

601 Does God Have Modern Prophets?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Not long ago two young men came by my house and asked to tell me about a 19th century prophet, whom they follow. Recently a lady told me that her friend had been to heaven and learned that Jesus was coming very soon. Once in a while we hear about Nostradamus. Each year the glitzy periodicals you find at the grocery market has the new year's predictions of the supposedly gifted psychics. Even some of the Christian bookstores have new videos out predicting the end of the world. Our question, "Does God have modern prophets?", is a timely one. You might call a friend and encourage him or her to listen to today's broadcast.

A prophet is a person who "speaks forth" from God. His message may or may not contain predictive elements, but his purpose is to call attention to God's message to the people to whom God sent him. Prophets are God's messengers; their message is not their own. One should listen to the message of a prophet, because his message carries the authority of God and not man. The prophet's task is to deliver the message of God faithfully and accurately. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha sometimes had additional miraculous powers, while others like John the Baptist, did not have any such powers.

Throughout history there have been many false prophets who have led people astray. Peter said in 2 Pet. 2:1-3, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." If we ask, are there prophets today. The answer is yes.

If we ask, "Did God send them?", we are then asking a far more relevant question. Here are some "false" prophets God did not send. They teach things that split churches and lead people into impurity. They exploit churches for their own personal gain and are doomed to destruction. The apostle Paul also warns about the problem of false teachers. He said in Acts 20:28-31, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." Here Paul warns these elders to protect the church, because people say twisted things and try to draw away Christians from the truth. He characterizes them as wolves who do not spare the flock. They don't care whom they hurt. My friends, not all religions are alike. Jim Jones and David Koresh claimed to be prophets, but they ended up destroying themselves and everyone who followed them as well.

During the days of Jeremiah, there were a number of prophets who claimed God was speaking through them; but God had a different idea. Jeremiah, the true prophet of God, said in Jeremiah 23:16, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.'" Throughout history, people have dreamed up strange things and said that God said, when God never said any such thing. I recall in 1988 a book I received prophesying the end of the world, but it was built on human schemes not God's revelation.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." What some people think God is saying is really from deceitful spirits who give the teaching of demons. They have seared consciences and do not care who they hurt or what lie they tell. They destroy families and stand against God.

Even more alarming is the charge Paul gave to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." I fear we are seeing plenty of that these days with preachers who tickle ears.

Like the false prophets of old they tell people what they want to hear rather than telling them what they need to hear. They give them myths to excuse their desire to live worldly lives rather than telling them God's truth. Faithful preachers of God's word "reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching." To reprove is to so convince another with such strong feeling that one exposes and convicts of sin. To rebuke is to speak against error and reprimand those who do it. To exhort is to encourage righteousness. Godly preachers do this with great patience and instruction. We need the truth today more than we need tickled ears!

Are there prophets today speaking from God? The answer to that question must come from the Bible. Does the Bible say there would always be prophets from God? The answer to that question is no. What the Bible says is that there would come a time when prophecy ceased. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 says, "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were for a time, but they were not for all time. Prophecy was to pass away.

Miraculous gifts were given in the first century in order to teach the church God's will and to confirm the message as God's own. But there would come a time when the miraculous tongues, prophecy, and knowledge would pass away when "that which is perfect" comes. What is this "perfect" thing? Well, it is not Jesus, because Jesus is a person and references to Him are masculine in gender. That which is perfect is in the Greek language neuter in gender. It is something other than Jesus. If we look closely at the text, the perfect is to replace the partial. We know in part and prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. What is the perfect? It is of the same character as the partial. It too is revelation; it is the revealing of the written Word of God. Once the written Word was complete as a covenant between God and man, there was no longer a need for any further revelation. The faith was to be written down for all people of all places for all time. Once that Word went out, there was no longer a need for prophets, because they had the Word. What was needed was for faithful men to preach the Word that they had rather than to think there had to be some new and different message continually coming from God. There is but one gospel!

Jesus the Lord promised the apostles in the first century in John 16:12-13, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to

come.” Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth—not some of it or most of it, but ALL of it! Now if the apostles did not have ALL the truth in the first century, then the promise of Jesus failed. And if there is truth being revealed today, then the promise of Jesus has failed.

If you have all the truth, you can't have any more truth. “All” means “all.” If Jesus gave them all the truth, then prophets who claim to reveal new truths are actually saying that Jesus' promise to the apostles failed. Well, did it fail? Did the apostles speak as if all truth had been revealed to them? The answer is yes. Let's look at what they said. Paul said in Acts 20:26-27, “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” If he lacked anything, Paul surely didn't talk like it. Paul gave them everything they needed to know to please God and to go to heaven.

Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent (perfect or complete), equipped for every good work.” The word of God is not lacking anything needed for us to live a godly and righteous life. We do not need modern day revelations. The Word we already have is capable of fully equipping us as competent servants of God. It does not need improving, embellishing, or re-inventing. The Word of God is capable of doing its work, work that it has done for two thousand years!

What Jude wrote in Jude 3 is good advice for us today. Rather than concern ourselves with contemporary prophets, we should, “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” The faith was once and for all time handed down to the saints in the first century. That faith was not just for them; it is for us today in this 21st century! Jesus said that “heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). He wanted his disciples to be taught “to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). What he taught was for all time!

Peter said in 2 Peter 1:3-4, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” My friend, we are not lacking anything. We do not need modern revelations from so-called prophets to teach us anything. We already have “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” If they did give us anything it would spoil what we have.

If what you have is perfect, you do not want to add to it or take away from it. To do so would ruin it. The Bible teaches clearly we are to respect Scripture by accepting it as it is. In Revelation 22:18-

19, the apostle John wrote, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” What is true of the book of Revelation is true of all the books of the Bible. Don't add or take away from them.

Those who claim to be prophets today are actually saying they can add to the Bible. They believe that the Bible is not the “whole truth.” They are saying that Jesus failed to give the apostles “all the truth” and they need to add to it. What they are really doing is what the false prophets of old did; they are “filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16).

I hope and pray you'll take care to listen to God as He speaks from the Word of God and not be fooled by false prophets. Today is a good to obey the Lord in faith, repentance and baptism. Come to the Lord today!

Someone says, “Phil, this prophet's words came true. He had to be speaking from God.” Moses, long before Jesus, also faced this. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 says, “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” There are times God tests us to see if we will hold true to Him.

Moses further said in verses 4-5, “You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God.” God did not approve of false prophets then, and He does not approve of them today. Of course this law for Israel is not for us today; we could not counsel putting anyone to death. But we certainly do not want to listen or support what God calls “evil” in Deut. 13:6. The best thing we can do is to go to God's Word, the Bible for our answers.

Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” That is what we need to do today, to stay with the word Jesus taught us and not be moved by sensational things dreamed up in the hearts of humans. What we all need is God's Word to teach us and to build us up in the most holy faith. Let's read it, study, love it, and live with it. There's never been anything anywhere at any time able to do what your Bible can do—set you free from sin! Keep the Lord first in your heart and stay with his words.

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