

Can We Trust New Testament Prophets?

Acts 21:4,9-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-8-2009

Introduction

A. The reason for this sermon

Today we come to a very controversial section in the book of Acts where people tend to dig in their heels to protect theological turf. I hope I don't do that this morning. It is easy to do, but we should all have open minds to what the Scripture says.

I think you will see why this passage is a crucial passage on the Charismatic debate. So I really can't just skip over it. As I pointed out last week, there are many different interpretations of the verses we read. I have no illusions that one little sermon will settle the issue completely in your minds. And that's fine. I will be happy if it just gets you studying. But for you to appreciate why I am doing this, I need to give at least a little bit of background on why there is even a debate.

On the issue of spiritual gifts people will often divide others up into two basic camps – Cessationist and Non-Cessationist. Have the supernatural spiritual gifts ceased or have they not ceased? But there are so many variations within each of those camps that it is not helpful to even use the term of Cessationist versus non-Cessationist, unless you are looking at the polar extremes. Let me give you an example: I think most anybody would consider Wayne Grudem to be a Non-Cessationist, and some of you would consider him to be a flaming Charismatic. He believes that the supernatural gifts continue to operate. Yet in chapter 1 of his book, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, he argues that the Old Testament gift of inspired prophets have passed away, and in chapter 2 he argues that the spiritual gift of Apostleship (which he really considers to be the same as an OT prophet) has also passed away as it gave the same kind of inspired prophecy as the Old Testament prophets did. And I believe that he has to take that position in order to protect the integrity of the Word of God. So here is the question: "If he believes one New Testament spiritual gift has passed away, is he a Cessationist or a Non-Cessationist? Well, it depends on what you mean. On the other side of the isle is a fascinating paper by Vern Poythress titled, *Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts*:

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Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology.

So he labels himself a Cessationist, yet argues that much that is being experienced in the Charismatic camp is legitimate and needs to be embraced. So is he really a Cessationist? I just finished reading a book that Joel Beeke highly recommends that argues that the majority of Westminster Divines in the 1600's were Cessationist, yet you look at the dreams, visions, guidance, and lower-level prophecies that some of them affirmed and you begin to wonder what Cessationist means. They clearly believed that no more inspired, infallible, authoritative, inerrant revelation continues. So in that sense they are Cessationist, but so are many Charismatics – especially Third Wave ones. So the bottom line is that we shouldn't throw around those labels too loosely unless we are willing to define them.

I would label myself as a *kind* of Cessationist because I believe two of the twenty-four or so gifts of the Spirit have ceased. But hey, if I hold to twenty-two of the twenty-four gifts, am I not also a Continuationist? I hold to just one less New Testament gift than Grudem does. I believe that Inspired Apostleship and Inspired Prophecy have ceased. Of course (and here comes the rub), I believe that all prophecy was inspired and infallible. And that brings us to the purpose for this sermon (and this is a perfect text to deal with this because Charismatics use this chapter to prove that I am wrong). Wayne Grudem argues (as did some Puritans) that there are two kinds of prophecy. He argues that Old Testament prophecy was inspired and communicated the very words of God. He argues that New Testament prophecy is quite different and does not communicate the very words of God, but rather, he says that it is a revelation imperfectly received and imperfectly communicated to others. It is very fallible. Because it is not inspired, he says that people should not receive a prophecy without using Spirit-led judgment (and he appeals to 1 Corinthians 14 and Acts 21 for that), and he says to reject such a prophecy is not a sin, but an option. He appeals to Acts 21:4 to show that Paul was not looked down upon for disobeying a prophetic pronouncement. He appeals to Acts 21:11 to try to show that New Testament prophecy can always be subject to error. So those are the kinds of differences of view that I want us to interact with this morning, while as much as possible dealing with every word in this text. So this is going to be one of those “thinking-cap-sermons.” I've put a lot into your outline so that you don't have to take extensive notes and can concentrate on trying to understand the debate.

It is rare for me to ever counter one person all the way through a sermon, but I am doing so today for three reasons: First, I think it will be

helpful since so many of you are familiar with Grudem's views. Second, the influence of Grudem's writings is huge. And it should be – he's a great guy. He has done a great service to the church 1) by opposing liberalism, feminism, homosexuality, Marxism, and other attacks on the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, 2) and by moving many in the charismatic (or non-Cessationist) movement to a more Scripture-based position. As such I see him as an ally and friend in the Gospel.

However, (and this is my third reason for using him throughout the outline), his approach to the prophecies in Acts 21 could unintentionally undermine the great work that he has done. And I have talked to Charismatic pastors in this city who have borrowed a lot from his book, but have used it to argue that Scripture is not inerrant. *Grudem* would not do that. He is a *champion* of inerrancy. But, one pastor has reasoned that if what Scripture terms "prophecy" can be in error (as he says it can), then why cannot Scripture (which is called "prophecy")¹ also have error? If a mixture of divine and human means a mixture of truth and error in congregational prophecy, why can't a mixture of divine and human in Scripture also mean a mixture of truth and error in what 2Peter 1:20 speaks of as the "prophecy of Scripture"? So it is a relevant question.

It is my belief that there is no difference between prophetic speech and prophetic writing other than the fact that the latter was committed to paper, and some (but not all) of the prophetic writings were also included by God in the canon.² 2 Peter 1:21 is clear when it says, "**prophecy never**

¹ Rev. 1:3; 2:19; 22:7,10,18,19; Romans 16:26. Though people question the Romans 16:26 passage, I believe it clearly refers to New Testament Scriptures. It speaks of the "...mystery kept secret since the world began but *now* made manifest, and, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations..." In this passage the New Testament Scriptures are called "the Scriptures of the prophets" (NASB). That this cannot be a reference to Old Testament Scriptures can be seen from three facts 1) the "mystery" Paul is referring to has not been revealed in the Old Testament (see also Eph. 3:4-5), 2) this "mystery" is *now* revealed, and 3) this "mystery" is now being made known by the Scriptures of the prophets to all nations. Though there are commentaries that differ with my interpretation, they fly in the face of these three stubborn facts.

Godet points out, "these writings are represented as the means of propagating a new revelation, and should consequently designate new prophetic writings. I think that the only explanation of this term in harmony with the apostles' thought is got from the passage which we have already quoted, Eph. iii. 3-6: 'For God by revelation made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.' The apostles are here called prophets, inasmuch as they are bearers of a new revelation. What then are their writings, if not prophetic writings?" (p. 505).

C.K. Barrett points out, "the combination of 'now' and 'prophetic writings' is curious in itself" if those prophetic writings refer to the Old Testament since it was precisely Paul's point that the revelation of the mystery was now, not then.

² Old Testament saints were constantly being referred to accurate information in other inspired (but non-canonical) books. Until the canon was finished they not only needed supplemental revelation by way of dreams, visions, oral prophecies, etc. (see Heb. 1:1), but they were also given temporary (non-canonical) books that were inspired. Scripture refers contemporary readers to the following non-canonical (though inspired) books as being trustworthy for further research by contemporaries: Book of The Wars of Jehovah (Numb. 21:14), Book of Jashar (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18),

came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke [notice this is not just writing – they “spoke”] as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Thus it was not simply Paul’s writings that are the very Word of God. Even Paul’s prophetic *speech* was the Word of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says the same thing: “**when you received the word of God which you heard from us [this is speech here], you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**” Even Paul’s oral prophecies were considered to be the very words of God every bit as much as Old Testament prophecies were. So it’s not just apostolic writings, but also apostolic prophecies that are inspired.

B. Reminder of what we have learned about apostleship and prophecy – the two “foundation” gifts.

I won’t go over all the Scriptures that we have looked at in the past. We don’t have time to do a review of the book of Revelation,³ Isaiah 8,⁴

another Book of Samuel on the Kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25), Book of the Chronicles of David (1 Chron. 27:24), Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 4:32; 11:42), Book of Solomon’s Natural History (1 Kings 4:32,33), History of the Kings (1 Kings 9:1; 2 Chron. 20:34; 33:18), Book of Samuel the Seer (1 Chron. 29:29), Book of Nathan the Seer (1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29), Book of Shemaiah the Seer (2 Chron. 12:15), Book of Gad the Seer (1 Chron. 29:29), Book of the Sayings of the Seers (2 Chron. 9:29), Book of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chron. 9:29), Book of the Visions of Iddo (2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15), Book of Jehu the Son of Hanani (2 Chron. 20:34).

Why were those inspired books not included in the canon? Scripture indicates that the canon was being developed to give the Kingdom generation (our generation) all the information they would need until eternity. Scripture explicitly affirms this: (“Now all these things . . . were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11; cf. 9:10 and Rom. 15:4). Peter says, “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel” (1 Pet. 1:12). Or to use Old Testament language, “This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord” (Psalm 102:18). Though the Old Testament saints were commanded to live by the progressively unfolding Scriptures (as well as by other revelation from God [cf. Heb. 1:1]), God always had in mind His purpose for a completed canon when he inspired and gave Scripture.

³ There is far too much material in Revelation to summarize here, but briefly:

- A. The New Testament “mystery” revealed to the apostles and prophets (see Eph. 3:4-5) was about the be finished when John wrote that book in 66 AD. He says, “in the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7). Note that these judgments “must shortly take place” (1:1; 22:6), and must happen “soon” (2:16; 3:11; 22:7,12,20) in fulfillment of O.T. references to 70 A.D. (10:7).
- B. A second clue is that the book of Revelation uses the word “book” in a broader way than merely the scroll of Revelation. (5:2f.; 10:1-11; 22:7,9,10). For example, before Revelation was completed, and certainly before it was distributed to the churches, the messenger tells John, “I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who are keeping the words of this book” (22:9). How could the saints be keeping the words of Revelation when it hadn’t been given to them yet? On the other hand, if “book” includes the whole canon to which Revelation was being added, then the passage makes sense. And indeed, the word “book” is used to refer to everything God had written (Gal. 3:10). This book was added to bit by bit. When Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, they were placed together as one canon of Scripture. Thus, in Joshua 8:31,34 and 23:6 Joshua calls the Pentateuch “the Book of the Law of Moses.” When Joshua wrote the book of Joshua, he didn’t have to wait till the council of Jamnia in the first century A.D. to get his work canonized. It was canonized as soon as it was written: “Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.” He added to the book of Scripture by God’s authorization! Even though there were inspired words that were deliberately excluded from the canon, what was to become Scripture was immediately treated as part of “the Book.” Thus, scribes who taught the Scriptures were said to teach “the book of the Law of the LORD” (2 Chron. 17:9). Psalm 40:7 refers to the “volume of the Book” when it refers to Scripture generally. Isaiah tells people to “search from the book of the

Daniel 9,⁵ Zechariah 13,⁶ Joel 2,⁷ and other key passages that indicate that prophecy would cease with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Part of the reason

LORD, and read: not one of these shall fail.” Often the individual books of the Bible are referred to as the scroll of the Book (cf. e.g. Ezek. 2:9). Thus the singular word “book” was often applied to a body of scrolls (cf. e.g. Acts 7:42). Christ said that all the Scriptures wrote about Him, and Hebrews 10:7 words the same truth this way: “In the volume of the Book it is written of Me.”

- C. Thus, Revelation 22 is making a statement about the total cessation of prophecy when it says,
 “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: ‘If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.’” (vv. 18-19)

In making this statement, Revelation is doing something revolutionary. The “Book” of Scripture had been added to for thousands of years. But now God was saying, “No more. The canon is closed.” And that would not have surprised godly Jews since the Old Testament had repeatedly prophesied that. As Revelation 10:7 says, “...in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.”

- D. In this and other ways, the book of Revelation declares itself to be the last prophetic pronouncement that God would send. It speaks of a finality to the “mystery,” to “prophecies,” to “prophets” and to inspired revelation.

⁴ Isaiah 8-9 is repeatedly quoted in the New Testament with a first century fulfillment. Isaiah 8:14-15 is specifically applied to the casting away of Israel in 70 AD (see Rom. 9:31-33; 11:9-11; Luke 2:34; 20:17; 1Pet 2:8), while Isaiah 8:21-22 describes the anguish of the Jewish war (see Luke 21:11-12,23,24; 23:28-31). It is in this context that verse 16 refers to the cessation of inspired revelation (“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples”), verse 19 labels seeking revelation outside of Scripture as demonic, and verse 20 says, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” From that point on, the Scriptures are to be the only infallible guide for God’s people.

⁵ Daniel 9 also has a terminal point in the war against Jerusalem (vv. 26-27). Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, six things must happen (v. 24), one of which is “to seal up vision and prophet.” Both the vehicle of inspired revelation (“prophet”) and the inspired revelation itself (the “vision” of the prophet) was to be closed off. Note that the same Hebrew word for “seal up” is translated as “make an end of” earlier in the verse. This speaks of an entire cessation of prophecy prior to the seven year war against Jerusalem which lasted from 66-73 AD, and exactly in the middle of which the temple was burned (see “in the middle of the week”) in verse 27.

⁶ Zechariah 13 also has a first century context. Chapter 12:10a was fulfilled in the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost; 12:10b is quoted in John 19:34-37 as being fulfilled in the piercing of Jesus’ side; 12:11-14 must be fulfilled in a period of history when Israel is still distinguishable by tribes and families (impossible after the scattering in the first century); 13:1 refers to Christ’s redemption (see John 19:34; Rev. 21:6,7; 1John 1:7; Ezek. 47:1-5); 13:7 is quoted in Matthew 26:31,56 and Mark 14:27 as being fulfilled in 30 AD; 13:8-9 is a reference to 70 AD when two-thirds of Israel is destroyed; all of the above sections are linked by the time indicator “in that day” (12:4,8,9,11; 13:1,2,4). Therefore the context should not be stretched beyond the first century.

In this context prophecy is said to cease:

- In connection with the advance of the Gospel (“cut off the names of idols ... unclean spirits”) God says of prophecy, “I will also cause the prophets ... to depart from the land.” (13:2)
- Verse 3 says that at that time (i.e. when prophets are caused to cease) that every prophet will be treated as a false prophet (13:3)
- Eventually even those who pretend to be prophets will be ashamed to admit it (13:4-6)
- So at some time in “the last days” of the Old Covenant (see below), true prophets will cease to exist.
- Even if the above interpretation is rejected, one still has to deal with the clear statement that at some point in history God Himself will remove prophets from the land (v. 2) and “if anyone still prophesies” his message will be rejected and he will be put to death as a false prophet (vs. 3-6).

⁷ Joel 2 details a time of God’s presence and blessing with His people (vs. 18-27) and then speaks of a later time in which people would prophesy and dream dreams and see visions. “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” Connected to these spiritual gifts are miraculous signs in verses 30-31. All of these spiritual and physical signs will occur “before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” as God’s wrath is poured out on Jerusalem in 70 AD (vs. 30-32). There is not space to uncover this passage fully, but the following points are relevant:

- The church can have God’s full favor (vs. 18-27) without having this pouring out of charismatic gifts. Therefore, there was a time of God’s blessing that was not accompanied by these “afterward” gifts of revelation.
- These revelatory gifts are said to come after the Inter-testamental Period, during a time period called “the last days” in Acts 2:17, but be a phenomena that will be experienced before the terrible day of the Lord.

for the 70 AD terminus is that one of the three functions of a prophet was to bring covenant lawsuits against a nation or church. Revelation clearly indicates that the prophets were bringing a covenant lawsuit against Israel and unbelieving Jews. Once Israel was judged, there was no longer a need for this primary purpose for a prophet.

But turn with me to Ephesians 2:19-21, and we will look at another primary purpose for the prophets. This is an important text for Wayne Grudem, and I think it would be helpful to at least give a review of what we have said about this text.

Ephesians 2:19 ¶ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, Ephesians 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, Ephesians 2:22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Notice especially verse 20 – “**having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.**” Paul is saying that the foundation of the church was being laid in the first century, and that foundation is made up of three parts: 1) Jesus Christ who is the chief cornerstone, 2) the apostles who are part of the foundation and 3) the prophets who also part of the foundation.

Wayne Grudem sees the significance of this passage as indicating that the apostles have indeed passed away. Just as you can't have multiple cornerstones and multiple Christ's in every century, you can't have multiple foundations and apostles in every century. That's why Paul said that he was the “last” of the Apostles (1 Cor. 15:7-8) and an apostle “born out of due time” (Gal. 1:16-18). Whatever this passage is talking about was clearly intended only for the first century. Grudem and I are agreed on that.

A second thing we agree on is that the context clearly indicates that the foundation is *not* made up of apostles and Old Testament prophets. Whatever the prophets are, he and I are agree that the context in chapter 3:5

c. This period of time during which the revelation is given is called “the last days” in Acts 2:17. Every reference to “last days” in the Bible refers to the time period of foreign domination of Israel that culminates in Israel's destruction as a nation in 70 A.D. Thus Jesus was born in the last days (1 Pet 1:20), spoke in the last days (Heb. 1:1), the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost on the last days (Acts 2:16-17), These are the last days of Israel, temple, sacrifices, priesthood, Old Covenant, etc. Thus, Hebrews uses the present tense when it says “Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” Heb. 8:13. The final “shaking” and evidence of the new kingdom was to be the destruction of Jerusalem (Heb. 12:25-29 with Haggai 2:6). The following is a list of every occurrence of the phrase “the last days” and its equivalents to demonstrate that it has reference to pre-70 A.D. history.

means that it isn't Old Testament prophets because it is a *new* revelation given to these prophets that hadn't been given to the Old Testament prophets. And we will look at that new revelation in a bit.

But where we part paths is where Grudem argues that the Greek Granville Sharp Rule (it's a rule you study in advanced grammar) could be used here to indicate that Paul was not talking about apostles *plus* New Testament prophets (as two different people), but about apostles who are also prophets. In other words, on his view, the apostles and prophets are exactly the same people. Now I will admit that if the Granville Sharp Rule applies here, then he is right. Why is this significant? Because whoever is being referred to here is foundational to the church and never to be repeated. I won't bore you with answers to his every proof for this unusual reading. I will just point to one fatal flaw: his reading violates the Granville Sharp Rule. And there have been many essays that have demonstrated that. For example, Daniel B. Wallace in this advanced Greek Grammar explicitly says that this verse does not fit the Granville Sharpe Rule. He gives extensive discussion to this Greek rule and states, "...according to Sharp, the rule applied absolutely *only* with personal, singular, and nonproper nouns. The significance of these requirements can hardly be overestimated, for those who have misunderstood Sharp's principle have done so almost without exception because they were unaware of the restrictions that Sharp set forth."⁸ He spends 20 pages discussing this Greek rule, and demonstrates how Grudem's reading is impossible. It's on pages 284-285. Let me read that for you. (By the way, it's kudos to how important Grudem is that even a Grammar Textbook takes notice of him.) But here is what Wallace says:

This text has become something of a theological lightning rod in conservative circles in America in the past several years, largely due to the work of Wayne Grudem. Grudem argues that the apostles and prophets are identical here. This is essential to his view of NT prophecy: on the one hand, he holds to a high view of scripture, viz., that the autographs are inerrant; on the other hand, he believes that non-apostolic prophets both in the early church and today mixed error with truth. If in Eph 2:20 the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and *other* prophets, then it would seem that Grudem either has to deny inerrancy or affirm that non-apostolic prophets only spoke truth (and were thus on par with OT prophets). Hence, he spends much ink arguing that in the NT the prophets are a separate class of individuals. This distinction allows him the luxury of embracing an inerrant NT while admitting that today's prophets (as well as first century non-apostolic prophets) can commit error in their predictions.

⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 272.

We must refrain from entering into the larger issues of charismata and fallible prophecy in our treatment of this text. Our point is simply that the syntactical evidence is very much against the ‘identical’ view, even though syntax has been the primary grounds used in behalf of it.

The bottom line is that the argument Grudem uses for apostles ending also proves that *prophets* end if this Greek rule is honored. And there are many other proofs I have shared with you in the past on why prophecy has ended.

For those who object that there wouldn’t have been any need for infallible prophets in every congregation when most of them didn’t write Scripture or say anything that would require infallibility, I will say two things: 1) First, Why was there a need for thirteen apostles when only four of them wrote Scripture? Obviously their infallibility was needed even though they didn’t write Scripture. That by itself should answer the objection. 2) Second, it appears that there actually was an enormous need for infallible guidance in every congregation. When we looked at Acts 15 we looked at the almost church-destroying issue of whether Gentiles could come into the church and be considered part of Israel without getting circumcised. It was a controversy that ravaged the church. Every church in the empire had this major issue and every church needed prophetic revelation to remind them of this mystery. So this is the second of three reasons why prophets were needed in every church in the first century. Keep reading in Ephesians 3 and you will see in context that the prophets did have an important foundational function. Their infallible gift was indeed needed.

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

Ephesians 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Ephesians 3:3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,

Ephesians 3:4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), [Notice this repetition of the mystery which Paul fought and fought for – that the middle wall of partition had been broken down and Gentiles didn’t have to become Jews to be part of Israel. It was a mystery. Continuing to read. Verse 5:]

Ephesians 3:5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit [notice this next phrase] to His holy apostles and prophets:

Ephesians 3:6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

Ephesians 3:7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Apostles and prophets were both ministers of the same mystery. They were needed to settle this mystery for all time in the first century. And both were equally up to the task because both were infallible representatives of God. That didn't mean they couldn't also reveal other things beyond their three primary tasks. Let me give some examples. Just as Samuel wrote Scripture *and* helped Saul find his donkeys by prophetic insight, these prophets could have a high calling of 1) bringing covenant lawsuits, 2) revealing this amazing mystery, 3) protecting believers from the deception of the Great Apostasy, *as well as* doing mundane things like warning Paul of danger. But prophets were equally part of the revelational foundation with the apostles.

And we don't despise prophesying when we don't despise Paul's epistle that he wrote by prophetic power. That in a nutshell is my position. It's a pretty big nutshell, I realize! That's a huge introduction. But I believe that all the gifts are useful for today, but that the gifts of apostleship and prophecy have been sealed up in the Scriptures and operate as the Spirit quickens the Word to us. And by the way, five of the New Testament books weren't even written by apostles. Prophets wrote them. Luke was *not* an apostle. He was a prophet just like Jeremiah was.

With that as a background, we will now look at Acts 21, which is the most credible text that Grudem could use to try to destroy my position. Verse 11 is Grudem's key verse, but he deals with verse 4 as well, so we will start there.

II. Questions raised on what is happening in verse 4.

Verse 4 says, “**And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.**” Let me first of all give Wayne Grudem's interpretation of this verse. He says,

But if this really is a report of prophesying, as it certainly seems to be, then it is very significant for understanding the nature of prophetic authority in ordinary New Testament congregations. It is significant because Paul simply disobeyed their words, something he would not have done if he had thought that they were speaking the very words of God....

In short, this passage indicates a type of prophecy which was not thought by Paul to possess absolute divine authority in its actual words: the prophets at Tyre were not speaking ‘words of the Lord.’

... There is a revelation from the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Tyre, and in response to that revelation, they tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem. [Dr. Gaffin agrees – I should point out that Gaffin's interpretation is the same as mine – Dr Gaffin agrees.] The difference in our viewpoints is that I would call the response

or report of that revelation a ‘prophecy’, and Dr Gaffin would not. [And I would add, Phil Kayser would not. He goes on:] But whatever term is used, it is significant that we would both say that there can be a ‘revelation’ from the Holy Spirit to a person or persons, and also a spoken response to that revelation which can have ‘impaired validity’ and ‘unreliability.’ That is really the essence of what I am arguing for in this book, and what – it seems to me – the New Testament usually calls ‘prophecy’.⁹

A. Did the Spirit tell Paul not to go up to Jerusalem or the disciples?

1. Note the “they” (in contrast to Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12)

Now I should point out that I agree with Grudem on most of what he says here. The main thing that I don’t agree with is whether we should call *both* what is revealed *and* what they say as “prophecy.” Since the text does not, I think we should be cautious.

Here are some questions: First, did the *Spirit* tell Paul to stay out of Jerusalem or did the *disciples* or was it both? Both Grudem and I agree that the Spirit did not say that, or there would be a contradiction in the sacred text. Verse 4 says, “**They told Paul...**” There was something that the Spirit enabled as well, and we will look at that. But it was the *disciples* who were said to speak. There are other prophecies in Acts where the Spirit is said to speak. Acts 13:2 – “And the Spirit said...” But here it says, “They told Paul.”

2. Note that the Spirit clearly led Paul to go to Jerusalem earlier (19:21; 20:22-25)

I won’t repeat the extended proofs that I went over last week, but it is clear that the Spirit of God has already led Paul to go to Jerusalem, as twenty-two of my commentaries point out. Acts 19:21 says that Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. Acts 20:22-25 we saw that Paul was bound in the Spirit for Jerusalem, and that in every city the Spirit had said that Paul would be in Jerusalem and would suffer chains and tribulations there. Those would be false prophecies if Paul didn’t head to Jerusalem.

3. Note that by inspiration the Spirit said Paul would be in Jerusalem and authorized his bringing the Gentile donation (Rom. 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:3; Rom. 15:30-33; etc).

But I think the inspired writings of Paul are exceptionally clear that Paul had to go to Jerusalem. Over and over Paul said that he would be there

⁹ Grudem, *the Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 94-95.

to bring the offerings of the Gentile churches. Romans would not be an inerrant book if Paul did not end up in Jerusalem. And FF Bruce gives other arguments that support what I am saying here.

4. Note that Jesus approves of what Paul did (Acts 23:11)

We saw last week that Jesus approved of what Paul did in Jerusalem in Acts 23:11, and said that he must do the same thing in Rome.

5. Note that Luke and the disciples are finally convinced this really was “the will of the Lord” (Acts 21:14).

And in Acts 21:14 Paul finally convinces Luke and all the others that going to Jerusalem was indeed the will of the Lord. **“So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’”** On this Grudem and I are agreed, so I won’t belabor it.

B. Then what did the Spirit do (note the words “through the Spirit”)?

1. Is Grudem correct when he says that “through the Spirit” expresses “a rather loose relationship between the Holy Spirit and the prophet, since it allows room for a large degree of personal influence by the human person himself”?¹⁰

But if that is the case, then the natural question comes up, “Why did Luke say that they told Paul “through the Spirit”? What does “through the Spirit” mean? Grudem says that it expresses “a rather loose relationship between the Holy Spirit and the prophet, since it allows room for a large degree of personal influence by the human person himself.” But I don’t see how that could be if the only thing reported here is what the Spirit Himself did *not* say. It may refer to a general influence of the Spirit, yes, but I don’t see how the part Grudem sees as wrong could be attributed to the Spirit in any way. And besides, the term “through the Spirit” can refer to inerrant prophecy.

2. Was this inspired truth such as Jesus spoke “through the Spirit” that contained a moral imperative (Acts 1:2)?

For example, Acts 1:2 says about Jesus, **“until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen.”** That appears to be quite strong – moral imperatives from the mouth of Jesus. Grudem doesn’t

¹⁰ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 90.

want the phrase to have *that* strong of a meaning, yet it is certainly a possible meaning.

3. Was this a prophecy such as Agabus spoke “through the Spirit” (Acts 11:28)?

The same phrase “through the Spirit” is used in Acts 11:28 when it speaks of a previous prophecy of Agabus that was fulfilled. So it could refer to prophecy.

4. Was this equivalent to the inspiration given to the apostles “through the Spirit” (1Cor. 2:10)?

In 1Corinthians 2:10 it clearly refers to inspiration given to the apostles. But Grudem doesn’t want to go there. He wants it to mean an uninspired prophecy.

5. Or was this a lesser “word of knowledge” or “word of wisdom” or some other gift “through the Spirit” (see 1Cor. 12:8)?

On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 12:8 indicates that it wouldn’t even have to *be* a prophecy. It says, “...**for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit.**” I have had words of wisdom and words of knowledge, but I would never want to call such prophecy. So this could be something along those lines.

6. Or was this a general influence upon them “through the Spirit” (Eph. 3:16; 6:18; Rom. 5:5; 2Tim. 1:14)?

Under sub point 6 I list some Scriptures that would support Grudem’s thesis of general influence of the Spirit, but those aren’t helpful for him because those are clearly *not* called prophecy. That’s the key point.

7. Or was this a previous inerrant revelation about the coming danger (see parallel in verse 11) that enabled them to warn Paul and tell him not to go to Jerusalem? Did Paul disobey a prophecy? Or was he ignoring something lesser? Or is this verse parallel to verses 10-14?

I don’t want to be dogmatic on this verse, but it is my view, and the view of the vast majority of commentaries on my shelf that the saints got a previous prophetic revelation about the dangers that Paul would face quite parallel to verse 11. By means of this supernatural knowledge (that’s the “through the Spirit”), they approached Paul and not only told him about the

danger, but added that Paul should not go. Without the supernatural knowledge they wouldn't have even known to make this logical conclusion. So they make an OK conclusion (but it's not the right conclusion) based on this Spirit given knowledge. But there was a distinction between the advice that *they* gave and the former revelation that the *Spirit* gave. Luke leaves it vague because he is going to amplify in verses 10-14 how all these examples of previous prophecy worked out. He gives four examples of prophecy to Paul in these chapters and then amplifies only one to illustrate.

There have been other attempts to reconcile this verse¹¹ with the verses saying that the Spirit told Paul to go to Jerusalem. But to me, this makes the most sense. And as I mentioned earlier, it is the position of twenty-two of my commentaries.

III. Questions raised on the daughters who prophesied in verse 9.

A. Are Luke's brief accounts of prophets (Luke 20:23; 21:4,9) being thematically explained by 21:10-14?

OK, let's move down to verse 9, which is the next prophecy in this chapter. "Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied." I agree with Grudem that they likely prophesied the same things that chapter 20 has said happened in every city, and probably the same thing that the saints in verse 4 and Agabus in verse 11 prophesied. We are not told that, but in terms of how Luke crafts the story, that seems reasonable.

B. Does this verse show "that these prophecies did not have the authority of words of the Lord"?¹²

But I don't see how Grudem can get from the text that this verse shows "that these prophecies did not have the authority of words of the Lord." He concludes this by saying 1) first, that women don't have authority over men, and certainly not over apostles, 2) second, that if their prophecies were infallible, their prophecies would be on a par with those of the apostles and this would give them authority over the apostles when they prophesied

¹¹ The following are the three most common interpretations:

- a. The interpretation I have given.
- b. The interpretation that says that the Spirit did indeed tell Paul to go to Jerusalem to see if Paul would be steadfast to his previous revelation. In other words, this is a kind of "Word test" to see if Paul will begin to question the previous clear revelation. [This interpretation is ethically difficult for me to accept because it appears to make the Holy Spirit contradict himself just to test (confuse?) Paul.]
- c. The Spirit did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem and Paul disobeyed an explicit order of God. [In light of the verses cited in this week's and last week's sermons, this does not seem credible.]

¹² Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 96.

to them. But that does not logically follow. It is not that women can't have *apostolic* authority over men. They can't have *any* authority over men. On the other hand, if the prophecies that they gave fit the description of 2 Peter 1:21, then their prophesying is not any more exercising authority over the apostles than Balaam's donkey was exercising authority over Balaam when God spoke through the donkey. They are merely vehicles for the direct work of God. Otherwise we get into trouble in many places in Acts. For example, prophets in Acts 13 command Paul and Barnabas to go as missionaries. Does that mean that they have authority over apostles? No. They are simply giving direct revelation from the Lord. Keep in mind that 2 Peter 1:21 says, "**for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**" So I don't have any problem with the idea of women prophets speaking to men as Deborah did. I do have a problem with women *teaching* men or *exercising authority* over men because this is clearly forbidden in the New Testament. But when it comes to prophecy it is *God* speaking, not Deborah. And notice that Peter isn't just talking about written prophecies of the Bible. He is talking about spoken prophecies – all prophecies. So again, Grudem is reading into the text something that is not there. It simply says that they prophesied, and that should be interpreted as any Hebrew would – in light of Old Testament prophecy – inerrant prophecy.

IV. Questions raised about Agabus.

A. Is there a distinction between an Old Testament prophet "who speaks God's very words" and a New Testament prophet "who speaks on the basis of some external influence"¹³ and has "no absolute divine authority"¹⁴ but rather is "speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind"?¹⁵

But now we come to the heart of Grudem's thesis – verse 11. Speaking of Agabus Luke says, "**When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'**" Because there aren't any so-called modern prophets who get their prophecies 100% right all the time (the best ones boast of a 60% accuracy rate), it is imperative that Grudem find error in New Testament prophecy as well. Otherwise you don't have a

¹³ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 409

¹⁴ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 110.

¹⁵ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 89.

parallel. He knows that Old Testament prophecy was inerrant and infallible. But he says that whereas an Old Testament prophet “speaks God’s very words,” a New Testament prophet “speaks on the basis of some external influence” and has “no absolute divine authority” because he is “speaking *merely human words* to report something God brings to mind [emphasis mine].” I don’t have a problem with saying that the Spirit brings things to mind for Grudem and other Charismatics. I am not in any way denying their experience. What I am denying is that their experience is Biblical prophecy. Let’s look at the evidence.

1. Agabus is called a prophet in a book that frequently calls writers of Old Testament books, “prophets.”

a) References to Old Testament “prophets” and/or Old Testament quotes about “prophets”: Acts 2:16,30; 3:18,21,22,23,24,25; 7:37,42,48,52; 8:28,30,34; 10:43; 13:15,20,27,40; 15:15; 24:14; 26:22,27; 28:23,25. Jesus as a “Prophet”: Acts 3:22,23; 7:37,42. New Testament “prophets”: Acts 11:27; 13:1,6; 15:32; 21:10. Note that the only references to “prophecy,” “prophesy,” or “prophesied” are in Acts 2:17-18 (OT quote of NT prophecy), Acts 19:6 and 21:9.

First, Agabus is called a prophet in a book that frequently calls writers of the Old Testament books “prophets.” There is not the slightest hint elsewhere in this book that Luke did not think of prophets as inspired and infallible. I have written out in your outlines every reference in Acts to prophet, prophets, prophecy, prophecies, prophesy. You will notice that in 28 verses the word is referring to an inspired, inerrant prophet either in the Old Testament or prophesied in the Old Testament. There are only seven verses where the word describes what Grudem calls a New Testament congregational prophet. But those references are intermixed with Old Testament prophets as if Luke thinks that they are exactly the same thing. For example, in Acts 13 we have two references to prophets in the Antioch church mixed in with four references to “the Law and the Prophets,” “Samuel the prophet,” “the Prophets which are read every Sabbath,” and a quotation from Old Testament prophets. That’s four references to Old Testament prophets mixed in with two references to New Testament prophets. And you can study the other verses for yourself. To me that list is overwhelming evidence that there is not a hair’s breadth of difference

between an Old Testament prophet and a New Testament prophet in the book of Acts.

b) Note the “also” in Acts 15:32. Who are the prophets Judas and Silas compared to? Either the inspired Jerusalem decree of verses 23-31 (immediate context) or the only other “prophets” mentioned in the chapter – the Old Testament prophets quoted in verses 15-17.

Let’s just look at one other example. Turn to Acts 15:32. **“Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.”** The main thing I want you to notice is the word “also.” If they were “also” prophets, who are the other prophets that Judas and Silas are being compared to? I see only two alternatives: Either this is referring to the inspired decree of Jerusalem which was written by James and was said to be from the Holy Spirit in verse 28 (that’s the immediate context), or it is comparing them to the only other prophets mentioned in the chapter 15 the Old Testament prophets quoted in verses 15-17. Either way, Judas and Silas are being compared to inspired prophets. There were inspired prophets. Judas and Silas were *also* prophets. Again, there is not a hair’s breadth of difference between an Old Testament prophet that Wayne Grudem admits is inspired and speaks the very words of God, and a New Testament prophet like Judas or Silas.

2. He acts with authoritative drama even with Paul (v. 11a)

But let’s go back to Acts 21:11. Notice that Agabus is not only called a “prophet,” he acts with prophetic authority even with Paul. No one would dare to walk up to a man like Paul and remove his belt unless God told him to do so and unless he had already been recognized to be a prophet, as Agabus had in 11:28.

3. He uses prophetic drama just like Old Testament prophets.

Third, just as Ezekiel and other prophets had prophetic acting in connection with their prophecies, this text says that Agabus **“took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said.”** This is prophetic acting. This is such a strong parallel to Old Testament prophetic acting that several commentaries point it out.¹⁶

¹⁶ As an example, John B. Pohill says, “In a symbolic act much like the acted-out prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, Agabus predicted Paul’s coming arrest in Jerusalem.” *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2001), p. 435. F. F. Bruce says, “The mode of his prophecy is reminiscent of much Old Testament prophecy: it is

4. He begins his prophecy with a “Thus says the Holy Spirit.”

Fourth, Agabus begins his prophecy with a **“Thus says the Holy Spirit.”** The phrase, “thus says the [followed by some title of God]” is used 448 times in the Old Testament to precede an Old Testament prophecy. Any Jew reading this would take Agabus to be doing exactly what Old Testament prophets did.

5. His prophetic ability had already been tested in this book (11:28) just as Old Testament prophets were tested (Deut. 13; 18; see also Matt 7:15-23; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:19-22)

Fifth, just as Old Testament prophets were tested before they were officially recognized, Agabus had been tested in Acts 11:28. Luke records, **“Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.”** This indicates an evaluation of a prophet. Let’s consider the whole subject of evaluation.

Grudem says that while individuals were responsible to evaluate the *content* of individual prophecies, they weren’t called to judge each prophet as true or false (as they did in the Old Testament).¹⁷ In other words, Grudem wants Christians evaluating each prophecy on whether they think it is right or not, but he doesn’t want them categorizing someone as a false prophet simply because 40+% of what he prophesies is incorrect. He knows that if he used that kind of criteria, it would pretty much wipe out the prophetic ministry in the USA. Again, he is trying to distance New Testament prophets from Old Testament prophets. When prophecies did not come true in the Old Testament, no one was supposed to ever listen to such a prophet again. In fact, he was in danger of being stoned. But with modern Charismatics, prophets are constantly mixing error with truth (as Grudem freely admits). After reading Grudem, I would get the impression that (definitionally) there could be no such thing as a false prophet in the New Testament. I know he doesn’t believe that because the New Testament speaks of false prophets eleven times,¹⁸ but when more than 40% of what a prophet says can be false and the prophet still be considered by Grudem to be a “true prophet,” it

conveyed in action as well as in word.” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). P. 401.

¹⁷ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 74-78.

¹⁸ Matt 7:15; 24:11,24; Ma4k 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2Pet 2:1; 1John 4:1; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10. Grudem does say, “... the possibility of false prophets coming and speaking under the influence of some demonic spirit certainly existed (cf. 1 Jn 4:1,3). Though Paul did not discuss such a possibility explicitly in 1 Corinthians, it is fair to conclude from what Paul does say that he no doubt expected that false prophets would have been detected by those with the ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Cor 12:10), and they would have betrayed themselves by their blatantly aberrant doctrine (1 Cor 12:3; 1 Jn 4:2-3).” (p. 78). But n

makes it difficult to understand how anyone can be a “false prophet.” It’s not just the *prophecy*, but the prophet *himself* who is judged as “false.” That’s identical to the Old Testament.

So here’s my question: “Why is Agabus not a false prophet if Grudem is correct that Agabus made two mistakes that are at the heart of his message? I will deal with that in a little bit, but this point is saying that New Testament prophets are judged just like Old Testament prophets were, and I want to back it up. Let me read some sample Scriptures. Turn first to Matthew 7. I really want you to read along with me on this one. In Matthew Jesus promised to send apostles and prophets to His church. But He gives warnings about false prophets who would creep into the church. Let’s begin reading at verse 15

Matthew 7:15 ¶ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:16 You will know them by their fruits.

Notice that he is warning about the *prophets*, not just the individual prophecies. He says you will know *them*, not just which individual prophecies are correct. He goes on in the middle of verse 16:

Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

Matthew 7:17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Notice that it is the tree itself that is being judged, not just the fruit. Certainly judging the fruit is part of judging whether the tree is bad or whether the prophet is false, but it is both the fruit and the tree that is in view. Grudem’s thesis about New Testament prophets does not hold up. Continuing to read this tree illustration of the prophets in verse 18:

Matthew 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.

He’s not talking about individual Christians in their sanctification or you would have perfectionism. Do you bear any bad fruit of sin in your lives? Yes. Of course. All of us do. But the context is talking about false prophets and the bad fruit of false prophecies. True prophets are infallible and never, ever bear bad fruit. They never have any error mixed with truth when they prophesy. Let me read verse 18 again. “**A good tree** [that’s a good prophet right? A good tree”] **cannot bear bad fruit...**” Verse 19:

Matthew 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Wow! If that is not a parallel to the Old Testament, I don’t know what is. Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 18 both command Israelites to ignore a prophet if something he says does not come to pass. And he is to be cut off from his people. God takes prophecy very seriously in the New Testament

too. Remember that the trees are prophets. Verse 19 says, “**Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**” It’s not just the *content* of the prophecy that is discarded. The prophet himself is judged and discarded. And Jesus is talking about prophets in the New Testament church age. Verse 20:

Matthew 7:20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 7:21 ¶ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?”

So we are not just talking about prophets from other religions. We are talking about people who thought they were prophesying in the church and serving Jesus. Verse 23:

Matthew 7:23 And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

So those were obviously false prophets. I think this passage is determinative of how we treat prophets. Christ is giving instructions for the church in advance. From my perspective, this means that there are no prophets in the church today since no modern prophet that I know of has a 100% accuracy rate. Does that mean that what they are experiencing is not from the Spirit? No. I am not saying that. I think that God is indeed giving at least some of them illumination. But illumination is a far cry from inspired revelation, and I believe that this is one among many passages that teach that all prophets gave inspired revelation. But certainly they were judged like OT prophets were. Grudem’s thesis that it is just the *content* of a prophecy that is evaluated, not the *prophet himself* is not true.

Zechariah 13:1-6 predicts a time in the New Covenant when there would be no true prophets and even false prophets will not dare to prophesy (v. 4). And if one does, verse 3 says, “**It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the LORD.’ And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies.**” That’s a Deuteronomy 13 and a Deuteronomy 18 kind of a penalty on false prophecy. Zechariah is saying that New Covenant prophecy will be judged in exactly the same way that Old Testament prophecy was judged.

1Corinthians 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Grudem says that the “others” is every person in the congregation. But most commentaries believe that it is the other prophets who are recognized. There is a judging activity.

Please turn to 1Thessalonians 5. This is a passage that is frequently used to prove that we are resisting the Holy Spirit when we say that prophecy no longer exists. Let’s begin reading at verse 19.

1Thessalonians 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.

That’s an important admonition, and I never want to quench the Spirit or grieve the Spirit by rejecting anything that the Spirit may want to give. And by the way, some of the Cessationist Puritans experienced the same kinds of things that Third Wave Charismatics talk about while rejecting the idea that prophecy continued. I have experienced many of the same things these Charismatics experience, and it isn’t prophecy. I do not believe I am in any way quenching the Spirit. Verse 20:

1Thessalonians 5:20 Do not despise prophecies.

If God continued to give prophecies I would receive them. One of the prophecies that Paul didn’t want them rejecting was this uncomfortable book of 1Thessalonians that was rebuking them for their sin. He wanted them to cherish that book and not despise it, since the book was a prophecy. We are in deep water when we despise any prophecy of the Scriptures. Why? Because it is the inerrant word of God.

But these congregations were also despising prophets that had been sent to them to teach them three things: 1) The mystery of Jew and Gentile being in one body (Eph. 3:1-6), 2) bringing warning of God’s lawsuit against Israel (Luke 11:49-51; Matt 23:29-38; Rev. 1:3; 10:7,11; 11:3,6,10,18; 16:6; 18:20,24; 22:6,7,9,10,18,19), 3) warning of the coming apostasy (2 Thes. 2:1-12; Acts 20:28-29; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; Matt 24:10-14,24-25). The prophets God sent to the various congregations were trying to keep them from falling, yet despite their valiant efforts, a massive apostasy was happening even in the days of the apostles. The people were despising the prophets who had been sent to them. In fact, the falling away prior to 70 AD was the Great Apostasy. But it is important that we not stop reading at this verse. Notice verses 21-22. In the context of prophecy Paul says,

1Thessalonians 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

1Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from every form of evil.

The amplified Bible has, “Abstain from evil [shrink from it and keep aloof from it] in whatever form *or* whatever kind it may be.” He’s talking about the bad tree and the bad fruit. He’s saying, “Stay away from it. Don’t even listen to them.” When you’ve tested a prophet to be false, avoid him

altogether and avoid his prophecies altogether. The point is, Agabus had been evaluated just as every prophet should. In chapter 11 he was evaluated based on the fulfillment of a prophetic prediction.

6. The New Testament Scriptures are called “prophetic Scriptures” (Rom. 16:26; see also 1 Pet 1:20; Rev. 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19), and just as the Scriptures reveal the “mysteries” of the kingdom (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 1Cor. 15:51; 3:3-9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:25-27; 2:2; 4:3; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:7), New Testament prophecy reveals mysteries (1Cor. 13:2; 14:2; Eph. 3:4-5).

B. Is Grudem right that “strictly speaking, Agabus predicted two events which ‘did not come to pass’ Deut 18:22” and that “Luke so clearly describes the non-fulfillment of the two parts of the prophecy in the immediately subsequent narrative”?¹⁹

With that as further background, let’s look at Grudem’s analysis of Agabus. On page 100, Grudem says,

“strictly speaking, Agabus predicted two events which ‘did not come to pass’ Deut 18:22.”

I find it shocking that Grudem would be willing to admit that Agabus would have been judged as a false prophet in Deuteronomy. Let me read that again: “strictly speaking, Agabus predicted two events which ‘did not come to pass’ Deut 18:22.” Grudem is admitting that if Agabus had lived in the Old Testament, he would have been stoned as a false prophet! Yet ironically, the supposedly mistaken Agabus has now become a model for New Testament prophecy! It just doesn’t compute in my head. On the same page he says,

“Luke so clearly describes the non-fulfillment of the two parts of the prophecy in the immediately subsequent narrative.”

On page 98 he also approvingly quotes D.A. Carson as saying about Agabus’ prophecy, “I can think of no reported Old Testament prophet whose prophecies are so wrong on the details.” Based on what we have seen about prophecy, if Grudem and D.A. Carson are right about these mistakes, then we would have to treat Agabus as a false prophet rather than accepting Grudem’s conclusion that it’s OK for modern prophets to make mistakes. But was Agabus wrong? Absolutely not!

¹⁹ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 100. Grudem approvingly quotes D.A. Carson who says, “I can think of no reported Old Testament prophet whose prophecies are so wrong on the details.” (p. 98)

1. First, Grudem claims that Agabus makes a mistake by saying that the Jews will “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (v. 11) when what actually happened is that “the Jews do not ‘deliver’ Paul over to the hands of the Gentiles.... [but] tried to kill him themselves (Acts 21:31). He had to be forcibly rescued from the Jews by the tribune and his soldiers (Acts 21:32-33).”²⁰ Grudem calls this a “mistake” that is at “the heart of his prophecy” and that “on these two key elements, he is just a bit wrong.”²¹

What’s the first purported error? Let me read sub point 1. “First, Grudem claims that Agabus makes a mistake by saying that the *Jews* will “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (v. 11) when what actually happened is that “the Jews do not ‘deliver’ Paul over to the hands of the Gentiles.... [but] tried to kill him themselves (Acts 21:31). He had to be forcibly rescued from the Jews by the tribune and his soldiers (Acts 21:32-33).”²² Grudem calls this a “mistake” that is at “the heart of his prophecy” and that “on these two key elements, he is just a bit wrong.”

a) Answer: In Acts 28:17 Paul agrees with Agabus and says, “I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans” (Acts 28:17). Note the parallels “I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans” (NIV).

My answer is that *Paul* didn’t think Agabus was wrong, and that’s good enough for me. Paul uses exactly the same language to describe his having been arrested and delivered to the Romans. In your outlines there is a chart that compares the three parts of each verse with each other.

Agabus (Acts 21:11)	Paul (Acts 28:17)
“So shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind [Greek = <i>deo</i>] the man...”	“I was arrested [Greek = <i>deo</i>] in Jerusalem”
“and deliver him over [Greek = <i>paradidomi</i>]”	“and handed over [Greek = <i>paradidomi</i>]”
“into the hands of the Gentiles”	“to the hands of the Romans”

Agabus says, “So shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man,” using the Greek word *deo* for bind. Paul said, “I was arrested in Jerusalem” using the

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 97.

²¹ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 97-98.

²² Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 97.

same Greek word *deo* for “arrested.” So whether you translate it as bind or as arrest, Paul said that what Agabus prophesied actually happened to him.

Agabus says, “and deliver him over,” using the Greek word *paradidomi*. Paul said, “and handed over” using the same Greek word.

Agabus said, “into the hands of the Gentiles,” and Paul says “to the hands of the Romans.”

If Agabus was wrong on this point, then so is Paul in Acts 28. And my response is that Paul ought to know. He was the one who experienced it. Luke later in this chapter records part of what happened, but not everything. So for us to assume that if it wasn’t recorded it didn’t happen is presumptuous.

Let me give you one plausible explanation: We know the crowds were trying to kill Paul. Verse 27 speaks of “the whole crowd,” verse 28 of the “men of Israel,” and verse 30 of “the people.” But we aren’t told what the Jewish *leaders* were trying to do. This arrest takes place in the temple. The temple is controlled by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were in bed with Rome, and the High Priest was appointed by Rome. So ordinarily the Sadducees tried to cooperate with the Romans in order to save their jobs. They would no doubt have been trying to keep the crowd from killing Paul when there were Roman soldiers around. So perhaps they handed Paul over to the Romans while the crowds were trying to do a lynching. We simply aren’t told. But with Paul himself saying that he was handed over to the Romans, and using the same language as Agabus, I am comfortable in saying that every detail of this part of the prophecy was fulfilled. Paul says it was fulfilled. There must have been at least some Jewish leaders who handed Paul over to the Romans.

2. Second, Grudem contrasts the statement in verse 11, “So shall the *Jews* at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt” with verse 33 – “the *commander* ... commanded him to be bound with two chains.” The claim is that it was the Romans, not the Jews who bound Paul, making this “an inaccurate prophecy.”

The second supposed mistake: Grudem contrasts the statement in verse 11, “**So shall the *Jews* at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt**” with verse 33 – “**the *commander* ... commanded him to be bound with two chains.**” The claim is that it was the Romans, not the Jews who bound Paul, making this “an inaccurate prophecy.” So that’s Grudem’s position.

a) Answer: There were no doubt two bindings: one with a belt and one with chains. Notice that Agabus used a robe belt to bind Paul, something that would have been readily available to the Jews when they “laid hands on him” (v. 27), cried for “help” (v. 28), “seized Paul” (v. 30), took him out of the temple (v. 30), and beat him (v. 32). It is very likely that they used a restraint of some sort during that time lapse. The Romans did not use a belt, but used chains (v. 33). Though the text does not say it, it makes perfect sense to say that the Jews bound Paul with a belt (perhaps even his own belt) in order to beat him, and the Romans later used chains (for imprisonment). But it is clear that Grudem has not demonstrated any error.

But you cannot call it an error if there is a plausible explanation. This is the point conservatives make when liberals claim there are mistakes in the Bible. If you can give two or three plausible explanations, you cannot say it was an error. Let me read my answer: “There were no doubt two bindings: one with a belt and one with chains. Notice that Agabus used the belt from Paul’s robe to bind Paul, something that would have been readily available to the Jews when they “laid hands on him” (v. 27), cried for “help” (v. 28), “seized Paul” (v. 30), took him out of the temple (v. 30), and beat him (v. 32). It is very likely that they used a restraint of some sort during that time lapse. The Romans did not use a belt, but used chains (v. 33). Though the text does not say it, it makes perfect sense to say that the Jews bound Paul with a belt (perhaps even his own belt) in order to beat him, and the Romans later used chains for imprisonment. But it is clear that Grudem has not demonstrated any error.”

C. Is Grudem right when he says that New Testament prophets should not say, “Thus says the Lord”?²³

Another difference that I see between Grudem and our text is that Grudem a number of times tells people not to say, “Thus says the Lord.” It bothers him when Charismatic prophets do that. With the degree of fallibility that he believes exists with prophecy, he believes that is presumptuous to say, “Thus says the Lord” as if the prophet is

²³ See Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy, chapters 4 and 5*. Sam Storms says, “We must avoid prefacing our prophetic utterances with ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ a declaration which implies infallibility and morally obligatory revelation.”

communicating the very words of God. I applaud him for his cautions. That's great. But it would achieve the same goal and be much more Biblical if he told modern so-called "prophets" not to call what they are doing "prophecy," but instead to speak of it as a word of knowledge, illumination, guidance or something like that. The fact of the matter is that Agabus does indeed say, "**Thus says the Holy Spirit**," and then gives the very words of the Spirit. To me that argues strongly against Grudem's position.

***D. Is Grudem right when he says that "Thus says the Holy Spirit" means here not that the very words of the prophecy were from the Holy Spirit, but only that the content generally had been revealed by the Spirit.**"²⁴ "Thus says the Holy Spirit" means "The Holy Spirit was saying 'approximately this' or 'something like this.'"²⁵*

Of course, Grudem tries to explain this away. Point D gives a sample quote. On page 100 Grudem says,

'Thus says the Holy Spirit' means here not that the very words of the prophecy were from the Holy Spirit, but only that the content generally had been revealed by the Spirit.'

On the next page he says,

"Thus says the Holy Spirit" means "The Holy Spirit was saying 'approximately this' or 'something like this.'"

1. Answer: "Thus says the [with a divine title]" is used 448 times in the Old Testament to precede prophetic utterances that carried the very words of God. It is arbitrary to assign a different meaning to a very familiar Hebrew phrase – a technical phrase. Luke himself quotes two of those OT references in Acts 7:49 and 15:17.

My answer is twofold. First, "**Thus says the** [with a divine title]" is used 448 times in the Old Testament to precede prophetic utterances that carried the very words of God. It is arbitrary to assign a different meaning to a very familiar Hebrew phrase – a technical phrase." You see, this is a phrase that Hebrews would immediately have associated with infallible prophecy from the Old Testament. Luke himself quotes two of those Old Testament occurrences.

²⁴ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 100. Note that though he gives three possible interpretations, he rejects the other two as being improbable and says, "After considering the three solutions I tend to think the second is most likely" (p. 102).

²⁵ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 101.

2. The New Testament uses similar phrases to introduce Scripture (Rom. 12:19; 14:11; 1Cor. 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:17,18; Heb. 3:7; 8:8,9,10; 10:16; 10:30; Rev. 1:8; 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 14:13)

My second response is that the New Testament uses similar phrases to introduce Scripture. And I give twenty New Testament occurrences. Agabus was an inspired prophet just like the Old Testament prophets were. Some people have said that this trivializes the nature of inspiration by making it relate to things like predicting persecution. But it no more trivializes prophecy than Paul's inspired statement, "**Greet Mary,**" in Romans 16 trivializes Romans, or "**Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas,**" in 2 Timothy 4:13 trivializes the book of 2 Timothy, or Samuel's prophesying about where Saul could find his donkey trivializes the inspiration of Samuel the prophet. The fact of the matter is that their inspired gift could be used by the Spirit for anything that the Spirit desired.

V. What difference does it make?

A. It makes a difference on how we defend the canon of Scripture.

I think you can see that it does make a huge difference what we believe about these things. It makes a difference on how we view the canon of Scripture. If the only people who were inspired in the New Testament were Apostles, then how did the Gospel of Mark get in the Bible? He wasn't an apostle. How did the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts get in the Bible? Luke was not an Apostle. What about the books of Hebrews, James, and Jude? Grudem's answer is that these men must have been associated with the apostles, and the apostles must have reviewed their books. I don't buy that. Something doesn't become Scripture simply because an apostle read it and approved it. There were thousands of people associated with the apostles. What about every elder that the apostles had established in the churches? It is not a good enough argument. 2 Peter 1:20 says that "**no prophecy of Scripture is of any private origin.**" It is the origin that is at stake, not whether an apostle read what Mark wrote. The next verse says, "**for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**" Now don't get me wrong. Grudem is one of the leading defenders of the authority of Scripture. He's an able combatant on this important issue. But it would be so much simpler to say that apostles and prophets wrote the New Testament. Instead of spending a hundred pages defending canon, you could spend a dozen. It would be so much clearer.

B. It makes a difference on how we evaluate “prophecies” today. Is the revelation simply guidance, or is it prophecy?

Second, it makes a difference on how we evaluate prophecies today. Is the revelation simply guidance, or is it prophecy? Grudem is doing a valiant job of getting Charismatics to not treat prophecy abusively by giving it more authority than he believes it should have. But it would be so much simpler to say, “Hey. All the gifts of the Spirit are at work in the church except for Apostleship and Prophecy.” Those two are sealed up in the Scripture (as Daniel 9 and Isaiah 8 say).

C. It affects our confidence in Scripture.

Third, it affects our confidence in Scripture. There are pastors in this city who excuse their mistakes in prophecy by trying to say not only that Agabus made mistakes, but by trying to say that Old Testament prophets made mistakes too. This has happened almost a dozen times in the last few years.

One pastor told me that when Paul had the prophetic Macedonian call in Acts 16, he thought it was a man calling him over to Macedonia, and it ended up being Lydia, a woman who called him. He said that Paul’s chauvinism made his ability to receive the message slightly messed up. And my response is, “Hey, there were men like the Philippian jailor in Macedonia too.” But these guys are using Grudem’s proof texts for errors in prophecy to undermine all Scripture. Grudem is trying to correct such misguided attitudes, but there isn’t sufficient grounds to be able to do so on his terms. It would be so much easier to accept the teaching of Scripture that apostleship and prophecy were inspired and foundational gifts that we have with us until the Second Coming, but *we only have those gifts as they are preserved in the Bible*. I receive every word of prophecy that God has preserved for me. I do not despise one bit of it.

D. It is a needless obstacle to unified ministry.

The last reason this issue matters is because it poses needless obstacles to unified ministry.

Conclusion

I would admonish you to not be adversarial or prideful in your interactions with such Charismatics. This is an in-house sermon to help strengthen you. But receive Charismatics who differ in the Lord and be patient with them. Many times what they are experiencing is a work of God’s Holy Spirit and can be reinterpreted within a Biblical framework and

be received. I am in no way trying to diminish the work of God's Spirit in the church. On the contrary, I pray that God would bust open the doors of this church with spiritual gifts. But it is important that we never relinquish the one sure word of prophecy that continues to today – the Bible. It's all the prophecy that we need. Trust it, follow it, and evaluate my teaching based upon it. Where the prophetic Scriptures are inspired, I sure am not. So be Bereans, eat the corn from this sermon, and throw away the corncob. And may we all grow in Christ as a result. Amen.

Outline: Can We Trust New Testament Prophets?

Acts 21:4,10-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-8-2009

Introduction

- A. *The reason for this sermon*
- B. *Reminder of what we have learned about apostleship and prophecy – the two “foundation” gifts.*

I. Questions raised on what is happening in verse 4.

- A. *Did the Spirit tell Paul not to go up to Jerusalem or did the disciples do so?*
 - 1. Note the “they” (in contrast to Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12)
 - 2. Note that the Spirit clearly led Paul to go to Jerusalem earlier (19:21; 20:22-25)
 - 3. Note that by inspiration the Spirit said Paul would be in Jerusalem and authorized his bringing the Gentile donation (Rom. 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:3; Rom. 15:30-33; etc).
 - 4. Note that Jesus approves of what Paul did (Acts 23:11)
 - 5. Note that Luke and the disciples are finally convinced this really was “the will of the Lord” (Acts 21:14).
- B. *Then what did the Spirit do (note the words “through the Spirit”)?*
 - 1. Is Grudem correct when he says that “through the Spirit” expresses “a rather loose relationship between the Holy Spirit and the prophet, since it allows room for a large degree of personal influence by the human person himself”?²⁶
 - 2. Or was this inspired truth such as Jesus spoke “through the Spirit” that contained a moral imperative (Acts 1:2)?
 - 3. Or was this a prophecy such as Agabus spoke “through the Spirit” (Acts 11:28)?
 - 4. Or was this equivalent to the inspiration given to the apostles “through the Spirit” (1Cor. 2:10)?
 - 5. Or was this a lesser “word of knowledge” or “word of wisdom” or some other gift “through the Spirit” (see 1Cor. 12:8)?
 - 6. Or was this a general influence upon them “through the Spirit” (Eph. 3:16; 6:18; Rom. 5:5; 2Tim. 1:14)?
 - 7. Or was this a previous inerrant revelation about the coming danger (see parallel in verse 11) that enabled them to warn Paul *and* tell him not to go to Jerusalem? Did Paul disobey a prophecy? Or was he ignoring something lesser? Or is this verse parallel to verses 10-14?

II. Questions raised on the daughters who prophesied in verse 9.

- A. *Are Luke’s brief accounts of prophets (Luke 20:23; 21:4,9) being thematically explained by 21:10-14?*
- B. *Does this verse show “that these prophecies did not have the authority of words of the Lord”?²⁷*

III. Questions raised about Agabus.

- A. *Is there a distinction between an Old Testament prophet “who speaks God’s*

²⁶ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 90.

²⁷ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 96.

*very words” and a New Testament prophet “who speaks on the basis of some external influence”²⁸ and has “no absolute divine authority”²⁹ but rather is “speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind”?*³⁰

1. Agabus is called a prophet in a book that frequently calls writers of Old Testament books, “prophets.”
 - a) References to Old Testament “prophets” and/or Old Testament quotes about “prophets”: Acts 2:16,30; 3:18,21,22,23,24,25; 7:37,42,48,52; 8:28,30,34; 10:43; 13:15,20,27,40; 15:15; 24:14; 26:22,27; 28:23,25. Jesus as a “Prophet”: Acts 3:22,23; 7:37,42. New Testament “prophets”: Acts 11:27; 13:1,6; 15:32; 21:10. Note that the only references to “prophecy,” “prophesy,” or “prophesied” are in Acts 2:17-18 (OT quote of NT prophecy), Acts 19:6 and 21:9.
 - b) Note the “also” in Acts 15:32. Who are the prophets Judas and Silas compared to? Either the inspired Jerusalem decree of verses 23-31 (immediate context) or the only other “prophets” mentioned in the chapter – the Old Testament inspired prophets quoted in verses 15-17.
2. He acts with authoritative drama even with Paul (v. 11a)
3. He uses prophetic drama just like Old Testament prophets.
4. He begins his prophecy with a “Thus says the Holy Spirit.”
5. His prophetic ability had already been tested in this book (11:28) just as Old Testament prophets were tested (Deut. 13; 18; see also Matt 7:15-23; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:19-22)
6. The New Testament Scriptures are called “prophetic Scriptures” (Rom. 16:26; see also 1 Pet 1:20; Rev. 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19), and just as the Scriptures reveal the “mysteries” of the kingdom (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 1Cor. 15:51; 3:3-9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:25-27; 2:2; 4:3; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:7), New Testament prophecy reveals mysteries (1Cor. 13:2; 14:2; Eph. 3:4-5).

*B. Is Grudem right that “strictly speaking, Agabus predicted two events which ‘did not come to pass’ Deut 18:22” and that “Luke so clearly describes the non-fulfillment of the two parts of the prophecy in the immediately subsequent narrative”?*³¹

1. First, Grudem claims that Agabus makes a mistake by saying that the Jews will “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (v. 11) when what actually happened is that “the Jews do not ‘deliver’ Paul over to the hands of the Gentiles.... [but] tried to kill him themselves (Acts 21:31). He had to be forcibly rescued from the Jews by the tribune and his soldiers (Acts 21:32-33).”³² Grudem calls this a “mistake” that is at “the heart of his prophecy” and that “on these two key elements, he is just a bit

²⁸ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 409

²⁹ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 110.

³⁰ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 89.

³¹ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 100. Grudem approvingly quotes D.A. Carson who says, “I can think of no reported Old Testament prophet whose prophecies are so wrong on the details.” (p. 98)

³² Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 97.

wrong.”³³

- a) **Answer: In Acts 28:17 Paul agrees with Agabus and says, “I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans” (Acts 28:17, NIV). Note the parallels.**

Agabus (Acts 21:11)	Paul (Acts 28:17)
“So shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind [Greek = <i>deo</i>] the man...”	“I was arrested [Greek = <i>deo</i>] in Jerusalem”
“and deliver him over [Greek = <i>paradidomi</i>]”	“and handed over [Greek = <i>paradidomi</i>]”
“into the hands of the Gentiles”	“to the hands of the Romans”

2. **Second, Grudem contrasts the statement in verse 11, “So shall the *Jews* at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt” with verse 33 – “the *commander* ... commanded him to be bound with two chains.” The claim is that it was the Romans, not the Jews who bound Paul, making this “an inaccurate prophecy.”**

- a) **Answer: There were no doubt two bindings: one with a belt and one with chains. Notice that Agabus used a robe belt to bind Paul, something that would have been readily available to the Jews when they “laid hands on him” (v. 27), cried for “help” (v. 28), “seized Paul” (v. 30), took him out of the temple (v. 30), and beat him (v. 32). It is very likely that they used a restraint of some sort during that time lapse. The Romans did not use a belt, but used chains (v. 33). Though the text does not say it, it makes perfect sense to say that the Jews bound Paul with a belt (perhaps even his own belt) in order to beat him, and the Romans later used chains (for imprisonment). But it is clear that Grudem has not demonstrated any error.**

C. Is Grudem right when he says that New Testament prophets should not say, “Thus says the Lord”?³⁴

D. Is Grudem right when he says that “‘Thus says the Holy Spirit’ means here not that the very words of the prophecy were from the Holy Spirit, but only that the content generally had been revealed by the Spirit.”³⁵ “Thus says the Holy Spirit” means “The Holy Spirit was saying ‘approximately this’ or ‘something like this.’”³⁶

1. **Answer: “Thus says the [with a divine title]” is used 448 times in the Old Testament to precede prophetic utterances that carried the very words of God. It is arbitrary to assign a different meaning to a very familiar Hebrew phrase – a technical phrase. Luke himself quotes two of those OT references in Acts 7:49 and 15:17.**
2. **The New Testament uses similar phrases to introduce Scripture (Rom. 12:19; 14:11; 1Cor. 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:17,18; Heb. 3:7; 8:8,9,10; 10:16; 10:30; Rev. 1:8; 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 14:13)**

³³ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 97-98.

³⁴ See Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, chapters 4 and 5. See also Sam Storms,

³⁵ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 100. Note that though he gives three possible interpretations, he rejects the other two as being improbable and says, “After considering the three solutions I tend to think the second is most likely” (p. 102).

³⁶ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 101.

IV. What difference does it make?

- A. It makes a difference on how we defend the canon of Scripture.*
- B. It makes a difference on how we evaluate “prophecies” today. Is the revelation simply guidance, or is it prophecy?*
- C. It affects our confidence in Scripture.*
- D. It is a needless obstacle to unified ministry.*

Conclusion