7 Sure Signs of a Genuine New-Covenant Prophet

Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of a two-part article. For Part 1, click here.

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But What About False Prophets in the New Covenant?

The phrase "false prophet" is used 11 times in the New Testament, and it *never* refers to a believer. There is *the* false prophet of the antichrist and Bar Jesus of Acts 13, "a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!" and he was "seeking to turn the proconsul *away from the faith*." (v. 8, ESV).

The other references refer to false messiahs and deceivers of the truth. Never, not once, is a child of God referred to as a false prophet—and yet, we know that every believer was encouraged to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1). So, if one claims that someone who makes a mistake in prophecy is a false prophet, they are claiming that he is an unbeliever, presently and always, in line with the devil, seeking to deceive the body—despite repentance, loving Yeshua and bearing fruit for the kingdom—which is absurd.

Furthermore, we must ask ourselves: are prophecy and prophets exactly the same under the New Covenant as the Old Covenant? If so, should one who prophesies presumptuously be put to death? (Duet. 18:20). If that is our conclusion, then a host of others should be killed. But there is a clear difference.

Every Believer Should Seek to Prophesy

In the Old Covenant, God spoke almost exclusively through prophets. In the New Covenant, every believer is encouraged to seek to prophesy: “Follow after love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. But he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification and exhortation and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:1, 3)

The Greek word translated *eagerly desire* is *zeloo*—where we get our word zeal. It is an onomatopoetic word, meaning it sounds like itself (like buzz) and it sounds in Greek like “boiling water”. In other words, we are to be *boiling over with zeal for the gifts of the Spirit* (as we “follow the way of love”). It should be something we pray for every day.

Now, if someone who makes a mistake in prophecy is then cut off from the Lord and deserving of death, why, then, is the apostle seeking to put the everyday believer in such a precarious and perilous position by encouraging him or her to seek to prophesy? And, yet, we know that under the New Covenant, it is not just prophets who prophesy, but every believer can do so. That is Peter’s meaning in quoting Joel in Acts 2—that God’s Spirit is not just for prophets, but all flesh, meaning, any believer who is hungry.

Prophecy is an objective word from heaven, but it is highly filtered through the subjective lens of the human vessel—through our emotions, our intellect, our theology and even our wounds and presumptions. Paul said, “We see as through a glass dimly” and “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” (1 Cor. 13: 12a, 9) Paul also says, “If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith.” (Romans 12:6) So, there must be the possibility of prophesying beyond your faith or presumptuously, as in Deuteronomy. In such cases, leaders should deal with that, but with the goal of restoration, not repudiation.

Paul says, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies. Examine all things. Firmly hold onto what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19-21) What about that which is not good—or bad—and the people who falsely or presumptuously prophesied? Did they kill them? Did they label them permanently as false prophets, excommunicating them from the body of believers? It seems not.

Something Has Changed

The argument is very simple. Michael Brown has a chapter in his 2018 book *Playing With Holy Fire: A Wake-Up Call to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Church* on the problems and pitfalls of prophecy. He simply says that the standards of 1 Corinthians 14 show that other prophets and leaders weigh prophecy in the New Covenant, and there is no hint that there is a penalty for making a mistake.

Obviously, something has changed. It is simply to note that the consensus of the charismatic and Pentecostal world (and its scholarship) is that New Covenant prophecy does not function in the same way as the Mosaic covenant standards. It is that all might learn to hear from God and that leaders would be responsible to confirm (or not).

Because they did not have the Scriptures in the way that we do today, the word of the prophet was much weightier. A missed word could be the difference between life and death. With the New Covenant and the deeper revelation of Yeshua and the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are less dependent on prophets today—though they are needed—and more dependent on hearing God through His word and in personal time in prayer.

Need for Accountability

Indeed, there are many self-proclaimed prophets who do damage and take advantage of the Lord’s people. There is a horrible lack of accountability when it comes to public prophecy. We must do better! Please do not take this writing as an excuse for the plethora of silliness that is out there when it comes

to prophecy and prophets. But we cannot throw out the baby with the bathwater (or drown him for being a false prophet).

So, are we going to take the position that anyone who is not 100 percent accurate is a false prophet? Or can one make a mistake, repent and ask God for forgiveness, and seek to grow? Does not God forgive such things? Or, are we then disqualified for life? We are for mercy, but that should not be interpreted as taking prophecy light*. It is no small thing to declare that you are speaking for the Lord.* And one who does so presumptuously *in public* should submit to discipline by other leaders.

Tone it Down

One thing we can do is tone down our proclamations. We rarely, if ever, say, "The Lord told me…," but use language like, "I sense that God *might* be saying…," "The Holy Spirit bore witness with my spirit," or, "I felt led of the Spirit."

Making proclamations such as "Thus says the Lord…" places one in a precarious position and will rightly invite rebuke if you are wrong. It is always better to tone down the way in which we deliver prophetic words.

Accept for the account of Agabus in Acts 21, we do not see New Testament prophets saying "This is what the Lord says…" Rather, James' tone, and he was the most senior apostle, is more low key in Acts 15 when he says, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28a).

Function of the New Testament Prophet

1. A prophet can know things by the Spirit (Peter knowing that Ananias and Sapphira lied (Acts 5)).
2. He can sense one's calling by the Spirit (Ananias to Paul, Acts 9; prophets to Barnabas and Saul, Acts 13:1).
3. Strengthen the body (Silas and Judas, Acts 15, Eph. 4).
4. Proclaim the word of God in power (many examples such as

Acts 2, 10).
5. Predict the future (Paul predicts that the false prophet Bar Jesus will be blind, Acts 13, or Agabus predicts a famine, Acts 11:28).
6. Proclaim judgment on a believer or unbeliever (with Ananias and Sapphira , Acts 5 and Bar Jesus, Acts 13).
7. Weigh the prophetic words of other prophets and non-prophets (Acts 14).

Final Word

False prophets go to hell or, at least, invite "swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Peter 2:1c). They do not go around the world preaching the gospel and loving Yeshua. False prophets lead people away from Yeshua, as do false teachers. Just as a teacher's doctrine can change over time, and he can make mistakes in his exegesis and hermeneutics, so, too, can a believer make a mistake in prophecy, repent and be restored.

There can be no question that the New Covenant brings a higher level of mercy in regards to mistakes in prophecy and that believers are never referred to as false prophets. {eoa}

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