

A Prophetic Showdown Is Coming

✖ Just like Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, the time is coming when God's New Testament mouthpieces will confront modern day merchandisers. The true will defy the false. The holy will challenge the unholy. Until that day, **spirits of divination**, with a little help from the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, are working overtime to woo God's true prophets to the side of err.

Some **merchandising prophets**, with their miracle water, prophetic soap and prosperity oil, are catching naive Christians hook, line and sinker. Other gospel gainsayers are profiting with urgent announcements that God will heal the first five people who run up to the altar with \$100 bill in hand.

But perhaps the most dangerous merchandisers are those who use their gift to tap into divination. These **prophets** announce what the believer wants to hear in order to sow a false seed of faith in his heart and reap an improper financial reward, inappropriately earned position or wrongly received recognition. No matter the merchandiser's brand of deceit, it is a practice that stinks in the nostrils of God.

"Then the Lord said, 'These prophets are telling lies in my name. I did not send them or tell them to speak. I did not give them any messages. They prophesy of visions and revelations they have never seen or heard. They speak foolishness made up in their own lying hearts. Therefore, says the Lord, I will punish these lying prophets, for they have spoken in my name even though I never sent them. They say that no war or famine will come, but they themselves will die by war and famine!'" (Jer. 14:14-15)

Of course, most false prophets don't start their ministries as **false prophets**, rather they are tempted and enticed by the idolatry in their hearts. Avoiding Satan's snare begins with the fear of the Lord and the promised wisdom that follows. After all, the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies and all the things that you can desire are not to be compared to her (Prov. 3:14-15).

The wisdom in God's Word plainly illustrates that with every temptation there is also a way of escape. By comparing the responses of Balaam with Daniel and of Jezebel's diviners with Elijah, we get a clear view of the trap, the way of escape—and the ultimate fate of merchandising prophets.

Balaam is best remembered for his talking donkey. He was a true prophet of God who went the way of divination for the promise of financial gain when King Balak offered him rewards to curse Israel. But Balaam did not fall into sin upon the first temptation. In fact, he refused the king's initial offer. His royal majesty then upped the ante, promising the prophet promotion, honor and power if he would curse the Israelites. Balaam once again refused, saying "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18).

Despite his bold confession to obey the Lord's will, Balaam secretly desired to attain the rewards pledged by the king. And so the testing begins. Balaam would follow his rebellious heart 320 miles on a donkey's back to curse Israel and claim his coveted merchandise. But to his surprise, the Lord would not allow him to pronounce the curse when he arrived in Moab. Disappointed and still hoping to collect the king's bribe, Balaam shared a strategy to trip up the Israelites through sexual sin that led to the downfall of his brethren.

Balaam had a clear way of escape: Telling the king's messengers upon their first visit that the Lord forbid him to

curse Israel. That would have closed the door to future offers and put an end to the temptation that would lead to his destruction. The end of Balaam came by the command of Moses at the sword of his own people—the Israelites he tried to curse through divination.

Daniel, on the other hand, refused to give in to the temptation presented in King Belshazzar's dilemma. Belshazzar and his guests were drinking from gold and silver cups that his father had stolen from God's temple and giving praises to idols when the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the palace wall. Belshazzar was frightened and summoned enchanter, fortunetellers and diviners to come, promising riches and power to anyone who could interpret it. When none could, the king called Daniel and made him the same offer (Daniel 5).

Daniel was faced with at least three choices at this critical turning point in his ministry. He could accept the king's offer to interpret the message, thereby merchandising his gifting. He could exercise the gift he had freely received from Jehovah to freely interpret the message, all the while knowing that such a harsh word from the Lord could land him in the lion's den. Or he could stand on his credible reputation as God's prophet to falsely interpret the warning message as a blessing message and in all likelihood collect the loot anyway.

Unlike Balaam, Daniel unlocked the hard truth in the writing on the wall. He told the king that his days were numbered and that his kingdom would be divided up and handed over to the enemies. Daniel refused to compromise, no matter the consequences, and God used the king to promote him. As one of his last acts as king, Belshazzar robed him in purple, draped a great gold chain around his neck and positioned him as third-in-charge of the entire kingdom.

King Ahab and his wife **Jezebel** took the tradition of kings

calling on prophets to unlock the mysteries of god a step further—and a few steps too far. Jezebel had **false prophets** on her payroll. The wicked queen regularly fed 450 prophets of baal and 400 prophets of asherah. Bible scholars estimate that feeding those false prophets cost her about \$12,750 a week or \$663,000 a year. That's a hefty price tag for a good **prophetic word**.

So while Jezebel's prophets had full bellies in a time of famine, the queen cut off the prophets of the Lord for fear of the truth (1 Kings 18:4). Obadiah hid 100 of God's prophets in caves and fed them bread and water. While this may appear like a good work on the surface, Obadiah was only facilitating Jezebel's plan to cut off the uncompromising **prophetic word**.

While Jezebel's prophets looked well-fed and God's true prophets looked like sheep being led to the slaughter, the story changes in a hurry when Elijah confronts the 850 merchandisers at Mount Carmel in what goes down in Biblical history as the ultimate showdown between the true and the false. Elijah threw down the prophetic gauntlet and challenged the false camp to bring fire down from heaven by calling upon their God. The merchandising diviners cried to Baal from dawn to dusk with no answer.

When the false camp had finally exhausted itself, Elijah built an altar holding a sacrifice to Jehovah, drenched it with four barrels of water, said a simple prayer, and watched as the **fire of God** fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and even the water in the trench. Then Elijah slew his false counterparts one by one. So the ultimate fate of the false prophets came at the hand of the true prophet, who was later taken to heaven in a chariot of fire.

Like Old Testament prophets, **modern day prophets** are also being tempted to merchandise the anointing for fame, fortune or friends in high places. Being plugged into a strong local

church is a safety net because apostles boldly confront false moves of the Spirit and give merchandisers a way of escape by leading them into deep repentance.

Recall Simon the sorcerer, who was highly esteemed among the Samaritans because he bewitched them. The apostles Peter and John met up with Simon after praying for the baptism of the **Holy Ghost** for the new believers there. When Simon saw that the people were filled with the Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on them, he offered them money. "Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:19-21). Simon may have repented and did ask the apostles to pray for him. Repentance is the appropriate response for New Testament prophets who fall into the trap of merchandising.

The decision to go the way of Baal and or to go the way of Elijah lies in the prophet's heart. If pride, self-will, anger, or lust occupies the place where obedience, love and truth should live, then the merchandising prophet may succeed in reaping worldly rewards for a season but the retirement fund built on ill-gotten gains leads only to death (Romans 6:23). While there is certainly abundant grace for the true prophet who misses it, the Book of Revelation makes it clear that the false prophets (those who purposely set out to lie and deceive God's people) will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

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