

PROPHET OF DELIVERANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 77:11-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 12:28-50; Deuteronomy 18:15-22

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 18:15-22

I. Authority

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

15. While Moses did not specifically identify this *Prophet*, he did offer some distinguishing characteristics. First, the prophet would be *from the midst of* the Israelites, a member of the covenant people. For this reason, the one to come could be expected to be faithful to God's law and not attempt to lead the people into idolatry.

Second, the prophet would be *like* Moses in certain respects. The command *ye shall hearken* implies the third characteristic: that the prophet would be someone who had

authority (Mark 1:22), someone to whom the people needed to listen to and obey.

The capitalization of the word *Prophet* is not reflected in the Hebrew text. Calling Moses a prophet reflects the fact that Moses' words had not lost their significance by the time of Jesus. For instance, a question directed at John the Baptist was, "Art thou that prophet?" (John 1:21), which John promptly denied before pointing to Christ (1:26-27). Peter and Stephen quoted Deuteronomy 18:15 in Acts 3:22 and 7:37 in declaring its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

An earlier fulfillment, closer at hand for Moses' audience, was found in the man Joshua. He was the one who became the leader of Israel after Moses' death (Deuteronomy 3:28; 31:1-8). When the people listened to him, things went well. But when they trusted their own human nature, unpleasant consequences followed (Joshua 7). The names *Joshua* and *Jesus* both mean "the Lord is salvation."

16. This promise of a coming prophet was rooted in a request made by the Israelites when *God* spoke to them at *Horeb*. After God spoke, the people expressed extreme fear and trepidation at hearing *the voice of God*. They pleaded with Moses to speak to them instead of having the Lord do so, lest they die (Exodus 20:19-21).

They had good reasons to be afraid. God had commanded the people to gather at the

foot of that mountain and had given strict commandments regarding how close they could get to it—with dire consequences for disobedience (Exodus 19:12-13, 20-24). The scene had been marked by a mighty display of thunder, lightning, *fire*, smoke, the deafening sound of a trumpet, and the shaking of the mountain itself (19:16-18). God then spoke to the people what we call the Ten Commandments (20:1-17).

17. This further summarizes what the Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:27-28). Because of the people's legitimate fear of the Lord, Moses continued to serve as the mediator between God and the people.

18. While this verse clearly anticipates Joshua's role in Israel, the Lord also pointed to spiritual leadership beyond both Moses and Joshua. God would ensure that the people did not have an excuse to imitate the nations as those nations sought to divine God's desires by forbidden means. Prophets chosen by God would provide access to the *words* of the Lord.

All legitimate prophets spoke only what the Lord told them. They proclaimed the words of God boldly, often at the risk of their own lives. The Old Testament prophets foreshadowed the ultimate prophet, Jesus. He conveyed God's words as none of Jesus' predecessors ever could. And since John the Baptist was "more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26), how much greater in that sense was Jesus himself (Matthew 21:11; 16:13-16). Moses' words foreshadowed the many prophets God would send, leading ultimately to Jesus' own ministry.

II. Accountability

Deuteronomy 18:19-22

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

19. To *hearken* to the *words* God speaks through His appointed messengers implies obedience to those words. If obedience does not follow, then one has not truly listened. The price for rejecting the Lord's words is great: he will call the disobedient person to account.

20a. Those who *presume to speak* for God without being *commanded* to do so are false prophets (Matthew 7:15). Moses gave God's people two tests to use in determining whether a person's claim to be a prophet of the Lord was legitimate.

The first criterion was to verify the content of the alleged prophet's message. Was it consistent with the previously revealed word of the Lord? If it did not square with that divine standard, then the prophet's teaching had to be rejected and the man himself judged as a false prophet.

Closely related to this criterion was the nature of a person's character. For example, the prophet who is "like unto" Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) will be characterized by humility (Numbers 12:3). Those who were arrogant and self-serving did not exhibit this trait. The character of a prophet had to align with what God has revealed as good for His people (contrast Jonah 1). Thus we have two sides of the same coin: content of character had to match content of message.

20b. The second criterion is seen in the phrase *speak in the name of other gods*. To do so constituted a clear violation of the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). The test included the additional caution regarding an alleged prophet's ability to perform impressive signs or wonders. Such a person was to be rejected if those wonders were accompanied by encouragement to worship other gods. Idolatry proved the person to be a false prophet, no matter how spectacular his sign or wonder may be. The direction of his leadership always trumped any kind of miraculous sign.

This is not to say that only Israelite prophets were empowered to speak the truth. Balaam is an example of a foreign prophet who was also a true prophet (Numbers 22–24). He was called by the Moabite king Balak to curse the people of Israel. However, Balaam insisted that he would only speak what the Lord revealed to him. Balaam blessed Israel repeatedly instead of cursing them even once.

How faithfully did Israel carry out the command to put false prophets to death? Not very well since false prophets seem to have become more prevalent after the nation divided in 930 BC. Their number increased during the reign of wicked King Ahab, who promoted the worship of the false god Baal and his consort Asherah. The king encouraged prophets who claimed to speak for these deities, and so those prophets and their idolatry flourished. Elijah ordered those prophets put to death after the Lord's triumph over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.

False prophets tried to counter the message of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:5-28) and stood in the way of prophets like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 28) and Micah (Micah 3:5-8). False prophets were allowed not only to live but were encouraged to advise! Their messages resulted in great damage to the spiritual welfare of God's covenant people.

21. The question posed here and the accompanying answer (Deuteronomy 18:22) addressed predictive prophecies by an alleged prophet. God could have openly, visibly identified a false prophet when such came among the people. God could then have put the deceiver to death himself as God's law required. But God has always desired that His people become spiritually mature and discerning. He wanted His people Israel to be able to "give the test" when necessary.

22. Although it would take some time and patience, the people could *always* recognize a false prophet if *what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord did not come true*. It is important to add that just because an individual's prediction does come true does not in and of itself validate that person as a true prophet of the Lord.

In the matter of predictive prophecy, the problem of course is when a prediction will not come to pass for many years. If the prophecy fails to come true at the appointed time, the so-called prophet may have already died before his word could be judged. Thus he may have been able to gather a large following during life and to avoid judgment as a deceiver.

In that case, we can look at the alleged prophets' motives. Micah 3:5, which notes such prophets declaring "peace" in one situation, then turning around and predicting "war"—whatever suits their agenda at the time. False prophets tend also to "go along with the crowd" in predicting what people want to hear.

The verb *be afraid* occurs 10 times in the Old Testament. In 6 of those instances, it refers to fear of another human being; 1 time for fear shown by fictitious gods; 1 time for fear on behalf of a calf-idol; and 2 times as the reverence to be shown to the true God. It is our fear (reverence) for the Lord that causes us not to fear (be terrified of) anything else—especially false prophets.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

PROPHET OF DELIVERANCE

Into the Lesson

List qualities of a good leader in the spaces provided. Do the same for an untrustworthy leader. Compare and contrast results in whole-class discussion. Analyze whether certain attributes apply to leaders in a secular context but not in a church context and, vice versa.

Into the Word

Complete the following closed-Bible test.

Choices, Choices!

- ___ 1. Another name for Sinai is (a) Horeb; (b) Mizpah; (c) Egypt; (d) Goshen.
- ___ 2. The Lord promised to raise up a prophet like (a) Moses; (b) Isaiah; (c) Ezra; (d) Joel.
- ___ 3. The fate of a false prophet was to be (a) imprisoned; (b) beaten; (c) executed; (d) excommunicated.
- ___ 4. When encountering a false prophet, the people were *not* to react with (a) revenge; (b) fear; (c) cursing; (d) laughter.

- ___ 5. The voice of the Lord at Horeb had been associated with (a) wind; (b) rain; (c) fire; (d) an eclipse of the sun.
- ___ 6. At Horeb, the people had feared that, were they to hear the voice of the Lord again, they would (a) laugh; (b) die; (c) repent; (d) return to Egypt.

Into Life

What are some ways to spot false teachers or false prophets in the church?

Use the following references in answering the question: Zechariah 13:1-6; Matthew 7:15; 24:24; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 4:3; 1 John 4:1; Jude 17-19; Revelation 2:20; 22:14-15.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER
God provides guidance for His people.