

Spirit Gifted

By David Feddes

The book of Acts is a very exciting part of the Bible which speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in launching the church of Jesus Christ and in spreading it to the ends of the earth. And we've seen how the Holy Spirit has done that through testifying that only Jesus is the way of salvation, through filling people and making Spirit-filled people mighty in his service. Also, we've seen that the Holy Spirit works in amazing ways to lead us and guide us in a whole variety of ways to walk in God's ways.

And today, we want to think about how the Spirit equips us, what it means to be Spirit-gifted people as we see that in the book of Acts and then as we see how the Spirit works in our lives today. So, we want to think about some of the areas where people were gifted by the Spirit in the book of Acts and in the rest of the New Testament and consider how the Spirit gifts you and me and all of us today.

Miraculous gifts

- Healings
- Tongues
- Prophecy

When you read the book of Acts, one of the really striking things is how amazing and miraculous some of the gifts are. There are healings that go beyond natural or medical means of healing. There are tongues—speaking in various languages. There is prophecy—messages from God that are given. And those are some of the miraculous gifts, as we're going to see. There are also other gifts besides those which we might not call miraculous, but they are just as much gifts of the Holy Spirit. But first, let's look at some of these miraculous gifts that we find in the book of Acts. We'll begin with some of the stories of healings.

Healings

A man in the temple had been lame from birth, and he was a beggar every day there. But when he met Peter and John, they gave him something better than a little more money. They told him to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus Christ. And he was leaping and dancing and praising God. He was completely healed (Acts 3:1-10).

Peter was enabled by the Lord to do amazing healings. The Bible gives a few examples of those, but then it also gives a general picture: "People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:15-16).

God's healing power was so mighty on Peter at this particular point in time that everybody who came to him was healed. The Bible also speaks of Peter going to other areas beyond Jerusalem. In one of those, he came upon a man named Aeneas who for eight years had been bedridden,

paralyzed, unable to use his legs. Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you” (Acts 9:34). And Aeneas was able to get up and walk as though he had never been lame or crippled or paralyzed at all.

Peter also went to a person who had died. Her name was Dorcas, or Tabitha. The name means “gazelle,” whatever language you say it in. She was known for doing wonderful things, making clothes, and helping people who were poor. When she died, everybody was crying and showing each other what she had made for them. Peter came to her bedside, prayed for her, and then said, “Tabitha, arise.” And the dead woman got up (Acts 9:36-41). So when we talk about healings, the apostles’ healings weren’t even limited to healing people who were still alive. Peter raised a dead woman back to life again.

Philip was someone who was not an apostle. He was a close associate of the apostles. He was one of the seven deacons. Sometimes he was called Philip the evangelist because he also had great gifts of evangelism and sharing the gospel. But God gave him powers of healing as well. “Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8). So in bringing the gospel to Samaria and the towns of that region, Philip was empowered by God to do things that really got people’s attention and brought healing and restoration.

The apostle **Paul** was another who had power from God. As a mighty apostle, God gave him the ability not only to preach the gospel with tremendous effect but also to heal people. In the city of Lystra, Paul saw a man who had been lame from birth. Paul spoke to him, and the man rose up and was completely healed (Acts 14:8-10).

And like Peter, we get the idea that the miracles of Paul that Acts tells us about are not the only ones he did. “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them” (Acts 19:11-12).

This was an amazing and wonderful thing. It is also, sadly, the source of a bad practice today—televangelists sending you handkerchiefs if you send donations. We are not going to go that route. But God did indeed work through Paul, so that even his presence and the power of Jesus in him would bring healing to people.

There’s also the humorous story of Paul preaching on and on because he hadn’t seen the people for a while. He launched into an all-nighter, preaching throughout the night. A young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window. It was a little stuffy, and he fell asleep while Paul spoke on and on. Eutychus fell out the window, several floors down, and was dead. Paul went down, took him in his arms, and raised him back to life again (Acts 20:7-12). Peter raised Dorcas (Tabitha) back to life, and here Paul was able to raise Eutychus back to life in the power of Jesus.

These tremendous healings are just a sample from the book of Acts. Now let’s think about what that means for us today.

Healings FAQ

- What were NT gifts of healings?
- Are gifts of healings today the same as in Acts and NT churches?
- If today's healing ministry differs, is it always bad?
- Are there gifts similar to NT healing that serve some similar purposes?

What were New Testament gifts of healings?

You might think, "Oops, maybe he had a typo there. Shouldn't it say 'the gift of healing?'" But when the Bible speaks of this in the epistles, it speaks of "gifts of healings" in the original language (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30). It sounds like there are multiple gifts and multiple healings.

Maybe it means there's not just one gift that somebody either has or doesn't have, and that always heals whenever they use it. "Gifts of healings" may mean that somebody has power on a given occasion from the Lord, or knowledge from the Lord that healing is going to occur on that occasion.

If you look at the apostles, you'll find they didn't always have that power for everybody. God gave it to them in certain settings to heal in mighty ways. But there were times they could not heal. Paul couldn't heal himself at one point. He had an affliction he called a "thorn in the flesh" that he prayed about but was not healed of (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). He had close associates who worked with him who got so sick that he had to leave them behind, and they wondered whether they were going to die. They eventually recovered, but not by a miracle where Paul or Peter simply spoke in the name of Jesus and brought them healing (Philippians 2:25-27; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20).

So there's something about these gifts of healings that are not simply that a person has the gift, and therefore wherever they go and whatever they do, somebody is always healed. But there were times when they would come to a city, and whoever came to them would be healed and made well again. So there's a kind of mystery to these gifts of healings as to when God would choose to do it and when he would not.

It is very clear in the book of Acts, though, that the gifts of healings in Acts are very closely associated with the frontier edge of the gospel and with those who were the apostles or close associates of the apostles. God gave them tremendous power to heal on certain occasions when he really wanted to aid the preaching of the gospel.

Are gifts of healings today the same as in Acts and NT churches?

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Does that mean that wherever the gospel goes, and where there is a certain ambassador of the gospel, they are going to have the same powers that Peter and Paul and others had?

I think the short answer to that is no. The longer answer might be yes and no, because gifts of healings are still meant for God's people today.

I'm not an apostle, and neither is anybody else today. There are no people who have that office and calling of apostle. There are no people who have that same authority. These apostles were receiving a sign from God that they were God's emissaries, and these are the people who wrote down the truth of God in the New Testament. Just as there is no Jesus but Jesus, there are no apostles but the apostles.

So we do have to face the fact that something has changed since then. There aren't apostles anymore. And so the nature of the healings that occur might shift if you don't have Peter and Paul and those who wrote the New Testament and were on that first frontier of the gospel.

On the other hand, we have to say that when the Bible speaks of gifts of healings, it's not just talking to the apostles or about the apostles. When it talks about gifts of healings, it's talking to the ordinary people of the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30) or in other letters of the New Testament. So God was giving gifts of healings for different occasions in different people.

It's possible that someone might receive a gift of healing just once—where God gives a gift of faith to know that a healing is going to occur, to pray for that, to speak it, and to see it happen. It has happened that way in the lives of quite a number of people, where they didn't become healers who always had that power upon them, but God gave it on a particular occasion.

So gifts of healings today are not necessarily exactly the same as they were in Acts and in the New Testament churches. But that is not to say that God no longer heals and that God no longer answers prayers for healing.

James 5 says that we should "call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:14-16).

So it's not just a matter of saying, "Well, I'm not going to pray for healing or ask for healing if I don't have that special gift of healing." We who are leaders are called to pray for healing—not because we necessarily have a greater gift than others, but because as leaders we are praying on behalf of all of God's people who are praying for that healing.

If today's healing ministry differs, is it always bad?

Now, there are some who say, "If today's healing ministries don't match up to the apostles in every regard, they're probably bogus, a bunch of phony baloney." And yes, there are faith healers who send out handkerchiefs for a donation. There's no doubt that some who do that are phonies. But that doesn't mean that everybody who has a gift, and whom God may bless in special ways as they call on the Lord for healing for others, is fake. Their gift may differ significantly from the apostles', but that doesn't mean there is no such gift.

It also means we need to be cautious about always insisting that the gift of healing comes instantly and with supernatural certainty. That was how the apostles operated. They didn't say, "Well, one leg is a little shorter than the other, so I'll pray over you and we'll get a good leg

adjustment.” No, they took dead people and made them alive again—instantly, completely (Acts 9:40-41; Acts 20:9-12). That’s very different from praying for someone who is sick and seeing a gradual turn in their condition.

Does that mean that seeing a gradual turn in someone’s condition is worthless or that God didn’t do it? No. It’s just saying that it was not a miracle of the same kind, suddenness, and completeness that God did through the apostles.

But God is the healer of every disease. So whether healing comes suddenly and miraculously, or slowly and through medical means, there are people who have gifts of healings.

Are there gifts similar to New Testament healing that serve some similar purposes?

The answer is yes. Anytime believers pray for the healing of another, that serves a purpose similar to those great and miraculous healings. Anytime someone with medical knowledge or knowledge of nutrition is able to help with your health—and if they are a believer, to pray with you for that health as they apply that knowledge—wherever there is a doctor, a nurse, a midwife, someone helping people toward greater bodily health, the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit is bringing gifts of healings to bear in the life of his body, the church.

So we should, as a body of believers, read the book of Acts with awe and astonishment at what God did to launch the church. We should realize that some things have changed since that foundation-laying period of the church and the mighty apostles God sent. At the same time, we should not dismiss the possibilities that lie open to us for God’s healing gifts to be present among his people and for healers to be used in a mighty way among God’s people.

Tongues

While there were gifts of healings, there were also gifts of tongues in the book of Acts. On the day of **Pentecost**, there was the sound of a great wind and tongues of fire. Then those who were gathered there—about 120 people—began to praise God in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

And then when Peter was called to go to the household of **Cornelius**, a Roman army officer, he preached the gospel of Jesus to them. While he was still speaking, Cornelius and those with him began to speak in tongues. These Gentiles were speaking in other languages, and Peter recognized that what was happening in Cornelius and the people with him was the very same thing that had happened when Pentecost occurred.

In fact, when others questioned Peter about why he ate with Gentiles, he replied, “God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (Acts 11:17). So whatever Cornelius and his household did, they received the same Holy Spirit, and they spoke in the same kind of tongue that was spoken on Pentecost in the same way (Acts 10:44-47; Acts 11:15-17).

There's a third story about speaking in tongues in Acts 19. "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied" (Acts 19:1-3).

They had been baptized. They had heard of John the Baptist, who talked about repentance. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:4). So they had heard the message of John the Baptist, but the message of Jesus hadn't reached them yet. That was their current status.

"On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all" (Acts 19:5-7).

Those are the three incidents in the book of Acts that involved speaking in tongues. That has been turned into a whole system by some believers who say that everybody who ever receives the Holy Spirit in his fullness will speak in tongues, because they say that's what happened in the New Testament.

It's a little more correct to say it happened three times in the New Testament. And when it happened those three times, what actually was involved? They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. But what was going on? What does it mean for us today?

Tongues FAQ

- What was the NT gift of tongues?
- Are "tongues" today the same as tongues in Acts and NT churches?
- If today's "tongues" are different, are such "tongues" always bad?
- Are there gifts similar to tongues that serve some similar purposes?

What was that New Testament gift of tongues?

What was that gift of tongues in the book of Acts? What happened on Pentecost when they spoke in tongues? It says that people from a whole bunch of different nations were in Jerusalem at that time for the festival, and they were hearing the praises of God in their own languages. "Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?'" (Acts 2:7-8).

So when Peter and the others were speaking, they were speaking in other human languages that were understandable to those who spoke those languages. It was a reversal of what had happened at the Tower of Babel, where people who were all speaking one language suddenly were speaking different ones and couldn't understand each other (Genesis 11:1-9). Here, people who hadn't learned a language were able to speak God's praises in that language and be understood by those who spoke it. So in the book of Acts, the gift of tongues is the ability to speak another

language that somebody who knows that language can understand—even though you never learned it.

Now, when did that happen in Acts? It happened at great turning points. It happened on Pentecost, when God first gave his Spirit to the church (Acts 2:1-11). It happened when a group of Gentiles came to the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time, and God gave them the exact same ability to show that they had received the exact same Spirit that had been given to the apostles and to the Jerusalem church (Acts 10:44-46; Acts 11:15-17). And then the third time it happened was with disciples of John the Baptist who hadn't yet heard the full message of Jesus (Acts 19:1-7).

And it happened each time to a group. It did not happen to an individual praying, “Lord, I know that the gift of tongues is a sign of having received the Holy Spirit. So please give me that Spirit and give me that gift.” You’ll notice that is not what happened in the book of Acts. The whole group received the gift at once and without seeking it. It happened on Pentecost. It happened with Cornelius and his household, who hadn’t even heard of tongues, and it just happened to them as a whole household. It happened with the twelve in Ephesus who had been followers of John the Baptist. They weren’t seeking anything. They were simply baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

In each case, it showed that they needed to be in the new covenant. By God’s grace through Jesus, you are brought into the new covenant when you believe in Jesus and are baptized into him. Then they received the gift of the Spirit, and they received a sign that John’s disciples, Gentiles, and Jewish people alike are all together recipients of the Holy Spirit.

That’s how the book of Acts describes the gift of tongues. There are many other people who came to faith and believed, and it doesn’t say anything about them one way or the other having received that gift of tongues. So it’s risky to turn three stories into an entire system in which tongues is always the sign of being baptized with the Spirit.

Are tongues today the same as tongues in Acts and in New Testament churches?

You might break that question down. Some think the tongues given in Acts are different from the tongues described in more detail in 1 Corinthians. Many scholars, even those who might be called charismatic or Pentecostal and who believe strongly in tongues as a main sign of the Holy Spirit, would still say that in Acts it wasn’t necessarily the same kind of gift as in Corinthians. Some would say in Corinthians it is more like speaking in a language no human speaks, whereas in Acts it was clearly human languages that people could understand.

Well, what about that? As I’ve already said, I think it’s clear from the book of Acts that people who spoke in tongues were speaking in other human languages, understandable to humans.

Some say that speaking in tongues is more like free vocalization, like a baby or toddler beginning to make noises and syllables that don’t mean anything, but are nonetheless expressions. And there might be some who would say, “If that’s what it is, I want nothing to do with it.”

But others say the gift of tongues as it is experienced today comes as speaking in a language they don't understand at all. They believe that if someone else hears it, another person might have a gift of interpretation to say what it means and give a message. But even if it is not interpreted, you may still have a private prayer language where, from the depths of your spirit, you are making certain kinds of sounds. You don't know what they mean, but they are coming from the Spirit through your spirit. That can build you up in faith and in zeal and in joy for the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14-15).

Saying that tongues are not any human language and yet can be interpreted by humans does have some hazards. At the very least, a church would need to be cautious about tongues and interpretation.

J. I. Packer, in his book *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, mentions someone who was part of a service where many people were speaking in tongues. He thought it was a multilingual prayer service. So he began praying in his own language—Ethiopian. He prayed the Lord's Prayer in Ethiopian, and some people in the service promptly interpreted it for him, saying it was a word about the second coming.

There was another who recited Psalm 23 in Coptic, and one interpreter said it was a prayer for guidance about a new job offer. Another said it was thanks for a return to health after a serious illness. But it was simply Psalm 23. And when they were informed of that fact, they weren't fazed. They said, "Well, both interpretations came from the Lord."

This is a very hazardous procedure, because a lot of people handle the Bible that way. They think the Bible means whatever thoughts get triggered in their brain when they hear a passage. But the Bible has definite meanings, and a passage doesn't mean what it doesn't mean. Meaningful communication of God's Word means that whatever interpretation is given must be true to the message actually being conveyed—not simply whatever thoughts are triggered by hearing the sounds.

So we need to be aware that where there is a tongue and an interpretation, there can be great risk that interpretations will be given which have nothing to do with what was actually said.

If today's "tongues" are different from Acts, are such "tongues" always bad?

Many people who practice tongues today would not claim to be speaking another human language they haven't learned—unless they say it is the language of heaven. But they would still say it is a gift, enabling them to praise God from their spirit without fully understanding what they are saying, without putting it into syllables that anyone else could necessarily make sense of, unless someone has the gift of interpretation.

Some would say, "That shows tongues are from the devil, because they aren't identical to the gift of tongues in Acts." I would say, not so fast. Something that doesn't measure up exactly to the Acts gift of tongues, and might even be mislabeled if you call it that, might still be something beneficial in the life of a believer and used by the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the Lord gives people a sense of release and joy in praising him in that way through their private prayers. That might not be an evil thing. It might bring them much blessing. But it would be a misunderstanding and mislabeling to call it identical to the Acts gift of tongues.

Are there gifts similar to tongues that serve some similar purposes?

I think so. One is translating Scripture. Take William Carey, who was called to be a pioneer missionary. He didn't have the gift of tongues, of speaking another language without learning it. He had to work hard to learn languages of India. But in another sense, you could say he did have the gift of tongues—he translated the Bible into eleven languages. He may have done more good than someone able to “jabber” in private devotions. I'm not trying to denigrate all ecstatic utterance. I am saying that translating the Bible into eleven different languages was a very great gift of the Holy Spirit to the church through William Carey, and to the people of India.

There is also nonverbal communication. Some may say, “He's really stretching it if he calls languages that aren't languages a gift of the Spirit.” But you do it every Sunday—you sing. Music is a language without syllables or precise meanings and definitions. Yet it speaks deeply. Music has dangers, too, but it also has blessing because it stirs and speaks from a part of us that is not merely rational or intellectual.

So music itself has something in common with a language of praise and prayer. And maybe some of you have other thoughts about what really stirs your spirit to praise the Lord—not by giving you new information for your mind, but by stirring your heart to love him more and praise him from the heart for things you already know.

As we think about the gifts of the Spirit, we need to be very cautious about saying, “If it doesn't rise to the level of Acts, if it doesn't match exactly what happened there, then it's useless or of the devil.” We need to be open to whatever gifting God gives that may be similar in purpose to those gifts.

Prophecy

What about the gift of prophecy? On Pentecost, the apostle Peter quoted from the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). This is a great prediction of what would happen when the Holy Spirit was given. Peter said, “This is what's happening now. God has sent his Holy Spirit on his people” (Acts 2:16-18).

Here's another story about prophecy—actually, two together. “Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied” (Acts 21:8-9). So these four daughters—whether girls or grown women by that point—had the gift of prophecy, and they were the daughters of Philip the evangelist.

“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles’” (Acts 21:10-11). So Agabus was a prophet. Earlier in Acts, he had correctly predicted a famine and helped the church prepare to deal with it (Acts 11:27-28). Now he tied himself with Paul’s belt and said, “This is what’s going to happen to you, Paul.”

“When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, ‘The Lord’s will be done’” (Acts 21:12-14).

So you have prophecy at a number of points in Acts. You have the apostles themselves, and you also have others who were called prophets—Agabus and some with him (11:27; 21:10), Barnabas and Saul, and at least three others in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Judas and Silas, who carried a letter from the Jerusalem Council about including Gentiles in the church, were themselves prophets. They weren’t just letter carriers. They had the gift of prophecy, which was one reason they were chosen to bring the letter (Acts 15:32). Those converts in Ephesus who spoke in tongues and prophesied after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:9). And in the letters to Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica, we read of people with gifts of prophecy (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:20). So prophecy was very much a part of the New Testament church, and it was a foundational gift.

There were people who were not apostles who were still prophets. Take Luke, for instance, or Mark. They wrote inspired Scriptures, even though they were not among the apostles appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Not only were they close associates of the apostles, but they had the gift of prophecy and the gift of writing exactly what God wanted them to write.

So you read about a foundation: a foundation made of apostles, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus and wrote exactly as the Holy Spirit directed them to, and prophets. “Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). Here it’s not talking about the Old Testament prophets. There are other passages that do, but here it puts apostles before prophets, and it is clearly referring to New Testament-era prophets.

It speaks of “the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:4-5). “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Now, there is only one foundation. That’s why there are no more apostles. But are there still other prophets? Some think so, but they don’t think there are prophets at the same level as the totally inspired prophets of the Old Testament, who spoke with absolute authority and were never wrong, or the inspired prophets of the New Testament, who wrote down Scripture—Luke and Mark.

They think there were also what you might call congregational prophets, who would spontaneously receive a sense of what God was saying, or a revelation from God, and then speak it in human words. Those words could be somewhat off, but nonetheless were an attempt to express something divinely given. That kind of prophecy would be very different than foundation-level prophecy, Scripture-level prophecy, and would not be absolutely perfect and infallible.

Here again, let me remind you of the main question that runs through all this: what is Acts? It is a history of the church's foundational period. That was a unique time that ended after the apostles died and the New Testament was finished. The foundation cannot be relaid. But it would be a mistake to say that's all there is to say, because Acts is also a portrait of lively church and mission in the new covenant age of the Holy Spirit, which continues until Jesus returns. So it's not correct to say, "That was way back then, and things are totally different now." And at the same time, it's not correct to say, "Things today should be exactly as they were in the New Testament era under the leadership of the apostles." We have to live in the tension of both facts: that the period was foundational and therefore unique in some ways, and at the same time it was laying the foundation for the work of the Holy Spirit to continue in wonderful ways in the life of the church in the years and centuries that followed.

Prophecy FAQ

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What was the New Testament gift of prophecy?

Sometimes when we hear the word "prophecy," we equate it with prediction. Actually, most prophecy wasn't prediction. There is some prophecy that predicts the future, but most prophecy is simply having God's insight into the present situation—seeing what's going on and speaking what God wants said in that situation. Sometimes that includes a statement of truth about the future and advance knowledge of what God is going to do. But a lot of the time, a prophet is someone who is speaking a word from God, and that word is insight from God into a particular situation.

Another thing to be said is that God promised in the new covenant he would write his law on the hearts of all his people and make people—young and old, male and female—his prophets. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). On Pentecost Peter applied Joel's prophecy about the Spirit being poured out on all people so that they would prophesy (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). So there is something universal and very broad about this gift. You have the Holy Spirit living in you, and he gives you an understanding of his Word and of how that Word applies to our situations today.

Is prophecy today the same as it was in Acts and New Testament churches?

One way of looking at it is how Wayne Grudem defines it. He says prophecy is telling in human words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind. That's what he calls congregational-level prophecy. God brings something to mind, and you say it. You don't necessarily say it in perfect, infallible, error-free words, but it is nonetheless prompted by God.

J. I. Packer would say that Spirit-given prophecy today isn't adding to God's truth. I think Grudem would agree with that. You're not adding to God's truth. The canon is finished. The Bible is written. All that God wants us to know of Christ, all that he wants us to know of the principles for Christian living, has been given. We are not *adding* to God's truth, but *applying* it to particular situations.

The insight of how Scripture applies, how God's truth applies to a particular situation, is one of the main elements of the gift of prophecy today. And that means if you want to flourish and grow in the gift of prophecy, part of it is simply to know your Bible. Read it a lot. Learn it. Memorize more and more of it.

Because something in common with the prophetic gift of ancient times is this: the Lord may call to mind a Scripture that applies to a situation or person. Or he may give you insight into a situation and then bring to mind the Scripture that goes with it.

If today's "prophecy" is different, is such "prophecy" always bad?

Bible-based, Spirit-prompted insight is different in some ways from Isaiah receiving direct visions and messages from God, or Paul writing letters where every word was directly from God. Now, if today's prophecy is different, does that mean it's bad? I don't think so.

But you might want to be cautious about using the word "prophet." Where do you use the word "prophecy," and where do you say "teaching," "exhortation," or "application of Scripture"? It's wise to be careful in how we use the word "prophecy." But to say, "There is no more prophecy, end of discussion," would be to underestimate what the Holy Spirit still does today.

The Holy Spirit illuminates the Bible when you read it, giving you understanding. He applies the Bible to your life. Sometimes he helps you see how it applies in the life of your church. Sometimes in conversation with someone, a thought may come to you. It might not be infallible, but it might be the exact message God wants shared with that person. You may think, "This thought that just came to me is no big deal. Everybody already knows that." But there are a lot of things everybody already knows that they still need to hear at the right point in time. That is, to a great degree, how the gift of prophecy works today: knowing the word that needs to be heard by this person right now.

Sometimes preaching has an element of that gift of prophecy. Preaching is largely teaching—careful study of the Bible, then trying to explain it as clearly as you can. But during the course of preaching, sometimes the Holy Spirit will come with a special power and anointing on that preaching. And sometimes he will give a word or something to be said that hits you right

between the eyes. The preacher might not even have planned it, but it had a particular prophetic relevance to your situation. It's not just general teaching. My main gift probably is teaching, but preaching sometimes includes a message from the Lord that goes beyond just the general principles and facts about our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are there gifts similar to prophecy that serve some similar purposes?

I think Scripture recitation is one. If God lays it on your heart to learn a particular passage of Scripture, that may be how he's speaking to you in a very particular way right now. When you share that, he may be conveying something for the blessing of the entire congregation.

When you have a testimony, you may say, "I'm so scared to get up front." But if God puts something on your heart and you have opportunity to testify—in conversation after church or during testimony time in church on the first Sunday of the month—that's part of using Spirit-prompted words that are meant to be shared publicly.

Word gifts

I'm a preacher. I get paid to preach. But churches too often become one-man shows. That's not what the church is designed to be. God gives a variety of people and a variety of gifts. God can give gifts of teaching and prophecy or communicating exhortation and encouragement—he gives those gifts to a wide variety of people, not just one paid preacher. So as churches we need to find ways to encourage and cultivate the sharing of those gifts. "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

To the Colossians Paul wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

So there are word gifts—prophecy or tongues, but also simply teaching, admonishing, encouraging, and singing. These are all ways that Christ's body is built up through the gifts of the Spirit.

"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:1, 39). 1 Corinthians 12–14 is the most extensive description of spiritual gifts in the Bible, especially prophecy and tongues, if you want to read more about it. But notice this: eagerly desire these spiritual gifts as an outflow of a life of love, not as an opportunity to show off or be a big shot. The call to love is what drives all the gifts.

Miraculous gifts

- **Attest apostles:** validate authority
- **Glorify God:** stir awe and joy

- **Spread gospel:** attract attention
- **Meet needs:** help the desperate
- **Build body:** strengthen church

Some say, “We should dismiss tongues, prophecy, miracles, and get on with the business of sound teaching and ordinary medical care.” I’m all for sound teaching and ordinary medical care. But some who are cessationist (saying certain gifts completely stopped) would argue that gifts were given only to attest to the apostles and validate their authority, and therefore they have no further function. But that was never the only purpose of the gifts. Yes, they did validate the apostles, and that was very important. But that wasn’t the only thing they did, and it’s not the only thing they can do now.

The miraculous gifts, should God be pleased to give them, will still do the same things they did back then: glorify God, stir up awe and joy in people, and draw attention to the gospel. Don’t we need awe and joy in glorifying God now? Back then, when these gifts were displayed, whole towns perked up. They took notice. They knew something was going on. They knew God was mighty and present. It drew attention to the gospel and proved to be a spark for many people to believe and come to faith. Don’t we need people coming to faith today?

Sometimes the apostles had very few resources. Peter once said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6). We’ve got a lot of cash nowadays in the churches, but maybe we’ve lost some of that power.

So whatever gifts God chooses to give, we need to keep seeking to meet the needs of the sick, the poor, and the desperate. And if we aren’t able to do that with the natural resources God gives, let’s call on him for supernatural resources and keep calling on him to meet needs through us.

These gifts were used to build the church, to build up the body, to strengthen it. All spiritual gifts, including the supernatural ones, were meant to make the body of Christ stronger and healthier. And we still need those functions of God’s gifts today.

Now, when we think about this, does that mean every church in every era should have the same array of gifts? Go back to a previous question. Should every person have all the gifts? The answer is clearly no. God gives some gifts to one, some to another (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27-30). So should every church have all the same gifts? I’m not sure about that. I don’t think every church necessarily has to have all the same gifts to the same degree. The Holy Spirit will determine which gifts are needed in which settings.

Do all churches in all eras have to have the same gifts? The Bible doesn’t say one way or the other whether God is always going to give all the same gifts to every era of the church. But I can tell you this: during times of tremendous revival and reformation, the Holy Spirit has done tremendous things that were not always accompanied by supernatural gifts. That doesn’t mean the supernatural gifts are bad. It does mean that God is not limited in his power to reform and save by always accompanying it with the same signs.

One thing you'll learn about the Holy Spirit is that he's hard to put in a box. It's very hard to make a ten-point list of what he always does and a twelve-point list of what he never does. There are some things, of course, that he never does. He never leads you into sin. He always leads you to Jesus. Those are excellent lists you can make of what he always does and never does.

But there are also different situations where he does different things according to his sovereignty. So when we think about the gifts, we need to pray for whatever will build up the body of Christ, advance the kingdom of Christ, and lead people to faith in Christ. Then we need to be open to that and also be content with what God brings.

Spirit gifted

Paul writes, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. (1 Cor 12:1). Our Lord God wants us to know what spiritual gifts are, and he wants us to use our gifts and benefit from the gifts of other believers.

Here's a definition: *A spiritual gift is a significant ability given to each believer by the Holy Spirit, who thus equips and moves members of the church to serve in special ways for Christ and his kingdom.* You don't necessarily have to memorize that definition. Here's a short, simple definition: *something I'm good at that glorifies God and helps others.*

Spiritual gifts may be very striking and supernatural at times, but often they are an ordinary part of the way God created you. He energizes or electrifies something he already gave you a talent for and makes it mighty to build others up.

What I don't want is somebody saying, "I don't have any spiritual gifts." We asked earlier, "Does anybody have all the gifts?" The answer is no—except Jesus. No believer has all spiritual gifts, but does any believer have zero spiritual gifts? No. There is nobody with zero. If you have the Holy Spirit, you have spiritual gifts.

So if you've never thought about spiritual gifts and what God has given you a talent for that can bring blessing to others and glory to him, think about it. Think hard about the range of things God has given you that you can leverage for his glory and for others' good.

Here's a sample list, more supernatural-sounding, from 1 Corinthians: word of wisdom, word of knowledge (though this might not be supernatural; it may just be God helping you to say the right or wise thing at the right time), faith (not just faith in Jesus, but special faith that something is going to happen on a particular occasion), gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healing, helping, administration, tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 27-30).

Here's a sample from Romans: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Romans 12:6-8). Notice that this list is not quite as

supernatural-sounding for the most part as the one in 1 Corinthians. It's not a better or worse list. It's just a different list.

And don't think that if you add up all the lists of gifts in the Bible, you now know all the spiritual gifts God gives. These biblical lists are samples. God may give an even wider variety than those listed in Scripture. The lists are there to get you thinking.

Peter gives a much shorter sample: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). That divides it up nicely—there are speaking gifts and serving gifts. A whole variety of ways to *speak* in the power of the Holy Spirit, and a whole variety of ways to *serve* in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Giving

"Much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:33-35).

There are businesspeople, people who are good with money, good at making things profitable. They may say, "I wish I had a spiritual gift. I wish I had a super-duper gift." Meanwhile, the people who are speaking and using those gifts of speaking are funded by the people who know how to make money and run a successful business, and have a Spirit-prompted desire to give. It's sad if people who've been given that gift always feel, "I'm just plugging along in business while the really super-spiritual people do what really needs to be done in the kingdom of God."

No—you need to see giving as a gift. The ability to make money and then the generosity to give it is a gift from God. Barnabas had that gift. "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36-37).

Encouragement

That wasn't Barnabas's only gift. He also had the gift of prophecy. And he had the gift of encouragement. "When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:23-24). This man got the nickname Barnabas, meaning son of encouragement, because he was such a powerful encourager.

When you hear about healings, speaking in tongues, prophesying, or preaching, you may say, "All I can do is say a little something now and then, like 'Keep going, buddy.'" But don't underestimate the gift of encouragement; it is so important.

Those who have gifts of leadership and preaching—if that's all they have, I have a one-word summary of what will happen: burnout. When you have a gung-ho leader, always the visionary,

always telling you what the Lord is up to and where he's leading next, that's wonderful. That is a great spiritual gift. But if you don't have encouragers who put their arms around you, speak God's Word into your situation, and help lift you when you're running low on energy, then those leaders will burn out.

Encouragement is a tremendous gift of the Holy Spirit. He himself is the Paraclete—the Encourager, the Exhorter (John 14:16, 26).

Helping/mercy

We read about Peter's healing of Tabitha and raising her from the dead, and we say, "Wow, what a gift that apostle had." But in reading that story, we might also say, "Oh, what a gift Tabitha had." She had a gift of mercy and of helping.

"Tabitha was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, so they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!' Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas [Tabitha] had made while she was still with them" (Acts 9:37-39).

Live in such a way that when you die, people will cry. Maybe you listen to this message and you say, "That sermon on spiritual gifts kind of confused me—there was a lot I didn't figure out." Well, try this: live in such a way that when you die, people will cry. That's a really good start on using your gifts to bless others. When Tabitha died, people cried because she had meant so much to them and had done so much for them. They showed Peter all the clothes she had made and all the wonderful things she had done as a helper.

Serve and love

So when you think about being Spirit-gifted, remember this: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

And do it all in love.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing...

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 7-10).

All of the spiritual gifts are really still the baby phase of walking with God. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). When we see Jesus face to face, prophecy, tongues, knowledge—all of that—will pass away. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:1).

Prayer

Father, do your work in us. Help us not to be resistant to your Holy Spirit, and at the same time to be discerning of what really is of your Spirit. Help each one of us to examine ourselves and, with the help of others, find out what you are calling us to do. Open our eyes to the opportunities and to the abilities we have. And Lord, give us that greatest of all abilities: AVAILABILITY, readiness to do your bidding, readiness to build up your body, readiness to spread your gospel. Help this group of people, Lord, to more fully exercise our gifts together, to bless one another, and to glorify you. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Spirit Gifted

By David Feddes

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- Tongues
- Prophecy

Healings by Peter

Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth. (Acts 3:1-10)

People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed. (5:15-16)

Aeneas had been bedridden and paralyzed for eight years. Peter healed him in Jesus' name. (Acts 9:32-35)

Peter raised Tabitha from death by Jesus' power. (Acts 9:36-42)

Healings by Philip

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:5-8)

Healings by Paul

In Lystra Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth and had never walked before. (Acts 14:8-10)

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (19:11-12)

After Eutychus was killed in a fall, Paul raised him from the dead. (Acts 20:9-10)

Healings FAQ

- What were NT gifts of healings?
- Are gifts of healings today the same as in Acts and NT churches?
- If today's healing ministry differs, is it always bad?
- Are there gifts similar to NT healing that serve some similar purposes?

Miraculous gifts

- Healings
- Tongues
- Prophecy

Tongues

- Disciples on Pentecost (2:1-11) All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
- Roman household of Cornelius (10:46)
- Disciples of John the Baptist (19:6)

Tongues FAQ

- What was the NT gift of tongues?
- Are “tongues” today the same as tongues in Acts and NT churches?
- If today’s “tongues” are different, are such “tongues” always bad?
- Are there gifts similar to tongues that serve some similar purposes?

Miraculous gifts

- Healings
- Tongues
- Prophecy

Prophecy

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

^{21:8} Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.”

Prophecy

- Apostles and prophets
- Agabus, others (11:27; 21:10)
- Barnabas, Saul, others (13:1)
- Judas and Silas (15:32)
- Ephesus converts (19:6)
- Philip’s daughters (21:9)
- Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica

Foundation

... the foundation of the apostles and prophets... revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets... Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people. (Ephesians 2:20: 3:5; 4:11)

What is Acts?

- History of church's foundational period, a unique time that ended after apostles died and New Testament was finished.
- Portrait of lively church and mission in the new covenant age of the Spirit, which continues until Jesus returns.

Prophecy FAQ

- What was the NT gift of prophecy?
- Is prophecy today the same as it was in Acts and NT churches?
- If today's "prophecy" is different, is such "prophecy" always bad?
- Are there gifts similar to prophecy that serve some similar purposes?

Word gifts

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. (Colossians 3:16)

Eagerly desire

Follow the way of love and **eagerly desire** spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy... Therefore, my brothers, **be eager** to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (1 Cor 12:28; 14:1, 39)

Miraculous gifts

- **Attest apostles:** validate authority
- **Glorify God:** stir awe and joy
- **Spread gospel:** attract attention
- **Meet needs:** help the desperate
- **Build body:** strengthen church

Miraculous gifts

- Healings
- Tongues
- Prophecy

Spirit gifted

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. (1 Cor 12:1)

A spiritual gift is a significant ability given to each believer by the Holy Spirit, who thus equips and moves members of the church to serve in special ways for Christ and his kingdom.

Sample of gifts

... word of wisdom... word of knowledge... faith... gifts of healings ... miracles... prophecy... distinguishing between spirits... various kinds of tongues... interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-10)

... apostles... prophets... teachers... workers of miracles... healing... helping... administration... tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

...prophesying... serving... teaching... encouraging... contributing... leading... showing mercy (Romans 12:6-8)

apostles... prophets... evangelists... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service (Ephesians 4:11-12)

...speaking... serving (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Giving

God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (4:33-35)

Encouraging

They sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (11:22-24)

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