

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Word from the Lord? Evaluating the Modern Gift of Prophecy (Nathan Busenitz)

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Strange Fire Conference

Well, good afternoon. My name is Nathan Busenitz and the title of our seminar this afternoon is *A Word from the Lord? Evaluating the Modern Gift of Prophecy*. That subtitle really defines our goal in this session. We want to look at prophecy in the contemporary Charismatic Movement and compare it to the Word of God.

Now as a side note, at the beginning, I want to note that much of the material that we're covering this afternoon parallels what you'll find in the *Strange Fire* book which you'll be receiving tomorrow. And I'm mentioning that at the outset so that if you're interested in doing further study on this important topic, you can do so by reading what Dr. MacArthur has published in that important resource.

Now before we begin this afternoon, it's important for us to define several terms. And I realize that these terms have been defined and used throughout the keynote sessions so far. But I feel like it's important from the beginning to define some key terms. One of those terms is Charismatic. The term "Charismatic" is very broad. It encompasses millions of people and thousands of denominations. In fact, according to the International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, there are more than twenty thousand distinct Charismatic and Pentecostal groups or denominations in the world. These groups are generally subdivided into three different categories or waves. The first wave began in 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, it really got started in 1905 or so here in Los Angeles and that would be classic Pentecostalism under the leadership of men like William Seymour and Charles Fox Parham.

The second wave is known as the Charismatic Renewal, began in the 1960's and it represents really the influence of Pentecostal theology in the mainline denominations. Actually started in Van Nuys, California, just a few miles from here.

And then the Third Wave began in the 1980's, really started under the leadership of two Fuller Seminary professors, C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber. Wimber, of course, associated with the Vineyard Fellowship and this is Pentecostal theology influencing evangelicalism and it's called the Third Wave.

These three waves together represent the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement and in our seminar today, we'll be using the term Charismatic in a broad sense to refer to all three of these waves, recognizing that it's not possible to deal with all of the nuances and specifics in the hour or so that we have this afternoon.

Another important term that we need to discuss is the term "Continuationist." The term Continuationist simply means that those who are continuationists believe that the gifts have continued, the miraculous and revelatory gifts of the New Testament have continued throughout the church age and are still operational today. Often the term, continuationist, is used to differentiate theological conservative Charismatics from those in the broader Charismatic Movement. And well-known continuationists would include Christian leaders like John Piper, Wayne Grudem, and Sam Storms, and I think it's important at the outset to mention the fact that we have great appreciation and respect for much of what these men and their ministries represent.

I like how Bob Kauflin defines the term Continuationist. He says this, "The term Charismatic has sometimes been associated with doctrinal error unsubstantiated claims of healing, financial impropriety, outlandish and unfulfilled predictions, an over-emphasis on the speech gifts and some regrettable hair styles." Then he says this, "That's why I've started to identify myself more often as a continuationist rather than a Charismatic." So I think it's helpful for us to note the distinction there between those two terms.

And then finally, we have the term cessationist. The term cessationist refers to those who believe that the miraculous and revelatory gifts passed away in church history shortly after the apostolic age ended. Cessationists assert that phenomena like the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, tongues and healing are no longer operational in the church today. Once the apostolic age passed, and the canon of Scripture was complete, the primary purpose for these gifts was fulfilled and they passed away.

Now with those sort of basic terms defined, we can then define the term prophecy. When we speak about prophecy or the gift of prophecy, or a word of prophecy, we are talking about the human declaration of divine revelation. In fact, continuationists author Sam Storms defines prophecy exactly that way as quote: "The human report of divine revelation."

Now, just to be clear, we are not talking about preaching, rather we are specifically talking about the reception of new revelation from God which is then articulated by a human prophet. And I think in terms of that very rudimentary definition of prophecy, I think most cessationists would agree, biblical prophets like Moses and Isaiah, they received new revelation from God which they then reported to people both by speaking the truth, declaring it, and by writing it down. Charismatics today similarly claim that they receive revelation from God and that they are then able to articulate words of prophecy to others.

Another term, the word prophet. The word prophet itself comes from the Greek, *prophetes* which means to speak in the place of or to be a spokesman. So a prophet is by definition a spokesperson for God.

I think this is an important point. When someone claims to be exercising the gift of prophecy, or claims to have received a word from the Lord, they are in essence claiming to be a spokesperson for God.

This brings up an important thing for us to consider, the need to test prophets. Throughout history there have been many people who claimed to be prophets, who claimed to speak for God. But all Christians, whether Charismatic, Continuationist, or Cessationist would agree that at least some, if not all, of these individuals were false prophets.

Now just for the sake of time, I'll give you three quick examples. One example from the second century would be Montanus. Montanus claimed to speak for God. In fact, the Montanus Movement called itself the New Prophecy. He said that the world was about to end. He promoted extremely legalistic ethical standards on his followers. He claimed that God was going to establish the New Jerusalem not in Jerusalem, but in the town of Pepusa(?) in Phrygia(?). And needless to say his predictions of the imminent end of the world did not come true and he was declared a heretic by the early church.

Moving all the way up to the Reformation, Dr. Lawson yesterday talked about some of the radical Reformers who at times claimed to receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. One of those would be a man named Melchior(?) Hoffman(?) who claimed that the New Jerusalem was going to be established in Strasberg, Germany. And we have Yen(?) Mathis one of his sort of disciples. Mathis said the New Jerusalem would be established in Munster, Germany. At some point somebody is going to recognize that the New Jerusalem is going to be in Jerusalem, but in any case, he and his followers essentially took over the city of Munster, Jerusalem and were finally eradicated and declared to be false prophets. The predictions that they made did not come true.

And then another perhaps more well-known example in the nineteenth century would be Joseph Smith who, of course, claimed to receive direct revelation from God. In his case, it came in the form of some golden tablets which he allegedly translated and the result is the Book of Mormon. Smith, of course, is widely recognized, in fact in his own day was widely recognized as a con-artist. He was imprisoned. In fact, he was killed while in prison by an angry mob who was offended by his doctrine of polygamy. And we would all regard Joseph Smith as a false prophet.

Now what's the point of these historical examples? Simply to demonstrate the truth that false prophets exist and that they represent a major threat to the church. Both the Old and New

Testaments repeatedly warned believers about the danger of false prophets. And if time permitted, we could go through dozens of similar examples and dozens of passages in which God's Word warns people to avoid anyone who claims to speak for God but in reality does not. So when a person claims to have received new revelation from God then, we might ask, "What criteria can we use to discern whether or not they are really speaking for God?" How can we recognize a false prophet? And I think that really is the key question that we have to ask even as we think about the modern Charismatic version of prophecy.

The Bible articulates three criteria for identifying a false prophet. And Tom Pennington hit on these quickly in his seminar just this morning. These three tests, I'm just going to state them briefly and then we'll go through them in more detail. The first would be the test of doctrinal orthodoxy. God's true prophets proclaim doctrines that are right and true. New Revelation is always consistent with previous revealed truth.

Second, moral integrity. God's true prophets are characterized by personal holiness. Those who claim to speak for God must also live out that truth in their lives.

And then thirdly, predictive accuracy...predictive accuracy. God's true prophets foretell future events or reveal hidden things with 100 percent accuracy.

We'll go through these each in more detail.

First, a true prophet must be doctrinally orthodox. Conversely any self-proclaimed prophet who deceives people by leading them into theological error is a false prophet. Now there are many places in Scripture that we could look to bear out this point, but we're just going to look at two today, for the sake of time. One of them was mentioned by Tom in his earlier message, that's Deuteronomy 13:1 through 5. Here's what it says, "If a prophet were a dreamer of dreams rises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder comes true concerning which he spoke to you saying let us go after other gods, 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 find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 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. 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."

In other words, Moses is saying if a prophet comes to you and even if the prophet does things that seem spectacular, even if they say things that come true, if that prophet leads you away from biblical doctrinal truth into heresy or error, that prophet is a false prophet. And you'll notice how seriously God

takes this offense, the death penalty itself is attached to those prophets who would tread in this area.

In a New Testament context, Peter gives a similar warning in 2 Peter 2:1. He says, "But false prophets also rose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." And notice in that passage Peter equates false prophets from the Old Testament with false teachers in the New Testament. Those who teach false doctrine demonstrate themselves to be false prophets.

Now, if we wanted to do so, we could spend the whole time this afternoon documenting time after time when well-known Charismatic prophets have taught egregious forms of doctrinal error from the prosperity gospel to the Word of Faith Movement, to one is Pentecostalism, those things that Dr. MacArthur articulated this morning. The larger Charismatic Movement is hardly known for its doctrinal orthodoxy. And I realize I'm speaking in broad terms.

But when we see egregious doctrinal errors being taught by self-appointed prophets, like when Benny Hinn famously claimed there were nine members of the Trinity, or when Kenneth Copeland stated that Jesus took on the nature of Satan on the cross, we can be immediately certain that those individuals are not true prophets. But we need to move on.

Moral integrity, a second requirement or a second test for a true prophet of God. Any self-proclaimed prophet who lives in unrestrained lust and greed, or unrepentant sin shows himself to be a false prophet. Again we could look at numerous texts in Scripture that bear this out, but once more we will consider just two.

Jeremiah 23, Jeremiah says this, "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem, I have seen a horrible thing, the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood, and they strengthen the hands of evil doers so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to me like Sodom and are inhabitants like Gomorrah, therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning these kinds of prophets, Behold I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water. From the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land. Thus says the Lord of hosts, do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you, they are leading you into futility, they speak a vision of their own imagination which is not from the mouth of the Lord."

There in an Old Testament context, here we have these immoral prophets and God says don't listen to them, they are false prophets. In the New Testament context, Matthew 7 verse 20, Jesus said that prophets will be known by their fruit which certainly includes the fruits of their lives. Second Peter 2, we read verse 1 already, here's verses 2 and 3, "Many of the false prophets whom Peter is describing, or those who follow them, many will follow these false prophets sensuality and because of them, the way of the truth will be maligned. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

Their judgment from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep.”

So again we see that false prophets can be identified by their life style and also by the lifestyles of those under their influence. We really can know them by their fruits. And again, if we wanted to this afternoon, we could spend our whole time documenting times in the broader Charismatic world where some of the best known Charismatic celebrities and self-proclaimed prophets have been exposed for the immorality, carnality, and greed that exists in their life styles.

When the best known leaders and public faces of a Movement are frequently embroiled in scandal and controversy to do lavish lifestyles and immoral escapades, it does call into question their self-appointed status as prophets.

Maybe just one example. One of the most prolific prophetic groups from a few years ago, at least, is known as the Kansas City Prophets, included men like Mike Bickle and Rick Joyner, two of the most highly regarded were Bob Jones, not of Bob Jones University, different Bob Jones, and Paul Cain. Both of these men were regarded as prophets by their fellow Charismatics. Both of them were highly visible and influential, especially within the Third Wave circles where they ministered. But both of them were subsequently disqualified from ministry on moral grounds.

Bob Jones had to be removed from ministry when it came to light that he was using his prophetic gifts to illicit sexual favors from women. And Paul Cain's ministry was publicly scandalized when he admitted to long-term drunkenness and homosexuality. Irony is that in spite of their lack of moral integrity, they continued to be held up as true prophets by many within the Charismatic world. Bob Jones, for example, still has a thriving ministry. On his web page he compares himself to the prophet Daniel.

Well that brings us then to a third test of false prophets, predictive accuracy. And this is where we're going to spend more of our time this afternoon. When a true prophet speaks about future events or other unknown things, he speaks with 100 percent accuracy. And that's because God knows all things. So if someone is accurately speaking on God's behalf, what he says will invariably be true.

Now once again, there are a number of scriptures that we could look at on this point, but we will consider just two. The first is Deuteronomy 18 which Tom Pennington referenced this morning, but it's worth reading again. Here God Himself says this, "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 if the Word, or how will we know the Word which the Lord has not spoken?'" In other words, how will we know if this is a true prophet or a false prophet.

“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” Well that’s just about as clear as you could possibly make it. God says if a prophet claims to speak for God, but then says things that do not come to pass or are inaccurate, then that prophet has spoken presumptuously and he can be considered a false prophet.

The rest of Scripture reverberates the same truth. According to Isaiah 44:26, God confirms the words of His true messengers. According to Jeremiah 28:9 the true prophet is the one whose predictions come true. According to Ezekiel 12:25, “The Word which God speaks will come to pass.”

By contrast a false prophet, all he can do is hope in the wishful thinking sort of hope, hope that what he has predicted will actually happen. Here’s what Ezekiel 13 says, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. You have not gone up into the breaches nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord. These prophets, they see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, The Lord declares, when the Lord has not sent them. Yet...notice this...they hope for the fulfillment of their word.’ Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said the Lord declares? But it is not I who have spoken. Therefore thus says the Lord God, because you have spoken falsely and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord God. So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel that you may know that I am the Lord God.”

So a prophet who claims to speak for God and then what he says turns out to be a lie, turns out to be false, God Himself says that He is against those prophets. So God’s Word is very clear.

Now when we compare the modern Charismatic form of prophecy to this third biblical requirement, we again find that it falls far short. In fact, by their own admission, proponents of the modern gift of prophecy readily acknowledge that modern prophecies are often inaccurate and full of error. Just to give you some examples. Here Rick Joyner says, and he’s commenting about Bob Jones, he says, “There is a prophet named Bob Jones who was told that the general level of prophetic revelation in the church was about 65 percent accurate at this time. Some are only about ten percent accurate. A very few of the most mature prophets are approaching 85 to 5 percent accuracy. Prophecy is increasing in purity but there is still a long way to go for those who walk in this ministry. The problem is biblically a true prophet is not recognized based on how many predictions he gets right. Rather, false prophets are recognized by how many predictions they get wrong.”

Rick Joyner again in a different place says this, “One of the greatest hazards,” and this, by the way, helps us understand, what do they do with Deuteronomy 18? They know that it’s there, what do they

do with it? Well they just ignore it. Here's what he says. "One of the greatest hazards effecting maturing prophets is the erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament exhortation that if a prophet ever predicted something which did not come to pass, he was no longer to be considered a true prophet. The warning was that if this happened, the prophet had been presumptuous and the people were not to fear him." That's a right understanding of the text. But Joyner just says, "If one predicts something in the name of the Lord and it does not come to pass, he probably has spoken presumptuously and that needs to be repented of but that does not make him a false prophet. No one could step out in the faith required to walk in his calling if he knew that a single mistake would ruin him for life."

But that is not how Scripture defines the test. Here's Bill Hayman(?), he says, "We must not be quick to call someone a false prophet simply because something he said was inaccurate. Missing it a few times in prophecy doesn't make a false prophet, no mortal prophet is infallible. All are liable to make mistakes." But you see how far short this is falling from the biblical standard. Here's Jack Deere, "Prophets are really messy. Prophets make mistakes. And sometimes when a prophet makes a mistake, it's a serious mistake." I mean, I know prophets just last year that cost people millions of dollars with the mistake they made. I talk to people who made the wrong investments, actually moved their homes and spent tons of money.

In the extended interview between Mike Bickle and Bob Jones, which if we had time we could read the whole thing, a large portion of it is included in the *Strange Fire* books. So you'll see it when you get the book tomorrow. The interview concludes with Mike Bickle asking Bob Jones, so there have been errors, there's been a number of errors in your prophetic ministry—is the implication. And Bob Jones answers, "Oh, hundreds...hundreds of them."

A couple of other examples, Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce at a prophecy conference in 2000 acknowledged, "We've made a lot of mistakes. There's no excuse but we need to do better. And Kim Clements(?) on TBN said, and this pretty much just sums up the Charismatic view of prophecy, "You can be a wrong prophet, and not be a false prophet."

Now someone might say, "Well that...that's the broader Charismatic Movement. That's the TBN mainstream larger, wider Charismatic Movement, what about the continuationists? What about the more conservative continuationists?"

Well, this view of prophecy is prevalent among continuationists as well. Perhaps the most well-known proponent of modern prophecy is Wayne Grudem and Grudem says this in his book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. He says, "There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the Charismatic Movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted."

As a result of this then, continuationists acknowledge that people can rely too much on the subjective guidance of prophecy. So Grudem says, "Usually this has been because they did not realize that prophecy in the church age is not the Word of God and that it can frequently contain errors." Sam Storms adds this, "One should avoid looking to or depending on the gift of prophecy for making routine, daily decisions in life, because God does not intend for the gift of prophecy to be used as the usual way we make decisions regarding His will." In other words, modern prophecy can't be trusted.

Very interesting here, Wayne Grudem talks about how you can know whether or not a prophecy is legitimate. You'll note how subjective this becomes because now the objective criteria of being accurate is no longer being used. So Wayne Grudem says this, "Pastorally if someone is in charge of a home fellowship group, or if a pastor is in charge of a prayer meeting, you call it as you see it. I have to use an American analogy. It's an umpire calling balls and strikes as the pitcher pitches the ball across the plate. So by ignoring the objective standards of Scripture, then, evaluating whether or not something really is a true prophecy becomes hopelessly subjective."

Here in another place, and this again comes from his book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, Grudem adds this. "Did the revelation seem like something from the Holy Spirit? Did it seem to be similar to other experiences of the Holy Spirit which he had known previously in worship? Beyond this, it is difficult to specify much further except to say that over time, a congregation would probably become more adept at making evaluations and become more adept at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit and distinguishing it from their own thoughts." You can see the subjective language that is being used because all objective criteria have been ignored.

Now this raises an important question. If the Bible requires 100 percent accuracy for prophets, then how can the Charismatic Movement justify prophets who regularly speak errors when they claim to be speaking words from God? Now just to illustrate some of the more outlandish errors, we could talk about, for example, in 1989 when Benny Hinn predicted that Fidel Castro would die sometime in the 1990's. Or when he predicted that the homosexual community in America would be destroyed by fire before 1995, or that a major earthquake would devastate the east coast before the year 2000. None of those predictions came true.

In the 1990's, Bob Jones and Rick Joyner predicted that within a matter of months, Southern California would be swallowed by the Pacific Ocean after a major earthquake. That also did not come to pass. And in 2007 Pat Robertson predicted a major terror attack in the U.S. in that year. Here's what Robertson said on his show, "The Lord didn't say nuclear but I do believe it will be something like that, that it will be a mass-killing, possibly millions of people, major cities injured. There will be some very serious terrorist attacks. The evil people will come after this country and there's a possibility not a possibility, a definite certainty that chaos is going to rule."

Those kinds of stories, of course, could be multiplied many times over. And those are just a few more egregious examples to make a point. If we were to apply the standard of Deuteronomy 18, we would have to consider these men to be false prophets. But Charismatics are quick to say, just because a modern prophet gets a prediction or many predictions wrong, that doesn't make him a false prophet. How can they say that?

Well the answer may surprise you. Defenders of modern prophecy generally claim that there are actually two categories of prophets or prophecy depicted in Scripture. The first kind of prophet is the one that is described in Deuteronomy 18. That kind of prophet had to be 100 percent accurate. And in that category they would include the Old Testament prophets, along with the Apostles and the writers of any other New Testament books. So they have to be 100 percent accurate.

But then they would contend that there's a second lower category of prophet, a second tier of prophet in the New Testament. They refer to these as New Testament congregational prophets and they claim that these prophets were not held to a standard of 100 percent accuracy. So the argument essentially goes like this. While first tier prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Peter and Paul were held to a standard of absolute, orthodoxy and correctness, these congregational prophets were allowed to deliver revelations from God that weren't actuality full of errors and mistakes. Because this second tier form of prophecy was not accurate, it also was not considered authoritative. And so, as a result you don't have to obey the word of a prophet.

In a sense then, this congregational form of prophecy was essentially nothing more than Spirit-led advice. It was optional for people to follow because it may or may not be accurate. In fact, Wayne Grudem himself speaking of modern prophecy says, "I would put this idea of God bringing things to mind in the same category of authority as advice or counsel from a godly person."

Now there's a significant pastoral issue with that redefinition of biblical prophecy because modern prophecy unlike mere advice, can be used to abuse, manipulate, and coerce people who think that they're obeying the Lord when in fact they are not.

Kim Crutchfield(?), Charismatic author, an advocate of modern prophecy acknowledges this fact. He says, "Some churches and church leaders become abusive. Abusive church leaders use prophecy to castigate, vilify and place fear in a person's heart. These are false prophecies, uttered as a tool of social control. They predict doom for those who leave a church. Such leaders do not allow people to question the prophet, judge the prophecy or call the message into question. This is a clear abuse of spiritual authority, Unscrupulous leaders often use prophecies and words from the Lord to manipulate their flock. It is a crass form of spiritual manipulation. It leaves people vulnerable to the whims and manipulations of would-be prophets." I think that is absolutely true.

On a practical level, if you tell me that you've received a Word from God for my life, that's definition more than you just telling me that you're sharing a Word of advice or counsel that comes from your own opinion. So you can see the devastating effects this type of prophecy can have in the church. It can really become a burden on well-meaning people.

But there's an even bigger problem. Continuationists justify errant prophecy by suggesting a lower-class of New Testament prophets. The bigger problem than just the pastoral implications is that this is simply not a biblical way to define prophecy, either in the Old Testament, or in the New Testament. The notion of a lower tier of prophets who are frequently inaccurate in their prophetic declarations is completely absent from the New Testament record. The New Testament nowhere suggests that prophets in the church were to be held to a lesser standard than their Old Testament counterparts. In fact, the evidence indicates exactly the opposite. New Testament prophets, no matter what church congregation they were part of, were held to the very same standard as those used...the very same standards as those used in the Old Testament.

So, for starters, the New Testament refers to both Old Testament and New Testament prophets using the exact same terminology. There is no distinction in the way the New Testament talks about Old Testament prophets, or New Testament prophets. We see this in the book of Acts where time after time references are made to Old Testament prophets and then references to New Testament prophets are interspersed throughout the book of Acts without any sort of distinction, comment or caveat being used.

Sam Waldron says this, "If New Testament prophecy in distinction from Old Testament prophecy was not infallible in its pronouncements, this would have constituted an absolutely fundamental contrast between the Old Testament institution and the New Testament institution. So suppose that a difference as important as this would be passed over without explicit comment is unthinkable." So the New Testament never defines prophecy in a New Testament context as being anything different than what it was in an Old Testament context.

But there is more than just evidence from silence to support the fact that there's only one kind of prophet described in Scripture. In Acts 2:18, for example, Peter quotes from Joel 2:28 to describe the type of prophecy that would characterize the New Testament age. Joel 2:28 is an Old Testament passage, it's describing Old Testament quality prophecy. So by using that passage, Peter was declaring that New Testament prophecy would be of the same kind as the Old Testament prophecy that Joel had just described.

Not only that, but the New Testament describes prophets in the New Testament in a way that is equivalent to how the Old Testament describes prophets as well. So we have the same terminology and now we have the same descriptions. Dr. David Farnell(?) who teaches New Testament here at

the Master's Seminary, after a lengthy study of this issue in the New Testament says this, this is about the prophet Agabus in particular, we'll talk more about Agabus in just a few minutes. But he's showing how Agabus is described in the same way as Old Testament prophets were described. Agabus introduced his prophecy with the formula, "This is what the Holy Spirit says," or "Thus says the Holy Spirit," which closely parallels the Old Testament prophetic formula of "Thus says the Lord." It's the same introductory phrase, in fact, that the Lord Jesus used when He declared words of prophecy to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. And certainly, we would not accuse the Lord Jesus of using ...of using fallible or errant prophecy.

Like many Old Testament prophets, Agabus presented his prophecies through symbolic actions. Again as a similarity. Like the Old Testament prophets, Agabus was empowered by the Holy Spirit and like the Old Testament prophets, Agabus' prophecies were accurately fulfilled. Now on that last point, we're going to go into a little bit more detail because Continuationists would argue that perhaps Agabus was not accurate in his prediction.

But Dr. Farnell summarizes the evidence and says, "Look, in summary, the early post-apostolic church judged the genuineness of New Testament prophets by Old Testament standards. Prophets in the New Testament era who were ecstatic, who made wrong applications of Scripture or who prophesied falsely were considered false prophets because such actions violated Old Testament stipulations regarding what characterized a genuine prophet of God.

The New Testament church during the apostolic age, their scriptures consisted of the Old Testament. So when they went to the Bible to decipher how to judge a true prophet from an false prophet, they derived the same principles from the Old Testament that we have articulated this afternoon.

The bottom line then is this, nothing in the New Testament suggests that there was a second tier of congregational prophets in the early church that was held to a lower standard of one hundred percent prophetic accuracy. The New Testament indicates the prophets and the church were measured by the very same criteria as Old Testament prophets: doctrinal orthodoxy, moral integrity, and predictive accuracy.

So there are two types of prophets in the Bible, true prophets and false prophets. But there is not this third middle ground that the contemporary Charismatic Movement wishes to hold to.

Now, someone will say, "Well there are some objections that Charismatics will raise to what you have just articulated." So let's take a moment to answer three of the most common Charismatic objections.

The first is an appeal to Romans 12:6, proponents of fallible prophecy, or prophecy that has mistakes and errors in it, will often point to Romans 12:6 which in the NAS reads as follows, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly. If

prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.” Based on this verse, Charismatics and Continuationists argue that the accuracy of one’s prophecy can vary depending on how much faith you have. So if you have 80 percent faith, then you can deliver a prophecy that is 80 percent accurate.

But that is actually a misunderstanding of the Greek in this verse. And, in fact, though I like the New American Standard, they have mistranslated this verse. The pronoun, the possessive pronoun “his” before the word “faith” is not in the Greek. In Greek it is the definite article THE. It should read, “According to the proportion of the faith.” Now a number of translations like the ESV and others do better they say, “In proportion, or in measure to our faith,” sort of a collective sense. But the Greek itself is explicit. It is THE faith.

What this means then is this is not saying that the accuracy of your prophecy fluctuates depending on how much faith you have. Rather it is saying that whatever a prophet speaks, it must perfectly accord with THE faith, those things that were previously revealed. Jude 3 and 4 talks about contending earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints. And Romans 12:6 should be understood in that same light. If someone prophesies, if someone claims to speak for God, their message must be measured against the faith...as it has been delivered in previous revelation. So this is simply affirming that Old Testament principle of doctrinal orthodoxy. You must be perfectly accurate theologically when you claim to speak for God.

Now there’s another objection that Charismatics often raise and that is an appeal to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 20 through 22. This verse reads, or these verses read as follows, “Do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully. Hold fast to that which is good and abstain from every form of evil.” Based on this verse, continuationists ask, if New Testament prophecy was infallible like Old Testament prophecy, then why did Paul tell the Thessalonians to test it carefully, or to examine it carefully?

Well, we would respond with the following observations. First of all, I think it’s important to note that Paul’s statement “Do not despise prophetic utterances” was written at a time when everyone agrees that the gift of prophecy was still active. So when cessationists reject the false predictions being made by self-appointed modern prophets, they’re not disobeying Paul’s command, rather they’re taking the command to test things seriously. When we test modern prophets using the biblical standards, we are right then to reject those who do not pass the test.

Verse 22, Paul states that those prophecies which do not pass the test, and I think by implication those who declare such prophecies, that they are to be regarded as evil and believers are to abstain from them. This indicates that there is a seriousness, a *gravitas* to that kind of rejection of error and cessationists seek to apply that in a meaningful way.

Now the fact that Paul instructed his readers to examine prophecy carefully, it does not mean that New Testament prophecy was fallible or full of errors. Rather it indicates that false prophets posed a real threat to the New Testament church. Consequently believers needed to test all supposed prophecies so as to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets. False prophets wreaked havoc in the Thessalonian church. As John MacArthur explains, the Thessalonians in particular needed to be wary of false prophets. Paul's two epistles to them indicate that some within their congregation had already been misled, both with regard to Paul's personal character, and with regard to the eschatological future of the church. Much of Paul's instruction was in response to the erroneous teaching that was wreaking havoc within the Thessalonian church.

Finally, the idea that New Testament prophecy had to be examined or tested, that does not make it qualitatively different than Old Testament prophecy. In fact, the very reason that God gave those tests in Deuteronomy 13 and in Deuteronomy 18, was so that Old Testament saints could test prophecy too, just as New Testament believers were commanded to do it in 1 Thessalonians 5.

Now why did Old Testament prophecy need to be tested? Because just as in New Testament times, the threat of false prophets was in ever-present danger. I think it's important to note as well that in Acts 17:11 the Bereans were considered noble for examining the things that even the Apostle Paul was telling them. So even apostolic teaching should be tested by that which had been previously revealed.

So, Dr. MacArthur says this, putting all this together, we see that 1 Thessalonians 5 does not support the Charismatic case for fallible prophecy. Rather it leads to the opposite conclusion because it calls Christians to test any message, or messenger that claims to come from God. When we apply the test of Scripture to the supposed revelations of modern-day Charismatics, we quickly see their prophesying for what it really is, a dangerous counterfeit.

Now there's one more objection that Charismatics raise, and perhaps this is the most common objection of all. Tom hinted at it this morning in his message. But let's talk just a little bit about the prophet Agabus.

In Acts 11:28, Agabus is affirmed as a true prophet who accurately foretold the coming of a severe famine. But controversy surrounds Acts chapter 21 verses 10 and 11, according to continuationists, Agabus was a true prophet who got the predictive details of his prophecy wrong. In their minds then, he provides an example...in fact, really the only New Testament example of a prophet who failed to make an accurate prediction but was still considered a true prophet.

Here's what Luke says in Acts 21:10 and 11. "As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem....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.'" Now according to continuationists, the overall gist of Agabus' prophecy is correct, but the details are wrong. In particular, according to continuationists, Agabus erred when he stated, number one, that the Jews would bind Paul and number two, that the Jews would deliver Paul into the hands of the Romans. So here Wayne Grudem says this, "This is a prophecy whose two elements of binding and giving over by the Jews are explicitly falsified by the subsequent narrative." In another place, Grudem says, "The prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies and detail that would have called into question the validity of any Old Testament prophet."

So how are we to think about Agabus? Are the details of his prophecy explicitly falsified? Did he err when he predicted that the Jews would bind Paul and hand him over to the Romans? I think the answer to this question is no. I don't think Agabus got anything wrong in his prophecy. Let me give you five reasons why.

Number one, nothing in the text states that Agabus got his prophecy wrong. So the idea that this is explicitly falsified is in itself explicitly false. Neither Luke nor Paul, nor anyone else in Scripture, criticizes the accuracy of Agabus' prediction or says that he erred. Thus at best, the continuationists' conclusion about Agabus is based on an argument from silence.

Secondly, Luke's description of what happened to Paul in Jerusalem farther down in Acts chapter 21 implies that the Jews bound him just as Agabus predicted. In fact, Luke doesn't need to repeat those details because he's already given us those details through the words of Agabus. But the details are implied as being perfectly fulfilled. So the rest of Acts 21 explains the Jews laid hands on Paul. They seized him, they dragged him and they sought to kill him and they were beating him when the Roman soldiers finally arrived.

Later when Paul stands before Agrippa, he reiterates that the Jews seized him in the Temple and tried to kill him. The mob would have had to restrain Paul in some way in order to do all of this to him, since Paul did not subject himself to it willingly. As they forcibly removed him from the Temple, they would have used whatever means were necessary to seize him and to bind him.

So the implication in both Acts 21 and Acts 26 is that Paul was bound exactly as Agabus said he would be. In fact, the Greek word "to bind" can mean to arrest or to imprison, but it can also simply mean to tie someone up, or to wrap someone up with rags. So when Agabus says you're going to be bound in this way, that's exactly what happened.

Number three, Paul's later testimony confirms that the Jews delivered him over, or handed him over to the Romans. Continuationists claim that Agabus also erred when he predicted that the Jews would deliver Paul over to the Romans, but that error is not demanded by the text. In fact, in Acts 21:32,

Paul is being beaten when the Roman cohort arrives, the Jews upon seeing the soldiers stop assaulting Paul and the implication of the text is that when the Roman soldiers arrived, the angry mob dispersed and relinquished Paul into the hands of the Roman soldiers. That, of course, accords perfectly with Agabus' prediction. But there's an even more explicit statement in Acts 28 where Paul has just arrived in Jerusalem. He's under house arrest in Rome. Here's what Luke says. "When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with a soldier who was guarding him. After three days, Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews and when they came together, he began to say to them," and this is Paul speaking, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered." That word for delivered is the exact same word that Agabus used when he said that Paul would be delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Romans. Here he says, "I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans."

So you can see, there's no reason to cast aspersion or doubt on the details of Agabus' prophecy. Now here's probably the most important reason why I think it's very dangerous to accuse Agabus of getting the details wrong. Agabus is quoting the Holy Spirit. In Acts 21:11 Agabus begins his prophecy by saying, "Thus says the Holy Spirit." Just like the Old Testament prophets would declare, "Thus says the Lord." Nothing in the text indicates that he was wrong to do that, and, in fact, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record Agabus' prophecy in exactly this way.

So, those who accuse Agabus of error ought to be very careful. And I don't say this flippantly but meaningfully, Agabus is quoting the Holy Spirit and I believe it is dangerous to then accuse the following words of being inaccurate.

Now finally and probably least important in our list of five, but one that I appreciate because I teach church history, no one in church history ever accused Agabus of errant prophecy until the modern Charismatic Movement. And we don't have time this morning for me to read to you from Augustine and Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus, and Ambrose and others who talk about Agabus. But when they do talk about Agabus, which isn't very frequently, they acquaint him with the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel and they never ever imply that his prophecy was wrong.

So, based on these five reasons, I feel confidence stating that there is no hint of fallible prophecy not only in church history but in a straight-forward reading of the biblical text, no hint of fallible prophecy in Agabus' prediction. Which means if Agabus didn't get the details wrong, then there is no New Testament example of a prophet who got the details wrong.

Now, what are the implications of what it is that we are discussing? We have just a few minutes left this afternoon, and I want to talk just a little bit about what it is that we've been discussing and what the implications of this are.

Terms of a review, the Bible articulates three criteria by which to evaluate a true prophet from a false prophet. Those criteria are, number one, doctrinal orthodoxy. Number two, moral integrity. And number three, predictive accuracy. A word that truly comes from God will be consistent with what has previously been revealed and will come from the life of someone who is consistent in their own walk with the Lord and if it includes details of prediction, or of hidden knowledge that is being revealed, those details will be perfectly accurate because the source of that prophecy is the God who knows everything and who cannot speak falsehood.

Self-proclaimed prophets who fail any of those three tests should consider the serious biblical warnings against falsely claiming to speak for God. So quote from the *Strange Fire* book, John MacArthur says, "Fallible prophets are false prophets. Or at best, misguided non-prophets who should immediately cease and desist from presumptively pretending to speak for God. When compared to the clear criteria set forth in the Word of God, nothing about modern prophecy measures up."

Now, from a cessationists standpoint, and I appreciated Tom Pennington's defense of cessationism this morning, we would say that the true gift of prophecy has ceased. According to Ephesians 2:20, the foundation of the church built on the foundation...the church being built on the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets, the foundational age, once that age passes, both Apostles and prophets, those gifts associated with those offices pass away as well. So the foundation age has passed and so we would contend that the gift of prophecy passed along with it.

With the canon of Scripture complete, there is no longer any need for us to receive new revelation from God. We have the prophetic word and it contains all that we need for life and godliness. And I appreciate the emphasis that's been made in the keynote sessions and that will be made with Dr. Lawson's upcoming message, and that emphasis is that the sufficiency of Scripture itself is at stake. Any concept of new revelation from God undermines the authority of Scripture and it also competes with the exclusivity of biblical revelation. And that is what makes the concept of modern prophecy, even if you redefine it as Spirit-led advice, the concept itself is dangerous.

So the idea that new revelation is still being given, undermines the doctrine of Scripture sufficiency. It also enables unscrupulous leaders to abuse their people supposedly in the name of God and I recognize that not everyone who claims to be a Charismatic prophet is guilty of abusing people, but it does happen and the problem comes by labeling error as prophecy. It shows us how dangerous the idea of modern prophecy really is.

Now I'd like to close our time by citing three well-known figures from history...two from church history, and one from biblical history. All three of these extended quotations are going to be included in the *Strange Fire* book, so you will have these tomorrow when you get the book. But I think they provide a

fitting conclusion to our discussion about modern prophecy.

The first comes from a well-known British pastor of the early twentieth century, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Here's what he said in his work on Ephesians chapter 4. He said, "Try to imagine our position if we did not possess these New Testament epistles but the Old Testament only. That was the position of the early church. Truth was imparted to it primarily by the teaching and preaching of the Apostles but that was supplemented by the teaching of the prophets to whom truth was given and also the ability to speak it with clarity and power in the demonstration and authority of the Spirit. But once these New Testament documents were written, the office of a prophet was no longer necessary. Again, we must note that often in the history of the church, trouble has arisen because people thought they were prophets in the New Testament sense and that they had received special revelations of truth.

The answer to that is that in view of the New Testament scriptures, there is no need of further truth. That is an absolute proposition. We have all truth in the New Testament and we have no need of any further revelations. All has been given, everything that is necessary for us is available. Therefore, if a man claims to have received a revelation of some fresh truth, we should suspect him immediately. The answer to all this is that the need for prophets ends once we have the canon of the New Testament. We no longer need direct revelations of truth, the truth is in the Bible. We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. The Spirit speaks to us through the Word so we should always doubt and query any supposed revelation that is not entirely consistent with the Word of God. Indeed the essence of wisdom is to reject all together the term revelation and speak only of illumination. The revelation has been given once and for all. And what we need and what by the grace of God we can have and do have is illumination by the Spirit to understand the Word.

Now this next quote that I want to read to you comes from another well-known British pastor, a couple of generations before Lloyd-Jones, and that's Charles Spurgeon. This quote is direct. So I want to hide behind the fact that this is Charles Spurgeon's quote. Okay...good. He says this, "Honor the Spirit of God as you would honor Jesus Christ if He were present. If Jesus Christ were dwelling in your house, you would not ignore Him. You would not go about your businesses if He were not there. Do not ignore the presence of the Holy Spirit in your soul. To Him pay your constant adorations, reverence the august guest who has been pleased to make your body his sacred abode. Love Him, obey Him, worship Him. Take care never to impute the vain imaginings of your fancy to Him. I have seen the Spirit of God shamefully dishonored by persons—I hope they were insane—who have said they have had this and that revealed to them. There has not, for some years, passed over my head a single week in which I have not been pestered with the revelations of hypocrites or maniacs. Semi-lunatics are very fond of coming with messages from the Lord to me, and it may save them some trouble if I tell them once and for all that I will have none of their stupid messengers. Never dreamed that events are revealed to you by heaven, or you may come to be like those idiots who dare impute their blatant follies to the Holy Spirit. If you feel your tongue itch to talk nonsense, trace it to the devil,

not to the Spirit of God. Whatever is to be revealed by the Spirit to any of us is in the Word of God already. He adds nothing to the Bible and never will. Let persons who have revelations of this, that and the other go to bed and wake up in their senses. I only wish they would follow the advice and no longer insult the Holy Spirit by laying their nonsense at His door.”

That was harsh but I would add this, I didn't read that intending it to be funny, I read it intending it to be sobering because I think Spurgeon intended it to be received in a spirit of sobriety, recognizing just what an offense it is to claim to speak for God and then to speak words that don't actually come from God.

Last place I'd like to read to you from is from Jeremiah, this is the Lord Himself speaking through the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 23:16 to 32, this, I believe, underscores just how serious God takes it when people claim to be prophets but the revelation they've supposedly received is from their own imaginations and not from Him.

“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council and had caused My people to hear My Words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart.’ Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who used their tongues and say, ‘The Lord says,’ behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the Lord, and tell them and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them, therefore they shall not prophet this people at all.”

Let's close our time in prayer.

Heavenly Father, those are sobering words to end this seminar with, and we do not seek to be trite, but rather to recognize the sober warning of Scripture. And, Father, we are so thankful that You have given us the prophetic Word which is complete and which is sufficient to reveal to us the knowledge of God which is all that we need for life and godliness. And so, Lord, we ask as we seek to apply what we've talked about this afternoon, we ask that we would be faithful to find our joy, our satisfaction, our contentment in the things that You have revealed to us in Scripture and that we would not look for some other fountain of knowledge because none other exists. You have chosen to reveal yourself through Your Word and You've given us Your Holy Spirit through whom in Him we can come to understand through His illuminating power the truth of that Word and submit ourselves to it. So, Lord, we ask that as we are conformed to Your Word, that we would also be conformed to Your Son, Jesus

Christ. We pray this in His precious and holy name. Amen.

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