

Sermon – 26/3/2006 am

A Prophet like Moses

Study Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-22

How does God communicate his will to his people? This is an age old question but is still one that arises today. There is no lack of men and women who declare that God has spoken to them with a new message for his people – a message for our time! It is often a person from within the church who assumes such a prophetic role, and then proceeds to lead the flock into a self-destroying sect.

There were false prophets in Moses day. There were false prophets in New Testament times. And there are still false prophets today – Charles Russell of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Joseph Smith of the Mormons to name but two. The Lord called upon his people to be discerning, to test the prophets to see whether they were from God or not (13:1, I John 4:1).

Already in this chapter of Deuteronomy the idea that the Lord might communicate through divination has been ruled out. The Lord God is omniscient but does not convey his knowledge through any sorcerer, magician or medium who calls up the dead. Such practices are heathen and detestable to the Lord.

Rather the Lord would *raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear* said Moses (18:15). Moses himself was chosen by the Lord to be his spokesperson. He was a prophet whom the Lord knew face to face (34:10).

Remember when the Lord revealed himself in a spectacular way back at Mt Sinai. The people trembled at the sight, and at the voice of the Lord. They said to Moses *let us not hear again the voice of the Lord our God, nor let us see this great fire anymore, lest we die* (18:16, 5:27, Exodus 18:16). They wanted Moses to mediate messages from the Lord – and the Lord approved (18:17, 5:28). And so the prophetic office began in Israel. *In time past God spoke to our fathers by the prophets* (Hebrews 1:1).

Office of Prophet

Called – the prophet was a man called and commissioned by God. *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me* (18:15.18). This was not a hereditary office like the priest or Levite. It was not a royal or political appointment. He was not a man elected by the people – although he was one of them. He was chosen by the Lord from among the brethren.

We are told little of the background of the prophets in Israel. Elijah was simply the Tishbite – we are told no more. Elisha was just found ploughing the fields. Jeremiah we read was a priest and Amos a sheep breeder. The prophet's background was not important. What was important was that he was called by the Lord.

The prophet was called and empowered by the Lord. Jeremiah was only a young man who, like Moses, complained that he could not speak. But the Lord told them that he would put words into their mouth. *Whatever I command you shall speak* (Jeremiah 1:7). They were not to go about proclaiming their own ideas and opinions. They were to speak the words of the Lord. Such words would not always be well received. The people often tried to silence the prophet.

Communicate – The prophet had but one task – to communicate the will of God. In general this was by words, although Ezekiel and others often acted out messages from God. Through Moses the Lord said *I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him* (18:18). He was to declare ‘Thus says the Lord’ or ‘this is the word of the Lord’. Such words were not open to judgment by men – they were the words of God.

The prophet Micaiah was under great pressure to speak words affirming King Ahab in his plans. Ahab had gathered 400 other prophets to enquire of the Lord. They all said to the King ‘yes what you plan to do is good’. Micaiah had a different message from the Lord. He alone was a true prophet and was constrained to declare the truth. He told Ahab *if you ever return in peace the Lord has not spoken by me. And he said ‘take heed all you people’* (I Kings 22:28). Despite disguising himself, Ahab died in that battle. The word of the true prophet was fulfilled.

How were the people to know if the prophet was true or false, if he was called by God or was simply assuming the office for himself?

Firstly, Moses had already spoken of a prophet or dreamer who gives a sign or wonder but who does not hold to the covenant (13:1). The true prophet will never speak in the name of another god or tell the people to go after other gods (18:20). The true prophet will be faithful to the covenant. He will be a man who obeys the Lord just like Moses.

Joseph Smith, whose mother practiced magic and who himself was given to given to occultism, especially divining and fortune telling with ‘peep stones’, gave the Mormons the book of Mormon. They hold this book as a further revelation of God, given through Smith as his prophet. Scripture says if any man adds to the words of the Bible that God will add to him the plaques of this book (Revelation 22:18). The prophet of the Jehovah’s Witnesses denied the Trinity and the deity of Christ, fundamental truths of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Secondly the words of the true prophet will always come to pass (18:22). If what he says does not happen then you know that the prophet has *spoken presumptuously* and is a false prophet. Moreover, note that the words of the Lord were never vague – they were specific. False prophets, like diviners and sorcerers – they are actually the same – speak vaguely about the future so that their words are hard to verify.

Playing with the souls and lives of God’s people was not tolerated by the Lord. This is what false prophets were doing in giving false messages. Moses commanded that those who presume to speak in the name of the Lord shall die (18:20). Like trafficking drugs today the potential for gain was great but the penalty was high – and divine judgment of course was certain.

Speaking of penalties, Moses also had a word for those who refuse to hear the words of the true prophet – *I will require it of him* (18:19). What does this mean? Well, turn to Scripture itself and we will find out. Look in Acts 3:23. The person who does not hear or obey the word of the Lord through the prophet will be utterly destroyed. Prophecy is a serious matter. The prophet had a solemn duty to declare God’s words without fear or favour. And the people had a solemn duty to hear and obey the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet.

The Prophet

The word prophet has a capital P in the New King James Version. This is somewhat interpretive, but the Jews did understand these words as referring to the Messiah. When John the Baptist started preaching they asked him ‘are you the prophet’ (John 1:21) and when Jesus started

preaching they asked the same question (John 6:14). Some believed that Jesus was the prophet spoken of by Moses (John 1:45, 7:40).

Peter and Stephen made reference to this verse in Deuteronomy when preaching the fulfilment of the old covenant in Jesus Christ (Acts 3 and 7). Jesus is indeed the prophet Moses spoke of here. *In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son whom he has appointed heir of all things* (Hebrews 1:2).

What about modern day prophets and prophesy you might ask? The Bible does speak about prophesy as one of the gifts of the Spirit – indeed as a most desirable gift. *He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men* (I Corinthians 14:3) – in contrast to speaking in tongues. But what is meant by prophesy in this context?

Some think that with this gift of prophesy they can declare new revelations and can foretell certain outcomes. ‘God told me this’ or ‘God told me that’. ‘The Lord told me that you should marry so and so’. A young friend of ours was in great distress because a so called ‘prophet’ in the church had told him he was to marry a particular person. He went ahead and married, but the marriage failed.

What was it that Moses said about the word of the true prophet – it never fails! It is in fact the word of the Lord and so it is infallible. Can any man today speak the infallible word of God? Where do we find the infallible word of God? In the Bible – and only in the Bible!

In these last days God has spoken by his Son. The last infallible word of God was spoken through his Son, Jesus Christ. As the Son of God every word he spoke was infallible. All that Jesus said was true and it has, or will, come to pass. No man today can speak such words.

The gift of prophesy is the gift to declare the word of God as contained in the Scriptures. It is the words of Scripture when preached that edify and comfort people. These words may also rebuke and correct just as the words of the prophets of old (I Timothy 3:16). The words of Scripture are to be proclaimed with the same authority as the prophets of old. The word of God that goes forth does not return void, but accomplishes what the Lord pleases (Isaiah 55:11).

(Westminster Confession of Faith 1:6) ‘the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at anytime is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or the traditions of men’. Remember no new revelation through dreams and visions, and no new revelation coming from traditions! The Scriptures are the only light we have and the only light that we need.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon