

come in the flesh. Therefore, while Jesus is indeed the 'prophet like Moses', he is more than that; he is the one to whom the OT prophecies all pointed: 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27; cf. Acts 3:18; 10:43; 26:22; Rom. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:10). Moreover, while the OT prophets were messengers who declared, 'Thus says the Lord', Jesus is himself the author of his message, who has the authority to declare, 'But I say to you' (Matt. 5:28, 32, 34, 44). Hebrews 1:1-2 explicitly contrasts the many kinds of revelation that came through the OT prophets and the far superior, single revelation that has come in the last days through God's own Son: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.'

However, true prophets in the OT tradition do appear in the gospels, including Zechariah (Luke 1:67), Anna (Luke 2:36) and, pre-eminently, *John the Baptist (Luke 1:76; 3:2; cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:12). They appear at the time of Christ's coming, because they are God's messengers to proclaim what God has done in sending his Son into the world.

Regarding false prophets, Jesus warns that they are still to be expected; but they will be recognized by their fruit and by their false doctrine (Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22).

The gift of prophecy in Acts and the epistles

Beginning with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in new covenant fullness at Pentecost, the gift of prophecy was widely distributed in the NT church: 'but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy"' (Acts 2:16-18). The Pentecost outpouring was not an isolated event, but one that signified the beginning of much more widespread and frequent personal communication between God and his people, and thus it also signified that a more deeply intimate relationship between God and all his people would be one

of the rich blessings of the new covenant.

Although several definitions have been given of the gift of prophecy, the NT indicates that it should be defined not as 'predicting the future', nor as 'proclaiming a word from the Lord', nor as 'powerful preaching', but rather as 'telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind'. The following material gives support for and explanation of this definition.

The NT apostles are the counterparts to OT prophets

Many OT prophets were able to speak and write words which had absolute divine authority (see above), and which were recorded in canonical Scripture. In NT times also there were people who spoke and wrote God's very words and had them recorded in Scripture; however, Jesus does not call them 'prophets' but uses a new term, 'apostles'. The apostles are the NT counterpart to the primary, established prophets in the OT (see Gal. 1:8-9, 11-12; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8,15; 2 Pet. 3:2). It is apostles, not prophets, who have authority to write the words of NT Scripture.

When the apostles want to establish their unique authority they never appeal to the title 'prophet' but rather call themselves apostles (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 11:12-13; 12:11-12; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 3:2, etc.). (See also *Mission.)

The meaning of 'prophet' in NT times

Why did Jesus choose the new term *apostle* to designate those who had the authority to write Scripture? One reason is that the gift of prophecy was going to be widely distributed to God's people at Pentecost, and it was appropriate to use another term to refer to the small group who would have authority to write NT Scripture. Another reason is that in NT times the Greek word *prophetes* ('prophet') generally did not mean 'one who speaks God's very words' but rather 'one who speaks on the basis of some external influence' (often a spiritual influence of some kind), or even just 'spokesperson'. Titus 1:12 uses the word in this sense; Paul quotes the pagan Greek poet Epimenides: 'One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."'