

The Danger of Presumptuous Prophets

“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

Many of you have heard the story of Henry Stanley, the ambitious American reporter who went to the Dark Continent in search of Dr. David Livingstone, an 19th-century missionary who explored sub-Saharan Africa.

When Stanley finally tracked down the famed **evangelist**, his first words when approaching the only other white man in Ujiji, Africa, were, as the story goes, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” The white man’s identity may have seemed like a no-brainer to the young journalist, but if he had been a **prophet**, Stanley’s presumption would have landed him in a heap of trouble. That’s because **presumption** is on God’s blacklist.

What does it literally mean to presume? And what exactly is presumption? Webster defines *presume* as “to form an opinion from little or no evidence” and “to take as true or as fact without actual proof.” *Presumptuous* is defined as “to overstep due bounds” and “to take liberties.” Those definitions outline some critical prophetic dos and don’ts.

First off, there is no room for personal opinion in the prophetic. Our “proof” must come from the **Holy Spirit**, not our own spirits or some other spirit. As mouthpieces for God, others take our words and insights very seriously, and we cannot abuse the grace people perceive on our lives.

We must not fall into the trap of filtering **prophetic** utterances through our own biases and in doing so deceive the hearers. What would cause the prophet to think anyone wants his opinion, anyway? (We’ll get to that in a minute.) The function of the prophet is to reveal the mind and will of God, not the mind and will of the **prophet**.

Second, **prophets** must recognize boundaries and not take the liberty of overstepping their prophetic authority. Yes, where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, but not the liberty to speak outside our God-given spiritual jurisdiction.

That jurisdiction begins in the local church and expands as the prophet matures. Even the president of the United States, with all his authority, would be presumptuous to issue a decree over another nation. His words would fall to the ground because he would be overstepping his bounds.

Doubtless, God hates **presumption**—and He has good reason. There are several variations of the Greek word *presume*. Typically, the word portrays insolence (insultingly contemptuous speech or conduct), pride, arrogance or audacity (bold or arrogant disregard for normal restraints). Considering that the Lord includes a proud look and a false witness among the seven abominations, presumption is not something to be taken lightly.

In fact, while the **Bible** only mentions the words ***presume***, *presumed*, *presumptuous* and *presumptuously* 11 times, it almost always leads to death. Indeed, there are few things worse than a presumptuous prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20 declares, “The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (NKJV).

Mercy! Of course, we are living in a time of grace and even the most presumptuous prophet probably won’t be struck dead for this sin. But we must ask ourselves: What is happening inside of us, in our spirits, when we presume? Selah.

If you think God likes presumption any better in the New Testament than the Old Testament, then think again—or ask the apostle Peter, who was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost when he revealed that those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise government

(authority) are presumptuous, self-willed and slanderous (2 Pet. 2:9-10).

After pointing out that these presumptuous ones love to indulge in evil pleasures, revel in deceitfulness, possess an insatiable lust, lure people into sin and train themselves to be greedy, among other sinful qualities, Peter finally connects them with Balaam, the presumptuous prophet.

You remember Balaam. King Balak sent messengers to him with a sinister request and rewards of divination in their hands. Balak offered to pay Balaam to curse the Israelites. Wicked story short, Balaam initially refused to pronounce the curse but eventually helped King Balak defile the Israelites by giving him a strategy involving sexual sin (Num. 31:16). Balaam wound up committing treason (fighting against the Israelites), and his end was death. Listen to how the apostle Peter refers to Balaam's presumption:

"They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice. These people [Which people? Presumptuous people!] are as useless as dried-up springs or as mist blown away by the wind. They are doomed to blackest darkness" (2 Pet. 2:15-17, NLT).

Remember our friends, young Stanley and Dr. Livingstone? Livingstone's fascinating books sold in huge numbers all over the world as he pursued his dream to open the continent to make a way for other missionaries to preach the gospel. Stanley, on the other hand, was notorious for changing the facts to suit his purposes—or even making them up—in his books.

Stanley even lied about his heritage. He fought for the South in the American Civil War and then committed treason (like Balaam) and served the North when captured. He later helped

the king of Belgium fulfill his greedy purposes (like Balaam) in Africa. Like Balaam, Stanley's greed and pride caused him to compromise his professional ethics. Stanley eventually became a mass murderer.

It seems the fate of the presumptuous is ultimately the same throughout history. Thank God we have a Savior. We can repent of such sinful works. We need to pray like David. In Psalm 19:13 he cried, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then I shall be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (KJV).

You can download a sample chapter of Jennifer's new book, *The Making of a Prophet*, by clicking [here](#).

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