



**Study guide for
THE TYPES OF PROPHECY**

Wayne Grudem “The gift of prophecy”

Grudem alludes to two types of prophecy without affirming it. He hints but never explicitly affirms the existence of two type of prophecy. Grudem generalized Old Testament prophecy to be completely authoritative without exception. NT prophets are viewed as capable of mistaking in the transmission of a revelation. He holds the prophets of the Old Testament as conscious of their divine authority. Likewise the Apostles of the new testament functioned same type authority as the prophets of the Old testament. This leaves room for text about NT prophets and prophecy to be coherent, as inspired yet fallible thus needing to be judged and ultimately under the authority of the apostolic deposit (ie scripture). Below is a reading from Appendix A in ‘The gift of prophecy in the New Testament and today’ from Wayne Grudem ¹

The expectation that someday all of God’s people would prophesy

The existence of an initial group of secondary prophets (the seventy elders who prophesied with Moses, Num. 11:25) provides a pattern for subsequent bands of prophets later in the Old Testament (see below) and also provides an expectation that someday the gift of prophecy would be widely distributed among God’s people: Moses says, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” (Num. 11:29, RSV). Here Moses longs not just for the prophetic gift but even more for the widespread personal relationship to God that the gift would indicate, for he knows by experience that prophets walk close to God. This expectation is repeated in Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-29) and finds initial fulfillment in the New Testament church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-18).

a. Established, primary prophets

Just as in the Pentateuch Moses was established as the primary prophet of God, so in subsequent Old Testament history there are prophets such as Samuel (1 Sam. 3:20), Gad (1 Sam. 22:5), Nathan (2 Sam. 7:2), Elijah (1 Kings 18:22), Elisha (2 Kings 2:15), Isaiah (2 Kings 20:1), Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:12), and other writing prophets who are established and recognized as prophets of the Lord. The pattern for such a recognized and prominent role was seen in Samuel when he was “established as a prophet of the LORD” (1 Sam. 3:20, RSV), and the Lord “let none of his words fall to the ground” (v. 19, RSV). The text frequently notes that such primary prophets were attested by miracles (1 Kings 18:24, 3839; 2 Kings 5:3, 14), the truth of their predictions (1 Sam. 19–20; 1 Kings 14:18; 16:12), and their loyalty to the one true God.

b. Secondary bands of prophets

In addition to “established” prophets who had recognized positions of leadership, there were several secondary bands of prophets such as those who met Saul after Samuel anointed him as king (1 Sam. 10:5), as well as the 100 prophets who were hidden by Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4), and the bands of prophets or “sons of the prophets” in Bethel (2 Kings 2:3, RSV), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5, 7), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38).

These bands of prophets are not viewed as false prophets but as servants of the one true God who are affiliated with true prophets such as Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7) or Obadiah (who hides them from wicked Jezebel, 1 Kings 18:4). Therefore these secondary prophets must have received some kinds of messages or revelations from God, for this was the essential requirement for being called a “prophet.” (They had special knowledge from God that he would take Elijah on a certain day, for example—2 Kings 2:3, 5). However, none of their prophetic utterances are preserved in the canonical Scriptures, which may suggest that their

¹ Taken from Appendix A in the revised addition of ‘The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today’ Wayne Grudem, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossword books, 1988, revised in 2000) pgs. 272, 273-6, 290-1. Also found The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Gen Eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester, England IVP 2000) under “Prophecy and Prophets,” Wayne Grudem pgs. 701-710.

prophesying was not ordinarily counted equal in value or equal in authority to the messages of the primary, established prophets such as Samuel or Elijah. The wider distribution of prophecy to these bands of prophets foreshadows the outpouring of prophecy to “sons and . . . daughters . . . menservants and . . . maidservants” (Acts 2:17-18, RSV) in the New Covenant. The involuntary “prophesying” and physical restraint that affected Saul and his messengers (1 Sam. 19:20-24) stands as a unique incident in Scripture, and should not be generalized into a claim that there were “ecstatic” bands of prophets throughout the land (1 Sam. 10:5-13 indicates musical accompaniment of prophecies but not involuntary ecstatic experience).....

g. The authority of the prophetic message

The prophets’ words throughout the Old Testament are the very words of God. When a true prophet predicts events, those events surely come to pass, “according to the word of the LORD which he spoke [by the prophet] . . .” (1 Kings 14:18; 16:12, 34; 17:16; 22:38; 2 Kings 1:17; 7:16; 14:25; 24:2). It is easy to understand why this should be so: If an omniscient, omnipotent God predicts something, then it will surely happen.

Because the prophets’ words are words of God, the people have an obligation to believe and obey such words. To believe God is to believe his prophets (2 Chron. 20:20; 29:25; Hag. 1:12), for the words of the prophets are the very words of God (2 Chron. 29:25). Therefore, to disbelieve or disobey a true prophet is to disbelieve or disobey God, and he will hold the hearer responsible (1 Sam. 8:7; 1 Kings 20:36; 2 Chron. 25:16; Isa. 30:12-14; cf. Deut. 18:19). Because the words that claimed such divine authority were also recorded in the written Old Testament Scripture, these passages present a strong *prima facie* argument regarding the authority of Scripture: God’s people throughout all ages are under obligation to treat all the words of the prophets as the very words of God, words which he requires his people to believe and (when understood and applied rightly with respect to a New Covenant situation) also to obey.....

a. The New Testament apostles are the counterparts to Old Testament prophets

Many Old Testament prophets were able to speak and write words which had absolute divine authority and which were recorded in canonical Scripture. In the New Testament there were also people who spoke and wrote God’s very words and had them recorded in Scripture; however, Jesus no longer calls them “prophets” but uses a new term, “apostles.” The apostles are the New Testament counterparts to the primary, established prophets in the Old Testament (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 1:8-9, 11-12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Pet. 3:2). It is the apostles, not the prophets, who have authority to write the words of New Testament Scripture.

When the apostles want to establish their unique authority, they never appeal to the title “prophet” but rather call themselves “apostles” (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 11:12-13; 12:11-12; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; 3:2; etc.).

b. The meaning of the word “prophet” in the time of the New Testament

Why did Jesus choose the new term apostle to designate those who had the authority to write Scripture? One reason is that the gift of prophecy was going to be widely distributed to God’s people at Pentecost, and another term was appropriate to speak of a small group who would have authority to write New Testament Scripture. Another reason is that the Greek word *prophētēs* (“prophet”) at the time of the New Testament generally did not have the sense “one who speaks God’s very words” but rather “one who speaks on the basis of some external influence” (often a spiritual influence of some kind), or even just “spokesman.” Titus 1:12 uses

the word in this sense, where Paul quotes the pagan Greek poet Epimenides: “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’”

c. The apostles as “prophets”

Of course, the words “prophet” and “prophecy” were sometimes used of the apostles in contexts where the apostles were giving a “prophecy”—contexts that emphasized a special revelation from the Holy Spirit that was the basis of what they said (so Eph. 2:20; 3:5; and Rev. 1:3; 22:7), but this was not the ordinary terminology used for the apostles, nor did the terms “prophet” and “prophecy” in themselves imply divine authority for their speech or writing any more than Paul’s calling himself a “teacher” (2 Tim. 1:11) implies that all “teachers” in the time of the New Testament had authority equal to Paul’s. With respect to the apostles functioning as “prophets,” Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 speak of the “foundational” role of a unique group of apostles (and perhaps a limited group of prophets with them) who received the special revelation of the Gentile inclusion in the church (3:5). However, these verses have no direct relevance to the question of understanding the gift of prophecy as it functioned not in the “foundation” but in the rest of the church—in thousands of ordinary Christians in hundreds of local churches at the time of the New Testament. In the remaining New Testament passages, the words “prophet” and “prophecy” are used more commonly to refer to ordinary Christians who spoke not with absolute divine authority but simply to report something that God had brought to their minds.

d. The gift of prophecy in ordinary Christians: Indications that it did not carry the same authority as Scripture

Acts 21:4: In Acts 21:4 we read of the disciples at Tyre: “Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” This seems to be a reference to prophecy directed toward Paul, but Paul disobeyed it. He never would have done this if this prophecy contained God’s very words and had authority equal to Scripture.

Acts 21:10-11: Here Agabus prophesied that the Jews at Jerusalem would “bind” Paul and “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles,” a prediction that was nearly correct but not quite: The Romans, not the Jews, bound Paul (v. 33; also 22:29); and the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force (21:32). The verb used by Agabus in 21:11, *paradidōmi*, requires the sense of voluntarily, consciously, deliberately giving over or handing over something to someone else—but that sense is not true with respect to the treatment of Paul by the Jews: They did not voluntarily hand Paul over to the Romans! The prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies in detail that would have called into question the validity of any Old Testament prophet.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21: Paul tells the Thessalonians, “do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20-21, RSV). If the Thessalonians had thought that prophecy equaled God’s Word in authority, Paul would never have had to tell them not to despise it—they “received” and “accepted” God’s Word “with joy from the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13; cf. 4:15). But when Paul tells them to “test everything,” it must include at least the prophecies he mentioned in the previous phrase. When he encourages them to “hold fast what is good,” he implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good. This is something that could never have been said of the words of an Old Testament prophet, or the authoritative teachings of a New Testament apostle.

1 Corinthians 14:29-38: More extensive evidence on New Testament prophecy is found in 1 Corinthians 14. When Paul says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said” (1 Cor. 14:29, RSV), he suggests that they should listen carefully and sift the good from the bad, accepting some and rejecting the rest (for this is the implication of the Greek word *diakrinō*, here translated “weigh what is said”). We cannot imagine that an Old Testament prophet such as Isaiah would have said, “Listen to what I say and weigh what is said— sort the good from the bad, what you accept from what you should not accept”! If prophecy had absolute divine authority, it would be sin to do this. But here Paul commands

that it be done, suggesting that New Testament prophecy did not have the authority of God's very words.

Paul suggests that no one at Corinth, a church that had much prophecy, was able to speak God's very words. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:36, "What! Did the word of God come forth from you, or are you the only ones it has reached?"

All these passages indicate that the common idea that prophets spoke "words of the Lord" when the apostles were not present in the early churches is simply incorrect. These passages also warn that prophecies today should never be prefaced with, "Thus says the Lord," for that is claiming an authority that New Testament prophets do not have.

D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit:

Carson allows for two kinds of prophecy in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Carson is not satisfied with Grudem's sharp distinction between apostolic prophecy and the prophecy of New Testament prophets. Carson understands the Holy Spirit to superintend the process as to allow for the personality of the authors to be used in the formation of the new testament canon.

Key quote

"The Old Testament, for instance, records the existence of "schools" of the prophets; and it is far from clear that everyone in a particular "school" enjoyed the status of Amos or Isaiah. There is no single, stereotypical Old Testament prophecy and a different stereotypical New Testament prophecy. Indeed, it has been compellingly suggested that Numbers 12:6-8 and 11:29 give evidence within the Old Testament of two kinds of prophecy—one "charismatic and enigmatic" and the other "Mosaic." The suggestion may nevertheless provide indirect support for Grudem since the "charismatic and enigmatic" kind is picked up by Joel's prophecy, which is said by Peter to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.). Grudem's general point stands, but as we shall see in the last chapter, it needs some qualification." (Pg 98)

Three Longer readings from "Showing the Spirit"

1. Reflections on Revelation

Doubtless you will recall that in the treatment of prophecy in my third chapter, I largely followed Grudem's excellent study, but expressed dissatisfaction at a couple of crucial points. One of these deserves further exploration. Some take Grudem to be distinguishing between the authority of prophets (such as the Old Testament writing prophets) whose revelation from God extended to the very words and the authority of prophets whose revelation from God consisted in general ideas only. Grudem himself disavows this formulation: but as he has been misunderstood along these lines, we need to probe the cause of the misunderstanding and seek a way out of the dilemma.

This misunderstanding is unwittingly injurious to the doctrine of Scripture. It is true that Scripture insists that God's superintending inspiration of Scripture extends right down to Scripture's words (as Grudem himself elsewhere argues);² but thoughtful expositors of the doctrine have carefully distinguished between the mode of inspiration and the result of inspiration in order to avoid all mechanical theories of dictation. The result of inspiration is a text truly from God, right down to the words, while also being in the words of the human author; but that does not mean the mode of inspiration required God to dictate the text. However, by referring to the revelation that the prophet receives as either in conceptual categories or in words, this view pushes back from the resulting message or text to the mode of inspiration. There is too little evidence that much of Scripture was revealed by this mode, and the problems such a formulation raises are real and intractable.³

² Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 19-39, 359-68.

³ An attempt has been made to discuss the contemporary questions surrounding the doctrine of Scripture espoused by the main streams of historic Christianity in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); idem, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); D. A. Carson, "Three Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983): 337-67.

This raises the possibility, at least, that revelation, whatever the mode, might well not be communicated accurately unless the results are guaranteed. In that case the prophecy that has actually come by revelation might well have to be evaluated, without reflection on the quality of the revelation itself.

Some of the debate is hampered by a view of revelation that is narrower than that employed in Scripture. Consider, for instance, these words from Vos:

The question may be raised, whether within the limits of the principles here laid down, there can be expected still further revelation entitled to a place in the scheme of N[ew] T[estament] Revelation. Unless we adopt the mystical standpoint, which cuts loose the subjective from the objective, the only proper answer to this question is, that new revelation can be added only, in case new objective events of a supernatural character take place, needing for their understanding a new body of interpretation supplied by God. This will actually be the case in the eschatological issue of things. What then occurs will constitute a new epoch in redemption worthy to be placed by the side of the great epochs in the Mosaic age and the age of the first Advent. Hence the Apocalypse mingles with the pictures of the final events transpiring the word of prophecy and of interpretation. We may say, then, that a third epoch of revelation is still outstanding. Strictly speaking, however, this will form less a group by itself than a consummation of the second group. It will belong to N[ew] T[estament] revelation as a final division. Mystical revelation claimed by many in the interim as a personal privilege is out of keeping with the genius of Biblical religion. Mysticism in this detached form is not specifically Christian. It occurs in all types of religion, better or worse. At best it is a manifestation of the religion of nature, subject to all the defects and faults of the latter. As to its content and inherent value it is unverifiable, except on the principle of submitting it to the test of harmony with Scripture. And submitting it to this it ceases to be a separate source of revelation concerning God.⁴

Here we find the neat antithesis, objective revelation or uncontrolled mysticism. But the Bible's use of "revelation" (ποκλυψις, apokalypsis) and "to reveal" (ποκλύπτω, apokalypt) reflects a wider range of possibilities. In all of the occurrences, the revelation is granted by God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit, or brought about directly by them or in connection with them. Especially frequent are the references to the revelation of Jesus Christ at the parousia, or to the gospel itself, including the space-time manifestation of Jesus Messiah. Normally these terms are not used when some more specific term is available (such as dream or vision); and, as Grudem himself rightly points out, "revelation" can take place in some surprising contexts.⁵

For instance, when Peter makes his confession at Caesarea Philippi, he has to be told that the Father had revealed this truth to him (Matt. 16:17 par.): apparently revelation can take place without the individual knowing that it is taking place or has taken place. In Galatians 1:16, it pleased God to reveal his Son, Paul says, ἐν ἐμοί (en emoi)—literally, "in me," presumably "to me" or even "with reference to me." This of course has reference to Paul's conversion: we are not dealing here with the objective self-disclosure of the Son of God in space-time history, a revelation witnessed widely and now attested by the public record of Scripture, but with the private disclosure of the Son to and in Paul.⁶ If someone objects that Paul's conversion is unique, involving as it did the appearance of the resurrected Christ after his ascension, we may nevertheless compare Matthew 11:27 and 1 Corinthians 2:10. In the former, we are told, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 326-27.

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 69-70, 119-36.

⁶ See further William Baird, "Visions, Revelation, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12:1-5 and Gal 1:11-17," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 651-62.

to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”); in the latter, after being told that God’s wisdom has been hidden in the past, and from the rulers of this age, we are assured that “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit”—and the contrast with the rulers of the age makes it clear that the referent of this “revelation” is not simply the appearance of Jesus Messiah, but the conversion of some people over against other people. This too is called “revelation,” even though unveiling of the Son to the inward eye of faith in a particular individual is not itself either the public revelation of the Son in history or the parousia—the two alternatives offered by Vos.

This does not mean that from the point of conversion on, the believer understands all of the Son that has thus been revealed to him or her, or could verbalize the experiences with infallible assertions. More revelation takes place in the believer’s life as he or she grows in grace and understanding. Paul can write to converts and explain some foundational Christian truth, and then add, “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear [lit., “will reveal”] to you” (Phil. 3:15). A similar understanding of revelation lies behind Ephesians 1:17, and probably also behind some passages where the terms revelation and to reveal are not actually used (e.g., Eph. 3:14-19). There is no hint in any of these contexts that the “revelation” involved falls into one of Vos’s two categories. Apparently, at least some of this revelation came through a quiet (possibly even unrecognized but no less gracious) divine disclosure, part of the Christian’s growing grasp of spiritual realities—a growing grasp that can come only by revelation, which is to say it comes by grace.

Thus, when Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon. To argue in such a way is to confuse the terminology of Protestant systematic theology with the terminology of the Scripture writers. The prophecy Paul has in mind is revelatory and Spirit-prompted, and it may, as Turner and others suggest,⁷ deal largely with questions of application of gospel truth (though there is no biblical restriction along such lines). None of this means it is necessarily authoritative, infallible, or canon-threatening. Such prophecies must still be evaluated, and they are principally submissive to the apostle and his gospel. To bring such a prophecy “to the test of the harmony of Scripture,” to use the language of Vos, may dismiss it as a separate source of revelation on an authority scale at par with that of Scripture; but it is difficult to see how such a test dismisses the claim to revelation in the attenuated sense sometimes found within Scripture itself and argued for here.

Not all visions or revelations mediated even by apostles were necessarily above thoughtful examination. The Macedonian call (Acts 16:9), as Bowers has pointed out, took place while Paul had already started the move toward Europe;⁸ and once Paul had related the vision to the others in his team, they collectively concluded (συμβιβζοντες, *sumbibazontes*)⁹ that it meant they should press on for Macedonia. An apostle was not kept free from error or sin just because he was an apostle. These specially appointed men, however, did recognize their own peculiar authority under the gospel (Gal. 1:8-9) and over the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 4; 14:37-38; 2 Cor. 10-13). How they themselves distinguished binding truth would take us too far afield to explore here; my only purpose in raising these points is to stress that revelation and authority in the New Testament are more nuanced concepts than is sometimes recognized. Among those who closely observe the phenomenon of alleged contemporary prophecy, there is widespread agreement that the person uttering such prophecy remains in control of his or her own language. Those who have command of two or more languages can switch from one to the other at will, depending on the language of the congregation. As one charismatic explains:

⁷ Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” 46-48.

⁸ W. Paul Bowers, “Paul’s Route Through Mysia: A Note on Acts xiv.8,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979): 507-11.

⁹ I am grateful to Dr. Peter T. O’Brien for reminding me of this.

The language we use in prophecy is under our control. Prophecy comes through a particular human being, and it will be expressed in the language of that person. When a highly educated man speaks in prophecy, he will very likely use a different vocabulary than a poorly educated person would use.¹⁰

The conclusion to be drawn from such observations is that not much can be concluded, so far as the authority status of the contemporary phenomenon is concerned. After all, conservative noncharismatics will be the first to insist that even the Scripture writers use the language, style, and vocabulary native to them; so the fact that the modern “prophet’s” language remains under his or her personal control cannot be used to discredit the phenomenon. Neither can it be taken as evidence that the result is as authoritative as Scripture, for after all, such control is the common experience of almost all human communication... (Showing the Spirit, pg. 137-141)

2. Warning (14:37-38)

Part of the answer to the questions in the preceding verse (36) must be something like: No, we admit that the word of God first came to us through you; you first preached it to us. Verse 37 then follows naturally with a focus on apostolic authority, but this is so elevated that it stands a quantum leap above that of the prophets at Corinth. Indeed, Paul can actually make the acceptance of the authority of what he writes a necessary criterion of the validity of all claims to spiritual giftedness, including prophecy.

Several observations on the text will help to clarify the thrust of Paul’s claim. First, the words rendered “what I am writing to you” are a translation of a plural expression, “the matters about which I am writing to you” or the like. This strongly suggests that Paul has in mind not the single injunction dealing with the silence of women, but everything he has said in this epistle—and principally, beyond. But even if one were to decide that the relative pronoun has exclusive reference to chapters 12-14, it is hard to imagine that Paul himself understood chapters 1-11 to be less authoritative.

Second, the textual variant—whether we should render it “is of the Lord” or “is the Lord’s command”—has little bearing on the authority claim Paul is making. The latter is marginally more likely; but that means the use of “command” (ντολ, entol) is a little different from that in 1 Corinthians 7, where “the Lord’s command” refers to what Jesus taught in the days of his flesh. Paul is not making that claim here: he simply means that what he has been writing is backed by the authority of the risen Christ himself. This shows that “the Lord’s command” was not a stereotyped expression, but could vary in force according to context.

Third, the word Lord is placed in an emphatic position. Paul is therefore associating submission to what he writes with submission to the Lord. Not to submit to what the apostle writes is thus to deny the lordship of Jesus, which is the Christian’s central confession as stipulated at the beginning of these three chapters (12:3). It is hard to resist seeing an inclusio (a figure of speech in which everything in these three chapters, sandwiched between two strong references to the lordship of Jesus, must be read in the light of that lordship). As we shall see in a moment, there are other hints that Paul is harking back to 12:1-3 and drawing his argument to a close.

Fourth, that Paul’s authority should be placed so decisively above that of the prophets has obvious bearing on our understanding of prophecy in Corinth. Paul clearly believes that prophecy is revelatory (see v. 30); equally clearly, he does not conclude on this ground that the authority of the prophets is therefore absolute. Rather, he holds that, principally, the prophetic word “must at every point agree with the apostolic deposit or it is to be rejected.” I shall try to wrestle a little more with the notion of “revelation” in the next chapter, but clearly this principle

¹⁰ See Bruce Yocum, *Prophecy: Exercising the Prophetic Gifts of the Spirit in the Church Today* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1976), 82.

must go some way to stilling the alarms of contemporary noncharismatics who detect in any revelatory gift of prophecy a threat to the apostolic deposit, and thus to Scripture itself. The presupposition seems to be that if a prophecy is in any sense revelatory, it must be true, and thus authoritative—and therefore what is there to prevent a contemporary “prophet” from, say, annulling various components of the new covenant in much the same way that the New Testament writers claim to fulfill and therefore transcend certain aspects of the old covenant? But the remarkable fact is that Paul takes the prophecy of his own day to be in some sense revelatory (14:30) and yet to have less authority than his own written word. One cannot fail to perceive that those interpretations of New Testament prophecy that insist it enjoys the same authority status as Old Testament canonical prophecy see in the phenomenon a great deal more than the apostle himself allows. Conversely, of course, this verse presupposes not only considerable authority vested in the apostle Paul, but his self-conscious awareness of it. Some of the protestations over the obscurity of this verse are located, I think, in the failure to recognize this fact.

Fifth, the use of πνευματικός (pneumatikos) is striking: literally, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or a spiritual”—that is, a spiritual person, a pneumatic. The three chapters began with consideration of what spirituality consists in (see discussion of 12:1-3 in my first chapter). Now that Paul has concluded his arguments, he can say not only that the prophet will recognize the authority of his remarks, but also that the spiritual person, the person with the Holy Spirit, will do so. Here, then, is a foundational test of the Spirit’s presence, of “spirituality” if you like: submission to the apostolic writings, not simply because they are the writings of an apostle, but because they are the Lord’s command, and therefore tied irrevocably to the believer’s confession, “Jesus is Lord!” (12:1-3).

Sixth, this apostolic authority grounds the open threat of verse 38. The initial clause does not mean “if he is ignorant of this,” despite the verbal similarity to 12:1, for after three chapters of exposition, Paul may reasonably expect his readers are not ignorant of what he has to say. What he fears, rather, is that some may ignore what he has to say. If anyone succumbs to that temptation, Paul warns, “he himself will be ignored [sc., by God].” That, surely, is the severity of the threat—not, with some variant readings that try to soften the thrust, “let him not be recognized [i.e., by the congregation],” or still less “he himself will be ignored [sc., by the congregation].” The latter two are inadequate as a threat in the light of the immense claims Paul has made, as Hemphill rightly points out. The Corinthians may pursue their own self-interested definitions of what is spiritual, and run the risk of being ignored by God; or they may recognize afresh that their confession of Jesus as Lord is not only the significant criterion of the Spirit’s presence (12:1-3) but something that can be tested by enthusiastic obedience to that Lord’s commands, mediated through the apostle. (Showing the Spirit: pg. 111-114)

3. Prophecy and Prophets (12:10, 28, 29)

The range of phenomena covered by this word group in the first century is enormous.¹¹ But just what was included under the rubric of “prophecy” in the New Testament?

The answers to that question are legion. Sometimes they are formulated less in terms of what prophecy is than of what prophecy does. One commentator, for instance, writes: “Prophecy was the power of seeing and making known the nature and will of God, a gift of insight into the truth and of power in imparting it, and hence a capacity for building up men’s characters, quickening their wills, and encouraging their spirits.”¹² That is, of course, true; but since it is cast in terms of function, it could be applied equally to gifted preaching—and

¹¹ See Aune, Prophecy

¹² Robertson and Plummer, Corinthians, 306.

elsewhere the same commentators make precisely that connection.¹³ When Paul says that prophecy is for the “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (14:3) of the congregation, he does not thereby define prophecy, for exposition, prayer, and teaching might serve the same ends. Further, it is not clear (as Turner points out) that 14:3 provides a necessary criterion of prophecy; for such a view inevitably marginalizes rather arbitrarily such prophecies as those of Agabus (e.g., Acts 21:11).¹⁴

There is in fact a sustained tradition that identifies New Testament prophecy with what we today call preaching or expounding Scripture.¹⁵ The reasons offered are many. One of the most common is that prophecy in the Old Testament is largely devoted to calls to reform and renewal: it is paraenetic. Therefore paraenetic ministry under the new covenant is also a form of prophecy.¹⁶ Logically this connection cannot be made, unless prophecy and paraenesis are so tightly bound together as never to be found separately or in any other linkage—a manifest absurdity. The argument of Ellis—that the exegesis and application of Old Testament texts in the New Testament are sometimes accompanied by a phrase like “says the Lord” and therefore to be treated as prophecy (thereby serving as a model for our exegesis and exposition of Scripture)¹⁷—has been shown by Aune to be mistaken.¹⁸ Aune points out that the “says the Lord” formula in passages like Romans 12:19, citing Deuteronomy 32:35, does nothing more than identify God as the source of the Old Testament quotation. Moreover, similar application of Scripture in Barnabas is labeled as teaching, not prophecy.

On the other hand, Green forges an absolute disjunction between prophecy and preaching¹⁹ (a point to which I shall return in the last chapter). Schlink makes New Testament prophecy and Old Testament prophecy indistinguishable, insisting moreover that the gift continues today; but she does not recognize the inherent dangers in that position:²⁰ that is, once again, the finality of canon is threatened, at least theoretically. Prior, alert to the danger, suggests that at least most of the New Testament prophets enjoyed the same authority status

¹³ Ibid., 301.

¹⁴ Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” 13.

¹⁵ E.g., David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 108ff. (though he has some legitimate reservations); E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 147ff.; Ralph P. Martin, *Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 14; E. Cothenet, “Les prophètes chrétiens comme exégètes charismatiques de l’Ecriture,” in *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*, ed. J. Panagopoulos, *Novum Testamentum Supplements*, vol. 45 (Leiden: Brill, 1977) especially 79-81; and many Reformed writers. Some scholars resort to what I can only call slippery language: e.g., Mühlen, *Charismatic Theology*, 149ff.

¹⁶ E.g., Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 215. He writes that “the essence of the prophetic ministry was forthtelling God’s present word to his people, and this regularly meant application of revealed truth rather than augmentation of it. [We may note in passing an odd disjunction here: Packer would be the first to insist that when an Old Testament prophet called the people back to the standards of previous revelation, and his prophetic word was then inscripturated, the result must be labeled some kind of augmentation of revealed truth.] As Old Testament prophets preached the law and recalled Israel to face God’s covenant claim on their obedience, with promise of blessing if they complied and cursing if not, so it appears that New Testament prophets preached the gospel and the life of faith for conversion, edification and encouragement.... By parity of reasoning, therefore, any verbal enforcement of biblical teaching as it applies to one’s present hearers may properly be called prophecy today, for that in truth is what it is.”

¹⁷ Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, e.g., 186.

¹⁸ Aune, *Prophecy*, 343-45.

¹⁹ Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 171-72

²⁰ Basilea Schlink, *Ruled by the Spirit*, trans. John and Mary Foote and Michael Harper (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969), 43.

as their Old Testament predecessors; but they died out with the apostles, and any subsequent manifestation of the gift must be subordinate to the canon.²¹ This position may be theologically safe, but it is difficult to justify exegetically, and it labors under the disadvantage that any subsequent gift of prophecy is rendered unlike the gift of prophecy that was exercised in New Testament times. Whereas many writers in noncharismatic traditions attempt to align prophecy and contemporary preaching, others emphasize the essentially revelatory nature of tongues and prophecy, concerned to argue that revelatory material of any kind must eventually prove a threat to the stability of Christian truth once and for all delivered to the saints and now preserved in the canon.²²

This is not the place to analyze each New Testament text that deals with prophecy. Some of the relevant texts lie in the chapter before us, and will be briefly considered in a few minutes, and other studies have laid the necessary groundwork.²³ Aune defines prophecy as “a specific form of divination that consists of intelligible verbal messages believed to originate with God and communicated through inspired human intermediaries.”²⁴ Grudem bases his definition of prophecy in Paul on a detailed study of 1 Corinthians 14:29-30: prophecy is the reception and subsequent transmission of spontaneous, divinely originating revelation.²⁵ The verb to prophesy denotes this process. Rather similar is the definition of Panagopoulos.²⁶ But Grudem’s thesis on New Testament prophecy breaks new ground. I am generally sympathetic to it, although I have reservations at two or three critical points. I shall not defend this thesis, as that would be to write a book he has already written, but I shall summarize some of his arguments, indicate my mild dissent now and then, and show how the thesis bears on these chapters.

Grudem seeks to put on a systematic basis what has been suggested by some others, that the prophecy of the New Testament must be distinguished from the prophecy of the Old Testament, especially in its authority status. Some of the reasons include the following.

(1) Adequate definitions of prophecy, like the two previously reported, accept that prophecy presupposes revelation—the prophecy comes from God. But they do not presuppose that each prophecy is in the form of a direct quotation from God, prefaced perhaps

²¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Leicester and Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1985), 235-36.

²² E.g., MacArthur, *Charismatics*; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979); Leonard J. Coppes, *Whatever Happened to Biblical Tongues?* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Pilgrim, 1977); and many others.

²³ See the bibliography in Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now”; and especially Aune, *Prophecy*, 247ff. I confess, however, that I am not persuaded of the reliability of Aune’s five criteria for identifying prophetic oracles in the New Testament, even with the stipulation that all five do not have to be present in every instance. For instance, the fourth criterion, that the putative oracle must be prefixed by a statement of the inspiration of the speaker, works out rather poorly in the passages Aune adduces; and the fifth, that the saying or speech must not sit easily in the literary context, is an appeal to aporias by another name—a notoriously slippery approach.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

²⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 115ff., especially 139-43.

²⁶ J. Panagopoulos, “Die urchristliche Prophetie: Ihr Charakter und ihre Funktion,” in *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*, ed. J. Panagopoulos, *Novum Testamentum Supplements*, vol.45 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 27: “Das prophetische Wort wird unmittelbar durch Offenbarung ermittelt oder gegeben und zwar durch Traum, Vision, Audition oder direkte Offenbarung der Herrn, eines Engels oder an derer Vermittlungsorgane; der Prophet empfängt es ohne sien Zutun und verkündet es weiter.... Die propheten können aber nicht von sich aus allein solche prophetischen Worte aussprechen, sondern wo und wann Gott selbst will.”

by a stern “thus says the Lord”: such instances are rare in the New Testament, and somewhat disputed.²⁷

(2) For Paul, the legitimate heirs and successors of the Old Testament prophets, so far as their authority status was concerned, were not New Testament prophets, but the apostles — “apostles” defined in a fairly narrow way. Here again Grudem expands on a point advanced by others.²⁸ Once a prophet was tested and approved in the Old Testament, God’s people were morally bound to obey him. To disobey such a prophet was to oppose God. If a prophet speaking in the name of God was shown to be in error, the official sanction was death. But once a prophet is acknowledged as true, there is no trace of repeated checks on the content of his oracles. By contrast, New Testament prophets are to have their oracles carefully weighed (14:29; so also 1 Thess. 5:19-21). The word διαίνω (diakrin) suggests that the prophecy be evaluated, not simply accepted as totally true or totally false.²⁹ “The presupposition is that any one New Testament prophetic oracle is expected to be mixed in quality, and the wheat must be separated from the chaff.”³⁰ Moreover, there is no hint of excommunication as the threatened sanction if the prophet occasionally does not live up to the mark. More importantly, Paul places the authority of Christian prophets under his own (14:37-38); and to contravene apostolic authority may eventually bring enormous threat (see 1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:11; 13:1-10; 1 Tim. 1:20).³¹ There is even evidence, albeit disputed, that Paul’s self-consciousness as an apostle has close similarities to the self-consciousness of the Old Testament prophets.

These exegetical observations undermine the criticism of Gaffin, who against Grudem insists that the evaluation in view is not of the prophecy but of the prophet, or rather of the prophecy in order to pass judgment on the prophet himself—exactly as in the Old Testament:

The distinguishing or discrimination required functions to determine the source of an alleged prophecy, whether or not it is genuine, whether it is from the Holy Spirit or some other spirit; it does not sift worthwhile elements presumably based on a revelation from those that are not. Perhaps also included is an interpretive function, assessing in some way the significance of the prophecy for the congregation.... What also needs to be grasped is that in the case of genuine prophecies, the need for evaluation does not show that they lack the full authority of God’s Word. Rather, this evaluation is of a piece with the positive proving, the affirmative testing Paul the apostle commands for his own teaching.³²

This is rather more assertion than argument, and it flies in the face of too much of the evidence. If Gaffin is right, why is the authority of the prophets at Corinth so emphatically placed under his own (14:37-38, a point to be emphasized in the next chapter)? Why is it the prophecy that is to be judged, and this with a tone that suggests normal operating procedure? If Paul wanted

²⁷ See Kevin Giles, “Prophecy in the Bible and in the Church Today,” *Interchange* 26 (1980): 75-89, who points out that there are very few instances where a New Testament prophet quotes God or the exalted Jesus directly (as in Rev. 2-3)—rather unlike most modern charismatic claims to prophecy, a point to which I shall return in the last chapter.

²⁸ E.g., H. A. Guy, *New Testament Prophecy: Its Origin and Significance* (London: Epworth, 1947).

²⁹ See Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 58-59, 64-66; and 263ff., a reprint of his article, “A Response to Gerhard Dautzenberg,” to which reference has already been made. Grudem demonstrates that the verb διαίνω commonly (though not consistently) bears in Hellenistic Greek the connotation of sifting, separating, evaluating; whereas the simple form ίνω is used for judgments where there are clear-cut options (guilty or innocent, true or false, right or wrong), and never for evaluative distinction.

³⁰ Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” 16.

³¹ J. Panagopoulos, ‘Η Ἑλησία των ποφητων. Το ποφητιόν Χιςμα ν τη Ἑλησία των δο πώτων αώνων (Athens: Historical Publications, Stefanos Basilopoulos, 1979), insists that New Testament prophets were faithful to the apostolic tradition.

³² Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 70-71.

to make the point Gaffin detects, why did he not use the verb $\nu\omega$ (krin) instead of the verb $\delta\iota\alpha\nu\omega$ (diakrin, weigh)?

(3) The New Testament does not see prophets as the solution to the problem of apostolic succession. The silence is startling. If the gift of prophecy was regarded as the equivalent in authority to that of Old Testament prophecy, and if it persisted throughout the New Testament era right into the midpatristic period, why, once the apostles had died, were the prophets not presented as the church's bastion against false teaching, its source of light and information in the face of uncertainty? In fact, the latest epistles in the New Testament sound a different note. The emphasis is "Guard the deposit! Keep the faith once delivered to the saints! Return to what was from the beginning!" (2 Tim.; Jude; 1 John respectively). One must either conclude that the prophets died with the apostles—a conclusion so totally at variance with the early Fathers it must be instantly rejected—or that the prophets of the new covenant never enjoyed the authority status of the apostles (in the narrow sense of that term).

(4) Although New Testament prophets apparently spoke on a variety of topics, there is little evidence that they enjoyed the clout in the church that either the apostles demanded in the church or the writing prophets demanded in Israel and Judah. I do not mean that Old Testament prophets were universally revered and uncontested, nor that New Testament apostles were never opposed, maligned, or slighted by Christians. Quite the reverse: it is precisely because of the public status and high claims to authority that there were such polarized reactions. But New Testament prophecy, by contrast with that of the Old, cuts a very low profile. The Thessalonians actually have to be told not to treat prophecies with contempt (1 Thess. 5:20); and in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul has to advance the cause of prophecy above the cause of tongues. There are only two passages in the Pauline correspondence where prophets stand in more exalted company, Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. The former is crucial: the church, we are told, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. In an extended treatment, Grudem argues that the construction means "the apostles who are prophets";³³ certainly the New Testament writers sometimes view the apostles as prophets (see 1 Cor. 13:9; 14:6; and possibly Rev. 1:3, if the traditional authorship is correct). There are difficulties with his view that he himself acknowledges; but his lengthy discussion demonstrates, at the least, how complex is the detailed exegesis of that verse, and how cautious our deductions should be under any interpretation of it. If we conclude, against Grudem, that the "prophets" in question here enjoy a role with the apostles in providing the revelatory foundation for Christianity (although that is not quite what is said), we must hasten to admit that this is an anomalous use of "prophets" in the New Testament. It is as illegitimate for Gaffin³⁴ to use this verse as the controlling factor in his understanding of the New Testament gift of prophecy as it would be to conclude from Titus 1:12 ("Even one of their own prophets has said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons' ") that New Testament prophets were pagan poets from Crete.

³³ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 82-105. One crucial point is the construction $\tau\omega\nu \pi\omicron\sigma\pi\acute{o}\lambda\omega\nu \chi\alpha\iota \pi\omicron\varphi\tau\omega\nu$ (the second noun anarthrous), which groups the two nouns together in some way. Such grouping can of course preserve distinction between the two members (e.g., Acts 23:7); but, argues Grudem, it can also identify them (e.g., Col. 1:2). Which it is must be determined from the context, and Grudem offers an admirable list of contextual factors to support his view. His list of more than twenty examples where a single article governs two substantives that have the same referent includes few instances of two plural nouns in this array: for instance, in Col. 1:2, just cited, we read $\tau\omicron\varsigma \nu \text{Κολοσσαῖς γίους αἱ πιστοῖς δελφοῖς}$, but strictly speaking the former is a substantivized adjective. In the expression $\tau\omicron\varsigma \delta\pi\omicron\mu\omicron\nu\alpha\varsigma \alpha\iota \delta\iota\delta\alpha\sigma\lambda\omicron\nu\varsigma$ (Eph. 4:11), it is not entirely certain that the referent is the same for both nouns. But there are certainly convincing examples where plural participles are involved; and similarly for singular nouns. Of course, Grudem does not argue that this construction demands that the two substantives have a single referent; but it certainly allows for it, much more so, it might be added, in the Pauline corpus than elsewhere in the New Testament. For an exhaustive list of the occurrences of this construction in the New Testament, see D. A. Carson, Paul A. Miller and James L. Boyer, *A Syntactical Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

³⁴ Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 93-95.

(5) There are instances of prophecies in Acts that are viewed as genuinely from God yet having something less than the authority status of an Old Testament prophecy. Perhaps most startling is Acts 21:4 where certain disciples “by means of the Spirit”—almost certainly a signal of prophecy, see 11:28—tell Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul goes anyway, persuaded that he is being prompted by the Spirit to visit the city. Perhaps, as Grudem suggests,³⁵ these prophets had received some revelation about the apostle’s impending sufferings, and interpreted them to mean Paul should not go. Whatever the case, the prophecy, so far as Paul was concerned, needed evaluating, and, in the form he received it from them, rejecting. The prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21:10-11 stipulates that the Jews at Jerusalem would bind the man who owns Paul’s girdle and hand him over to the Gentiles. Strictly speaking, however, in the event itself, Paul was not bound by the Jews but by the Romans; and the Jews did not hand Paul over to the Romans, but sought to kill him with mob violence, prompting a rescue by the Romans. I can think of no reported Old Testament prophet whose prophecies are so wrong on the details. The rebuttal of Gaffin, in my judgment, does not pay close enough attention to the text.³⁶

(6) The constraints placed on prophecy in this chapter—see verses 29, 30, 36—make it clear that the gift of prophecy stands considerably tamed. Moreover, it is precisely because prophecy operates at this lower level of authority that Paul can encourage women to pray and prophesy in public under the constraints of 1 Corinthians 11 (whatever they mean), while forbidding them to exercise an authoritative teaching role over men (1 Tim. 2:11ff.) or to evaluate the content of the prophecies (1 Cor. 14:33b-36). The latter point of course is immensely controverted; but I shall say more about it in the next chapter.

My hesitations about this thesis are two, neither of which does irreparable damage to it, but only refines it.

First, the thesis oversimplifies the contrast between Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets. The Old Testament, for instance, records the existence of “schools” of the prophets; and it is far from clear that everyone in a particular “school” enjoyed the status of Amos or Isaiah. There is no single, stereotypical Old Testament prophecy and a different stereotypical New Testament prophecy. Indeed, it has been compellingly suggested that Numbers 12:6-8 and 11:29 give evidence within the Old Testament of two kinds of prophecy—one “charismatic and enigmatic” and the other “Mosaic.”³⁷ The suggestion may nevertheless provide indirect support for Grudem since the “charismatic and enigmatic” kind is picked up by Joel’s prophecy, which is said by Peter to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.). Grudem’s general point stands, but as we shall see in the last chapter, it needs some qualification.

Second, Grudem describes the two levels of authority as, respectively, an authority of general content and an authority that extends to the very words of the prophet. This goes beyond the evidence, and is open to several objections.³⁸ Exegetically, the distinction does not seem securely based in Paul. It appears rather as an attempt to find a consistent explanation for distinctions in authority that are there; but another explanation may be possible. Moreover, Grudem’s distinction masks a difficult point in the prophetic psychology. When Old Testament prophets were declaring the word of the Lord, they were not always presenting what they believed to be verbatim quotes. We may agree that the inscripturated form of those prophecies

³⁵ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 79-82.

³⁶ Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 65-67.

³⁷ Peter Jones, “Y a-t-il deux types de prophéties dans le NT?” *Revue Réformée* 31 (1980): 303-17. Similarly, Joseph Brosch, *Charismen und Ämter in der Urkirche* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1951), 80-81, makes a distinction between the major Old Testament prophets and the “schools of the prophets” in Samuel’s time, and suggests that New Testament prophecy is closer to the latter.

³⁸ See Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” 16.

was so superintended by God that the result was God's truth right down to the words (that was Jesus' view of the Old Testament [Matt. 5:17]), but it is not obvious that when, for instance, Paul was explaining his itinerary to the Corinthians in his second canonical letter to them he was psychologically aware of a revelatory process operating that extended to the words he was dictating. The question arises therefore whether there is any difference between the psychological self-awareness of the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament prophet. What evidence is there that it was a different gift, so far as the prophets' self-perceptions were concerned? Grudem's distinction may be salvaged if the difference in authority level lies only in the prophecy qua result, and not in prophecy qua revelatory experience: but (wrongly, he assures me), he has not always been understood that way. In any case, in the prophecy of Agabus, the errors turn not on quibbles over words but on aspects of the content. Turner remarks:

This is where Grudem's distinction breaks down (and he is not unaware of the problems): semantically it is not the surface structure of the wording, but the semantic structure of the propositions of a communication that is primarily significant. And this suggests, what seems reasonable on other grounds too, namely, that there was no sharp distinction between apostolic prophecy and prophets' prophesyings—rather, a spectrum of authority of charisma extending from apostolic speech and prophecy (backed by apostolic commission) at one extreme, to vague and barely profitable attempts at oracular speech such as brought “prophecy” as a whole into question at Thessalonika (1 Thess. 5:19f.) at the other. A prophet's speech might fall anywhere on the spectrum, so the task of evaluation fell on the congregation.³⁹

That Grudem has rightly delineated some distinguishing limitations of New Testament prophecy is in my judgment beyond cavil. It will not do to question his entire synthesis because we have questions about some of his formulations. In the last chapter I shall offer tentative suggestions about how to resolve some of these tensions—in particular how we can speak of prophecy as revelatory yet avoid jeopardizing the canon, and how we can best distinguish between the authority of apostolic prophesying and the authority of (other) New Testament prophets' prophesyings. At the same time I shall briefly assess modern charismatic claims to prophecy. For the moment, however, I must return to 1 Corinthians 14. (Showing the Spirit: pgs. 79-85)

³⁹ Ibid.

Max Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,”

Turner does see a hierarchy of authority due to exegesis of 1 for 14 and the need for evaluation expressed by Paul. Yet Turner is not convinced that one can sharply distinguish between the new testament prophets and the apostles all prophecies are only partially understood. He prefers to use the term spectrum of authority. Below are two selected readings from his work. A link to his work online is found in the footnote.⁴⁰

1. The Authority and Limitations of New Testament Prophecy

The canonical prophets are represented as having spoken in the name of the Lord as his messengers: their words were neither more nor less than what God had commanded them to utter. A man might test the prophet, but he could not tamper with the oracle once he decided the prophet was authentic. To disobey such a prophet was to disobey God. Correspondingly, should the prophet be shown to have erred in any respect in his prophecy the sanction was death. The seriousness of disobedience or of prophesying falsely underscored that the oracles of the prophets were the very words of God, holy and authoritative. Such is the picture fleshed out by several scholars, and at its most nuanced in Grudem. In the New Testament, as Grudem, following writers such as Guy and Friedrich, sees it, the mantle of prophecy with authority of actual words transfers to the apostles, and New Testament prophecy carries only the authority of general content: it is parallel to the revelatory phenomena in early Judaism with its consciousness of the withdrawal of true prophecy—a weaker sort of prophecy with a lesser authority

The evidence on which this sort of construct is based is (1) Many aspects of Paul’s apostolic self-consciousness closely parallel that of Old Testament prophets. (2) Paul relativizes the authority of Corinthian prophets and subordinates them to his (1 Cor. 14:37f.). (3) John—an apostle—claims divine authority of actual words for the Apocalypse (Rev. 22:18f.). (4) Paul knows that prophecy is sometimes so unprepossessing that prophecy as a whole is in danger of being despised (1 Thess. 5:19f.). (5) Both at Thessalonika and at Corinth he demands that prophecy be evaluated—not that it just be accepted totally as true prophecy or rejected totally as false prophecy (as in the Old Testament, according to Grudem).

The presupposition is that any one New Testament prophetic oracle is expected to be mixed in quality, and the wheat must be separated from the chaff. The prophet may genuinely have received something from God (albeit often indistinctly), but the ‘vision’ is partial, limited in perspective, and prone to wrong interpretation by the prophet even as he declares it (1 Cor. 13:12).....

And this suggests, what seems reasonable on other grounds too, namely, that there was no sharp distinction between apostolic prophecy and prophets’ prophesying—rather, a spectrum of authority of charisma extending from apostolic speech and prophecy (backed by apostolic commission) at one extreme, to vague and barely profitable attempts at oracular speech such as brought ‘prophecy’ as a whole into question at Thessalonika (1 Thess. 5:19f.) at the other. A prophet’s speech might fall anywhere on the spectrum, so the task of evaluation fell on the congregation.....Whilst we are unhappy about the way Grudem phrases his contrasts, we fully accept that he has put his finger on an important issue, and that Paul does relativize the

⁴⁰Max Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 7-63 A pdf of his work can be found at the link below. https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol15/gifts_turner.pdf

authority of prophetic communications in the church. We shall discuss the temporal limits Paul places on prophecy later...⁴¹

2. What is the Relation Between Revelatory Experiences and Theology, Yesterday and Today?

To keep within the scope of this paper we must remember that we are asking what relevance the 'word of wisdom', 'word of knowledge', 'prophecy' etc. have for theology. We confine ourselves to some brief remarks.

(1) Paul expects the gifts he mentions in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 to be widespread in the churches. 'Knowledge' and 'wisdom' are what the pneumatics at Corinth were claiming to have received; and 'prophecy' Paul can hardly be said to restrict narrowly. The determination of the gospel, by contrast, Paul regards as an apostolic function (Gal. 1-2 etc.); and this revelation is the test of all else: it provides the test of the revelatory charismata, not vice versa. Indeed, although Paul's wording in Ephesians 2:20, and his ranking of prophets second only to apostles in 1 Corinthians 12:28, suggest that the prophetic word of some established prophets contributed to the laying down of precedents, norms and traditions in the church (an activity which ultimately marginalized the prophets), Paul nevertheless clearly subordinates the authority of the prophetic phenomena at Corinth to his own (cf. 14:37ff.). He does not feel able to allow the Corinthian prophets to decide the agenda for worship, but specifies how they are to operate, and further relativizes their authority by demanding congregational sifting of their utterances. It would seem that Paul did not regard the Corinthian practice of the revelatory gifts, which he describes in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, as of primary significance in the shaping of theological structures. Their purpose seems more intended to have been to operate within the rough confines of the gospel and of apostolic teaching—either to illuminate these, or to elucidate their personal significance and application, or, again, to give direction in situations where neither scripture, nor gospel, nor tradition could do so, or, yet again, to set particular Corinthian events, practices or spiritual states in heavenly perspective; to indicate how the risen Lord perceived the church's condition in general and in particular, and to give it spiritual direction.

(2) Today we would be surprised and alarmed if anyone tried to add to or tamper with the fundamental structures of theology in the name of some revelatory experience (albeit that, as theologians, we sometimes tamper with them in the name of less godly authorities!). In practice, such prophetic adjustment is not attempted outside sectarian movements. But within the broad framework of established (?) theology, there is still need for the illumination, the interpretation (in the sense of application of original sense to 20th century situations), and the fresh and timely 'representation' of gospel truth and apostolic praxis. There is need, too, for deep spiritual diagnosis of individuals and congregations, and of specific leading on a host of practical issues. And these are the areas in which the revelatory gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 have contemporary relevance.

Of course the wise pastor, leader or interpreter today has infinitely more by way of aid in the precedents and norms laid down in centuries of church history and reflection. But ultimately it is still only by the Spirit's work that God gives shape to his church and directs its growth, and we cannot identify the Spirit's work with the natural workings of the pastor's mind simpliciter. The Spirit works sovereignly in the mind of the man of God without his necessarily being conscious of it (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16)—this we need not deny. He brings fruit through our disciplined study. But the New Testament lesson is that the Spirit also works at the level at which he is immediately perceived as giving direction. The pastor or leader today is as much in need as

⁴¹ Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): p.15-16

ever of such immediate charismata of wisdom, direction and heavenly knowledge—occasions where he is aware of these things breaking in on his existence as events of the Lord's grace and guidance, given specifically in answer to prayerful seeking, or sovereignly in response to a prayerful life. Where evangelicals seek the Lord this way, the difference between them and 'Charismatics' on the issue of the relation of theology and revelatory events is minimized.

Ultimately, the issue raised for this question by the so-called 'Charismatic Movement' is not one of the dangerous possibility of new authoritative revelation: that is a red herring. Nor does the real question concern which, if any, of the revelatory gifts in I Corinthians 12:8-10 are still possible today. When those gifts are truly understood it becomes clear that at least some of them are in operation today in both evangelical and 'Charismatic' camps. The real issue raised is not ultimately so much a theoretical one as a practical one. It concerns how we find the right balance between the Spirit's sovereignly creative work in our disciplined and prayerful study of scripture, and the Spirit's more immediately perceived leading.⁴²

⁴² Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): p54-56

Graham Houston "Prophecy Today"

Graham Houston in his work outlines Two types of prophecy

- 1.) The top communicated God's word with absolute verbal authority
- 2.) Another type was seen as a powerful sign of God's presence without necessarily bringing any specific message. The result of such prophecy was to confirm God's presence with his people, but the message was not authoritative in such a way as to be superintend by the Spirit to be written down and conveyed to future generations as God's Word. Below is a reading from the first chapter of his book "Prophecy Today"⁴³

Prophecy in the Old Testament

The phenomenon of prophecy is not easy to define. Nor is it always clear what authority is claimed for the prophets' words. By authority we do not mean the degree to which a person may be qualified to prophesy by reason of calling or experience. (We think of that use of the word when we say, 'He spoke with authority', because the person seemed to know what he was talking about and commanded our attention.) Here we are rather thinking of authority in terms of something invested in a person by another of higher rank or influence. For instance, an ambassador is appointed with the authority of his national government; he speaks with their authority and passes on their views on policy. On occasion he may speak instead as a private citizen and offer his personal opinions, and if so his words will be taken accordingly.....

We must begin a step further back, however, by looking at the authority claimed for prophecy in the Old Testament. It is most likely that the early church took its cues from prophetic traditions in the Old Testament. Most of the first Christians were Jews who found in Jesus the Messiah who fulfilled the law and the prophets. They shared their message with people who revered Moses and Elijah, at least at a popular level. They had been taught by rabbis who on the whole had no doubt that God had spoken of old through the great prophets, and they longed for the restoration of the prophetic word which they recognized had been absent since the time of Malachi (400 Bc).

Classical Old Testament prophecy

There have been various attempts to define the etymology of the word 'prophet' (ndbi') in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. There is, however, widespread agreement among scholars that at the very least a prophet (in the classical sense) claimed to be or was thought to be a messenger from God or another deity — a spokesman. We associate the prophetic message with such introductions as "Thus says the LORD", and we think of prophets as on the whole claiming to speak with a divine authority which extended to the actual words spoken and written. In Exodus 7: 1-2 we read that Aaron was called to be Moses' spokesman ('your brother ... will be your prophet') so that Pharaoh would hear God's word. This kind of prophecy is found throughout the Old Testament.

Moses was perhaps the first to define the phenomenon, although it can be traced much further back in the history of God's people. On the eve of the re-entry of the children of Israel into Canaan, after forty years in the desert, Moses warned them not to imitate the religious practices of those whom they would displace. Sorcery and divination were commonplace, and both were thought of as ways of manipulating the will of the particular deity who was worshipped. In contrast, the people of God were not to think that they could use religion to further their own purposes. Their God, the LORD (Yahweh or Jehovah — 'I AM WHOT AM', Ex. 3:14), was a God who communicated his will clearly by means of his prophets. In fact Moses thought of himself as the archetypal prophet, according to Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

⁴³ Graham Houston Prophecy today (Downers Grove, IVP 1989), 27-32, 40

That was ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah, as indicated in the New Testament (Jn. 1:21; Acts 3:21-22: 7:37). Moses saw this as being worked out in a succession of prophets who would continue to bring God's message to his people. He believed that God was speaking through him when he said:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (Dt. 18:18—19)

In other words Moses thought of the prophet as bringing the actual words of God to the people, so that to ignore the prophetic message was tantamount to ignoring God himself. Such a position of authority could not be claimed lightly, however, and the prophetic word was to be tested. In fact severe penalties were threatened in order to prevent people from claiming to be prophets without having a genuine message to proclaim: "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death" (Dt. 18:20). If someone dared to prophesy in the name of the LORD, the people were to use their discernment. If the word came true, then they were to accept that the person was a true prophet, and vice versa (Dt. 18:22). Another test is found in Deuteronomy 13:1-3, where the false prophet is seen as one who seduces his hearers from their allegiance to the true God, even though his predictions come true.

This understanding of prophetic authority is also found in the story of Elijah (c. 875 BC). Early in that account we find Elijah visiting a widow in Zarephath (now in modern Lebanon). She was suffering greatly due to the famine which God had caused as a result of Elijah's prayers against the evil king Ahab. Her son was dying, yet Elijah assured her that God would help them. Of course, a miracle was granted in the production of food and the raising of the boy. Interestingly the woman's response was: 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth' (1 Ki. 17:24). This was not principally because Elijah had been used to perform a miracle; it was because his words, which he had claimed to be from the LORD, had been fulfilled.

Elijah was truly a 'man of God', God's spokesman. Elijah acts as a bridge between the Mosaic tradition and the writings of the prophets which are recorded in the major and minor prophets. The major (such as Isaiah and Jeremiah) and the minor (such as Amos and Micah) were united in the conviction that they brought the word of the LORD to the people. That word was not limited to one aspect of the message, as can be illustrated from the prophecy of Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied c. 750 BC.

From Micah we can glean the essential elements of canonical prophecy in the Old Testament (ie. prophecy which has been included in the canon of Scripture under the name of the author). Such prophecy was primarily a forthtelling of God's word which could include an element of the fore-telling of events yet to happen:

In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be
established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it.
Many nations will come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.'
The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem...
All the nations may walk
in the name of their gods;
we will walk in the name of the LORD
our God for ever and ever.
(Mich. 4:1—2, 5)

The future was not seen in isolation. God's people were to live in the light of eschatology — God's ultimate purposes. The prophets brought this awareness of being caught up in the historical process which God would bring to a glorious end. The main thrust of the prophetic message did not dwell upon things to come, however, but concentrated on God's will for his people in their temporal situation. It was to offer direction, praise or blame:

Woe to those who plan iniquity,
to those who plot evil on their beds!
At morning's light they carry it out
because it is in their power to do it.
They covet fields and seize them,
and houses, and take them.
They defraud a man of his home,
a fellow-man of his inheritance.

Therefore, the LORD says:
'I am planning disaster against this people,
from which you cannot save yourselves.
You will no longer walk proudly,
for it will be a time of calamity ...'
'Do not prophesy,' their prophets say.
'Do not prophesy about these things;
disgrace will not overtake us.'
Should it be said, O house of Jacob:
'Is the Spirit of the LORD angry
Does he do such things?

'Do not my words do good
to him whose ways are upright?...
If a liar and deceiver comes and says,
'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,'
he would be just the prophet for this people!
(Mich. 2:1-3, 6-7, 11)

Micah was aware of having a message for his own day, and not merely a forecast of future events, and he knew that counterfeit prophets would try to get a hearing. In his prophetic self-awareness he was confident that his words would do his hearers good, whereas those of the false prophets were like poison. Because of that Micah was unafraid to warn of impending disaster and to summon the people to repentance:

Shepherd your people with your staff,
the flock of your inheritance...

'As in the days when you came out of Egypt,
I will show them my wonders,' [says the LORD]...

Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
of the remnant of his inheritance?

You do not stay angry for ever
but delight to show mercy.
You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
(Mi. 7:14a, 15, 18–19)

But this promise of forgiveness was to be enjoyed only by those who truly turned to the LORD and demonstrated true repentance: 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of your To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Mi. 6:8). Above all, the prophetic message was to encourage God's people that the LORD's purposes would be consummated in the coming of the Messiah and his heralding of a new age during which the message would go out to the ends of the earth:

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.'...

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be their peace.
(Mich 5:2, 4-5a)

Micah, as an example of the prophet who claimed to communicate the actual words of God to his people, brought something old and something new to his hearers. Much of his message was a timely application of truths previously revealed to Moses in the Torah (the law of God recorded in Genesis to Deuteronomy). At least one section of his prophecy was paralleled by Isaiah, who spoke to the same generation as Micah (cf. Mi. 4: 1-3 and Is. 2:1–4). And in his forecast that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem we have something quite unique in the Old Testament. Yet, whether repeating old truths or receiving new insights, his conviction was that the LORD was speaking through him and that those who prophesied an alternative message were impostors.

Other prophetic phenomena in the Old Testament

While the phenomenon of prophecy in the Old Testament is most often characterized by this claim to absolute verbal authority, there are some occasions where a type of prophecy is described which seems to have been regarded differently, not so much as a revelation of God's secrets but as a powerful sign of his presence with his people at crucial times in the unfolding of God's purposes.

An example of this is found in Numbers 11:24–30, where, after seventy elders have been appointed by Moses to help govern the people, it is said that they all prophesied together. This was not necessarily thought of as a message or messages from God, but was

nevertheless seen to be a clear sign that the Spirit of God was among them (Nu. 11:25). Yet Moses records that those who prophesied on that day did not do so again.

At that time two men who were listed among the elders did not go out to the Tent of Meeting with the others and so were not at first involved in the experience. The Spirit of God also rested on them, however (Nu. 11:26), and they prophesied in the camp. Joshua, Moses' right-hand-man, tried to stop them, fearing that this was a threat to Moses' authority. Moses' reply displays his legendary humility: 'Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!' (Nu. 11:29).

This longing that God's people might know the reality of his Spirit in their midst must be qualified by what we have already noted from Deuteronomy 18 concerning prophecy immediately prior to the invasion of Canaan. In that passage Moses seems to discourage what he had encouraged about forty years earlier, as quoted in Numbers 11:29. To warn people that speaking presumptuously in the name of the LORD would be punished by death (Dt. 18:20) would surely have curbed all prophetic activity if Moses was thinking of the same kind of prophecy in both instances.

Some might say that Moses later regretted his quoted largesse and may have limited prophecy because it was getting out of hand. It is more likely, however, that Numbers 11 and Deuteronomy 18 are referring to different types of prophecy; one to an experience of being inspired to speak the actual words of God to the people (Dt. 18); the other to an experience of coming under the influence of the Spirit in such a way that it was evident that God was in the midst, prompting unusual behavior or giving words of encouragement or praise, etc., the general significance which was noted rather than any detailed message (Nu. 11). What was important was that the latter would be a blessing to God's people in confirming his presence with them.

Another example of this secondary type of prophecy is probably found in the history of King Saul (c. 1000 BC). Samuel had anointed Saul as king, and he told him that he would meet a procession of prophets coming down from the holy place at Gibeah. Samuel promised that the Spirit of God would come upon Saul in power and that he would prophesy with them (1 Sa. 10:5–6). This was to be a sign that God was in their midst. It would change Saul into a different person. Samuel's forecast came true, and the change in Saul made such an impact that an ironic proverb was made up: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' (1 Sa. 10:9-12).

But despite the fact that Saul prophesied with those who were accepted as prophets, no record has remained of what Saul actually said. It is unlikely that his prophecy brought some important message for God's people, and it did not seem to claim to do so. The phenomenon of speaking spontaneously or acting in an unusual manner under the influence of the Spirit does not appear to have been subject to the scrutiny advocated by Moses in Deuteronomy 18. The popular reaction to Saul's prophecy may have been skeptical, but it was not judged to be contrary to the Mosaic guidelines.

The secondary type is probably found again in 1 Samuel 19:90–94. There an incident from the time of the flight of David from Saul is recorded. David escaped to Samuel's base at Ramah, and when Saul learnt of his whereabouts he sent men to capture him: 'But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied' (1 Sa. 19:20).

Eventually Saul himself went to Ramah, and the Spirit of God came upon him and he walked along prophesying (1 Sa. 19:23). Again, there is no record of what any of the prophets may have actually said (if indeed they said anything significant) while under the influence of the Spirit.

We can see, therefore, that there is considerable evidence in the Old Testament for at least two types of prophecy, one of which claimed to communicate God's word with an absolute verbal authority, and one which was seen as a powerful sign of God's presence without necessarily bringing a specific message....

Prophecy in the Old Testament and Judaism

The main thrust of the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament is characterized by a claim to absolute verbal authority. This is exemplified by Moses, Elijah and the canonical prophets. A secondary type is also discernible, however, in which it was believed that the Spirit of God might move people to speak spontaneously and appropriately without inspiring the very words themselves. The result of such prophecy was to confirm God's presence with his people, but no detailed message was recorded and passed on.

After Malachi (c. 400 BC) the voice of authoritative prophecy was stilled. In the between the Testaments many of the Jewish rabbis recognized that absolute verbal authority was a thing of the past. Many rabbis who accepted this cessation, however, also believed that prophetic phenomena were still operative in the inter-testamental period and in sub-apostolic times.

This prophetic activity was expressed in predictions and extra-sensory perception, among other things. For example, one rabbi saw some women coming to visit him, and it is said that he saw by means of the Holy Spirit that one of them had just had a quarrel with her husband. Yet when rabbis expressed their insights they often linked them with previous revelations recorded in Scripture. They said 'It is written' rather than "Thus says the Lord'.

Of course any reference to rabbinic Judaism of limited value in establishing the biblical view on prophecy, but it does confirm that our interpretation has a historical basis and is not a novelty.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to give an exhaustive account of prophecy in the Old Testament and Judaism, but to demonstrate that it is unnecessary to assume that the Hebrew/Aramaic terminology describing prophetic phenomena always refers to a claim to absolute verbal authority. In fact, there is much evidence for prophecy which made no such claim. While the phenomena associated with secondary prophetic activity may vary, we must now see if a similar distinction is discernible in the New Testament.