

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?**

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.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *1 Corinthians 12:4–6*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: That prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to some individuals in the church.

Feel: Gratitude for God manifesting His power in the church.

Do: Identify and use spiritual gifts.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Some to Be Prophets (*Eph. 4:11–13*)

A How would you define a spiritual gift?

B In what ways does prophecy contribute to the outcomes mentioned in verses 12 and 13?

II. Not All Prophets Speak for God (*Acts 8:9–25; 16:16–18; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10*)

A Certain gifts more obviously reveal the presence of the supernatural. What dangers exist in overemphasizing those gifts, undervaluing them, or blindly following them?

B How do you feel about manifestations of the supernatural? What role do our feelings play in discerning genuine versus counterfeit manifestations?

III. Apply Spiritual Gifts (*1 Corinthians 12*)

A This passage affirms the equality of the gifts while chapter 14 suggests that some may be more useful than others. How should prophecy function in relation to the other gifts? Does one gift override the others? What role does love (chapter 13) play?

B How can we discover what our gifts are? How do we recognize and affirm if there is a prophet among us?

▶ **Summary:** The Holy Spirit empowers the church for health and growth by dispensing spiritual gifts. One of these gifts is prophecy. We need to identify and use our gifts in the body of Christ so that the Head is glorified.

C O N T I N U E D 

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.*

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Just as God endows the church with spiritual gifts, including prophecy and tongues, each one of us is endowed with spiritual gifts to help finish God’s work on earth.

South Korean soprano Sumi Jo was born with a heart full of music. No surprise when you consider that her mother listened to soprano arias during her pregnancy, for she dreamed of having a daughter who would one day grow up to be a great singer.

In 1988 that dream came true. The great conductor Herbert von Karajan heard Sumi Jo debut, calling her, “a voice from heaven.”—www.scena.org/lsm/sm9-8/sumi-jo.htm.

The last time heaven gave a concert on earth, it took place at night before an audience of shepherds more than two thousand years ago. Unfortunately no one today, not even a music expert like the late Mr. von Karajan, has heard heaven sing since then. But one need only listen to Sumi Jo’s *Prayers* to get an idea of just what it must have been like to be in that field of shepherds.

Listening to the vocal purity and the ease with which she hits those high notes, you may find it surprising to know that Sumi Jo started singing as a mezzo soprano, with a much smaller range of notes. She most likely would have remained one if not for the intervention of a very special teacher, who told Sumi that she was a coloratura soprano, capable of singing impossibly high notes and complicated trills. Sumi could sing only a high C at the time. But after three years of hard study, Sumi Jo taught herself to sing 12 more notes beyond that, increasing her range by an octave and a half.—www.scena.org/lsm/sm9-8/sumi-jo.htm.

Gifted people take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. Sumi Jo’s voice is one in a million. But in a church of fifteen million members, each one of us is like the only one to God. Each is special and gifted in His eyes. It is up to us to use for Him what He has given us.

Consider This: Just as God has given the gift of prophecy to the church, He gives us talents and spiritual gifts to consecrate to Him for use to spread His truth. What are your spiritual gifts? How are you being called to use those gifts for Him? Like Sumi Jo, we may not be aware of the true range of our gifts. How has God used teachers or mentors to help you reach your true potential in Him?

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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.

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. Spiritual Gifts and the Gift of Prophecy** (*Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:11–13 with your class.*)

The spiritual gifts are given to build up God’s people (*1 Cor. 12:7, 14:4, Eph. 4:12*), to prepare them to face the future with confidence, and for eternal life (*John 12:50, Rom. 6:23*). Ephesians 4:12 says the gifts are used for “equipping” the saints (*NKJV*). Interestingly, the word used for “equipping,” *katartizo*, is also used in Matthew 4:21 to mean the mending of nets. In Galatians 6:1 the word is used to mean restoring those who have been overtaken in a fault. So, in a sense, the gifts were given for the purpose of “mending” or “restoring” God’s people and *knitting* or uniting them together. The prophetic gift was especially indispensable to the founding of the church in New Testament times, uniting God’s people together. And today it is the appointed guide of the remnant church.

Second Peter 1:19–21 defines the gift of prophecy. It is the act of speaking authoritatively for God, either by foretelling future events or declaring God’s will. Foretelling is not essential to the nature of a prophet; neither are all prophetic utterances considered predictions. Some utterances may be warnings or counsel given to the prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit. A prophet may speak of the past, present, or future.

Just as the Holy Spirit inspires the prophets, He also specifically equips the church with spiritual gifts, whether it is the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues. All who surrender to Jesus and join His church have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will equip them with the ability to perform their duties as Christians to the highest degree. Spiritual gifts are meant to prepare us to successfully do God’s work no matter what the circumstances.

Consider This: What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Why is the gift of prophecy so important to the church? While each of us has different gifts, what is implied by the fact that each and every member, surrendered to Jesus, is promised spiritual gift(s)?

II. Counterfeit Gifts (*Read Acts 16:16 with your class.*)

In Acts 16 we read of a young female slave with a spirit of divination, or a “Python spirit,” as Luke calls it, who was following Paul. In Greek

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?

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 reproved 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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

mythology Python was a serpent or dragon who was believed to have guarded the oracle at Delphi, the place where ancient Greeks sought the counsel of their gods. The sun god Apollo was believed to have killed Python and was hence called Pythian Apollo. Interestingly, Python was worshiped at Delphi as the symbol of wisdom. And the ancient writer Plutarch, who was a priest of Pythian Apollo, tells us that the name Python was given to those practicing ventriloquism, the act of talking through a medium. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 330.)

When one thinks back to the very first medium, the serpent in Eden that tempted Eve with its spurious brand of wisdom, this association of serpents as mouthpieces for divine wisdom really should come as no surprise. Satan was the first ventriloquist, and four thousand years later, Luke tells us that he's using his same tricks again, speaking through the body of this girl. Luke implies that her wild cries and contortions were similar to the priestesses at Delphi. No doubt the local people believed the slave girl's utterances were oracles or divine messages from the gods.

What makes the story even more tragic is that there were men who exploited the girl's powers for monetary gain. But what the men who exploited her didn't see was that the darkened mind of this girl longed for salvation. The evil spirit inside her used her at every opportunity to harass and block the progress of God's work. But when Paul gave the command to depart from the girl, the spirit was powerless to resist.


Consider This: More often than not, it is easy to be like the townspeople, who mistake the profane for the sacred. What guidelines do the texts in Acts 16 give us for separating the counterfeit gift of prophecy from the spurious utterance of the "Python"?

► STEP 3—Practice

Witnessing

It was dark and late when the fuel light flickered on. For Marie and her two colleagues traveling from Russia to Romania to hold health and Bible seminars for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it was a bad sign: they were almost on empty, and the town they approached had shut down for the evening. They prayed and kept driving.

They saw a man on a bicycle weaving down a side street. Marie called out to him. "We need fuel. Can you help us?" She spoke to him mostly in English, using the few Romanian words she knew.

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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?

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

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

He answered in a mixture of Romanian and Russian. “Follow me to my house,” he said. “It’s about ten minutes away, and I’ll help you find fuel.” To her surprise, Marie had no trouble understanding him. Her two companions, however, understood nothing he said. Marie urged them to follow him. One of her colleagues objected. It didn’t take a linguist to interpret that the man had been drinking. But Marie and her other colleague trusted that this man, though reeking of alcohol, might be an answer to prayer.

They followed the man on the bike to his house. But once they arrived safely, it suddenly became a struggle to communicate. Marie no longer understood him when he spoke, and he no longer understood her.

The next morning, the language barrier that had momentarily broken down the night before was still lodged firmly in place. Even so, the Romanian man took one of Marie’s colleagues and an empty gasoline can door to door until they collected enough fuel to make it to the Romanian border.

Though staying the night with the Romanian man’s family was only a small side trip in a much larger journey, the experience made a deep impression on Marie. It was a far cry from her first experience with tongues. Raised a Catholic who found her way into a charismatic church, she then experienced the false gift of tongues, never doubting it was the real thing.

Not long before joining the Adventist Church, however, Marie heard about an experience that made her question this belief: A visitor to the Episcopal charismatic church service recognized one of the tongues being spoken during the service. But instead of words of praise to God, the person speaking in tongues uttered blasphemy. “The false gift of tongues is powerful when you hear it in others or hear it in yourself. But this visitor planted a seed,” Marie recalls, making her doubt the charismatic church’s use of the gift. “Later when I studied the Bible with a Seventh-day Adventist Bible worker, I learned the truth and let go of the false tongues.”

For Marie, traveling from Russia to Romania to hold seminars was more than just getting from point A to point B. What she learned about the true gift of tongues was in many ways the true destination of her journey.

Consider This: How would you help someone understand the Bible’s teaching of the gift of tongues? What’s the difference between the true gift and the false? How can you tell? How does Marie’s experience illustrate one of the true purposes of the gift of tongues?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

Consider This: In what ways do you feel the Lord prompting you to use your God-given talents? In what ways can you use them to better serve your church and community?

Ask a volunteer to pray that God will help us to make good use of our spiritual gifts.

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.