

# Spiritual Gifts *and* Prophecy



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 2:1–11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9; Eph. 4:11; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.*

**Memory Text:** “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (*1 Corinthians 12:4–6, NKJV*).

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the existence of spiritual gifts. We're not alone either. Many charismatic and Pentecostal churches have claimed to see the manifestation of spiritual gifts among themselves. Some of these have included people in church, making noises like animals (lions, donkeys, dogs, even chickens!), as well as the utterances of prognostications and prophecies, such as the time it was prophesied that God blew up the space shuttle *Challenger* in order to teach America a lesson because there was a public school-teacher on board. (Apparently, someone believed that God doesn't like public schoolteachers.)

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, but we also believe that everything should be tested by the Word of God. This week, using the Word, we'll take a closer look at some of these gifts.

**The Week at a Glance:** What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? How are they manifested? What about the gift of tongues? What does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.*

## Spiritual Gifts

**“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers”** (*Eph. 4:11*).

Spiritual gifts (Greek *charismata*) are known as spiritual because they originate with the Holy Spirit, who apportions them to each according to His will (*1 Cor. 12:11*). In addition, the Holy Spirit is given to Christians so that they may understand and appreciate these gifts (*1 Cor. 2:10–13*).

**Paul** provides four lists of spiritual gifts (*Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30; Eph. 4:11, 12*). **What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Why were they given?**

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According to the New Testament, spiritual gifts are given for the completion of the mission entrusted to the church. This includes the nurture and edification of the church, as well as the proclamation of the gospel to the world. The existence of these gifts should serve as a constant reminder of our utter dependence upon the Lord in order for us to do the work He has called us to do.

From the Gospels we know that the apostles possessed spiritual gifts even prior to Pentecost. In Luke 9:1, Jesus “gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases” (*NKJV*), and in Matthew 10:8 He charged them to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (*NKJV*). Then at Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (*Acts 2:1–4*). This seems to indicate that it is possible to receive more than one baptism of the Holy Spirit.

**How have spiritual gifts been manifested in your own church? What has been the fruits of these gifts? What can you do to help nurture these gifts in your local congregation? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath for discussion.**

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## Spiritual Gifts in the Church Today

These days we find two views among Christians in regard to the permanency of spiritual gifts. Some believe that *edifying gifts*, such as knowledge, wisdom, teaching, exhortation, faith, and mercy, are permanent gifts but that the *sign gifts*, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, and miracles, ceased with the death of the apostles. Defenders of this view claim: “The sign gifts had a unique purpose: to give the apostles credentials, that is, to let the people know that these men all spoke the truth of God. Once the Word of God was inscripturated, the sign gifts were no longer needed and they ceased.”—John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), p. 199. Other Christians believe that all the spiritual gifts will be present in the church until the Lord comes.

**What** do the following texts say about the permanence of spiritual gifts? *1 Cor. 1:6, 7; 13:9, 10; Eph. 4:11–13.*

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According to Paul, the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts, will be in the church until Jesus comes, but does this mean that all the gifts will be present all the time?

The church father Irenaeus (A.D. 120–195) wrote about the presence and operation of spiritual gifts even in his day. Thus, according to Irenaeus, spiritual gifts were still in evidence at the end of the second century A.D.

During the next two centuries, however, the church suffered a serious spiritual and theological deterioration, and the spiritual gifts largely disappeared. During the time of the Reformation, beginning with John Wycliffe in England, God used the Reformers to restore neglected truth, and they certainly had the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and teaching. None of the main Reformers, though, claimed to have the prophetic gift. This particular gift, according to Revelation 12:17, was to be manifested again in the end-time remnant church.

**Paul says in Ephesians 4:12 that spiritual gifts are given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (NKJV). What kind of equipping is Paul referring to, and in what way do you see this happening in the church today?**

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## Counterfeit Gifts

**What** does the Bible teach about counterfeit gifts and their origin?

*Matt. 7:22, 23; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 16:13, 14.*

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By the power of God, Moses and Aaron, standing before Pharaoh, turned a staff into a snake (*Exod. 7:10*), the river Nile into blood (*vs. 20*), and made frogs come out of the Nile to cover the land (*Exod. 8:6*); but by the power of Satan the Egyptian magicians could do the same. However, from the third plague onward the Egyptian magicians were unable to counterfeit God's miracles.

This teaches us two things: (1) Satan can produce miracles that look like the genuine article, and (2) Satan can work only within the limits set by God.

Counterfeit gifts are not just a perversion of the true gifts of God but can be similar manifestations from a different source—Satan.

A study of the texts listed above should reveal to us a few other important points about the existence of counterfeit spiritual gifts. First, as we can see, these false manifestations can be done by those professing the name of Jesus; indeed, as Jesus said, many will claim to do some miracles in His name. And yet, according to Jesus, they are not of Him.

Second, there will be miracles, miraculous signs and wonders, powerful enough to deceive many. In other words, we need to be very careful not to be swept away by the existence of the supernatural. Even though something is done in the name of Jesus and appears to be supernatural doesn't mean it's a genuine gift of the Spirit.

Finally, in the end, Satan is working to do what he can to deceive as many people as possible. Thus, whatever manifestations that do appear, we always must test them by the Bible. If they are not in harmony with the Word of God, we have our answer, regardless of how impressive the manifestations appear to be. The Bible must be our ultimate standard.

**With these thoughts in mind, what are we to make of these ministries that claim to manifest all sorts of prophecies, healing, and wonders week after week? Without wanting to judge anyone, why should we be leery? What kind of questions should we ask, and why?**

## The Gift of Prophecy

The French physician Michel de Notredame (1503–1566), known as Nostradamus, supposedly predicted the great fire of London of 1666 with the words: “The blood of the just will be demanded of London, burnt by the fire in the year 66.” (<http://www.armageddonline.org/nostradamus.php> [Accessed January 29, 2007.]) The Irish seer Cheiro warned journalist W. T. Stead in 1894 and again in 1911 that he would drown in April 1912. Stead died when the *Titanic* sank in April 1912. In 1956 Jean Dixon published a vision in which she said she saw that a Democrat would be elected president of the United States in 1960, only to be assassinated in office. John Kennedy, a Democrat elected in 1960, was assassinated in 1963 while in office.

**How** can we account for these exact predictions by people who had little in common with the biblical prophets? *Isa. 8:19, Acts 16:16, 2 Cor. 11:14.*

Ever since Satan used the snake in the Garden of Eden to deceive Eve, he has used a variety of human agents to deceive men and women, including the giving of predictions that have come true. Which means, then, that the fulfillment of a prediction is not a guarantee that it is a true prophecy from God.

Nevertheless, prophets and prophecies play an important part in the plan of salvation. This point is made clear in the Bible.

**Prophecy**, or the prophetic office, is listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It appears first on the list in Romans 12:6 and second, after apostleship, in both 1 Corinthians 12:28–30 and Ephesians 4:11. What makes the prophetic gift so important that it is the only gift that is mentioned in all four lists of spiritual gifts or ministries?

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The purpose of the prophetic gift is to provide a means of communication between the Creator and His creatures. Prophetic messages in Scripture have unveiled the future (*Daniel 2*), counseled and reprovved kings (*Isa. 7:3, 4*), warned of coming judgments (*Jer. 1:14–16*), called for revival (*Joel 2:12, 13*), and encouraged and comforted God’s people (*Isa. 40:1, 2*).

Prophets were men and women who spoke the word of God to their generations. The emphasis in the prophetic gift was not on predicting the future (although this was one of the marks of a true prophet) but on setting forth what God wanted His people to hear.

## Spiritual Gifts and 1 Corinthians 14

The church in Corinth had many problems: division, immorality, court cases among believers, marriage problems, and the abuse of the Lord's Supper. Another problem concerned spiritual gifts, particularly the use of the gift of tongues (*1 Cor. 14:1–5*).

**What** was the gift of tongues in the book of Acts? Going solely by what these verses in Acts 2:1–11 say, what kind of languages were being spoken?

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**What** were the tongues spoken in the church in Corinth? *1 Cor. 14:1–25*.

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When we apply the principle *Scripture interprets Scripture*, which means obscure passages are explained by plain ones, we have to conclude that the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 are of the same nature as the tongues in the book of Acts, especially because the same Greek word *glossa* is used for tongues in both books. In other words, the evidence is that tongues in both places were the supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages. Some understand the gift to apply also to instances in which a person speaking in one language is understood in another language or languages by those listening. In either case, this undoubtedly rules out the common and popular notion of tongues today, in which people babble in unknown languages.

Also, God works through man's intelligence. Would the Lord, who warned us against babbling on as the heathen do (*Matt. 6:7, NEB*), inspire unknown noises? In 1 Corinthians 14:22, tongues are a sign to unbelievers as at Pentecost, and how could someone uttering noises that no one understands be a sign to unbelievers? Tongues, as Acts 2 shows, are real languages, given for the purpose of building up the church. Furthermore, spiritual gifts were given for the common good (*1 Cor. 12:7*), ruling out using a gift purely for personal gratification, as the so-called modern gifts of tongues are used today.

In spite of all the manifestations of ecstatic speech today, nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Modern tongues-speaking, called glossolalia, is not the same as the biblical gift of languages.

**Think about the words you speak on a daily basis. How much is meaningful, purposeful talk, and how much is nonsensical banter?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

“The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear to be genuine miracles.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 52.

“Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Some have been deceived here.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 412.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s study. What kind of gifts are manifested in your local church? How can you take better advantage of what you have? Most important, how are these gifts being used?
- 2 Pentecostal Christians believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, what is the true evidence of a Spirit-filled life? See *Gal. 5:22, 23*.
- 3 What are some of the supernatural manifestations common in your culture and your part of the world? What seems to be the fruit of these manifestations? What are ways that you, as a church, cannot only protect other church members from being deceived but also help others outside the church be aware of the potential dangers inherent in these manifestations?
- 4 Discuss what Ellen G. White says in the first quote listed above. What does she mean about the gifts being “purified and ennobled”? What is she talking about? Can people have gifts that are used for wrong purposes? Explain.

# Not Afraid

by ARASH\*

I am a refugee living in a Middle Eastern country. I was imprisoned when I refused to work on a project involving chemical warfare. There I met someone who helped me escape and flee the country.

I applied to the United Nations for refugee status and hid in the city while the paperwork was processed. There I met a Christian couple who really impressed me. Although I had grown up in a religious country, I did not practice religion. But I could see the difference their God made in their lives. I accepted their invitation to worship with them in their house church though I did not intend to become a Christian. I did not understand a lot of what the man said, but his life and behavior made me want to know about God. I began to read the Bible they gave me.

When the government learned that I was a refugee and knew military secrets about my homeland, they pressed me to talk. I refused. They threatened me, beat me, and put a gun to my head; but still I refused to talk. My Christian friends prayed for my safety, and one day the interrogator told me to leave the city if I wanted to live. He actually helped me leave the city. I made my way to the capital city.

When I arrived, I missed my Christian friends. I started worshiping in a Protestant church, but I noticed that they did not have the same love in their lives. I remembered how my friends who had introduced me to Jesus *lived* like Jesus. I kept searching.

Then one day I met a Christian woman and saw God's love in her life. She invited me to worship with a small group, and I accepted. I watched the people and realized that these Christians lived what they preached, as my friends had.

The pastor asked me to translate *The Desire of Ages*, and the book changed my life. I realized that the Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. Reading just the New Testament is like reading only the last half of a book and trying to understand it. I realized that I had found the true church that followed God's Word.

The church members are not perfect, but they seek to follow God's Word. I want to be like Jesus, to serve people, teach people, and help people, no matter who or where they are. I will go where God leads me, even back to my homeland. I am not afraid.

Please pray for me; pray for the people in my homeland and the people in my adopted country. They need to meet Jesus, for they are His children; they just don't know it yet.

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\*ARASH (not his real name) awaits God's marching orders from his adopted home in the Middle East.