

THE VOCAL GIFTS

Extracts from

“Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church”

by

David Pytches © 1985

Ch 7. THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Definition

This is spontaneous inspired utterance by the Holy Spirit, where the normal voice organs are used, but the conscious mind plays no part. The languages spoken or sung are entirely unlearned by the speaker.

Introductory comments

1. 'Speaking in tongues' or 'praying in the Spirit' is what happens when a Christian believer allows the indwelling Spirit to guide the form of words he utters. It is not an act of divine ventriloquism, but an act of collaboration. '*All of them ...began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them*' (Acts 2: 4).
2. We do not believe that the gift of tongues is necessary as the sign of being 'filled with the Spirit'. Neither do people who are filled with the Spirit necessarily manifest this gift, though we believe that everyone wanting it could have it.
3. We do not believe that tongue-speaking should be *forced* on anyone. .
4. We do not believe that anyone can have the true gift of tongues without being born again by the Spirit of God.
5. This gift is not manifested in the Old Testament.
6. This is the only gift which the Christian believer can use at will when used for personal edification.
7. This gift is the only gift which edifies the individual user on his Own.
8. The speaker in tongues may discover that he has been given several tongues and he employs different tongues *for* different purposes.

The distinction of tongues

There are apparently three distinct manifestations in the area of 'tongues':

1. The use of 'tongues' where the utterance is not understood by the speaker, but overheard by members of the public, and, without interpretation, understood by those whose own language it is: 'How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?' (Acts 2: 4-5).
2. The use of 'tongues' in public worship. The 'language' used is unknown and should be followed by an interpretation given by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14: 27).

3. The use of 'tongues' in private (1 Corinthians 14: 4a) which needs no interpretation, though apparently this could be asked for (1 Corinthians 14: 13). Most of those who use the gift in private have never exercised it in public worship. Public exercise is a distinct anointing, yet a link between the public and private use appears to exist, i.e. any person who exercises the gift of tongues in public almost invariably uses the gift in private.

The purpose of tongues in general

1. Where the tongue is not understood by the speaker, but understood by an unbelieving bystander, it is meant to be a 'sign' of the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 14: 22; Acts 2: 12, etc.).
2. 'Tongues' used in public enables the church to function as a body. Different members are involved. One speaks, another interprets (though others may also have been given the 'burden' of the interpretation if they have asked for it), and yet another person (or family or the church) is blessed through the interpretation, etc.
3. But the main purpose of tongues, whether for private or public use, is edification Jude 20,21; 1 Corinthians 14: 4a, 5b).
4. We believe that a 'tongue' is always speaking to Cod (I Corinthians 14:2) and that the interpretation will be either praise or prayer addressed to him.
5. Because the use of tongues frequently triggers off the other gifts, prophecy has often been uttered immediately following the 'tongue', but if this is believed to be the case, the leaders should repeat the call for an interpretation.
6. 'Tongues' are used for praise - a love language when one is 'lost in wonder, love and praise' and human words are inadequate or exhausted: 'We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' (Acts 2: 11); 'For they heard them speaking in tongues and *praising* God' (Acts 10:46).

The efficacy of tongues in private

1. 'Tongues' express a verbal intimacy with God (1Corinthians 14: 2) - providing a whole new dimension in a person's prayer life.

How can I describe this heart language of the spirit, but as a love language for the Father's ear? An intimate language springing to the lips in times of pain, grief and fear, as well as joy. . . . It is not only a superb piece of practical equipment, but in its use there seems to be a pervasive and wholesome aroma of the Holy Spirit, a fragrance my Spirit breathes in. (Rosemary Attlee *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984).
2. 'Tongues' is a prayer language which no man can understand, but only Cod, so such prayer cannot be hindered by opposing spiritual forces (as Daniel possibly experienced, see Daniel 10: 13).
3. 'Tongues' is also used as a means of prayer and intercession: 'We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express' (Romans 8:26).

There are occasions when I want to pray for a person but can't think of much to say about him. I can pray 'Lord, be with him in his problem and give him your grace' and that's all. If I go on puzzling what else to say, I tend to think about the person rather than pray for him. But with 'tongues' I can picture him in my mind's eye and lift him up to Cod for some time,

asking the Lord to use what I say, that it may be the prayer that the Holy Spirit wants me to make in intercession for him. (John Cunstone *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984)

Our attention was first drawn to the help 'tongues' could be in intercession by John Sherrill's book *They Speak with other Tongues*, where he mentions the case of Carol, the victim of a car accident. Her pastor was called in. He did not know how to pray. The doctor warned that if she recovered she might be a 'cabbage' for the rest of her life. He prayed in tongues under his breath for fifteen to twenty minutes. At the end of this time one of the patient's eyelids flickered, which he felt was a sign from God. He encouraged the distressed relatives to believe she would recover. She did.

In an editorial in *Renewal* (Oct/Nov, 1984) Edward England wrote: 'Now I find myself praying in tongues when facing a perplexing problem. It is not a substitute for thinking, for analysis, clarification and proficiency, but such prayer does enable us to range beyond where reason extends.' Again: 'When I pray in tongues I believe I am praying for specific needs, known only to God.'

Paul Y Cho, writing on prayer, says: 'Sometimes I feel a burden of prayer: yet I may not know exactly what I should pray for; or I may not have exactly the words to express what I feel. This is the time when I enter my spiritual language and can pierce through my natural inability to articulate to God what I am feeling. . .' (Paul Y Cho *Prayer* Word Ltd. 1985 pp. 127)

4. 'Tongues' is also used in spiritual warfare, during times of personal conflict, or when ministering to others in the area of deliverance or exorcism. Some have discerned a special sense of power and a different 'tongue' (very stern) given by God for this kind of ministry. Paul encourages us to 'Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests' (Ephesians 6: 18) when talking of the spiritual battle we are engaged in. This dimension, and the role of tongues is apparent in the following illustrations.
5. 'Speaking in tongues' had beneficial effects on new converts amongst the drug addicts from the Triad gangs whom Jackie Pullinger met within the Walled City in Hong Kong. It appears that once such new converts began to pray in tongues some remarkable deliverances took place. (cf. J Pullinger *Chasing the Dragon*).
6. 'Tongues' has also been most effectively used in praying for revival. This was the experience of the Rev. Dr WC Hoover of the Methodist Church at Valparaiso, Chile, in the early 1900s (WC Hoover *Historia del Avivamiento Pentecostal en Chile* Valparaiso 1948.)
7. 'Tongues' brings inspiration.

It seemed to me more and more certain as time went on that this tongue was for the edification of the spirit, not of the conscious mind, for after I had ceased speaking inspiration would come to me. Indeed much of the latter part of 'Behold Your God' was given to me in this way, for I would ask a question concerning the mysteries of Jesus Christ and apparently while I was speaking in tongues, my spirit would receive inspiration, and I would write it down. (Agnes Sanford *Sealed Orders* Logos 1972 p. 223.)

I recall the initial glow in my life, walking along the road praising the Lord in a language I knew and in a language I didn't, knowing he was nearer than the near and dearer than the dearest. With a new openness to God I found all my creative faculties awakened. There was a freshness in my soul and in my daily work. I found myself praising God more and doing my work better. (Edward England *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984)

8. 'Tongues' keeps one refreshed both physically and spiritually according to the testimony of David du Plessis:

'Often times. . . I have to get my night's sleep sitting up in a Greyhound bus or a jet plane. . . The minute I close my eyes I begin to pray in the Spirit. I pray all night that way, waking up and drifting back to sleep, always praying. I don't get much sleep, but I get a lot of rest. The next morning I'm fresh and strong and ready for a full day's work.'

9. 'Tongues' can be used when praying for wisdom:

I also use this kind of prayer when brief petitions to God for help and guidance are required. One situation might be when someone is coming to see me, expecting to receive some instruction or advice. In the few minutes before they arrive (and when I am usually rushing to finish the job in hand) I pray quietly in tongues in God's presence. While they are with me I sometimes pray in tongues again (unknown to them) at appropriate moments in the conversation. If it is suitable to pray together at the end of the interview, I use the gift silently for a moment or two before launching into spontaneous prayer aloud in English. (John Gunstone *Renewal*/Oct! Nov, 1984)

10. 'Tongues' can have a role to play in personality integration.

It would seem. . . that Jung believed 'tongues' could be a positive preparation for the integration of the personality. Most of Jung's followers have sustained the same view of 'tongues' as a genuine invasion into consciousness of contents from the deepest levels of collective unconscious. It would seem that, whilst speaking in tongues, many suppressed hurts are allowed to surface from the unconscious and in the process are healed, so that the subject's personality becomes more integrated. (Morton Kelsey *Tongue Speaking* Hodder & Stoughton, 1968, p. 199).

Receiving the gift

1. The gift was first given with an anointing of the Holy Spirit and this is usually the case today. This anointing for 'tongues' may come simultaneously with conversion, but usually subsequently. Where the gift is desired by the Christian, it may be asked for: 'Ask and it will be given to you' (Matthew 7: 7); 'How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him' (Matthew 7: 11b).
2. It may be helpful to begin using the gift in song.
3. Having asked, it is important to be *free from* as much tension as possible as this can be inhibiting. A hot bath is an ideal place. We can praise God aloud in any way we like in the privacy of the bathroom and in a relaxed way just let the new language come.
4. The Christian desirous of receiving the gift may find it helpful to be prayed *for* by another with the laying on of hands as in Acts 19: 6 (see 2 Timothy 1: 6 - where a gift of some kind was imparted by the laying on of hands).
5. The gift of tongues is exercised on the human side by an act of will- both its starting and stopping - just as speech in any language would be.
6. The new language may initially 'pour out', but not necessarily so. The Bible does not tie this down to any particular form.
7. Even though the language may initially 'pour out', on subsequent occasions it comes in the same way as ordinary speech, though 'in the Spirit' and not with the mind.

8. Initially there may be ecstasy (joy) in the use of the gift, which would be the case on receiving any kind of gift or blessing from God, but it is not necessarily the experience of those who use the gift on subsequent occasions.
9. The new language may be released with a *few* stammering words (as a baby speaks) but the more these words are used so more words are added to our vocabulary.
10. The Use of the gift in public should follow a special anointing each time.
11. Many, although not all, start praying in tongues in their private prayers.
12. It is only right to thank God for this gift of tongues when it is received, but it is probably unwise to announce to people that we have the gift, except perhaps those close friends who have prayed for us in this matter.

The exercise of the gift

1. The utterance, both in private and public, may be in a human language or that of angels (1 Corinthians 13: 1).
2. When used in public it should be spoken out loudly and clearly for all to hear. 'If the trumpet does not make a clear call, who will get ready for battle?' (1 Corinthians 14: 8).
3. The human language will not be one learned by the speaker, but may be known to someone else present in the assembly or by one who overhears the language being used *for* personal edification.
4. A tongue-speaker may be aware that he has been given more than one tongue. He cannot understand them, but he recognises them: we have discussed their purpose earlier.
5. The gift of tongues in private can be exercised at will anywhere. Some people pray in tongues driving their car or washing up whilst their mind can be employed elsewhere.
6. Some, like Jackie Pullinger, have found it helpful to set apart a specific time of say fifteen minutes each morning to exercise the gift of tongues privately.
7. The gift of tongues in public is not a permanent ability, but is manifested as the Spirit anoints. Unlike the private use of the gift, the person cannot expect to open his mouth at any time he decides to do so and utter words which, when interpreted, will be significant to others present. There must be the anointing.
8. Tongues uttered in public need not be expressed emotionally and would normally better not be, as this tends to be counter-productive - certainly so in the more traditional churches.
9. The gift of tongues may be exercised publicly in song. *This* may be a corporate offering of praise: 'Sing and make music in your heart *to the Lord*' (Ephesians 5: 19). This may be an individual communicating a message from God: 'Speak *to one another* with... spiritual songs' (Ephesians 5: 19).
10. John Sherrill describes his first experience of this:

As the music continued, several people. . . began to sing 'in the Spirit'. Soon the whole *room* was singing a complicated heavenly harmony - without score, created spontaneously. It was eerie, but extraordinarily beautiful. *The* song leader was no longer trying to direct the music, but let the melodies create themselves: without prompting one quarter of the *room* would suddenly start to sing very loudly while others subsided. Harmonies and counter harmonies

moved in and out of each other. John Sherrill *They Speak with other Tongues* Pyramid Books 1970 p.118)

11. Those present who do not have the gift may also join in singing with 'Praise the Lord', 'Hallelujah', 'Hosanna', etc.
12. The gift may also be used privately in song (1 Corinthians 14: 15). Two testimonies about speaking in tongues:

I awoke towards morning with a strange drawing feeling about my lips. I thought, 'Now what is happening to me?' . " Then I remembered my friends saying some thing about 'the movement of the Spirit about the lips', and so I let my voice come forth and. . . I found myself. . . speaking in tongues. (Agnes Sanford *Sealed Orders* Logos 1972 pp. 221-222)

When I pray in tongues, I begin by murmuring quietly or saying silently sounds which quite quickly develop into a language-like flow. I've never understood the language (if language it be), nor, as far as I know, has anyone else. .. I don't consciously control what I say. I don't think (to myself) 'I haven't used a "Zzzz" sound yet: I'll try and fit it in.' If there is any control by me on what sounds I make, it must happen at a deep conscious level. I'm not aware of it. (John Gunstone *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984)

Response to 'Tongues'

1. When used in public there should not be more than three individual 'tongues' at anyone point in the meeting (1 Corinthians 14: 27).
2. There should be silence for an interpretation following each 'tongue' offered in this way. If there is no interpretation, the leader should not allow 'tongues' to continue as it does not edify the rest of the assembly (1 Corinthians 14: 19,28).
3. The congregation should *all* pray for the interpretation when a 'tongue' is given, including the person who had the 'tongue' (1 Corinthians 14: 13).
4. It is obvious that when there is a general 'speaking in tongues' (1 Corinthians 14: 23) or 'singing in tongues' in the Spirit of praise or prayer, no interpretation is necessary because *all* are addressing God (1 Corinthians 14: 2). No one interpretation would be adequate in such a case. It's helpful for the leader to explain to all the congregation what is happening (if not on every occasion, then at least from time to time).
5. Experience in the public use of the gift seems to indicate that often the gifts of the Spirit are manifested in a sequence which begins with speaking in tongues and leads on to interpretation and then to other gifts. The same pattern appears to follow in the release of the gifts of the Spirit to individuals.
6. The leaders in the church will always aim to ensure that everything shall 'be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Corinthians 14: 40).
7. The use of 'tongues' at a public meeting will call into operation not only the gift of 'interpretation', but also the gift of 'discernment'. There are false 'tongues' as there are false prophets. The enemy will simulate every gift of God whenever he can. We all know that others use 'tongues' for enemy purposes.

In the South of Chile, the machis (witch doctors) amongst the Mapuche Indians all spoke in 'tongues' during their initiation rites. We have also met emotionally disturbed people who wander around 'speaking in tongues', which clearly do not originate from the Spirit of God.

Schizophrenics are sometimes given deceptive tongues which they cannot control themselves and cannot stop when they wish.

Final exhortation

'I would like everyone of you to speak in tongues' (1 Corinthians 14: 5) may mean 'I want you all to continue to speak in tongues.' The emphasis here may be less on the 'anyone' doing it, but rather be an encouragement to those who 'speak in tongues' to keep on doing so. Do not be put off! Keep it up!

Recommended reading:

Morton T Kelsey *Tongue Speaking* Hodder & Stoughton 1973

John L Sherrill *They Speak With Other Tongues* Pyramid Book 1970

Ch 8. THE GIFT OF INTERPRETATION

Definition

This gift is a supernatural revelation through the Holy Spirit which enables the Christian believer to communicate in the language of the listeners the dynamic equivalent of that which was spoken 'in tongues'.

Introductory comments

1. The interpretation is not an operation through the mind of the interpreter (except in the instance of the language being known) but of the mind of God.
2. The interpretation is just as much a supernatural manifestation as the original utterance in tongues: both are given 'in the Spirit'.
3. The congregation will remain unedified by 'a tongue' if there is no interpretation. Paul says that in public he would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Corinthians 14: 19).
4. Paul forbids the continued use of tongues without an Interpretation following such utterances (1 Corinthians 14: 28).
5. The interpreter receives the burden (dynamic equivalent) of the tongue and not a translation.

Purpose of the gift

This is to enable the church to *understand* the manifestation of the gift of *tongues* when it has been exercised in public through a solo utterance in speech or song.

How is the gift received?

1. A right relationship with God and with one's fellow beings must be maintained by the individual Christian believer.
2. The gift may be asked for whenever the need for it is felt, always remembering: a) that the Lord is sovereign and distributes his gifts as he pleases, and b) that our heavenly Father will not give us a gift that is bad for us (Matthew 7:11).
3. Some receive the gift without asking - the Lord bestows it sovereignly. One young person from an Anglican church near Vifia del Mar (in Chile), all freshly renewed through the Holy Spirit, began to pray 'in tongues' for the first time. A girl in their number began to expostulate in amazement: 'He is saying this - now he is saying this, etc.' She had never asked for the gift, did not know of the gift's availability to her, and was not expecting it.
4. As with prophecy, the gift of interpretation may come with just a few words at first. The rest will follow as we speak out in faith.
5. The interpretation may also be given to us *in toto*.
6. The 'words' or 'burden' of interpretation may be accompanied by a sense of joyful ecstasy or some similar subjective feelings, such as a swelling sensation in the tongue or a tensing of the throat (as with prophecy) which seem to be urging speech. Christine Huggett gets a 'thumb' in

the stomach as a sign that God wants her to speak out a tongue during a meeting. (J C Huggett *It Hurts to Heal* Kingsway Publications 1984 p. 58)

7. As the 'tongue' speaker continues, the interpretation may come to another in words, pictures of symbols or through an inspired thought.
8. Alternatively, the person being given the interpretation may hear the message of the person speaking 'in tongues' as though the person were speaking directly to him in his own language or in some other language with which he is familiar.
9. If the 'tongue' is a sung solo, the interpretation may be given in song as well, but not necessarily so. It is profoundly beautiful when it is - especially when it is the same melody, which sometimes happens.
10. On the other hand, the interpretation may be given in very different form from that of the original utterance. Without violating its meaning, it may be given in pictorial, parabolic, descriptive or literal language, according to the dictates of the Spirit or the character of the one interpreting. The Spirit is at liberty to operate as he wills.
11. It is not necessary for a person who has a 'tongue' which he uses for private prayer to have an interpretation, but it seems it may be given if it is desired/needed and asked for (1 Corinthians 14: 13).
12. Neither is it necessary for there to be an interpretation when many are singing together 'in the Spirit', because the purpose is that all should join in, each offering his own praises and thanksgiving and intercession as the Lord gives the utterance. No interpretation would be possible since each person is saying/singing something different in praise to God.

Exercise of the gift

1. Greater faith is needed for interpretation than for speaking in 'tongues'. Whereas the tongue is usually unintelligible, the interpretation is given publicly for the edification of the whole congregation and must be understood and tested.
2. The person who speaks 'in tongues' should also pray for the interpretation, but this is not limited solely to the person who spoke 'the tongue'. All those others who speak 'in tongues' should also be praying for the interpretation.
3. It is a very affirming experience to pray for and receive an interpretation, and, before one has opened one's mouth, to hear someone else utter exactly the same words one has been given oneself. The sense of the Spirit's presence and moving becomes wonderfully real.
4. At times one person may be given the first part of the interpretation and another given the words to continue or terminate. But care must be taken here because: it may become tempting for people to 'outdo' each other in interpretation. It should be noted that 'someone must interpret' (1 Corinthians 14: 27) may also be translated as 'Let one interpret' (as RSV), which would mean, therefore, that it is only permissible for one person to interpret, effectively ruling out such 'serial interpretations'.
5. Since it is the Lord who gives the interpretation, the length of time speaking may not correspond to the time spent over the actual speaking 'in tongues'. The interpretation may seem to be longer or shorter in length than the original utterance. There is nothing strange about this. It would be the case also for an Englishman translating/interpreting for a Spaniard.
6. It would seem better that the one who speaks should stand (1 Corinthians 14: 30),

7. It is wise for the one who speaks to speak out 'loud and clear'.
8. Initially interpretations may be a little 'muddy' due to nervousness.

Points of order

1. Where 'tongues' are legitimately employed the leader should ensure that time is given for interpretation.
2. Someone should interpret each separate utterance.
3. There must be no competition among interpreters. Several present may sense they have an 'interpretation' revealing the Spirit's meaning (1 Corinthians 14: 26) when in fact they may be being given prophecies.
4. Some may feel that they have been given a more adequate unfolding of the message 'in tongues', which often could be the case, but they must 'hold their peace'.
5. On the other hand, if someone has a further revelation along the same lines as that already given, this may be a call to 'complete the interpretation' (1 Corinthians 14: 30). A secondary 'interpretation' may *complement*, but may not *contradict* what has been said.
6. If there is a genuine call to 'contradict' an 'interpretation', this will come through the 'gift of discernment' and must not be introduced under the guise of interpretation, which would tend to debase this gift and cause confusion.
7. If the leadership discerned that 'a tongue' was ill conceived, obviously any interpretation of that particular utterance would only add to the confusion, and this should be explained, otherwise there should be no more utterances 'in tongues' at that time.
8. Similarly it may be that an 'interpretation' is ill-conceived and discernment must be exercised. This is illustrated by the Huggetts at a healing service at a Pentecostal Church in the Midlands when a lady spoke 'in tongues' :

Immediately John saw a picture of a fireplace. But at the same moment a man screeched out an interpretation in very emotional tones. It included quotations from Scripture and mention of the blood of the Lamb. But I discerned that it was motivated by a religious evil spirit. It left many of us feeling cold and we found it difficult to get back into an atmosphere of worship. The pastor was leading this part of the service, and when he eventually handed over to John, my husband shared how he had seen a fireplace with coals in the grate but no fire. It was a picture of the church there. God was calling the people to return to him before he would rekindle the fire of his Spirit in that place. . . I believed John's fireplace was the *true* interpretation of the 'tongue' given earlier in the service. (J and C Huggett: *It Hurts to Heal*, Kingsway, 1984, p. 173/4)

9. In a very large meeting with many visitors present it may be right to allow only those known to the leadership the liberty to interpret.
10. No amount of 'anointing' can allow anyone to go beyond the word of God. No more than three 'tongues' and three interpretations at the most in one 'spot' at a meeting are permitted (1 Corinthians 14: 27).

Ch 9. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Definition

'The gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12: 10; 14: 1) is the special ability that God gives to members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to his gathered people, a group among them or any one of his people individually, through a divinely anointed utterance.'

Peter Wagner (adapted).

Introductory comments

1. In its general sense prophecy covers a spiritual ministry by any servant of the Lord. In the Old Testament this was usually something distinct from the priesthood, though some priests also prophesied (e.g. Ezekiel). In the Old Testament, prophets were preachers, seers and miracle workers - a wide ranging ministry.
2. In its more specific sense 'prophecy' covers two areas: forthtelling and foretelling:
 - *Forthtelling*, such as preaching, teaching and evangelism, which could be through speaking, writing, drama and music, etc. A prophet may also be a person with a special burden for social justice (like Amos) who identifies areas in need of reform and who is emboldened to denounce the forces or sources of the evil. Such forthtelling usually emanates from, and appeals to, both the intellect and compassion of man. This office is recognised as authentic for the church today (see Ephesians 4:11).
 - *Foretelling* some event(s) of the future such as John did broadly in the book of Revelation or Agabus did specifically and personally in the book of Acts (21: 10,11). Such foretelling emanates from the Spirit (Revelation 1:10).
3. The gift of prophecy is not confined to recognized prophets (Ephesians 4: 11), but is more widely distributed in the church in fulfilment of Joel 2: 28. So we read 'For you can all prophesy in turn' (1 Corinthians 14: 31). In apostolic teaching there is a distinguishing line drawn between the gift and the ministry of prophecy. Though all can prophesy, by virtue of the Holy Spirit's anointing, not all are prophets. Though all can 'manifest' the gift of prophecy, only some are 'appointed' to the ministry of a prophet (d. 1 Corinthians 12: 7,28,29; 14: 29-33a). So Agabus arrived at Caesarea to meet Paul, who was lodging with Philip the evangelist and his four daughters. Although these four girls had the gift of prophecy, Agabus had the ministry of a prophet (the only one featured as such in the Acts of the Apostles). It was Agabus, not one of the four girls, who was entrusted with a major directive prophecy for Paul (Acts 21: 8-11).

The purpose of prophecy

1. Prophecy brings glory to Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:10c).
2. Prophecy builds up, encourages (this could include warnings) and consoles (1 Corinthians 14: 3).
3. Prophecy serves as a sign for unbelievers to convince them (1 Corinthians 14: 24,25).
4. 'Prophecy is not the equivalent of Scripture. Prophecy is a particular word for a particular congregation at a particular time through a particular person. Scripture is for all Christians in all

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places at all times. That is the difference' (Michael Green *To Corinth with Love* Hodder and Stoughton 1982 p. 75).

5. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that this gift was for the positive *building up* of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3), whereas the prophets had also to 'pull down' and 'denounce' (Jeremiah 1: 10).
6. This gift may also be used to foretell (John 16: 13; Acts 11: 28; 21: 10,11), but care should be exercised both in giving and receiving this (see Deuteronomy 18: 20-22).
7. Though prophecy may be given to warn, it is not necessarily irrevocable - see Jeremiah 18: 7,8.

The exercise of prophecy

1. In the exercise of all the gifts 'Follow the way of love' (1 Corinthians 14: 1). Love must always be the motive.
2. This gift is to be eagerly desired (1 Corinthians 14:1,39) and could be exercised by any anointed believers.
3. Prophecies should be restricted to two or three at any one time (1 Corinthians 14: 29).
4. The supernatural revelation behind the message may come to one prophesying through meditating on scripture, visions (Acts 18: 9), dreams (Matthew 2: 13), trances (Acts 22: 17), impressions (i.e. a word or a picture), an audible voice or even an angelic visitation.
5. The gift may come to an individual Christian in times of prayer concerning himself (Acts 2: 17-18). It may come in an obscure manner and he will need to leave time for the Lord to confirm it.
6. The words or visions for a prophecy are most likely to come in an atmosphere of prayer and adoration (Acts 13: 2).
7. The prophecy may be uttered loudly or quietly, in song, poetry, prose or mime, or any combination of these, but notice, as Michael Green says, 'Prophecy does not rant'
8. Having asked for the gift, while consciously seeking to maintain a right and open relationship to the Lord, one may sense an anointing for the utterance of the prophecy - a witness of the Spirit in one's own heart. There may be physical sensations, often related to the mouth area - dryness, tingling, slight swelling. An anointed person will begin to recognise the peculiar ways God is urging him to speak.
9. A person receiving an anointing for prophecy is not bound to utter it instantaneously. The prophecy may be appropriate for use on a later occasion. The prophet can wait. 'The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets' (1 Corinthians 14: 32). There need be no fear of forgetfulness: 'The Holy Spirit... will remind you of everything I have said to you' (John 14: 26).
10. The one prophesying should- always be fully in control of himself (1 Corinthians 14:32), and to express too much emotion will be counterproductive (cf 7 above).
11. The one who anticipates the gift may be given the first two or three words only. He speaks these out as an act of faith. Often he will not know how it will continue or end. The first words are like a stopper in the bottle. Once they are out the rest will follow.

'It's just like opening a packet of tissues' says John Huggett, 'I receive a few words in my mind and as I speak them out I'm given a few more, and so on, until it suddenly stops.' (J and C Huggett *It Hurts to Heal* Kingsway, 1984, p. 57)

12. Or he may simply sense a burden or see a picture in his mind's eye.
13. Don't be surprised if the prophecy is brief. (cf. Haggai 1: 13. "I am with you" declares the Lord.' Very short, but very comforting!)
14. Beware of continuing in the flesh when the anointing has lifted. Cease immediately the anointing ceases even if it appears to leave things in the air.. It may well be all that God wants to say or He may intend someone else to continue it (1 Corinthians 14: 30).
15. There may be a great sense of ecstasy (especially initially) in the exercise of this gift, but it is not necessarily the experience of those who continue in the use of it.
16. The introductory style of commencing may be formal and biblical, such as: 'I am the Lord' or 'Thus says the Holy Spirit' or even possibly 'Lo! I tell you a mystery' (1 Corinthians 15: 51 RSV). Or it may be reported in a more relaxed way, such as 'I believe the Holy Spirit/the Lord is saying/telling us/you that. . .' Plenty of room for variety in God's leading should be allowed and expected.
17. The prophecy itself may be couched in biblical language or quotations of scriptural texts. The book of Revelation is a prophecy (Revelation 1: 3), which contains over 400 citations from the Old Testament.
18. The fact that the speaker may use Elizabethan English should not surprise anyone. If someone has soaked his mind in such language through reading the King James version and been accustomed to hearing God speak in that way it will not be surprising if the Holy Spirit causes him to recall God's word in such old fashioned language.
19. There is no need for prophecy to be given in a strange voice. Neither should it be discredited on that account since this strangeness may be due to nervousness.
20. The gift of prophecy should always be sought and offered in great humility. 'It is not an ego-trip for the person concerned' (Michael Green). Frequent misuse will quickly bring prophecy into disrepute.
21. This is a purely human and subjective observation, but probably in the most pure prophecy eighty percent is of God and twenty percent human. In some cases it could be twenty percent of God and eighty percent human, but it would be sad to reject the latter completely when God really has something he wants to communicate.
22. Let the church be aware that some so-called 'prophecy' may be uttered out of wishful thinking, vested interests, because of a 'chip on the shoulder' or simply a lying spirit. (Ezekiel chapters 13 and 14 give some important warnings in this regard.)
23. It is best to limit the use of this gift to members of the local church asking visitors to refrain from utterance so that good order may be maintained.

The setting for prophecy

This will normally be when people are 'gathered together' (1 Corinthians 14: 23) for worship. Probably Paul had in mind a small group because he seemed to envisage participation by all present. Thus we could expect to find prophecy being used in a small gathering ('home group' cells are the best places to learn how to exercise it), but it will also be used in a larger congregational setting.

Response to prophecy

1. All prophecy should be carefully weighed (1 Corinthians 14: 29). Prophecy is uttered by humans who could be misled. No one should engage in prophecy who is not willing that his prophecy should be tested. Here another example may help:

At a rally in London a Christian woman gave a 'prophecy'. It was couched in religious phraseology, but delivered in a wailing tone and quickly I discerned it was not from the Lord. We were in an Anglican Church and after the woman had sat down the vicar stood up to say that he thought that the 'gift' should be tested. A number of folk in the congregation raised their hands to agree that God had not spoken. Then John swiftly encouraged people to turn their eyes back to Jesus (J and C Huggett *It Hurts to Heal Kingsway*, 1984, p. 173).

But we should be swift to hear and slow to speak and not rush into publically correcting prophecy in case when we root out the weeds we may root up the wheat with them (cf. Matthew 13: 29). When prophecy is of God there is a general consensus that it is so. When it is 'of the flesh' nearly everybody knows it except possibly the person prophesying who may have been deceived.

2. The 'spiritual gift of discernment' should be exercised.
3. The prophecy should be tested against the touchstone of scripture (2 Peter 1: 20).
4. The prophecy should be tested by whether it confirms what God is already doing.
5. The prophecy should be tested by determining its benefit.
6. It may be best, like Mary, simply to store up the words of a prophecy in our hearts (Luke 2: 51). No other immediate action should normally be taken unless the prophecy itself is a clear confirmation of what the Lord has already revealed in some other way.

The Huggetts were living in the North of England. One night Christine Huggett saw a picture of Dick Whittington with his little bag slung over his shoulder. 'It means we are going back down London way' said John, quoting from the old rhyme, 'Turn again Whittington... Lord Mayor of London'. 'During the next few days we asked friends to pray about a possible move. One of them was given the word "Sussex". We decided to store these things in our minds. If they were from the Lord they would come to fruition' (p. 133). In the autumn Christine 'began to get the impression of a very long building set in extensive grounds' (p. 151). After advertisements in the *Church Times*, they were led to Southwater, a village near Horsham in West Sussex (p. 152) to a place which exactly fitted all the details of their vision (see J and C Huggett, *It Hurts 10 Heal*).

7. There must be a witness of the Spirit in the heart of the one to whom the prophecy is addressed, or if it is in public we would expect a degree of acceptance by others (if not at the time, then later).
8. The character of the one giving the prophecy is relevant. 'By their fruit you will recognise them.' We must be alert because Jesus warned us that there are false prophets (Matthew 7: 20).
9. Do not over-rate this gift, because, at the moment, 'we know in part and we prophesy in part' (1:Corinthians 13:9.) - only later will we know in full.
10. Do not under-rate this gift either, as some of the Thessalonians were wont to do - 'do not treat prophecies with contempt' (1 Thessalonians 5: 20).
11. It is helpful at the end of a period when the gifts of the Spirit have been manifested for one of the leadership to summarise briefly the burden of what he feels the Lord has been saying to the

church through the Spirit: 'He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (Revelation 2: 7).

12. It may be appropriate to invite the Holy Spirit to apply the burden of the prophecies to the hearts of the congregation then and there.

Conclusion

If both those who exercise the gift and those to whom the prophecy is directed make love their aim, there will be a conducive climate for the gift to emerge and flourish. 'Love will be welcoming towards embryonic prophecy. Love will be forgiving when mistakes are made. Love will bind those with this gift and those without it into an interdependent unity' (Michael Green).

Recommended reading:

Donald Bridge *Signs & Wonders Today* I. V.P. (Appendix 3)

George MaHone *Those Controversial Gifts* Hodder and Stoughton (Ch. 2)

Michael Cassidy *Bursting the Wine Skins* Hodder and Stoughton (Appendix B)

Michael Green *To Corinth with Love* Hodder and Stoughton (Ch. 8)