

7 Characteristics of False Prophets You Should Watch For

No segment of our society boasts more false prophets than politics. You hear them. Commonly called pundits and politicians, they abound.

Every day, these false prophets predict the rise and fall of people and policies that affect you and me.

The world of sports possesses nearly as many false prophets as politics. Sportswriters and sports broadcasters, or false prophets, predict the winners, losers and point differentials of every sport imaginable.

The news media garners its share of false prophets, too. Their predictions fill print publications, broadcasts and the internet. They predict everything in our society by manipulating reports of events to their satisfaction in the attempt to dictate future events according to their agendas.

False prophets in almost every area of life gather followers who esteem them. It seems that the wilder these provocateurs' proclamations, often based upon nothing more than imagination, the more their popularity is enhanced. Their presence has increased to significant numbers today.

False prophets within Christianity flourish, too. Their numbers swell to include pastors as well as denominational leaders. Even conservative groups, previously immune to such leadership errors, now boast of their "adaptation" to culture by implementing "trailblazers who will lead the church into the new century."

Popular authors and speakers shape our doctrinal positions and ministry emphases more increasingly in line with cultural beliefs at the expense of biblical truth. Apparently, the

Bible does not sell.

Now, false prophets even preside over seminaries that train the next group of leaders. We have reached a sad day so that when you or your local congregation search for a leader from a professing Christian seminary, you take the risk of finding a false prophet.

The subtle yet significant spiritual decline of Christian congregations, perhaps even a description of your spiritual life, develops under the evil influences of false prophets.

The stories of religious false prophets pervade the pages of the Bible, too. During the time of God's anointed prophet, Jeremiah, Israel progressed deeply into sin, rejecting God's laws.

God called Jeremiah to ministry during the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah, the 14th king of Judah (Jer. 1:2). Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh, led Judah into great wickedness. The evil he established exceeded the evil abominations of the nations that God drove from the promised land under Joshua (2 Kings 21:2). The discovery of the Law of God in the temple during Josiah's sovereignty did not occur until the 18th year of his rule (2 Kings).

In Chapter 5 of his book, Jeremiah recounts the injustice, hypocrisy, idolatry and adultery present in Judah. These conditions, which began under the reign of King Manasseh, existed at the time Jeremiah began to prophesy.

At the close of Jeremiah 5, the prophet identified the underlying cause of the people's wicked condition: "The prophets prophesy falsely" (Jer. 5:31a).

The false prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day fostered the spiritual decline of Israel. As Jeremiah bewailed the spiritual condition of Israel, he described the characteristics of the false prophets who furthered it.

Characteristics of False Prophets

1. **False prophets declared a false message.** When they said, "God said," they lied. They spoke their own messages. Further, when the priests failed to correct the prophets, the priests gained support from the prophets for their lavish, wicked lifestyles. Moreover, the people loved it that way (Jer. 5:31).
2. **False prophets derided God's Word.** The shameful practices of Israel's leaders resulted in the people viewing God's word to them with derision. (Jer. 6:10). When God spoke to them through His prophets, the Israelites rebelled against Him and departed from His word without fear. Every level of society, rich and poor, defied God. His warnings fell on deaf ears and hard hearts.

They had no interest in God's word. They traded it for the messages of the false prophets and priests. Naturally, this brought about a dearth of the knowledge of God. Doubt and unbelief followed.

3. **False prophets desired possessions.** Jeremiah 6:13 identifies another characteristic of the false prophets, the desire for possessions. The false prophets of Jeremiah's era loved money and sought positions of prominence. Their unbounded indulgences of the flesh drove them to dishonesty.

Their sin infected everyone, from the poorest to the richest, so that covetousness contaminated their whole society. No one denied his or her own selfish interests.

4. **False prophets disregarded their duties.** False prophets in Jeremiah's day disregarded their duties. Verse 14 of Jeremiah 6 talks about healing the hurt of God's people slightly.

Imagine a physician treating someone with a broken bone piercing through flesh. Rather than taking the time and effort to set the bone straight, this doctor merely wraps it and puts a Band-Aid on the injury.

This is an appalling thought, isn't it? Instead of really fixing the hurt, he just patches it up and hopes it heals a little.

As inexcusable as this sounds, it describes how the false prophets in Jeremiah's era treated the spiritual ills of Israel. They made no attempt to apply God's word to the people, which would bring healing to the spiritually suffering. Instead, they pronounced false messages to them.

5. False prophets described a false peace. In addition, God accused the false prophets and priests of saying, "Peace, peace," when no peace existed. (Jer. 6:14) The priests and prophets attempted to cover up their failures by proclaiming that everything was good enough.

But God said that no peace existed despite the declarations of Israel's leaders. Their problems underwent only a slight repair.

Scripture records in other instances where God warned the leaders of Israel of their similar failures to address the true problems of His people.

- Jeremiah 23: God likened the false prophets and priests to shepherds who scatter and destroy their sheep.
- Ezekiel 34: God described them as shepherds who fed and cared for themselves but left the diseased and broken sheep without care.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day declared peace when none existed.

6. False prophets defied God's ways. When God chastised

these false leaders, who had forsaken God's ways for their sinful acts, they responded with defiance. They experienced no shame for their sins. In fact, when their behavior failed to bring satisfactory results, they felt no disappointment or perplexity for their failures, nor did any sense of humiliation lead them to repentance. They did not even blush (Jer. 6:15).

7. **False prophets denied God's ways.** The errant prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day showed their true colors by a denial of God's ways. In Jeremiah 6:16-17, God instructed them through Jeremiah to return to the old ways and walk in them, but they rejected His demands.

In addition, they refused to heed the warnings of the watchmen He sent to warn them. They refused to walk in God's way.

Why Did God Include This Story for the People of Judah?

God sent Jeremiah to prophesy to Judah of their wickedness and danger of judgment. God had warned His chosen people that if they deserted His commands, He would punish them through their enemies who would enslave them. God said He would become their enemy, remove them from their land and scatter them among the nations. (Lev. 26:14-39)

But God also promised them that if they repented of their sins, He would remember His covenant with them in their favor (Lev. 26:40-45).

Through Jeremiah, God reminded them of His promise of judgment and His determination to judge them for their wickedness. (Jer. 6:18).

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