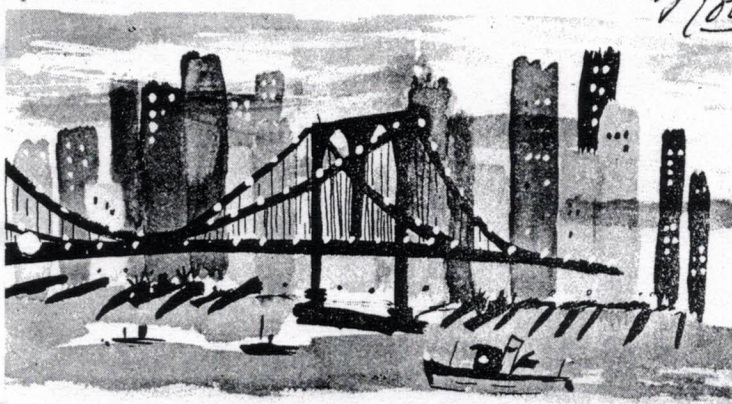


November 1971



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

THE ISSUE - 2

During my college days, I did a lot of hitch hiking between our home in Iowa and school in Nebraska. It was the best means of transportation due to the limited finances dictated by the economy of the times. Many of the men who would pick one up were traveling salesmen who were covering a large territory and wanted to talk to someone as they drove from one contact to another. I found that some of the salesmen were real thinkers and were interested in Bible topics, especially the prophecies.

On one occasion, as I was conversing about the Bible with the salesman with whom I was riding, he interrupted the conversation and asked - "When was the first book of the Bible written?" I replied - "About 1500 year before Christ." Then he asked - "And when was the last book of the Bible written?" I answered - "About 100 A. D." To this his response was - "Does that mean that God talked to men through prophets for about 1600 years, and then stopped and has said nothing since? Isn't God just as interested in speaking to men now as during those hundreds of years of Bible times?" I was thankful that I could tell that salesman about the abiding gift of prophecy in the church of God.

This experience points up the issue regarding the prophetic gift. What is the relationship between the manifestation of this gift in our day and its manifestation in previous periods of history?

The Godhead has spoken audibly once to man, and wrote in stone the words thus spoken.¹ The remainder of the Old Testament period is pierced by the messages

of the prophets who testified concerning this Law, and sought to challenge the people of God to whom the Law was committed to conform their lives to the standard of righteousness revealed in that Law. Through this dual means a norm was established by which all revelation can be tested. So it was written - "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."²

In New Testament times, the Godhead again spoke. Veiled in human flesh the Son proclaimed the will and purposes of the Father.³ "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."⁴ But the incarnate Son wrote nothing for posterity! Eyewitnesses penned what they saw and heard.⁵ These testimonies constitute the Gospels. The Epistles are what men inspired by the gift of prophecy wrote concerning the application of what the Son said and did as it relates to the lives of those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.⁶ Through this means a corollary was written to the Old Testament norm - "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."⁷ Thus the manifestation of the prophetic gift finds in the New Testament its true definition - It is the testimony of Jesus!

BUT, - and this point dare not be overlooked. The manifestation of the gift of prophecy in the Old Testament through the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, is not a different gift than what the New Testament enumerates as one of the gifts of the Spirit. It is still the Spirit of Christ testifying through the human agent.⁸ Justin Martyr in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew well stated the matter. He said to Trypho that "the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that (the gifts) formerly among your nation have been transferred to us."⁹ And the Spirit by which the gifts came was to abide in the Church to the end of time.¹⁰

While we may recognize the Canon of the Sacred Scripture as containing the norm by which all prophetic gifts are to be tested and judged, this is not to say

that once such a gift is recognized in any given period of human history, its inspiration, authority, or force is any less than the norm by which it is judged. If we would but take the time to learn why the canon of the New Testament was established, it would help us to properly evaluate the true force of the Spirit of Prophecy. After the apostolic age, spiritual decline marked the Christian church. Instead of the Holy Spirit reigning as the head of the church as the Vicegerent of the Son of God, bishops and synods of bishops were gradually assuming this authority. In reaction to this growing power of the clergy, and the spiritual laxity of the laity, Montanus of Phrygia claimed a revival of the prophetic gift. "The leaders of the church were not slow to mark the serious consequences of recognizing the uncontrolled authority of prophets who might arise among the lay members of the church."¹¹ What happened? Note the following summary:

It was now taught that prophecy in general was a peculiarity of the Old Testament ("lex et prophetae usque ad Johannem"); that in the new covenant God had spoken only through apostles; that the whole word of God so far as binding on the church was contained in the apostolic record - the New Testament; and that, consequently, the church neither required nor could acknowledge new revelations, or even instructions, through prophets. The revolution which this theory gradually brought about is shown in the transformation of the religious, enthusiastic organization of the church into a legal and political constitution. A great many things had to be sacrificed to this, and amongst others the old prophets. The strictly enforced episcopal constitution, the creation of the clerical order, and the formation of the New Testament canon accomplished the overthrow of the prophets.

The Apostolic Church had itself faced the same issue in its confrontation with Judaism. Were the writings of its prophets, men inspired by the Spirit, to be held on a par with the prophets of the Jewish church - Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah? Paul discusses this very matter with Timothy. He wrote in his final letter of the basic education that had been Timothy's, how that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures (ιερα γραμματα) which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."¹³ These were the writings of the Old Testament prophets - The Holy Scriptures of Paul's day! But now note

and follow carefully what Paul adds - literally translated - "Every (πασα - singular, nominative) writing (γραφη), God-inspired,[is] also (και) profitable for doctrine, for proof (ελεγγον/ελεγχον), for correction, for instruction in righteousness."¹⁴ The issue is clarified. Every writing determined to be "God-inspired" by the norms set forth in the "Holy Scriptures" are in turn equal in authority and force with that by which they have been judged.¹⁵ In other words, the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Christ - is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

How then shall we interpret the Spirit of Prophecy? To this question we shall devote the next thought paper.

¹Deut. 4:12-13

²Isa. 8:20

³Heb. 1:2

⁴II Cor. 5:19

⁵II Peter 1:16, I John 1:1-3

⁶Rom. 8:3-4

⁷I Cor. 3:11

⁸I Peter 1:11

⁹Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With Trypho", The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, chapter 82, p. 240. (Quoted in Abiding Gift of Prophecy, p. 184)

¹⁰John 14:16

¹¹A. G. Daniells, The Abiding Gift of Prophecy, p. 190

¹²Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. XXII, art., "Prophet", 11th Edition.

¹³II Tim. 3:15

¹⁴II Tim. 3:16, Literal translation.

¹⁵It is understood "that the light God has given through the Testimonies is [not] an addition to the Word of God." (See 4T 246) The norms by which the Voice of God can be determined - the Law, the Prophets, and the Life of Jesus - have already been established; nothing can be added. But once a writing has been determined to be "God-inspired", its force and authority are equal to that which God has spoken previously. To indicate a difference in the inspiration of a prophet of the Old Testament, and a prophet or apostle of the New Testament, and a prophet of post-apostolic times cannot be sustained Scripturally. With God, there is no variableness. See James 1:17.

+++++++

Elder Wm. H. Grotheer
P. O. Box 237
Florence, Miss., 39073

IV - 8 (Nov., 1971)

Published by the Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc. This Foundation is tax-exempt, - and all gifts to it are tax-deductible.