

False Prophets

Is there a chance that you could be or already have been deceived by a false prophet? By the end of this message you will understand the scriptural answer to that question.

The word prophet comes from a root which means ‘one who speaks for another’ and during Old Testament times God called many prophets, who spoke, saying, “Thus says the Lord ..” A true prophet is not merely one who predicts the future or talks mainly of future events. Prophets intended to evoke faith in God and His way, and so their work is not designed just to satisfy our lustful curiosity.

Prophets challenge the people of God, calling them to live according to the covenant they have made with Him. God wants His people to represent His way to the world, and so the prophet often comes with a call to repent. God told Jeremiah in 6:27, *‘I have made you a tester of metals among my people, that you may know and test their ways.’* ESV. He told Ezekiel in 3:17, *‘Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.’*

Prophets interpret national and international events. In times of calamity and confusion the prophet explains what God is bringing about, and how he wants His people to behave. In 1 Kings 18, God had brought drought and famine to the land because of Israel’s idolatry, verses 17-18.

‘And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.’

This chapter tells the story of Elijah’s triumph over the prophets of Baal, verse 37-39, *‘Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.’*

Prophets have often foretold the future. Although this was not their central task, many prophets did predict future events. Some were fulfilled quickly, such as Naaman’s healing (2 Kings 5:10-14). Others, centuries later, for example Isaiah’s prophecies about the coming millennium, or the many Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah to come.

Jesus spoke of John the Baptist as the last and greatest of the prophets, Matthew 11:11,13. *‘Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.’* After John’s forerunning message about Christ, the work of the prophets was largely eclipsed by the glory of the Messiah and His eternal gospel.

Jesus, of course, was also a prophet and his message, like John’s, was as balanced as that of the prophets of old, Matthew 3:1-2, *‘In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* and Matthew 4:17, *‘From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*

Soon, with the completion of the canon of scripture and the death of the last apostle John, fresh revelation from God, or prophecy, apparently ceased, for the word of God was then complete. Matthew 5:17, *‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.’* And Revelation 22:18-19, *‘For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.’*

Now, God's people must beware of false teachers, rather than false prophets who claim to speak directly from God, for the message of the teacher should be gathered from **the completed** revelation contained in the scriptures. Their message is of equal authority if it is based upon the words of God. Anyone today claiming to speak for God **beyond the authority of the scriptures**, however, can be counted as a false prophet if their message is about the future.

God's true ministers and teachers still exercise the first 2 characteristics of a prophet though— those of challenging God's people, and interpreting current events in the light of the Bible. Both are led by the Holy Spirit of God and both can be judged and evaluated by the same criteria as a consequence. Are their messages based upon the scriptural commands of God, and do their explanations of current events rely upon existing Biblical prophecy?

Prophecy in the New Testament is comparatively limited, 1 Corinthians 13:9, *'For we know in part and we prophesy in part.'* Always the congregation must judge, 1 Corinthians 14:29, *'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.'* That is still going to be necessary, because many teachers take to themselves the third characteristic – that of predicting the future and making fresh revelations, which they claim to be from God, though in fact their prophecies contradict established Biblical prophecy.

The fastest growing religion today, for example, is Islam. Supposedly delivered to Mohammed by an angel, the Koran is full of contradictions to the Bible. Even 'Christian' religions have fallen for such angelic or rather satanic deception, which has caused them to reject clear instructions in the Bible, for example Joseph Smith's teachings to the Mormons.

I have personally known two ministers who genuinely thought God had instructed them by visions, and went out on a limb with false prophecies. Sadly one of them, a quite young minister, died of a heart attack when the events he predicted failed to materialize, and the other still continues to deceive.

How do they make such serious mistakes? We gain an answer from 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, *'For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.'* So, men are deceived, just as was Mohammed.

False apostles fall into much the same category as false prophets and false teachers; all are used by Satan to side-track the people of God very subtly, verse 3, *'But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.'*

Satan will soon empower the False Prophet at the end of this age, to deceive most people around the world with his miraculous powers! Revelation 13:13-14, *'He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire comedown from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.'*

In fact, we can expect many deceivers, even within the Church, Matthew 24, 4-5,11,24, *'And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.'*

Whenever Satan achieves this, the New Testament refers to these as false prophets because these ministers are supposed to speak for God by expounding His sacred words. Jesus told us how to recognize them in Matthew 7:15....29, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that*

day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. [That God's Commandments are done away] These men can't hide their bad fruits, and a wise Christian should be able to spot them by examining their track record.

A true prophet or teacher will be found walking after the example, and in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:21, *'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.'* Jesus Christ explained their role to his disciples who were to become the Apostles, Matthew 20:25-26, *'But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.'* [Greek: diakonos, a servant, attendant, a waiter at table.]

When you find those claiming to be ministers of the Lord who believe their role is to rule over God's people, and be served by them, know that you are in the wrong church, 1 Peter 5:1-3, *'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.'*

Such men will often attempt to control their congregations by fear and dominion, claiming theirs is the only 'true church', while threatening any who would question their teaching with expulsion, and consequent loss of salvation. This of course is quite untrue, but it goes with the reversal of their role as the served, rather than the servant, which Christ required of them. Measure and shun such men, and seek out those who live by the scriptures.

Also, a true servant of God will be found taking the **whole gospel** to the world rather than a message designed to merely satisfy curiosity about the future. The balanced message of the New Testament we saw Jesus Christ bring, was dual – the good news of the Kingdom of God and the need to prepare ourselves for it by true repentance. The true servant of God builds and unites God's church with **His** word alone, and will not neglect this vital duality. The motivation of prophecy is repentance!

Secondly, false prophets and teachers often reach into God's church to subvert and divide God's people by misdirecting their attention from Christ, to themselves. 2 Timothy 4:3-4, *'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.'* 2 Peter 3:17, *'You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.'*

You will not find God's true servants parading their role or position – they are too busy directing the attention of God's people to their Saviour, so it will be very unlikely that their message will be accompanied by anything that glorifies themselves, their name, or personal details, but this cannot be resisted by the false prophet.

Thirdly, false prophets ignore the instruction of Matthew 10:8, *'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.'* They monetise the gospel, by **selling** their preaching and suggesting that donations if not tithes, are welcome. 2 Peter 2:3, *'By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.'* Instead of making their message freely available to all for reproduction, they copyright it as though it were their own invention.

And indeed it often is, for further, instead of sticking closely to the word of God, false prophets provide that extra 'special knowledge' which they use to establish their own unique separateness. A close examination of their doctrine will reveal its absence from God's word, if not its downright contradiction of scripture. 1 Timothy 4:1, *'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from*

the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.'

That does not stop them dividing God's church over such quite unscriptural details, to gain a following, despite Philippians 2:1-5, *'Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.'*

And Ephesians 4:3, *'endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'*

The only valid reason for division in the church is when it becomes apparent that it can be shown from the scriptures that it is not following the faith that was once delivered, Jude 1:3, *'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.'* This division must be on a major point which the refusal to rectify would result in sin. Then, repentance and change is required and reconciliation, though wished for, is not always possible.

While the motivation for such change is repentance alone, God often adds further prophetic insights to those who will obey and depart from error, when revealed from the scriptures.

Sadly, many are deceived by false prophecy because they have not been diligent enough in their study of God's word, for though end-time events may still be years away it will only be when such prophecies are proved false, that it will be too late for those deceived. Too late, because we should remember that the source of false prophecy is Satan the Devil, whose sole aim now is to bring about the death and destruction of as many of God's people as possible.

It is hardly surprising then, that false prophecy not only contradicts clear and specific scripture about end time events, but directs God's people into the most dangerous situations where scripture says they will not be found. Our article 'Armageddon – a Misunderstanding', on this website, provides an example of such misdirection.

So, a true prophet challenges the people of God to live by all His word, and not to be side-tracked by subtle, unbiblical teaching. A true prophet's ministry will reflect God's justice, mercy and faith, Micah 6:8, *'He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?'*the very character of God.

So, if you come across someone who preaches about the future, use this checklist to spot the symptoms of a false prophet. If you see someone damaging God's church by false prophecy which contradicts the scriptures, be fearless in your protection of scripture and God's flock. There is always a chance he will repent. Proverbs 9:8, *'Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.'* And remember, no prophecy can be true, if it disagrees with or contradicts existing scripture in the Bible!

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