



DISCOVERING REVELATION

#23

The Testimony of Jesus

The Bible is clear that all Christian believers have spiritual gifts—special abilities that God has given them to help in the work of carrying the gospel to the whole world. Every Christian has at least one gift, and no Christian has none. Lists of these gifts may be found in passages such as Ephesians 4:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11; and Romans 12:6-8.

As the world rapidly approaches the end of history, these gifts will enable the church to fulfill its mandate to bring the everlasting gospel to the entire world. This, of course, angers the devil, who is portrayed in Revelation 12:17 as a dragon who is angry with those who:

- Keep the commandments of God, and
- Have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

What does the expression “the testimony of Jesus Christ” mean? The Bible offers a key to understanding this mysterious expression. In Revelation 19:10, “the testimony of Jesus” is defined as “the spirit of prophecy” and the angel identifies John’s “brethren” as those who have “the testimony of Jesus.” In Revelation 22:9, the angel identifies John’s “brethren” as those who are *prophets*. In 1 Corinthians 1:6, 7, Paul identifies the “testimony of Christ” as a spiritual gift. When we put all the evidence together, it is easy to determine what “the testimony of Jesus” is. It is an expression used in the Bible to refer to a particular spiritual gift that is very active in the last days—the gift of prophecy. This gift appears in virtually all of the lists of gifts in the Bible.

But how can you tell whether or not somebody has the genuine gift of prophecy? There are enough nutcases running around to make you wonder. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24:24 that there would be a proliferation of false prophets in the last days—some of which will be so convincing that even *Christians* might fall for them!

We have a right—and even a duty—to be suspicious of anybody who claims to have heard from God. The marketplace is literally flooded with people who claim to be receiving special information from God: psychics, fortune tellers, aura readers, clairvoyants and even a few misguided “Christians.”

How can you tell the difference between the genuine gift of prophecy and a counterfeit? Fortunately, the Bible gives us some tests to apply and characteristics to watch for:

1. ACCURACY — Someone with a genuine prophetic gift will have an accuracy rate of 100 percent, because God is never wrong. Unless a prophecy is specifically conditional (like Jonah’s prophecy that Nineveh would be destroyed), it must come to pass without fail.

This rules out so-called prophets like Nostradamus, who out of 449 major prophecies only managed to get 41 right—an accuracy rate of about nine percent! It is simply not good enough. Nostradamus’ inspiration did not come from God. (And if it didn’t come from God, where do you suppose it came from? There’s a good reason God forbids the psychic arts. See Deuteronomy 18:10-12, for example.)

Deuteronomy 18:22 and Jeremiah 28:9 make it clear that if somebody has a genuine prophetic gift, when that person says “such and such” is definitely going to come to pass, you can count on it.

2. AGREEMENT WITH THE BIBLE — There are people who claim to have the prophetic gift who also say that the Bible is inaccurate or that their own writings somehow supersede Scripture. Deuteronomy 13:1 and Isaiah 8:20 strongly disagree. If somebody has the *real* gift of prophecy, they will not contradict what the Bible says. The Bible—and the Bible only—is the rule of faith for the Christian. If God speaks to somebody, He is not going to point them in a direction the Bible forbids. He won’t tell them to break His law, either.

(There is an interesting connection made between breaking God’s law and losing the prophetic gift in Lamentations 2:9 [not covered in the lecture]. It seems that when Israel’s apostasy got really bad, God suspended the gift of prophecy. Why? Because God won’t work with a prophet who doesn’t respect His Word!)

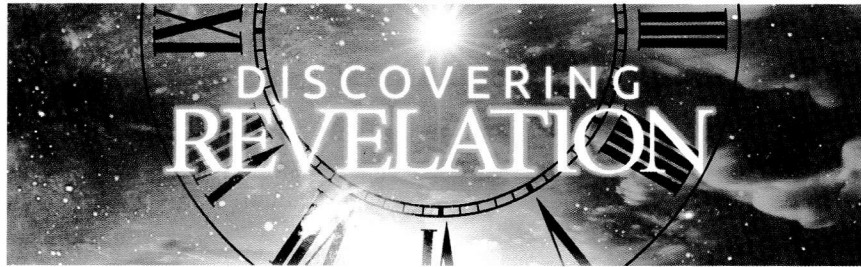
3. DREAMS AND VISIONS — The Bible is clear: God does not speak to people through tarot cards, tea leaves or crystal balls. His appointed method, as mentioned in Numbers 12:6 and Joel 2:28, is through dreams and visions.

4. BREATHING — A real prophet doesn’t breathe in vision, according to Daniel 10:16, 17. Daniel’s experience in vision was that he became very weak and quit breathing. If somebody claims to be having a vision from God, try pinching his or her nostrils shut!

5. SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH — According to Daniel’s experience in Daniel 10:18, after Daniel fell to the ground, an angel came, picked him up and strengthened him. Those who exhibit the *real* gift of prophecy have been known to exhibit unusual feats of strength.

In order for somebody to qualify for the real gift of prophecy, he or she needs to meet all of the above tests. This is God’s way of protecting us from counterfeits. It is not enough to simply ignore everybody who claims to have the gift; the Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 to “quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

God challenges us to put so-called prophets to the test, because sometimes, it is real. Does it still happen? We have no choice but to believe that it does, because the Bible is clear. It is a *real* gift of the Spirit—but we must be exceptionally cautious about it and never stray from using the Bible as our *only* rule of faith. There are lots of things going on in the name of Christianity today that people claim are genuine spiritual gifts. Not all of them are, and that is why Jesus warned us to be very careful. When someone claims to have a gift from God, test it with your Bible!



The Testimony of Jesus

Just before He returned to heaven, Jesus told the disciples that they were to be witnesses to the gospel, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading outward to the rest of Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the whole world. (Acts 1:8) But He also told them that they would not have to do this in their own strength. The Holy Spirit would give them the “power” to carry out this responsibility. Whenever Jesus asks us to do something, He always gives us the resources to do what He asks.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. On how many of Christ’s followers does the Holy Spirit bestow a spiritual gift? (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Every Christian receives at least one spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit; no one is left out. These are special abilities that the Spirit gives to help us carry the gospel to the whole world as Jesus has directed.

2. What abilities are included in these gifts of the Holy Spirit? (Ephesians 4:11, 12; Romans 12:4-7; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

As the coming of Jesus rapidly draws nearer, these spiritual gifts will enable the church to fulfill Jesus’ commission to share the everlasting gospel with the entire world. (Revelation 14:6) Of course, this makes Satan angry.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

3. What is it about Jesus’ church in the last days that makes Satan so angry? (Revelation 12:17)

They keep _____

They have _____

4. What is “the testimony of Jesus”? (Revelation 19:10)

The Bible defines “the testimony of Jesus” as “the spirit of prophecy.” What does this mean? The angel says that John’s “brethren” are those who have the testimony of Jesus. And in Revelation 22:9, the angel refers to John’s brethren as “the prophets.”

When we put all this together, it seems clear that “the testimony of Jesus” is an expression the Bible uses to refer to one particular spiritual gift—the gift of prophecy—that is active in God’s church in the last days. The gift of prophecy appears in each of the Bible’s lists of the Spirit’s gifts. (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4)

DETERMINING THE GENUINE GIFT FROM SATAN’S COUNTERFEIT

5. What warning did Christ give concerning the prophetic gift in the last days? (Matthew 24:4, 5, 24)



Satan tries to deceive us by counterfeiting God’s gifts. Jesus warns that there will be false prophets in the last days, claiming to have the genuine gift of prophecy from the Holy Spirit.

And we see that taking place today. Magazines, television,

radio, the Internet—these are filled with individuals claiming to have received a message from God. They claim to speak for Him as a prophet. And these false prophets will only increase as Jesus’ coming draws nearer.

6. What counsel does the Bible give us regarding the gift of prophecy in the church? (1 John 4:1)

How can we tell the difference between the genuine gift of prophecy that the Holy Spirit bestows and a counterfeit from Satan? Fortunately, the Bible gives us some tests to apply and some characteristics to look for to help us sort out the real from the false.



7. What can we conclude about someone who claims to speak for God as a prophet, if the things that person predicts do not actually happen? (Jeremiah 28:9; Deuteronomy 18:21, 22)

ACCURACY. God is never wrong or mistaken, so someone who speaks for Him as a prophet will have a 100 percent accuracy rate. A genuine prophetic word from God will come to pass just as predicted, unless it is specifically conditional—like Jonah’s prophecy that Nineveh would be destroyed. The psychics and the tabloid “prophets” have a poor track record in making accurate predictions! But you can rely on the word of someone who has the genuine prophetic gift, because that person speaks for God.

8. Can a person have the genuine gift of prophecy and contradict the teachings of the Bible? (Deuteronomy 13:1-4; Isaiah 8:20)

AGREEMENT WITH THE BIBLE. The Bible and the Bible *only* is the rule of faith and practice for the Christian. God will not speak to someone and point them in a different direction than what is outlined in His Word—nor will He tell them to break His commandments. If a person claims that his or her words supersede the Bible, then that person is not a genuine prophet from God.

9. Through what means does God communicate with His prophets? (Numbers 12:6; Joel 2:28)
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DREAMS AND VISIONS. God does not speak to people through crystal balls, tarot cards or tea leaves.

10. What does the Bible say about Daniel's experience while he was in vision? (Daniel 10:16-18)

SUPERNATURAL PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS. In vision, Daniel felt weak and breathless until an angel strengthened him.

11. What attitude should we have toward someone who claims to have the prophetic gift? (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

Since the Bible promises that the gift of prophecy will be present in God's church in the last days, we should not simply ignore anyone who claims to have this gift. "Do not despise prophecies," counsels Paul.

Yet we should not be too quick to accept, either. Paul continues, "Test all things; hold fast what is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Prophecy is a real gift of the Spirit—one that will characterize God's people in the last days. But we must always test it by the Bible. God's Word is our only rule of faith.

MY DECISIONS

- Lord, I want to use whatever gift the Holy Spirit gives me to serve You and share Your love with others.
- Father, I commit my life to You and desire to follow You in my life.

MY PRAYER

Father, thank You for the guidance You give us in the Bible through Your prophets. Please direct my life as I serve and follow You. Help me each day to be more like Jesus. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.