

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 17

THE DOCTRINE OF PROPHECY, PART 2

One of the hallmarks of an Old Testament true prophet of God was his ability to predict the future with perfect accuracy. In fact, if a person who called himself a prophet ever made a prediction that did not come true, he was a false prophet, people were not to heed him, and he was to be killed.

Deuteronomy 18:20–22 ²⁰'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously [רַיָּ] in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' ²¹'You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ²²'When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

We are not killing false prophets today, but this warning is applicable to us just as it was to the Israelites. We are just as susceptible to falling for lying charlatans who call themselves prophets as they were thousands of years ago. It is actually very prevalent in the world today and with our modern methods of broadcast communication systems, billions of people can be reached by false prophets—and they are. Part of the theology of Word of Faith preachers is to claim they receive prophetic words from the Lord and that is a specific claim to be a prophet of God. They often refer to themselves and to one another as prophets. Many of them overtly claim to be prophets and/or apostles.

One well known example we have today who manages to get his so-called prophecies into major mainstream media outlets is Pat Roberson. One suspects they report his so-called "prophecies" because he has a major media outlet in his own right via his 700 Club program and he is always wrong! In this way, the media can, at least in their mind and their thinking is not without merit, discredit what they think represents Christianity. The problem is Pat Roberson does not represent Biblical Christianity, but the secular world doesn't know that—and the "churchianity" world that looks like Christianity but is not doesn't know it either. How do we know Roberson is a false prophet? Primarily, we know he is a false prophet because there are no prophets receiving revelation from God today. We also know he is a false prophet because his prophecies never come true. He is a false prophet because his words and his ministry do not conform to biblical truth. His position on giving is unbiblical and the primary result of his teaching is that his own personal wealth is in the millions of dollars. In common with all the modern faith healers, his claims of healing people are without merit. He is an evolutionist and frequently criticizes biblical creationism and those believers who proclaim it. It is also

important to note that prophets are Jews. It is also entirely possible these people who claim to hear from God are, in fact, hearing from something or someone that isn't God; it is the one masquerading as God. These false prophets are either deceived or devious and they are misleading millions of people around the world.

Moses gave the Israelites God's guidance on how to spot false prophets and this advice is applicable to us as well. The first error of which to be aware is that the false prophet will speak "presumptuously in My [God's] name." Presumptuously, דַּיָּ or דַּיָּי, (the spelling is uncertain) means to be arrogant, defiant, rebellious, or to presume. It is to treat arrogantly or to be contemptuous; to treat another in a bad way showing no honor or respect for the object. To speak for God when God has not authorized a person to speak for Him, is therefore the height of arrogance and rebellion. It is nothing but sheer arrogance to claim God has spoken to you when He has not. In Deuteronomy 18:20 the Septuagint translated this word with ἀσεβέω which means impious, ungodly, and wicked. In the New Testament it carries a very strong connotation of sinfulness.

Jude 15 ¹⁵to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly [ἀσεβήεις] of all their ungodly [ἀσεβεία] deeds which they have done in an ungodly [ἀσεβέως] way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly [ἀσεβήεις] sinners have spoken against Him."

2 Peter 2:6 ⁶and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly [ἀσεβήεις] lives thereafter;

This word was used to describe the behavior of Babylon in Jeremiah 50:29 where it is written, "For she [Babylon] has become arrogant against the Lord." After Israel refused to go into the Promised Land, they rebelled against God by attempting to go into the land under their own power. In Deuteronomy 1:43, God linked this word with their rebellion. This word conveys a powerful message; therefore, to claim to be a prophet of God when it isn't true is serious business.

Jeremiah 50:29 ²⁹"Summon many against Babylon, All those who bend the bow: Encamp against her on every side, Let there be no escape. Repay her according to her work; According to all that she has done, so do to her; For she has become arrogant [דַּיָּ] against the LORD, Against the Holy One of Israel.

Deuteronomy 1:43 ⁴³"So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously [דַּיָּ] and went up into the hill country.

That can take on at least three distinct identifying characteristics. One way to identify them is when they claim to have a direct word from the Lord which is not possible since the death of the apostle John and is therefore, in this age, always untrue. Although that is the only way we need to identify a false prophet today, additionally, anyone who

speaks contrary to the Word of God is a liar and a false prophet. We can identify people as false prophets when their so-called prophecy leads us away from God and to false gods. They often masquerade as servants of God, but they are not. If what the prophet predicts does not come true, then he is a false prophet. This obviously rests on the fact that anyone receiving a word from God must be receiving truth and it therefore has to be verified as from God by coming true. If it never comes to pass, they never heard from God and have proven to be a false prophet.

It should be very obvious that the warning about a prophet “who speaks presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak” is a warning that should be given the utmost attention. This is no less applicable today. It is a grievous sin to falsely claim to speak for the Lord.

Signs and wonders, also not used at this time, can also be false. They can be false in two ways. One way is they are false because they are simply tricks. But Satan can perform false signs and wonders that are not tricks; they are real miraculous events. The thing that makes them false is they point to a false god rather than to God. We have already examined two Scriptures from Matthew in which Jesus warned against believing real, but false signs, miracles, and wonders.

Deuteronomy 13:1–3 ¹“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ²and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ ³you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Anyone who claims to be performing miracles today is automatically suspect in terms of their truthfulness because signs, wonders, and miracles are not part of God's program for this age. Their purpose, and their only purpose, is to authenticate the message of God as brought to the people by the messenger of God. If they point to a false god, they are, without question, to be ignored. If they are not authenticating the God of the Bible, they are to be ignored.

There are only five periods of signs, miracles, and wonders identified in the Bible and four of them served to authenticate God's prophets. Those four periods involve Moses, Elijah and Elisha, the Lord Himself, and the apostles.

Moses. When Moses objected to being God's emissary to Pharaoh and to the Israelites, God told him that his message would be validated by signs, wonders, and miracles.

Deuteronomy 34:10–12 ¹⁰Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹²and for

all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

The first authenticating given to Moses was turning his staff into a serpent and back to a staff.

Exodus 4:5 ⁵“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

The second authenticating sign was a leprous hand.

Exodus 4:8 ⁸“If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

The next authenticating sign was turning water from the Nile to blood on the ground.

Exodus 4:9 ⁹“But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

God gave Moses these signs in order that the people and that Pharaoh would believe Moses was an emissary sent from God with the message, “Let My people go.”

Elijah and Elisha performed many miracles designed to authenticate their message of judgment against Israel if the people did not repent and return to God. They did not and the judgments fell as predicted.

When Elijah resuscitated the widow's son she acknowledged him to be a man of God which was a validation of his ministry and confirmation that he was a true prophet of God.

1 Kings 17:24 ²⁴Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.

When Elijah called down fire from the Lord to consume his offering on the altar, his request of God was to authenticate the prophet as God's servant and that the miracle would authenticate Yahweh as the God of Israel. This was in contrast to the false god Baal who could not perform this miracle.

1 Kings 18:36–39 ³⁶At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷“Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the

dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.”

The purpose statement of the gospel of John specifically informs us the purpose of the signs was to authenticate Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Savior who grants eternal life to those who believe.

John 20:30–31 ³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Peter specifically told the Jews that Jesus was attested, or authenticated, by the signs, miracles, and wonders He performed in their presence during His First Advent.

Acts 2:22 ²²“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested [ἀποδείκνυμι] to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

The word translated attested, ἀποδείκνυμι, means to cause something to be known as genuine with a possible focus on the source of such knowledge. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* says it means “to show forth, exhibit, declare, [or] prove.” It means “To show by argument, to demonstrate, [to] prove. In Acts 2:22, meaning “approved, confirmed of God through [signs, miracles, and wonders] which is indicative of the fact that the miraculous demonstrations which Jesus did during His lifetime were for the purpose of proving Him confirmed of God. They showed that He had power to accomplish anything He chose to, i.e., anything out of the ordinary, and that what He did was a sign as to who He really was, the Messiah, the One approved of God.” [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, p. 221]. This word could just as easily have been translated “authenticated.” The Greek is pretty clear but the translation is perhaps not quite as clear. In English, “attest” means to provide or serve as clear evidence [of something], and “authenticate” means to prove or show (something, esp. a claim or an artistic work) to be true or genuine. Evidence is not certainty; it only points in that direction. Authenticate refers to the final conclusion that something is actually true and genuine. Either word is correct but authenticate seems to express the meaning more precisely in English according to Peter’s intent. The KJV translates the word as “approved” but this fails to portray the authenticating nature of the signs, miracles, and wonders. The NKJV must have realized this because they used the word “attested” in conformance with the NASB. The translators of the NET Bible apparently noted the weakness of the word “attested” because they added an adjective and made it “clearly attested” which seems to be an effort to forcefully explain the meaning in English beyond what our definition of “attest” expresses. The HCSB uses “pointed out” which is very weak. The NIV uses “accredited” which is much better and closer to “authenticate.” The New Living Translation translates it “publicly endorsed.” The New Century version translates it as

“very special” which is simply useless in this context. The Complete Jewish Bible translates it “demonstrated” which is better than some but really doesn’t carry the strength of “authenticate.” The Message translates it “thoroughly accredited” which seems to recognize the weakness in accredited by adding the adjective. In my opinion, “authenticated” would have been the best translation.

The apostles and other specifically designated believers were also empowered to perform signs, wonders, and miracles as a means of authenticating them as messengers of God presenting God’s truth concerning Christ Jesus and the gospel.

Acts 15:12 ¹²All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

In this case, the signs and wonders were authenticating these Jewish apostles not to other Jews but to Gentiles.

Acts 6:8 ⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

Stephen was performing signs among the Jewish people. The context of the immediately preceding verse, records the fact that the Word of God was spreading, disciples were increasing, and even priests were coming to faith.

2 Corinthians 12:12 ¹²The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

Paul is saying here that the signs were authenticating him as a true apostle. Paul said this in the context of receiving visions and revelations from Christ and in the suffering he experienced in the name of the Lord.

Acts 8:5–7, 13 ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. ⁶The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.... ¹³Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Philip was preaching in Samaria where the Word and the signs convinced many people to believe even including a sorcerer who had been practicing occult magic arts and who through the dark arts had convinced many people he possessed the power of God. Apparently, once the Samaritans saw true signs, they realized the difference between true and false, between the true God and a false god, and believed.

The final period of biblically identified signs, wonders, and miracles will be the during the Tribulation at the hand of the antichrist and his minions.

2 Thessalonians 2:8–9 ⁸Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,

Matthew 24:24 ²⁴“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

How do believers avoid being deceived? They look not to the signs themselves, but to who or what the signs are validating. In this case, the signs will be validating the man of sin and his claim to be god. They are not authenticating the God of the Bible.

It is important to note that antichrist and his followers will “show great signs and wonders” that are true, real miraculous works. Many theologians simply assume that no one but God and His people can perform the miraculous but both the Lord and the Bible say otherwise. That assumption could prove to be deadly in terms of a person’s spiritual welfare because assuming only God can do miracles will keep a person from examining them against the Word of God. God allows these evil people, to the extent that serve His purposes, to prophesy and to perform false signs, wonders, and miracles. False does not mean these things are not truly miraculous or that they are simply tricks; it means they point to the wrong person or thing in order to mislead people and take away from God.

This isn’t just a problem that is restricted to the Tribulation; it is a problem now as well.

1 John 4:1–6 ¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Isaiah 14:14 ¹⁴‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

Satan wants to be like the Most High; therefore, he tries to counterfeit who and what God is. It is our responsibility, each one of us as individual believers, to know the Word of

God well enough to be able to detect Satan's schemes. He appears as an angel of light and he sends his demons as counterfeit ministers of righteousness. They can speak a lot of truth but the error they slip in is deadly.

2 Corinthians 11:13–15 ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

1 Timothy 4:1 ¹But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

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