gifts constitute the total work of Christ in the Body, since:

- (i) **He gives the gifts through the Spirit** (Ephes. 4:7ff, cf. I Cor. chs. 12–14), and
- (ii) **He thus endows his Body with his own fullness** for the work he is doing (Ephes. 1:22–23). That is, his fullness is, and is in the Body for his operation of ‘filling all things’ (Ephes. 1:23, 4:10, 13, 5:18, etc.), or ‘summing up all things’ (Ephes. 1:10, cf. Col. 1:20).

This is not difficult to understand when we realise that the gifts he gives are his. In fact they are him. He is the charisma of life (Rom. 6:23, cf. I John 5:12). All gifts are contained in him, being in fact, his very 'fullness', and are given for the purpose of making his own testimony actional in the processes of history by means of the church. Thus the processes he is in, in working out the Kingdom to its final, triumphant end (I Cor. 15:24–28, Phil. 2:9–11, cf. Rev. 11:15), are by means of his Body the church, and in particular through the prophetic task to which they are committed in this age or eschaton of the Holy Spirit.

(ii) What Releases God's People into the True Ministry of Prophecy?

The obvious answer is, 'Being baptised in the Spirit', as is seen in Acts 2. Another way of saying this is 'having the Spirit come upon' one, which certainly happened at Pentecost, in Samaria, in Caesarea and in Ephesus to the new recipients of the Spirit. This, in fact, was what happened in the Old Testament on such occasions as Numbers 11:24ff, when the elders prophesied. The Spirit came upon King Saul, upon Elisha (from Elijah), and Micah says, 'I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord' (3:8). However what is more to the point is that God did not send out His prophets until first He had called them in. Each was given, as it were, an audience with God, in order that he should know God, and so speak to God's people. One excellent example is Isaiah's experience of God in the Temple (Isaiah 6). This really means the prophets had a revelation from God out of which they spoke, as God commanded them.

In Ephesians 1:15ff Paul prays that God may give to the Ephesians 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him', meaning they may have what the prophets (and others) had. Then they will know God, and His power, and action. This is what the true prophet has, through the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the One who comes to reveal Christ and the Father. When he reveals Christ, as the Spirit of truth, then the new prophet knows) for the revelation has not been made simply to him, but also in him. He has 'caught the shape of Christ' within himself (cf. Gal. 4:19).

(iii) What is the Power the Holy Spirit Brings to the Prophet?

It is simply the power of God Himself, but it works itself out in various situations, and through various channels. Recognising that such power is not like 'gas in the tank', i.e. a supply to be utilised by the recipient, but that he continually remains dependent upon 'that which the Spirit supplies' (Phil. 1:19), we can see that the believer is powerful whilst he walks in the Spirit, continuing to be led by the Spirit as also to be continually filled by him, remaining totally dependent upon him.

This power is to testify to Christ, that is take the things which are his and communicate them livingly, to others. This will mean, in effect, that the believer himself will come under the power of forgiveness, of holiness, and of the gifts. He will clothe himself in the armour of God, and so be 'strengthened with all might'. He will on the one hand communicate the saving power of God, and on the other hand be strong and protected against evil powers. The moment there is a shift from God's power to his own, he will find himself miserably weak, unholy, and exposed to the powers of evil. For this reason he will rejoice in his own weaknesses that the power of God may rest on him (II Cor. 12:9–10).

(iv) What Relationship Does Prophecy Have to Love?

If we consider that God's whole plan of salvation is to reveal and communicate His love, then the Holy Spirit, through the prophetic ministry, brings that love to human hearts – 'the love of God is flood into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us' (Rom. 5:5). Again, when we see God's love, we then love (I John 4:7–19). Thus the fruit of the Spirit is love and its concomitants (Gal. 5:22f). Hence he is the Spirit of love.

In I Corinthians 13:1–3 Paul shows that the gifts have been given for love. Love is not simply a disposition or attitude, but one such which gives. To give without love, or to exercise gifts for praise, is to negate love. In I Corinthians 8:1 Paul says (of a certain form of knowledge), 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up'. This principle – that love builds up – is shown in I Corinthians 14:4, '...he who prophesies builds up the church.' This shows how prophecy is really the action of love. Of course if God is love, and Christ the Son of His love (Col. 1:13), then the true testimony to Jesus, and the real testimony of Jesus, will surely be to love, as love itself, in action. Love is always and only known by action. The disposition to love manifests itself by actions.

6. General Conclusion

Seeing the nature and purpose of prophecy, and realising that we are in the age when all may, indeed should, involve themselves in the prophetic ministry, we cry with Moses, 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!' (Numb. 11:29). This, even viewing the fact that the true prophet may expect and accept nothing less than martyrdom. In so doing, of course, he is truly and dynamically, bearing testimony *to* Jesus, and having the testimony *of* Jesus.