

Sunday, November 2, 2025 | Martyrs

Week 12 | Acts 11:27-30 | “Believers, aka Christians, Pt. 2”

**READ:** Acts 11:27-30 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). <sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

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In this passage, **two things** characterize the church:

i. **Vs. 19-26 – The Church is distinguishable.**

**So, what’s the takeaway?**

An ordinary life lived for Christ leaves an extraordinary legacy.

The world’s history books are filled with important people doing important things. The Bible is full of ordinary people serving an extraordinary God.

ii. **Vs. 27-30 – The Church is charitable.**

**Vs. 27-28** – Luke says, “Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).”

When Luke says, “in the days of Claudius,” he’s referring to Roman Emperor Claudius, who reigned from AD 41 to 54. Interestingly, there were 5 different famines during Claudius’s 13-year reign, occurring everywhere from Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Judea.<sup>1</sup> However, he’s most likely referring to the event that occurred around 47 AD. This famine was particularly devastating in Judah because the region's breadbasket, Egypt, experienced a severe grain shortage.<sup>2</sup> Considering that Luke was writing around 62AD, this event would’ve still been fresh in the memory of Theophilus.

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 417-418.

<sup>2</sup> Peterson (2009), 357-358.

While prophecy is mentioned in the NT, particularly on the Day of Pentecost, this passage is the first mention of the office of prophet. **Prophets are those who receive spontaneous and infallible revelation directly from God.** Although this passage provides an example of **foretelling** the future, prophecy can also refer to **foretelling**—communicating a message from God, rather than predicting future events. Looking to the OT as a guide, a prophet often rebuked, warned, or comforted the people of God; **predictions about the future were not the norm, but rather the exception.** It is also important to distinguish prophecy from preaching or teaching: whereas prophets relay direct revelations from God, preachers and teachers explain and interpret God’s written word.

Like the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy marked the beginning of a new era in God’s redemptive history. On the day of Pentecost, Peter, quoting from Joel 2:28-29, says, **“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy”** (Ac. 2:17-18).

As I mentioned in our discussion of Acts 2, there is a debate among Christians regarding whether the miraculous sign gifts are still operative today. **Let me once again state my position explicitly: I am a soft-cessationist, aka a concentric cessationist.** In other words, I am “open-but-cautious” when it comes to the so-called charismatic gifts—e.g., speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing.

Allow me to briefly explain, first, why I am a **cessationist**, and, two, why I am a **soft-cessationist**, particularly as it relates to the gift of prophecy:

Paul says, **“You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”** (Eph. 2:20). The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles AND the prophets.<sup>3</sup> In other words, not only were prophets active in the first century, but they also held a **foundational position in the Church**, comparable to that of the apostles. And it is clear, they had a central role in the life of the church.

For example, Agabus predicts a famine here, and later in Acts 21, he predicts Paul’s imprisonment. In Acts 13:1-3, most likely through a prophet, Barnabas and Paul are

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<sup>3</sup> Citing the Granville Sharpe rule, continuationist say the Greek structure of Eph. 2:20 does not indicate two offices, “apostles” and “prophets,” but refers to “apostles who were prophets.” However, the Granville Sharpe Rule only applies to *singular* nouns. That “apostles” and “prophets” are in the plural indicates Paul was talking two separate offices.

chosen for a missionary journey. Eusebius, a first-century historian, notes that four years **before** Jerusalem's fall in 70 AD, Christians were warned in a vision to flee, which spared the faith community. Philip's four daughters also had the gift of prophecy (cf. Ac. 21:9).

However, I am a cessationist because, in my view, once the Christian faith was established and "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), **prophecy became subordinate to Scripture**. Paul says, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9). Therefore, if one claims prophecy is still operative today, **they must also maintain that all prophecy aligns with God's word**, as the canon of Scripture is closed.

But, by conceding that prophecy must align with God's word, all biblically based continuationists admit a categorical difference between what prophecy was in the first century and what it could be today. **In the NT, prophecy stood on par with apostolic teaching (cf. Eph. 2:20); today, it cannot be as authoritative as the Bible (cf. Gal. 1:8)**. Otherwise, their view suggests the canon of Scripture isn't closed, opening the door to new revelation.

To avoid this problem, continuationists argue that NT prophecy is less authoritative than Scripture because it is not infallible.<sup>4</sup> **However, if OT prophecy was infallible (cf. 1 Sam. 3:19), it follows that NT prophecy should also be infallible**. As Thomas Schriener explains, "Our natural expectation is that New Testament prophecy operates in the same way as Old Testament prophecy. Joel's promise that both the young and old will prophesy (Joel 2:28) assumes that the nature is the same in both Testaments."<sup>5</sup> **Since no clear passage distinguishes the two, claiming a difference is merely an inference**. Of course, continuationists have responses to these arguments,<sup>6</sup> **but they lack the burden of proof**.<sup>7</sup> At best, their retorts, while possible, aren't very convincing.

So, prophetic utterances were infallible in the OT era, they should be considered infallible in the NT era. As such, this puts any modern-day "prophet" in a precarious

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<sup>4</sup> e.g., Wayne Grudem, John Piper, DA Carson, Sam Storms, Gavin Ortlund, Allan Gilliam (Christian Fellowship Church of God, Middle River, MD), and Matt Robinson (Bethlehem Church, Middle River, MD).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018), 105.

<sup>6</sup> For example, they will point to Ac. 21 where Christians, apparently told by the Holy Spirit that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem, told him not to go. But Paul goes anyway. Does this not prove that NT prophecy was fallible? Otherwise, how could Paul disobey? But, as Schriener notes (2018), 115, that the Holy Spirit revealed that Paul would suffer was infallible while the inference drawn by the people—i.e., that Paul shouldn't go—was fallible.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Justin, "3 Reasons Charismatics Are Wrong about New Testament Prophecy," October 7, 2018, *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/3-reasons-charismatics-wrong-new-testament-prophecy/>, [accessed, October 24, 2025].

position. It means they speak the very oracles of God, and, should their predictions be proven false, the consequence should be severe (cf. Deut. 18:20). But, sadly, most so-called prophecies and prophets aren't held to such a high standard.<sup>8</sup> We should be **highly** skeptical of anyone claiming to have divine revelation.

Islam, Mormonism, and other cults started when someone claimed to get a vision. This is why John says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1). So many false prophets are in the world that any true prophet would be a **rare** find.

So, even when someone says they've had a vision, such things ought to be subjected to the Scriptures. A good example of this is how many Shia Muslims convert to Christianity after getting a vision that sends them to someone who can explain the Gospel.<sup>9</sup> But such visions run in line with what we saw in Ac. 10—i.e., a heavenly messenger sends a person to a gospel preacher. Thus, they serve an **auxiliary** function (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3). **In other words, true heavenly visions ought to push one into the currents of Scriptural principles. Should they go in the opposite direction, they ought to be silenced.**

I remain cautious when it comes to modern-day manifestation of sign-gifts, especially that of prophecy.<sup>10</sup> **Many modern instances of sign-gifts—such as tongues with *incoherent* speech, *flawed* prophetic visions, and *questionable* healing services—make it clear that not everything claimed to be from the Holy Spirit truly is.** Many of my continuationist friends would agree with this caution. Be wary of those who teach the gift of prophecy (e.g., Bethel) or claim the gift of healing (e.g., Benny Hinn), or insist that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation (e.g., Oneness/Apostolic Pentecostals). Such teachers are antichrists who promote a false message.

**And though I'm open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our services (as Paul admonishes us to be in 1 Thess. 5:20-21 and 1 Cor. 14:29), I'm also *pragmatic*. As such, while I may be open, practically speaking, the only official prophetic message that will be heard in service at Grace Pointe is that of the Scriptures.** Even those who hold the position that charismatic gifts are in

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<sup>8</sup> Bill Johnson, of Bethel Church in Redding, CA, says that students are **required** to get their prophecies wrong, failing at least three times. See *America Gospel: Spirit & Fire*, Bethel Redding (Part 3), <https://www.americangospelfilm.com/spirit--fire-ag3.html>, [accessed November 1, 2025].

<sup>9</sup> Carlson, Darren, “When Muslims Dream of Jesus,” May 31, 2018, the Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/muslims-dream-jesus/>, [accessed October 24, 2025].

<sup>10</sup> Recently, a number of internet teachers connected astronomical signs (like eclipses, blood moons, and planetary alignments) with Jewish feast days (especially Feast of Trumpets) and claimed it would mark the rapture. These predictions were often tied to numerology, calendars, or timelines from Daniel and Revelation. They claimed the rapture would occur September 23-24, 2025. This date has come and gone, proving such predictions were false.

operation today agree that these things are too often counterfeited. People, especially those who are biblically illiterate, can be too easily duped by so-called ‘supernatural’ experiences. The clear teaching of Scripture ought to be prioritized since a person has the explicit word of God to compare.

But, as I said, I am a **soft**-cessationist as opposed to a **hard**-cessationist. I hold this position because there is no explicit passage in the Bible that indicates the sign-gifts have ceased.<sup>11</sup> As I said in week 10, amending the words of Thomas Campbell, where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent. Where the Scriptures whisper, we whisper; where the Scriptures shout, we shout. **The continuation/cessation debate, like that of the debate around eschatology, is a matter where the Bible whispers.** So, while I’m firm in my convictions at this time and such a stance will impact how I interpret certain passages moving forward, **this is not a hill I’m willing to die on.** I’d agree with my continuationist brothers and sisters that this is a second-tier issue behind far more important doctrines like justification by faith alone, the virgin birth, and the Trinity.<sup>12</sup> So long as those who are continuationist **aren’t divisive**, I will gladly fellowship with them. Thus, to quote Rupertus Meldenius, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

**And most importantly, I reserve the right to change my position.**

**Vs. 29-30** – However, what’s remarkable about this moment isn’t that someone predicted the future, it’s that the believers in Antioch, Jew and Gentile alike, sent “**relief to the brothers living in Judea.**” That Judea was singled out implies the famine must’ve hit hardest in this region. And what would’ve been sizable amount was delivered “**by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.**”

Notice also that though the disciples directed the believers to give, the disciples wanted “**every one** [to give] **according to his ability.**” Though some gave a lot and others gave a little, all gave **as they were able.** God isn’t impressed by the amount of money we give (cf. Mar. 12:43); he’s impressed when we **give consistently** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2), **generously** (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6), **cheerfully** (cf. 2 Cor. 9:7c), and **responsibly** (cf. 2 Cor. 9:7b).

**So, what’s the takeaway?**

**Believers care for the Church both domestically and internationally.**

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<sup>11</sup> Many cessationists claim that when Paul says in 1 Cor. 13:10, “When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away,” that “the perfect” refers to Scripture and “the partial” refers to sign gifts. But such an interpretation is flawed. Given the context of 1 Cor. 13, it makes far more sense that Paul is referring to our glorification in the eternal state when he speaks about “the perfect.”

<sup>12</sup> Ortlund, Gavin, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 108-116

**READ:** Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

### **Video Description:**

#### **Martyrs | Week 12 | Acts 11:27-30 | “Believers, aka Christians, Pt. 2”**

Shortly after Luke tells us of the origin of the term “Christian,” he relates the account of a global catastrophe. Famines, far-reaching and numerous, gripped the ancient world. But God sent Agabus, a prophet, to prepare the Church. And, during this difficult time, Christians stepped up and cared for their own. This passage is a remarkable example of how Christians not only abide by the Word of God but also care for one another. True believers exhibit obedience to God and love towards others.

### **Sermon Manuscript:**

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