



***IS PROPHECY FOR TODAY?***

***Geoffrey Bingham***

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NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.  
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051  
1993

First published 1982 by  
NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC., AUSTRALIA

Reprinted 1993

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Nation Library of Australia card number and  
ISBN 0 949851 83 3

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Wholly produced and set up in South Australia at  
New Creation Publications Inc.

## CONTENTS

Introduction: Is Prophecy for Today?	1
What is a Prophet, and What is Prophecy?	1
Who were the Prophets?	2
What did the Prophets Prophecy?	3
The Word of God the Word of the Prophets	5
Pentecost and Prophecy Today	6
The Prophetic Community	13
False Prophecy in the World Today	18
A General Conclusion on Prophecy Today	20
Appendix—The Testimony of Jesus Notes	22
Notes	25

## **INTRODUCTION: IS PROPHECY FOR TODAY?**

What is a prophet? What is his function? Is the line of prophets completed? Are there prophets appointed by God to speak to us today? These and ‘many related questions are often in our mind. Those who believe the Scriptures to be true and to be from God accept the idea that the Canon of Scripture is closed, and no new prophetic or apocalyptic revelations will be made. The question nevertheless arises, ‘Does God give us revelations or prophetic guidance today?’ In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles there were prophets, and some epistles speak of the office of a prophet, and also of the charisma of prophecy; Did these elements cease at the end of the apostolic period, or does God still Speak through prophets and prophecy? Few would doubt that God still speaks through the prophets of the Bible and the prophetic messages they gave. Is there, however, a ministry of prophecy today? Some would say that the authentic proclamation of the truth of Scripture is prophetic, and surely is present today.

We need to examine the matter thoroughly to find ‘the answers to our questions.

### **WHAT IS A PROPHET, AND WHAT IS PROPHECY?**

There are a number of ways we can seek our answer to this question. The first is that we can try to find the meaning of the word ‘prophet’. The word in Hebrew was *nabi*, whose root derivation has been debated. Formerly it was thought that since the root idea was ‘call’ the prophet was one who called on God (cf. Gen. 20:8). However it is now thought the verb is in the passive and not the active. The prophet then is one who is called. Of course it is what he is called for which interests us.

The second way is to look at what the prophet did.’ Exodus 7:1–2 makes it clear that the prophet was the voice of God. This agrees with the statements of the prophets, ‘Thus says the Lord...’ They said what God wanted them to say, i.e. what He wanted to communicate through them to their hearers. The prophets also said, ‘As the Lord liveth...’ They meant, ‘He is the living God who does what He says. He always

acts.’ This meant that their word was also active. What they stated would come to pass, ie. it would happen.

Prophecy, then, is God’s communication to His audience. It comes primarily through His servant, the prophet. In some cases God has spoken without a prophet (eg. Gen. 3:9–19). Prophecy contains two clear elements, (a) exhortation and, (b) prediction. Any given prophecy can have either one of these elements or both. Prophecy is not necessarily predictive.

Prophecy is primarily connected with God’s plan for His creation. Amos 3:7–8 says, ‘Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?’ God, then, lets us know what we need to know. An interesting variation of this is seen in Isaiah 48:3–8. In effect God is saying, (i) ‘I have prophesied predictively of what I will do and then have done it, lest you should say your idols and gods did and commanded these things,’ and (ii) ‘There are some things I will not tell you prophetically lest you claim you have thought of them yourself. I therefore hide them from you, and suddenly make them to happen.’

In all then we can say that the prophet is the servant of God who tells the message of God to those whom He wills. This is intended to inform them, to exhort them, and to prepare them for what will happen.

## WHO WERE THE PROPHETS?

The first Old Testament prophet nominated in the Old Testament was Abraham (Gen. 20:7). The first prophet in the Bible nominated by the New Testament is Abel (Luke 11:49–51). The second is Enoch (Jude 14–15). Later in time we have Moses (Deut. 34:10). Aaron, in a secondary sense (Exodus 7:1), and Miriam (Exodus 15:20). In Numbers 11:10–30 we have the 70 elders prophesying at a single point in time. The Judges had prophetic ministry. Samuel commences the line of a prophetic series which culminated in John the Baptist (cf. Acts 3:24, 13:20, Heb. 11:32). Saul was temporarily prophetic (I Sam. 10:6). David is also a prophet (Neh. 12:24, 36). From this point onwards there are non-writing prophets such as Elijah, Elisha and others, and writing prophets whose names we read from Isaiah to Malachi.

We have used the one word *nabi* for the prophet. The term ‘man of God’ was often used for them, showing their close relationship with God. The term *roeh* or *hozeh* was used also, but primarily for one who was a seer, that is he could look into the future. He could predict. The

seers were often linked with the ecstatic experiences and these were not always trusted by the people, which would be natural enough. The seventy elders were ecstatic, but this was temporary and marked the anointing of the Spirit of God upon them.

Two prophets are outstanding in the OT They are (i) Moses, who is the paradigm of the true prophet (Deut. 18:18f.). *The* prophet who is to come will be after the order of Moses' prophethood. (ii) Samuel, who is also a type of Christ in that he was a prophet who was also a priest and even a king, ie. the judge of Israel and its leader.

In the NT John the Baptist is the prophet *par excellence* among men. This is because he saw (a) the fulfilment of all the prophets in the coming of Christ and (b) the fulfilment of his own prophecy. Christ called him 'greater than a prophet' (Matt. 11:11f.). John, however, was not 'that prophet' which Moses had said would come (John 1:21f). In fact it was Christ who was 'that prophet' (Acts 3:20–26). He was 'greater than greater than a prophet.'

From Pentecost onwards there are prophets. The office of a prophet exists (Ephes. 4:7f.). The Book of Acts speaks often of prophets (13:1, 15:32), and Agabus is one prophet who is named at the point of giving prophecy (11:28, 21:10–11). In one sense all God's people are to be prophets (Acts 2:17–18). Certainly the *charisma* of prophecy can be exercised by both men and women, although not all exercise it (I Cor. 12:10, 29, cf. I Cor. 11:4–5, 14:24–25).

One of the most important prophets in the NT is John the Divine who wrote or recorded the prophecy of the Revelation (Rev. 1:3, 10:12). Two important witnesses or prophets are spoken of in chapter 11. Commentators are not all agreed that these are two actual personages. Some see them as representing the (prophetic, witnessing) church. Even so prophecy of this nature is predicted for, and predicated of, the last days.

### WHAT DID THE PROPHETS PROPHECY?

We have already seen that the prophet is the mouthpiece of God. He tells the word of God, that is the words of God. To use Peter's term, 'he speaks as one who utters the oracles [truths] of God.' God desires to speak His words at different times, for differing purposes. Hebrews 1:1 says that, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to the fathers by the prophets.'

How and what Abel spoke we do not know, but we surmise his life was prophetic. It could be true that he spoke the words of God to his family and that these incensed Cain. Enoch is credited with apocalyptic

prophecy in Jude 14 and 15. Abraham was linked in prophecy with the Covenant action of God. Doubtless he declared this to his people. Moses was God's mouthpiece to Israel, although for some time Aaron had to take his words and convey them to such as Pharaoh. The Judges had a prophetic word for their time. By the time of Samuel we are told that 'the word of the Lord was very rare,' meaning that the times were bad, and no word came from God. When the Law should have been enough for guidance the people still longed for or dreaded the direct word of God through the prophets.

The prophets can be said to have one thing in mind—the will of God. In pre-Israel times God spoke through the prophets we have nominated. Amongst them Noah must be included as a prophet of warning. Jacob utters a Messianic prophecy (Gen. 49:10). (Later Hannah in her song is prophetic on these lines [I Sam. 2:1–10]. Mary in her day seems to fashion her song [the Magnificat] along similar lines.) There are of course many prophets whose prophecy relates to the coming Messiah, Son of man, Davidic King and Suffering servant.

For the most part prophecy is 'forth-telling' and 'fore-telling', which relates to Israel where and when it is in need of admonition, encouragement, and explanation. The prophets recall the people to the covenant agreement, to the law, to life as the witnessing community of God. When they are forth-telling, ie. hortatory, they are seeking to admonish, rebuke, correct, and motivate to obedience. Often they use predictive elements to reinforce this. They will speak of the coming judgements of God such as the destruction of Israel and exile from the land. This is not merely to be predictive or to satisfy the curiosity of the listeners, but to cause a change of mind and heart in their audience. Even so the predictions are important. What the prophets said will surely come to pass. See Jeremiah 25:4ff.

In the most general sense of all the prophets are concerned with Christ in their ministry. I Peter 1: 10–11 speaks of 'the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory.' Luke 24:25–27 and 44–47 show Christ as being the subject of the prophets. In his life he did only what the prophets had written, hence the statements concerning him such as 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled', 'as it was written of him', 'in accordance with the Scriptures'. The apostles claimed to be saying nothing but what the prophets had spoken (Acts 26:22–23). In fact all their messages are based on the prophets. Had they not been they would not have received any hearing from their audiences.

The Hebrews saw law and the prophets as one. Hence the law was prophetic (Matt. 11:13), and prophecy was consonant with the law. It is

noteworthy that the books from Joshua to Nehemiah are not called historical books by the Jews but ‘the Former Prophets’. They saw all history as prophetic, ie. God was speaking by His acts, the acts communicating who He was and is.

The verse which is most significant is Revelation 19:10, namely, ‘The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.’ This can mean either, ‘testimony to Jesus’, or ‘testimony of Jesus’. The weight of evidence is for the latter. Even so the paraphrased thought of Revelation could be, ‘The witness which Jesus gives to God and the truth of God is the subject of all the prophets. Also they testify to Jesus being the witness to God. This testifying by Jesus and also the prophets is the essence and content of all true prophecy.’

We see then that whilst the topics, themes, admonitions and predictions of the prophets are many and varied, the uniting theme is the will of God. In practice this means the plan of God being carried out to its consummation. Revelation 10:1–7 speaks of this consummation when the angel blows the seventh trumpet so that, ‘the mystery of God as *he announced to his servants the prophets* should be fulfilled.’ The plan of God is creation, redemption and the consummation of all things, out of which will come the new heavens and earth, and God’s family shall reign over eternity for ever.

## **THE WORD OF GOD THE WORD OF THE PROPHETS**

Isaiah 55:10–11 says, ‘For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.’ The essence of this statement is that God’s word is irresistible, and inevitably fruitful. This statement needs to be seen in the light of Isaiah 6:9–10, ‘And He said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people fat, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” When we say irresistible we mean it will result in either acceptance or rejection or both, but it will never be ineffective. It will polarise its hearers.

When then the prophetic word was spoken it was always dynamic for

*it was God Himself who was speaking.* Prophecies were the oracles of God. The creative word of God *caused* all creation to come into being. Psalm 33:6 and 9 say, ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth’; ‘For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood forth.’ Likewise Hebrews 11:3 tells us that by faith we know the worlds were made by the word of God. Seeing this word is so immediate, so definitive and so dynamic, prophecy was rarely accepted. It was too confronting and too demanding. Later we will see that the prophetic word was the word of truth. Men have exchanged the truth (of God) for a lie (Rom. 1:25), hence the need for the uttered prophetic word. However, man is so angered by the prophet that he feels compelled to destroy him. Jesus pointed this out in Luke 11:47–51, saying that his covenant people had always killed the prophets. He himself said he had better hasten to Jerusalem, ‘for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ In the Revelation the prophets suffer both persecution and death from their opponents.

In order to understand this anger we must comprehend the fall of man, and the rejection of God by men. Romans 1:18–32 with Genesis 3:1–12 shows us why men so oppose God. Since they have rejected God and exchanged the truth for a lie, it follows that they will not be wanting to be confronted by the truth. It will unhand, unnerve and unmask them. They have spent so much time and energy in re-rationalising the creation, the person of God, and mankind that they cannot afford to have this flimsy matter challenged and unmasked. The detached teacher imparting information and even theology does not greatly worry them. It is the one who utters the oracles of God as though God Himself were speaking who is hated. His sin of direct confrontation is inadmissible and unforgivable. He is directly speaking the truth. He is not only informing but demanding a response whether positive or negative. Hence the unpopularity of the prophetic word, or the prophetic action, for often the prophet spoke simply by actions. Some actions were, of course, interpreted.

The powerful truth is that the prophetic word is effective, ie. it achieves the results God sends it to accomplish. His plan will be fulfilled—come what may—hence the prophetic word which is the ground of hope for the believer is the direst threat to the unbeliever.

## **PENTECOST AND PROPHECY TODAY**

One of the primary promises of John the Baptist was that when

Messiah would come he would baptise his people with the Holy Spirit and fire. He pointed to Jesus as that one. Jesus said very little concerning this during the time of his ministry, but on the night before his crucifixion he spoke much of the Holy Spirit, and promised that his disciples would receive him. Following his resurrection he appeared to them during the forty day period before his ascension. Finally he told them that they would soon be baptised in the Holy Spirit. In this regard Acts 1:8 is most revealing: ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’

The coming of the Spirit would cause them to witness to Christ, that is to give testimony to him. He had previously said that the Holy Spirit would witness to him, Christ, and, in the same breath, that the disciples also would give testimony (John 15:26–27). When he had commissioned them to preach the Gospel in accordance with the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–49) he had said, ‘You are witnesses of these things.’ He laid down the basic condition for witnessing as reception of the Spirit (Luke 24:49, cf. Acts 1:4–5).

All of this does not become clear until they receive the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This reception of the Spirit is called ‘being baptised in the Spirit’. To clarify the matter to onlookers, Peter quotes Joel 2:28–32. He adds slightly to that account, so that amended it is given as, ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Acts 2:17–21). When we look at the passage we see the immediate outcome of being baptised in the Spirit is that *all God’s people will now prophesy*. That is both men and women will prophesy. Since Jesus had said they would *witness* to him, then *their ministry of prophecy must be*—either in part or *whole—witness to Jesus*. This would comport fairly well with Revelation 19: 10, ‘The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.’

We have previously said that ‘the testimony of Jesus’ is in fact the testimony that Jesus gave (or gives) to the Father and the truth (cf. John 3:11, 32–33). The apostles and the folk who prophesied on the day of Pentecost gave testimony *to* Jesus, but to do this they were giving the

testimony of Jesus. Since this is the true spirit of prophecy we underline our thesis, ie. that they indeed prophesied.

It is doubtful whether this proposition can be successfully contested. What can be contested is that *they went on prophesying*. We mean that at Pentecost they witnessed to Jesus, and since it is said that they prophesied then this contention must stand. Can we say, however, that they went on prophesying? The answer must be, ‘Yes. Their commission was to witness, and witness, rightly understood. is prophetic.’

It is clear from the Book of Acts that not only the apostles witnessed to Jesus. The community witnessed. They are the people who in the Revelation are said to ‘have’ or to ‘hold’ the testimony of Jesus. This surely makes them the prophetic community. If then we look at Acts 2:18–21 ( Joel 2:28–32) we see that with the coming of the Spirit the new community is anointed by the Spirit from the time of Pentecost on and up to ‘the day of the Lord, the great and manifest day.’ The Spirit then is for ‘the last days’ (Acts 2:17). Similarly the ministry of the Spirit is with a view to the eschaton (the last era and time). In John 16:7–15 Jesus had linked the coming of the Spirit with conviction concerning judgement, saying that ‘he will show you things to come’. The Spirit then—amongst other functions—is the eschatological Spirit. Of course, as we have seen, he was always the Spirit of prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

### **The New Testament Ministry of Prophecy**

What we must first get clear is that all believers do not have the office of a prophet. Agabus, Judas and Silas are nominated specifically as prophets in contradistinction to those who are not. In the use of the prophetic charisma Paul insists that the prophecies given must be tested by other prophets (1 Cor. 14:29–32). Whilst it would seem there is no limit to those who may prophesy (I Cor. 14:1f, 14:24–25), in practice not all do. What we must see nevertheless is that *the community is a prophetic community*. We gather from I Peter 2:4–10 (cf. Heb. 13:15–16) that the community is also *a priestly community*, yet in fact *no person is a priest*, as such. Just as there is the priesthood of *all* believers but not of *each* believer so with the prophetic community. In the case of the prophetic community *some* believers are prophets.

We may well see the utterances of the word of God at Pentecost as the paradigm for all prophetic utterance. None of this would have been so without the anointing of the Spirit, for he is the Spirit of witness (testimony). We gather from Acts 19:6 that when the Spirit came upon John’s disciples at Ephesus they too prophesied. This must surely be the case at Caesarea with the Gentiles on whom the Spirit fell and at Samaria when the same event happened. What then was this prophetic

utterance? It was clearly the testimony *to* Jesus which revealed the testimony of Jesus. In fact the testimony of Jesus brings to birth (by the Spirit) the testimony to Jesus. Peter's speech at Pentecost was wholly witness to Jesus, and in fact his sermon to the Gentiles at Caesarea was of the same order.

A further confirmatory incident is that recorded in Acts 4. The apostles return to the church having been threatened by the Sanhedrin. The church comes together and prays to the Lord to strengthen the threatened apostles. They say (verses 29–30), 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, whilst thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant, Jesus.' The result is that the apostles *and all the company* are freshly filled with the Spirit and 'speak the word of God with boldness'. Thus Luke records, 'And with great power the apostles gave their testimony [witness] to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus...'. This means the prophetic (witnessing) ministry was renewed. The subject of their witness is Jesus.

This must mean that wherever witness is given to Jesus the prophetic ministry is exercised. This does not minimise the hortatory–predictive ministry of the official prophets, for their gift, office or charisma, like all other such ministries (apostle, evangelist, teacher and pastor) are likewise participatory and supportive of the whole community in its prophetic task.

## THE IDEA OF WITNESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now come to the heart of our matter. The word 'witness' (Gk. *martur*) has been bypassed by many scholars. It is a word which has been passed over in favour of the terms *kerugma* (proclamation) and *euangellion* (gospel) to which, incidentally, it is strongly related. Thus its importance has been missed to a great degree? We simply take the thesis that witness is primarily juridical and work from that. We are told that God has never left Himself without a witness. Acts 14:17 says, '... He did not leave Himself without witness...'. Paul, who said these words, then proceeds to say that God's provision of creation and for creation is a witness. In support of this we may quote Romans 1:19–20 and Psalm 19:1–4. In context of Paul's utterance the witness is the goodness of God in giving rain and fruitful seasons.

There are other witnesses, such as the law, conscience and the like. In Psalm 36:5–7 the psalmist sees God in His love, His truth (faithfulness), His righteousness, His judgements, and His salvation

for man and beast. In Romans 3:21 the law shows the righteousness of God. In fact the justifying righteousness of God is witnessed to by both the law and the prophets. In Romans 2:14–15 the law is written on the heart if we care to acknowledge it. However such witnesses—which man does not wish to acknowledge—are supported and verified by God’s own witness of His people. God says to Israel, ‘You are My witnesses.’ This is a constant theme of the prophet Isaiah (eg. Isa. 43:10, 12).

We may ask why it is that in the NT the Son, the Spirit, and the prophetic community all witness to God, to His Word, and to the truth. The answer is that fallen man does not know the truth, having exchanged it for a lie. *The truth is something which is lived as* we see in John 3:20–21, Ephesians 4:15, I John 1:6, II John 4, III John 1, 4. Man does not wish to have the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:28, 3:11), but without it he must perish. God as we have seen is constantly witnessing to Himself. He does this through many forms of media such as creation, providence, angelic messengers, dreams, visions, theophanies, His own acts in history, through the incarnation of His Son, through the Spirit, and through the church. One thing is common to all these media, namely that *all are His word (or words)* uttered in these various ways. Since, then, the prophet is the mouthpiece of the Lord, all these media can be said to be prophetic. All witness to Him, and in this sense are proclaiming the truth of God as against the lie of man.

## **JESUS DECLARES THE TRUTH OF GOD**

Man cannot know the truth until it is revealed to him. In Biblical terms he is blind and deaf to it, and so will never utter it, let alone live according to it. In fact he is dead. He is inert to truth. What will rouse him? Only the truth itself, but the truth uttered by God, in order to recall man to reality. This word, uttered through the media we have nominated, is supremely communicated through the incarnation, life and ministry of Jesus. It is then followed and uttered dynamically by the Spirit. The Spirit inspires and enables the church to proclaim the truth, and to witness to the truth. Thus it becomes the prophetic community.

We saw in John 3:11, 32–33 that Jesus witnesses to God. In John 8:40 Jesus tells the hostile Jews, ‘... now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God...’. He then goes on to say

they cannot bear to hear his word (ie. the true witness) because they are of the Devil who ‘has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.’

Again in John 18:37 Jesus tells Pilate, ‘... I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.’ He adds, ‘Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.’ Pilate asks, ‘What is truth?’ thereby emphasising the fact that man is ignorant of the truth and needs witness to it. Jesus told his disciples that he was (is), ‘the life, the truth, the way’, meaning by this that he is the way to the Father; the truth of the Father, and (so) the life of the Father. For him to be the truth of the Father is thus to be wholly a witness to the Father.

## THE WITNESS IN ACTS, THE EPISTLES AND REVELATION

A concordance which uses the words for *witness*, *testimony* and the cognate verbs for *witnessing* and *testifying* quickly shows us that what Jesus had said would happen when the Spirit of God would come, was in fact the case. That is the community began to witness to Jesus. *In Acts* the community—under its apostolic leadership—witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. Indeed one cannot be an apostle unless one has actually witnessed the resurrection. The impact of the resurrection truth is to show man that God has worked in His Son in a unique and significant way. Man must now repent and believe, and receive the forgiveness of sins which issues from the redemptive Atonement.

*In the epistles* various aspects of witnessing are set forth. Timothy is admonished, ‘Do not be ashamed, then, of witnessing to our Lord’ (II Tim. 1:8). Paul tells Timothy (I Tim. 6:13) that Christ witnessed a good witness before Pilate. He reminds Timothy that he, Timothy, had ‘made a good confession before many witnesses.’ Paul claims, in writing to the Corinthians, that ‘the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you’ (I Cor. 1:6), and in I Corinthians 2:1 he speaks of proclaiming ‘the testimony of God’ amongst the Corinthians. He has the witness of his own conscience that he has witnessed well (II Cor. 1:12, cf. Rom. 9:1). In II Thessalonians 1:10 he has an important statement, namely that in the *parousia* of Christ many will be present because ‘our testimony to you was believed’. Peter speaks of being a witness of the sufferings of Christ (I Pet. 5:1). John speaks of having seen and heard and felt the word of life, Christ himself, and says that he with others bears witness to Jesus (I John 1:1–3). He has a remarkable passage in I John 5:6–12 in which he shows that the Spirit, the water (baptism of Christ) and the blood (the Atonement) all bear witness to Christ. He says that God’s testimony is that He has borne witness to His Son. He adds that he who

believes has the witness in himself, but an unbeliever has rejected the very witness which God has borne to His Son, and such rejection is utterly reprehensible.

*In the Book of the Revelation* the principle is undoubtedly prophetic. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (essence, substance, subject) of prophecy. This is Jesus' own testimony to God. Believers 'hold' or 'have' the testimony of Jesus to God, and in so doing they testify to the testimony. In 1:5 and 3:14 Jesus is the true and faithful witness. In 19:11 he is called 'Faithful and True'. In 1:2 and 9 John speaks of bearing witness to the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. In 6:9 we see the souls of the martyrs who had been slain for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. They are mentioned again in 20:4 where it is said they were beheaded for the witness to Jesus. In 12:17 the dragon (the Devil) makes war 'on those who keep the commandments of God and have [hold] the testimony of Jesus.' In 19:10 the angel speaks of those who have (or hold) the testimony of Jesus. 12:11 speaks of those who overcome the dragon by 'the word of their testimony', which is undoubtedly their testimony to the testimony of Jesus. In 11: 1–13 we have the account of the two witnesses—whoever they may be—and in this passage the word 'prophet' is synonymous with 'witness'. In verse 3 they are called witnesses and they prophesy. In verse 7 they finish their testimony (witness). In verse 10 they are called prophets again. It is obvious then that to prophesy and to give testimony are the one thing. We must also notice that their testimony is in the 'spirit of Elijah'. That is they can prevent rain from coming and can cause plagues to happen. Also their testimony is a torment to the hearers who resist them because of its dynamic nature and the hurt it brings to the opponents of God.

It remains only to see that John calls the Revelation God's prophecy, and also that the prophecy is really the testimony of Jesus. The book is called 'the prophecy' in 1:3 and 'the book of this prophecy' in 22:18–19. In 1:1–2 John calls the book 'the revelation of Jesus Christ', and adds that he himself bore witness 'to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw.' This confirms the idea that the prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. In 1:9 John says he was on the island of Patmos 'on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. He may mean that because he has always proclaimed the word of God and the testimony of Jesus he was therefore exiled to Patmos or he may mean God set him there to hear the prophecy so that he could proclaim it. In 10:11 he is told by an angel, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.' This will doubtless constitute 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'.

## THE WORD, THE WITNESS AND THE TRUTH

We have seen that whatever is the mouthpiece of God is in some sense prophetic. Wherever the voice of God speaks there is prophetic proclamation, whether it be by creation, providence, angels or prophets. In this age, we have been told, we will prophesy (Acts 2:17–18). In the Acts this proclamation was known as ‘the word of God’. So many times the early church’s main concentration is on proclaiming the word. We may call this ‘apostolic proclamation’ or ‘evangelistic proclamation’, in which case we could speak of apostles and evangelists making proclamation. That is, of course, correct. Yet the overall proclamation is the prophesying of Acts 2:17–18. Thus wherever and however the word is proclaimed it is prophetic. Doubtless when Peter says, ‘If any man speak, let him speak as uttering the oracles of God,’ he means specifically that those given the gift of proclamation must be prophetic, for they are undoubtedly the mouthpieces of God. Generally he may mean that no such proclamation should be made by any person without it being the oracles of God.

We must also keep in mind that without the witness of the community *no person can know the truth*. Without the word of God *no truth is proclaimed*. Without the Spirit of God *no effective proclamation of the word, ie. of truth, is made*. The truth is ‘the testimony of Jesus’ to God. Unless God gives this through His servants there is no effective proclamation.

## THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

No man can utter the truth but by the Spirit of truth, ie. the Holy Spirit. This is because no man can see and know the truth unless the Spirit first reveals it to him. The nature of fallen man being what it is, it is impossible for one human being to bring the truth to another by his own unaided efforts. He needs the Spirit of God to enable him to do this. At the same time the truth is not simply something we know cerebrally. Much as that is both helpful and necessary, the truth is something we live. It is something we do. To bear testimony to Jesus means to have his testimony to God within us, and to have it as the primary consideration within our lives. The propagation of this is the very purpose of our lives. Yet we cannot bear testimony *to* the testimony apart from living the testimony. For the witnessing community to live inconsistently with the life and witness of Jesus is inadmissible. Christ is the Head of his people, and they are subject to his Lordship. They do his will. They obey his

commands. They are fellow-workers with him in what he is doing. Jesus' testimony to the Father did not conclude at the ascension. This testimony still goes on, for it is composed not only of what he did prior to the ascension, *but what he is now doing*. Rightly understood the current testimony of Jesus is his life being lived through his people both as to their ethico-moral life, and their participation in the plan of God.

This means then that the life of the church, the community of the Spirit is also its witness to Jesus, and so to his witness to God. This, then, makes all life to be witness, and thus in every respect and aspect the life of the community is prophetic. To proclaim the word of God but not live by it is dangerous and hypocritical. This can be seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). To live by the word of God is to live the truth and not to live a lie, which, again, was the case with Ananias and Sapphira. Every act of life proclaims truth or a lie. It is either truly prophetic or anti-prophetic. Sometimes where the truths of the faith are distorted it is falsely prophetic, ie. false prophecy. We are warned strongly against this indeed in the gospels and epistles. They are most emphatic that we live in the truth, that we 'truth it in love', and that we follow the truth. Only then are we the true community. Only then is our prophetic ministry valid and our stance correct.

What we will need to keep in mind is that prophetic witness will inevitably draw fire from unbelieving mankind, and the dark powers of evil. Not only do men dislike confrontation but evil dislikes the truth as it is lived out by the prophetic community. It not only hates the truth, but it hates to see the truth lived out. This is too obvious a demonstration of essential reality, and evil is occupied with unceasing deceit. Hence the fierce opposition the truth will always meet. This should cause us to examine our ideas of 'low-profile proclamation', and what we call 'soft-sell'. In the eleventh chapter of Revelation we see that the two witnesses are killed by the Beast who 'makes war on them'. Prophecy has so often caused people to react in homicidal fury.

## **PROPHECY AND THE FUNCTIONAL COMMUNITY**

We have not yet dealt with the matter of prophecy which is not only proclamation of the truth. There is prophecy in the New Testament which deals with the day-to-day life of the church. It has elements of the hortatory, the predictive and the prescriptive. I personally would see a prophet as an office or ministry which, whilst it is linked with those of an apostle, evangelist, pastor and teacher, is yet distinct from the charisma of prophecy which was generally exercised at times of worship. This charisma is referred to in I Corinthians 12 and 14. In Ephesians 4:7-11

the prophet is what we might call a gift ministry. This appears to be so also in I Corinthians 12:28. In I Corinthians 12:8–11 Paul seems to place prophecy amongst other gifts which are not, strictly speaking, ministry gifts. In a hypothetical example Paul seems to suggest that all could exercise the gift of prophecy (I Cor. 14:24, cf. 14:1). It seems to me that whilst it may be argued well from I Corinthians 12 that both are the same, yet their function is somewhat different. For example we do not hear of a female prophet in Acts or the epistles? yet we certainly have females prophesying. In Acts 21:9 we read, ‘And he [Philip] had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.’ It could of course be argued that they were prophetesses. In I Corinthians 11:5 Paul speaks of women prophesying as normal practice in the congregation.

The little knowledge we have of prophets leads us to believe they sometimes exercised predictive elements. This is seen from Acts 11:28 where Agabus predicts a world-wide famine. Again in Acts 21:10–11 Agabus predicts Paul’s being delivered to the Gentiles. Acts 20:23. indicates that the same sort of prophecy was given in every city Paul visited. In Acts 13:1–3 we see the Spirit speaking to the teachers and prophets, but do not know whether his voice came through a prophet or not. We may reasonably assume it did. From time to time Paul exercises the predictive ministry of a prophet, especially on his voyage to Rome.

From I Corinthians 14:1–5 Paul makes it clear that the gift of prophecy is primarily for the edification of the church. In I Corinthians 14:29–32 the gift of prophecy is linked with the receiving of revelations. Paul may refer to one such revelation in Galatians 2:1–2. If this were the case then prophecy is prescriptive, that is to say, directive. We gather that much use of the charisma of prophecy was simply to edify the church, and this perhaps by revealing the nature of God, stimulating to worship, and encouraging the brethren to action and spiritual fidelity. Certainly this was what a prophet was to do, for we read in Acts 15:32, ‘And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them.’

We have to say that the distinction between ‘the prophet and the one using a charisma of prophecy may or may not be valid. What is clear is that prophecy is the next highest ministry–gift to that of apostleship. We also see that Paul urged all who desired gifts (and perhaps extra gifts) to seek the charisma of prophecy. Having said that we hold to our primary conclusion and thought that the church is the prophetic community and corporately proclaims the prophetic word. This word of God is the truth, and this truth is the truth of God witnessed to by Christ as Christ is witnessed to by the prophetic community. Being prophetic means the church is the mouthpiece of the Father and His Son. As such it warns,

proclaims, exhorts, and all this with a view' to bringing men and women into the Kingdom. For this purpose the Spirit of truth who is the Spirit of witness is given continually to the church up to and until, the 'great and notable day of the Lord comes'.

## **SOMETIMES THE COMMUNITY IS NOT PROPHETICALLY FUNCTIONAL**

We cannot escape the fact that the church today is often (and even largely) *not* prophetic. A reading of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 shows that by the end of the first century (if not before) the churches had lost much of their prophetic ministry. Christ admonished them through the Spirit, and today still admonishes us. It may be that then—as now—we are aware of the peril to us of being prophetic. Even so we must determine under God to be no less than prophetic. Not to be prophetic means we deny the word of God, the word of truth and the telling witness, without which no true impact is made in and upon a world that lives a lie. Only by prophetic utterance will men come to conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement, and so to the truth itself. Then they can exchange the lie for the truth and become incorporated into the prophetic community.

We are bound then to draw this strong and irreducible conclusion, namely that *without prophecy the truth is never communicated*. That means without prophecy humanity is left to its own doom, and this brought upon itself by its rebellion. Proverbs 29:18 says, 'Where there is no prophecy the people east off restraint...'. Some translations have, 'Where there is no vision the people perish'. The word *vision* is important because it is a synonym for *prophecy*. We must remember that in Acts 2:17–18 where Joel is quoted, God's promise was, '...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall *prophesy*, and your young men shall see *visions*, and your old men shall dream *dreams*... and they shall *prophesy*.' Numbers 12:6 shows us that the prophet received his message from God through dreams and visions: 'And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a dream..."'. We note in Numbers 12:7–8 that Moses received the prophetic word from God in face-to-face relationship with Him. This was unique for a prophet at that time. Hence Moses is the prophet *par excellence*. He is the prototype of Jesus who claimed such things as, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me', 'I know him [who is true] for I come from him and he sent me', '... you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God' (John 7:16, 29, 8:40).

To return now to Proverbs 29:18 and its statement, 'Where there is no

prophecy the people cast off restraint'. We understand that when God does not speak directly to man, and especially to His people, they imagine, in their sinfulness, that God is no longer *directly* concerned with them. Prophecy is always, 'Thus says the Lord,' or 'As the Lord lives,' meaning that God is currently concerned with man, and is acting out His nature in their presence. This is one of the reasons why Israel could not *elect* a prophet as such. Whilst there were what are called 'cult prophets', ie. schools of prophets as under Elijah and Elisha, yet such prophets were always suspect because prophecy is not a professional vocation. As such it would always be suspect. Prophets would become political. Their prophecy would be in danger of being used by the establishment. Such prophecy would also appeal to the superstitious in the community. When made directive it could become a cruel bondage, for superstitious people feel bound by and to the letter of a prophecy.

What we cannot doubt is that prophecy is essential to the life of man. He needs revelation, exhortation and correction, and he needs to have it come directly from God. Hence the statement, 'If any man speak, let him speak as uttering the oracles of God.' We realise that often the church is not functional. From the point in time when the Emperor Constantine legalised Christianity. in the fourth century, the church has been in the danger of compromise. Her politics have always taken her away from her prophetic role. Even so the church has retained—if only in part—her prophetic role. This is made clear in the eleventh chapter of Revelation. The two witnesses described there as the two olive trees and the two lampstands are called prophets. For them to prophesy is to witness, and to witness is to prophesy. In the first chapters of the book of the Revelation there is constant mention of the seven churches, meaning, doubtless, the sevenfold or complete church. In Revelation 11 not seven lampstands are mentioned, but two. This must mean either that only two churches are prophetically operative out of seven, or only two-sevenths of the church is prophesying. In turn this could either mean that prophetic ministry in the church constitutes two-sevenths of its functional operations, or that whilst the church should be wholly prophetic its prophetic ministry has dropped by five-sevenths? Whatever the meaning we see that the two lampstands carry enormous dynamic in their witness. They affect the entire world, and their affects are those of torment. When the Beast kills the prophets the whole world celebrates the matter joyfully until God raises the prophets and causes fear to enter the hearts of the watching and wondering world.

Our point, then, is confirmed: *prophecy is that dynamic operation by which the world is confronted with the nature and will of God.* This leads us naturally to the truth that false prophecy must also be

dynamical, albeit perversely so. It either falsely indicates the nature and purpose of God, or it posits another son of action altogether to that consistent with the truth.

## FALSE PROPHECY IN THE WORLD TODAY

False prophecy is the counterpart of true prophecy. True prophecy purports to tell the truth of God in the face of the lie in which humanity lives because of sin and Satanic deceit. The truth, being something which is lived, as known, is necessarily dynamic. False prophecy—purporting to be the *real* truth—must also necessarily be dynamic, even though perversely so. Romans 1:18–25 shows man as rejecting truth (ie. things as they really are) for the lie. Satan preceded him in this operation. Thus the world–system of Satan is an entirely false and (so) deceitful one. This is confirmed by Christ in John 8:44f. Many times in the Revelation Satan is called ‘the deceiver’.

In history man has desired to know the future, partly out of curiosity, partly out of fear, and also because he is a creature both of time and eternity. Knowing the future is indispensable to him. He is a future–oriented creature for various reasons and so must know where he and history are heading. Because man has this ‘future–shaped blank’ within himself and needs what may be termed ‘supernatural communication’, he is therefore open to all elements which are futuristic. In fact he is incredibly gullible when it comes to the pretensions of futurism. Hence many fall prey to the futuristic sects which are most simplistic, and political ideologies—such as Marxism—which have a philosophy of the future. *Those systems that promise a future which does not make moral demands upon the person are the most acceptable.* The fact is that true prophecy has many things in mind. It has in mind the true presentation of the nature of God, His purposeful acts in history, and so far as man is concerned his concurrence with these matters. Man is a creature of destiny, and his destiny lies in two things, (a) fulfilling his identity, and (b) maintaining his integrity. False prophecy has none of these things in mind.

That false prophecy has always proved powerful is clear from Jeremiah 23:23–32. This should be studied thoughtfully. Thus, ‘Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off?. Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed!” How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets

who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord; and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, "Says the Lord." Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord.' (Cf. Jer. 14:14–16, 5:30–31, Ezek. 12:24–25.) If we add to these Scriptures the warning of Moses (Deut. 18:9–14, 21–22) then we see the Old Testament understanding regarding false prophecy. It is dire contrast to the true (ie. Deut. 18:15–22). Prophecy is tested out by whether the prediction comes to pass or not.'

In the New Testament false prophecy is unmasked. In the Gospels Christ warns of the deception of false prophecy in the last days, eg. Matthew 24:23–27 (of. II Thess. 2:9–12). In Revelation chapter thirteen we have the dragon (Satan) initiating a beast which comes out of the sea. It acts on behalf of the dragon, and indications am that it is the counterpart of Christ for it has a mortal wound which has been healed. It is given 'a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words'. It is allowed to do this for exactly the same length of time that the two lampstands utter their prophetic witness, namely 3 1/2 years. Revelation 13:11 shows us yet another beast. This beast does similar works to what the two prophets (of chapter 11) accomplish, ie. brings fire down from heaven and executes special signs. Revelation 19:20 says, 'And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that bums with sulphur.' We see then that the second beast is the false prophet. In 16:13 we read that 'from the mouth of the prophet [issue] three foul spirits like frogs,' which are obviously trinitarian in their action.

We see then that false prophecy is an unwitting testimony to the power of true prophecy. Satan must fill the prophetic needs of the human race, but by nature of the case his prophecy must be false. Hence believers are warned to test the spirits (I John 4: 1f.), and in the assembly of believers the spirits of those prophesying must also be discerned (I Cor. 14:29–33, cf. 12:10). Otherwise the church can be led into evil ways. This is further reinforced by the letters to the churches in Revelation

chapters 2 and 3. The churches at Pergamum and Thyatira have problems with idolatry and the occult. At Thyatira there is a false prophetess who has beguiled some of the believers. True believers must separate themselves from her.

On all scores then, we must be alert to the dangers and acts of false prophecy. The word of Isaiah 8:16 and 20 is the true test: 'Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples.' 'To the teaching and the testimony! Surely for this word which they speak there is no dawn.' The true teaching will be according to the true word. It is as simple as that. Of course we need the classic test of Deuteronomy 18:21–22, namely that if what has been prophesied does not come to pass then that prophecy is false.

### **A GENERAL CONCLUSION ON PROPHECY TODAY**

Whilst we do not admit special revelations which are contrary to canonical prophecy, we cannot nevertheless exclude the possibility of many revelations coming through contemporary prophecy. These, as we say, will not be at variance with that which is canonical, and they certainly could add nothing to them. Every ministry, in some sense must be prophetic and in another sense some ministries will be specifically prophetic.

What we must not neglect is the *prophetic deposit*. By this we mean the prophetic teaching given through the millenniums to man. All of it is precious. The apostles spoke nothing but what was in that deposit. That is they valued what had been spoken, as well as what was being spoken apostolically. That is why Paul can speak of the household of God being 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets'. He would see the apostolic word as deriving from the prophetic and so being prophetic. Christ had told the apostles that all Scripture spoke of him. The use of the term 'prophets' in Ephesians 2:20 (cf. Ephes. 3:5, I Cor. 3:9, 11) doubtless refers to New Testament prophetic truth, but then truth based on the Old Testament prophetic deposit. The OT and NT prophetic deposit makes up the sum of (canonical) prophecy. It is by this we walk.

Whether then it be the office of a prophet, the charisma of prophecy, the general prophetic utterance of the Christian community, or the general use of the prophetic deposit, prophetic utterance is a dire need today, as in all ages. We need to see continually, that 'Where there is no

vision the people perish,' or, 'Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint'. For this reason we need to listen to the prophetic deposit of the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. Because the Revelation has been given for the church-age it has immense value. Indeed without it we would be greatly hampered in understanding history, especially the history in which we are living. We need then, to become skilful in the prophetic word, both in knowing and in uttering it. As we know it we are enabled to live in it, and as we live in it we are enabled both to know and utter it. This is the true prophecy.

## APPENDIX

### THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

**‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ (Revelation 19:10)**

Because of the importance of this term we append the following interpretations and commentaries regarding its meaning.

**Swete** (p.249): ‘“Those who have the witness of Jesus” are those who carry on His witness in the world.’ (*The Apocalypse of St. John*. London: Macmillan, 1907).

**Caird** (p.238): “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit that inspires the prophets.” It is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet... It is the Gospel of the Cross that gives to the prophets their assurance of their mission and its ultimate success (of. 10:7). To be a prophet in the streets of the great city is to follow the steps of the master (11:3, 10).’ (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966).

**Wilcock** (p. 174): ‘Does it mean, “He who has the spirit of prophecy will witness to Jesus”, or does it mean, “He who has the witness of Jesus will prophesy”? The more acceptable meaning will be the one which fits better in the general sense of the passage; and the view taken here is that the second interpretation is more likely... John himself has “the witness of Jesus”; therefore he too can prophesy, and has words to proclaim which are just as amazing [as the words of the angel].’ (*I saw Heaven opened*. London: IVP, 1975).

**Eller** (p. 173) paraphrases as follows:’ “I, the angel, like you, John, the prophet, have significance only in the testimony I bear to Jesus; so let’s keep our attention on *martyria Jesu* rather than upon the bearers of it!”’ (*The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

**Beasley–Murray** (p.276): ‘... the... sentence must mean, “The testimony given by Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.” ... We should,

therefore, interpret verse 10 as meaning that the testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy.’ (*The Book of Revelation*. London: Oliphants, 1974).

**Morris** (p.228): ‘The “testimony of Jesus” might mean “the testimony which Jesus bore” (and is now committed to his servants), or it might mean “the testimony borne to Jesus”. If we take the former meaning the whole will signify that the message of Jesus is the spirit, the heart of all prophecy... If we accept the latter meaning, then the significance is that the true prophecy will always manifest itself in bearing witness .to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets such as John, and the angels, all alike, bear their witness to the Son of God.’

**Morris** quotes Preston and Hanson (Torch Bible Commentaries, 1957), ad loc, ‘Jesus and his revelation of God, which Paul calls “the mind of Christ”, is the content of the prophet’s message as it is of what John had been told to write in his book.’ (*Revelation*. London: Tyndale, 1969).

**Hailey** (p.380): ‘The testimony of Jesus is that truth to which he bore witness (John 18:37) which was the word given to him from God (John 8:28, 12:47, 14:24, Rev. 1:1, et all This testimony borne by him must be held faithfully by all disciples.’ (*Revelation—An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

**Simcox** (p.177): ‘... what is said to St. John as a prophet is in its measure true of all Christians. All in their measure are witnesses for Christ, and all are partakers of His Spirit; and therefore all are prophets in the same sense that they are all priests and king.’ (*Cambridge Greek Testament*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

**Moffat** (p.465): ‘“for the testimony or witness (ie. borne by) Jesus is (ie. constitutes) the spirit of prophecy”. This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying (22:20). It is the self–revelation of Jesus (ie. according to Rev. 1: 1 due ultimately to God) which moves the Christian prophets. It forms at once the impulse and subject of their utterances (cf. Ignat. Rom. viii.; Eph. vi.). The motives and material for genuine prophecy consist in readiness to allow the spirit of Jesus to bring the truth of God before the mind and conscience (cf. 3:14, 22)? (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol.5. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).

**Lenski** (p.546): ‘What the “testimony of Jesus” is, the speaker states: it is “the spirit of prophecy,” which may be explained: By holding firmly to the testimony which Jesus made and conveyed to us, thou and I and all

the brethren hold the actual spirit of the prophecy, the inner content of the divine prophecy. “The prophecy” is defined like “the Word,” “the salvation.” Some restrict this to the prophecy contained in these visions of Revelation, but there is no need for such a restriction. Because we have and hold this testimony, which is no less than here stated, we worship no one but God while we are here on earth or, like this speaker in heaven and on the throne.’ (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963).

**Trites** (p.157): ‘In other words it is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet.’ (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

## NOTES

1. Friedrich in *The Theological Dictionary of the NT* (Kittel, Eerdmans, Michigan. 1968. Vol.6, p.849) sees the new community as wholly prophetic: ‘Acc. to Ac. 2:4; 4:31 all are filled with the prophetic Spirit and acc. to Ac. 2:16ff. it is a specific mark of the age of fulfilment that the Spirit does not only lay hold of individuals but that all members of the eschatological community without distinction are called’ to prophesy. In Corinth there was obviously a greater number of prophets, for those who spoke at divine service had to be limited to two or three. 1 Cor 14:29. In spite of this, Paul urges the Corinthians to strive after the charisma of prophecy, I Cor 14:1, 5, 12, 39. It is not a gift for the chosen few. It can be imparted to any man even though in practice it may—be limited to a comparatively small circle.’

2. We cannot understand ‘witness’ in the NT unless we first understand it in the OT For a helpful understanding of the whole subject I am indebted to a monograph by Allison A. Trites entitled, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977). He has thoroughly researched the concept of witness in both the OT and the NT His primary conclusion is that *witness is juridical*, ie. that God is actually amassing the evidence concerning Himself and His character against the false ideas which the human race—and even Israel—have regarding Him and against Him. In some cases He even invites His listeners to enter into the very courtroom, state their cases, amass their evidence and assess the verdict. This verdict is always weighted for God and against rebellious man.

3. There have of course been women prophets such as Huldah and Deborah. In Luke chapters 1 and 2 Mary, Elizabeth and Anna all prophesy, even if they are not specifically called ‘prophetesses’.

4. Notice in the Revelation that the 144,000 seem to be especially dedicated and dynamic. It may even be that they are the martyrs. The word ‘martyr’ is really ‘witness’, but those who are killed in witnessing especially deserve this name. 18:24 (cf. 6:1 1) indicates those killed were prophets. It may be then that the 217th constitute the actual martyr–witness element without detriment to the entire body of believers.