

# The Test of a Prophet

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I honestly don't know what people expect in terms of a prophet. I don't think many people really know where to look for one. You would certainly be making a mistake to look at the pulpit of a church somewhere or maybe in some stadium where you have an evangelist speaking to 60 or 70,000 people. You're not likely to find a real prophet in those environments.

One ancient prophet for example was a shepherd and a fruit picker before God spoke to him. And he seems to have been a very reluctant prophet at that.

On one occasion when he had delivered a very unpleasant prophecy concerning Israel, he was told to knock it off, to go home and shut up.

Here's what he replied, you'll find it in Amos the seventh chapter beginning in verse 14. Amos said, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a shepherd, and a gatherer of wild figs: And the LORD took me as I followed the sheep, and the LORD said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

So he wasn't schooled, he wasn't trained, he wasn't taught.

## **How Does God Work?**

I've noticed something peculiar about how God works. When He decides He wants to tell you something, He does not look for someone who will impress you. He is just as likely to pick somebody that you wouldn't listen to. Somebody could come along and you would say, "You want me to listen to this guy?"

A long time ago, I made up my mind to that. I said I know for a fact that if God ever decides, for whatever reason, to send somebody to talk to me with a message from God, it is going to come from somebody I will definitely not want to hear it from.

## **Who Does God Reveal Secrets To?**

So here's a prophet, named Amos. Amos left us with a very interesting principle. He said this, you'll find it in chapter 3 and in verse 7, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. The lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

God will do nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. Now I kind of understand what he's saying. I know for example that I am no prophet, but if I find something that God has said, how can I possibly keep quiet about it. "He said the lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" But if God has said, "He will do nothing except that He reveal His secret to the servants the prophets." Where are they? Surely God is not silent to the world, or is He?

It seems to me that we're heading into some really bad times in this world, but God seems to be disinterested or at least detached, or at least He's not talking to any of us.

Oh, I realize there are many pretenders to the prophet's office, and I've met a few of those myself, but they all have been just that, pretenders. I'm still waiting to encounter a real prophet but I'm in no hurry.

### **Lazarus and the Rich Man**

On the other hand, suppose God has already said His piece, and we were not paying attention. Jesus explained the principle behind this to a group of Pharisees one day and He did it with the parable. He laid it out in graphic detail with two characters (Luke 16:19-31). One a wealthy man, stinking rich, he had everything. The other was a beggar who laid at the rich man's gate. The beggar was in a lamentable state. He got only the crumbs from the rich man's table. It was a miserable life the poor guy had. So they died as the story goes. The beggar is carried to be with Abraham and the rich man is buried. Then follows a dialogue between the rich man and Abraham. And being in torment in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham a long way off, and Lazarus in his bosom. You know lying as the custom would be like your lying at meal. Lazarus is right there reclining next to him and he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Miserable, poor guy. Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he's comforted and your tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so that those who want to pass from here to you, cannot, nor can anyone come back the other way."

Now remember, this is a parable, it is not a description of what is, but a story to illustrate a point. So what is the point? Well, it follows. He says, "I beg you, therefore, father, that you send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. Oh, please send him." And Abraham said, "Well, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them." And he said "No, father Abraham, but if someone came to them from the dead, they would repent" and Abraham answered, "No. If they won't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

I think what Jesus is saying is that God isn't going to tell us the same thing over and over again. Why should He send us a prophet when we haven't listened to the prophets that He sent long ago.

### **Two Categories of Prophets**

There are two categories of prophets in the Bible. There are the oral prophets and the written prophets. Elijah, the archetype of all prophets, never wrote down a word as far as we know. He spoke directly to the those who were the object of the prophecy. Someone else wrote his words or we would know nothing of Elijah's message and work.

Then there are the writing prophets. Now, why do you suppose their word was written down and preserved down through the generations, instead of being merely delivered orally, say like a sermon? Well, whatever the case, it is clear enough that Jesus concluded that the prophets wrote their messages down, so God wouldn't have to tell us again and again. On the assumption that if we won't listen to it when it has been written down by the likes of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel, why should we assume anybody will listen even though somebody rose from the dead to tell them.

So, if we think we would like to hear from a prophet, maybe the starting place is with those prophets who have already long since spoken. Now I can hear someone saying "Yeah, but all those prophecies were fulfilled in the Old Testament. They are not for the future, are they?" Well, apart from the fact that that idea would leave the world somewhat hopeless in the modern world with no message from God is not quite true.

### **Show the Former Things**

I used to teach Old Testament and every year I would pass over a section in Isaiah that addresses this issue and finally I got the point. It is found in Isaiah Chapter 41 and verse 23 . It comes in the middle of God challenging the false gods and idols that Israel were chasing around. He says, "Present your case. Bring forth your strong reasons. Let them bring forth and show us what will happen." Now right there, that is what most of us are looking for. We want to know what's going to happen. Now why we want to know it, that is another question entirely, but we want to know.

He says "Let them shows the former things, what they were, so we can consider them, and know the latter end of them, or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods."

Now, this is not only useful in the study of prophecy, it's also useful in evaluating a prophet, which is what this statement is all about. It's all about whether or not somebody comes to you with a message out of the blue, hanging it out there with no support under it whatsoever, or whether he comes forward and says "Okay, here is what God has said, and here's what God has done in history. I'm here to tell you, He's about to do it again."

## **Want-to-Be Prophets**

I've encountered a few want-to-be prophets in my time, every one of which I rejected as a prophet. How can I be so sure? The reason is, that not one of them anchored his prophecy in history. Not one of them went and showed me the former things what they were, so I could think about them and apply the lesson to what's coming in my own future.

A new one showed up a while back. His prophecy was "Something is going to happen on October 23rd." Now how useful is that? Of course it came to pass, something did happen on October 23rd., I got up out of bed the first thing in the morning, I brushed my teeth, I shaved, I showered, but I don't really think that is a particularly useful illustration of prophecy.

### **God Does Not Send a Prophet to Tell Us How Well We Are doing!**

Now if you read the Bible very much, and if you think about what you read, there are some important ideas that emerge from the prophets.

One thing that occurred to me as I was making my way through the prophets is, God does not send a prophet to tell us how well we are doing! Not ever. He doesn't come down and give us pats on the head and say "That's good, You people are living the life just right and the future will go on." And God doesn't send prophets with a feel-good message.

If the prophets have any encouragement at all to offer, it seems always to be on the other side of the terrible disaster. So give me the disaster and say, and on the other side of this, those of you who survive will go into much better kingdom.

God does not send a prophet with pabulum and I will have to tell you that a great deal of what comes down the road these days as prophecies is nothing more than regurgitated Psalms. You can tell where they come from. They come from the King James version of the Bible and you can tell it because of all the "thee"s and "thou"s that are sprinkled in the middle of it all and it really doesn't have much to do with anything.

Now, if you see a prophet, and you know he is walking down the road toward your house, you can start worrying immediately because God does not send a prophet to us to tell us how well we're doing. He sends a prophet to tell us that we have screwed up, and we better straighten up or big trouble is coming our way.

### **Why Should God Tell Us the Future?**

Why on earth, after all, should God tell us anything about the future? The only reason I can think of is, that He expects us to do something with the information, like repent, turn your life around, and straighten out your life and fly right.

Okay, now why does God not send a prophet to tell us what we should already know? He doesn't do that, you know. The way He figures it is, if you won't respond to the written word,

here it is, it is right there on the pages of your Bible. If you can't get it there, you're not going to do any better even if someone rises from the dead to tell you. So if you're wishing that God might send you word by a prophet, you might want to rethink that idea.

### **Prophecy and Apocalypse**

Now there are two important words that we need to think about here. One is the word 'prophecy', which means to speak under divine inspiration. Prophecy, almost always, includes some moral content. Example: "You people are lying and it has screwed up your judgment, and I'm going to come down there if you don't straighten this out," or as someone once said, "A letter from God. Don't make me come down there."

The other word is 'Apocalypse'. Apocalypse means revelation and it is merely a recounting of future events, often in highly symbolic words and visions as in the book of Revelation. What most people are looking for is not prophecy, because prophecy is sent to correct their sins. What most people want is Apocalypse, revelation. They want to predict the future, not change their lives.

I'm sorry, it doesn't work that way. A real prophet tells us what is going to happen and why. It should make some kind of sense. God doesn't send prophets to us with the answers to trivia. It just doesn't work that way.

### **Test the Prophets**

I realize that I have laid down a major marker when I say I have never encountered a true prophet. How can I be so sure? Well, for one thing, the man of God should not be gullible.

John wrote it this way in his first letter (1 John 4:1), he said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world." Note that, not just a few, they're out there in their dozens and hundreds. So what are you supposed to do about that? You're not supposed to believe every spirit that comes along. You are expected to try them. Who is? You are! You're not supposed to rely on somebody else's judgment of these guys. You're supposed to trust your own judgment and to look into the pages of your Bible.

John goes on in his fourth chapter to address a heresy in his own day, but this principle stands here for us to read and apply. "Don't believe every spirit," check them out. There are all manner of preachers out there, each with his own message, his own claim, sometimes with his own miracles. Now John seems to be saying it's okay to think about these men or women. You don't have to swallow what they say. Put them to the test. After all, there were then and there are now plenty of false prophets in the world. Now who do you suppose they might be if you look around you?

Now how do you go about the actual process of testing a guy to see whether he's really a prophet of God, or whether he is simply talking about it out of his ear as it were. Well, based upon what we've already seen, their testimony should be consistent with the message of Moses and the prophets, right?

We may have to go back to what Abraham told the rich man, he said, "They have Moses and the prophets hear them," so surely any prophet that comes along has to be consistent and should not be a mere regurgitation of what we already know. Some would-be prophets just give us back the King James Bible and claim it's prophecy. Actually it is plagiarism. You can recognize it by the King James English.

### **Isaiah was a Real Prophet**

Now here's what a real prophet had to say about this. His name is Isaiah, chapter 8 and verse 19, "When they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter, Should not people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word it is because there is no light in them."

Now when Isaiah speaks of the law, he is obviously talking about Moses, there's no other source to go to. What is not so obvious until someone points it out, is that the word 'testimony' as is used in the Old Testament means the Ten Commandments. We're accustomed to speak of the 'ark of the covenant.' You may not know that the original name was the 'ark of the testimony.' Why? Well, because it contained the testimony of God in ten statements of law. That is what it was. The Ten Commandments were called 'the testimony.'

So where are we when a prophet comes along with a word from the Lord, and that prophet tells us that the Law and the Ten Commandments were abolished in whole or in part. I'll tell you what we have, we have us a genuine, certified, card-carrying false prophet. Now what do you suppose a real prophet would have to say of the various and sundry self-appointed prophets of our own day? We are not left in the dark. Now remember, prophecies don't have to be repeated because history repeats. What happened before will happen again. The language may be different. The names may be different, but the spirit is the same.

### **Jeremiah was a Real Prophet**

So our real prophet on this occasion is named Jeremiah and he has a really hard message.

If you read Jeremiah carefully, you'll understand that occasionally he is citing God's words and occasionally he is expressing himself. In Jeremiah 23 and verse 9, he says, "My heart within me is broken because of the prophets." He had looked around, he saw what was going on in the temple, he saw what was going on with all of the preachers in his own day, and what he is about to explain is a massive failure of the preachers of his time.

Jeremiah said, "All my bones shake. I'm like a man that is drunk, I'm like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the Lord, and because of His holy words for the land is full of adulterers."

You know, it's really not saying too much to notice that this is a fair description of our land right now. Adultery and fornication are a defining characteristic of our world. Love has been replaced with sex in our world, and nobody seems to care very much who it is with or when.

He continues, "Because of a curse, the land mourns, the pleasant places of the desert are dried up, their course of life is evil and their might is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane, yes in my house, I found their wickedness, says the Lord."

Now this is stunning, because what he is saying is, about the lone preacher of righteousness to be found in the entire land was one poor guy named Jeremiah. The whole temple, the temple precincts, were loaded up with prophets and priests that had profaned everything.

Israel had no doctrine of separation of church and state. The prophets were the preachers, the priest tended to be the civil administrators, and they had become utterly corrupt.

We learn from the history books of the Bible that pagan worship had actually been carried right into the temple and idols were set up there. We learned that prostitution, male prostitution, female prostitution had moved right on to the Temple Mount and they had set up their little booths right around the courts of the Temple. It was all right there.

Continuing in verse 12, "Therefore, he said, the way shall be to them like slippery ways, in the darkness they shall be driven on and fall in them, for I will bring disaster on them, the year of their punishment, saith the Lord."

### **Our Clergy Today**

Years ago I was reading something about the clergy, men who are in the ministry, and they alongside psychological counselors are people who need that psychological counseling themselves. Sometimes they have a fairly high degree of neurosis and psychosis and in fact it is probably because they keep seeing what God's word says and they keep not saying it to the people when they preach to them that their mind begins to go.

God says, "I'm going to bring disaster in the year of their punishment." Upon whom? Upon the priests, and the prophets and those who follow them.

"I've seen folly in all the prophets in Samaria, that is the house of Israel in the North, they prophesied by Baal, and caused My people Israel to err." Baal has many names, and it has been around for generations and he still hasn't gone away.

God continues in verse 14, "I've seen the horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem. They commit adultery. They walk in lies. They strengthened the hands of evildoers, so people

don't turn back from their wickedness." They don't tell them what they're doing is wrong, they don't preach to them about sin. "All of them were like Sodom to me, and the inhabitants like Gomorrah."

Adultery in the ministry? Sodomy in the priesthood? Oh, say it isn't so. But it was, and it is.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning these prophets, "I will feed them with wormwood. I'll make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem, from the preachers, profaneness has gone out into all the land.""

I want to tell you something that maybe you don't understand, this is where it all began in our own country. The trend so prominent today did not emerge on its own. It doesn't come about through secularization of the government and the school system. All of this followed the failure of the preachers who did not stand for righteousness. Preachers who wanted to dismiss the law of God. Preachers who wanted to say, "Well, sin is relative," and they would like to eradicate the word 'sin' because "We can't tell people that they're sinning. It is so passé, it is so out of date." But it started in the churches. It started in the pulpits and the failure of the preachers to preach God's word.

Continuing in verse 16, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, "Don't listen to the words of the prophets that are prophesying to you. They make you vain. They speak of visions of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me," the Lord has said, "You will have peace.""

Think about this. The preachers would stand up and say "You're going to have peace," and he says it to people who hate God. They say to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, "No evil shall come upon you." So what are you supposed to follow if not after your own heart? The Law and the Testimony!

Continuing in verse 21, "I've not sent you these prophets," said God, "yet they ran. I have not spoken to them. They prophesied." Then comes a truly remarkable statement. "If they," these prophets that God had not sent, "had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear My words that even they would've turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doing."

You know, I take great heart from that. God has not spoken to me in the night. I have had no vision from God. I have not been dreaming dreams, but I do have a grip on His words and I find them in the pages of the Bible. If I can make people hear those words then maybe even I can turn them away from the wickedness of their doings

Then he summarizes in verse 28, and he said, "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell his dream. He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff, the dream, to the wheat?" says the Lord. "Is not my word like a fire," says the Lord, "and like a hammer, that breaks into pieces the rock. Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets who

steal my words everyone from his neighbor, behold, I am against the prophets," says the Lord, "who use their tongues and say, God says. "Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams and cause my people to err, by their lies, and by their recklessness."

Put the prophets and your preachers to the test!

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