

When True Prophets Completely Miss It

How can you tell a true prophet from a false one? That's a big question, and it doesn't have a simple answer—not in New Testament times, anyway.

It seemed simple enough in the Old Testament, didn't it? Deuteronomy lays it out in no uncertain terms: "But 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.' And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deut. 28:20-22).

And it gets worse: "But 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'" (Deut. 18:20). Of course, we aren't living with this same standard today or we'd see plenty of Internet, TV and itinerant prophets being carried away in caskets. No, we have a new covenant with God and that includes a new paradigm for prophetic ministry—one that allows grace for innocent mistakes.

Nathan flat out missed it

Indeed, even in Old Testament times, we see God's grace in prophetic ministry. I'm reminded of the time David was dwelling in his house meditating upon the Lord. God had given him rest from all his enemies. David was talking with the prophet Nathan—the same prophet who later would rebuke him

for committing adultery with Bathsheba and setting up the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 12). David was dismayed because God was dwelling inside tent curtains while he lived in a house of cedar (2 Sam. 7:2).

That's when Nathan spoke these words from his anointed mouth: "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you" (2 Sam. 7:3). Although this wasn't a "thus saith the Lord" type of prophetic word, it was a word of approval from a trusted prophetic voice in David's life. David was looking for prophetic counsel about his plans to build a house for the Lord, seeking confirmation that it was in God's will. David seemed to receive that confirmation, but the Lord took steps to correct Nathan's pure-hearted mistake before the king got too far.

God sent Nathan back to David with a bona fide prophetic word that contradicted his friendly counsel to "do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you." The Lord did not want David to build him a house but rather committed to establishing David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:4-17).

Learning prophetic lessons

There are two lessons we can learn from this incident. First, if you flow in prophetic ministry, you have to be careful not to accidentally lead people astray by sharing your opinion without a disclaimer—and sometimes even with a disclaimer.

In other words, if people know that you flow in prophetic ministry, they will often seek counsel and often take your words as prophetic in nature even if you're just sharing your opinion from experience or natural wisdom. You could accidentally lead someone astray because they are so desperate for a word from God that they take anything you say as a prophecy.

The larger lesson, though, is the grace of God to correct mistakes in prophetic ministry. Again, although Nathan didn't

preface his encouragement to David with “thus saith the Lord,” he did give David the confirmation he was seeking. David could have charged forth to build a house for God even though it wasn’t the Father’s will.

Be responsible, and let grace abound

Many times in prophetic ministry today, I hear prophecies flat out directing people to buy houses, get married, move to such and such a place, and make other life-altering decisions that are prefaced by “thus saith the Lord.” But many times they flat out miss it and cause plenty of heartache.

Although I’m the last one to encourage people to prophesy about babies and houses without absolute certainty that God is speaking—and even then, I’m not a big fan of those types of prophetic words because of the abuse and error that often trails them—I am grateful that there is grace for those who are growing in their gift. I am grateful that prophets who miss it aren’t put to death. I am grateful for mature prophets that are raising up young prophetic voices who will walk with greater accuracy as they come into greater intimacy with the Lord.

So, no, I’m not excusing irresponsible prophecies—no, not by a long shot. But I am offering a gentle reminder that we don’t need to pick up stones when any prophet—whether immature or seasoned—misses it out of a sincere heart. We need to learn and grow together. Amen.

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