

Prophet of God
Deut 18:15-22

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. A Chinese proverb says: "Prediction is hard, especially when it concerns the future."
1. That is so very true. For example:
 - a. In 1773, King George III said that the American colonies had little stomach for revolution.
 - b. An official of the White Star Line, speaking of the firm's newly built flagship, the *Titanic*, launched in 1912, declared that the ship was unsinkable.
 - c. In 1939 *The New York Times* said that the problem of TV was that people had to glue their eyes to the screen, & that the average American wouldn't have time for it.
 - d. An English astronomy professor said in the early 19th century that air travel at high speed would be impossible because passengers would suffocate.
 2. Every single one of those predictions has been proven false.
- B. When we think of prophets, we typically think of those who predict the future.
1. The biblical prophets did, at times, predict the future.
 - a. Centuries beforehand, Isaiah declares,
 - 1) "Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed" (Is 45:1).
 - 2) Cyrus had not yet even been born, but Isaiah names him as the one who would allow the Israelites to leave Babylon.
 - b. Even in this text, there is mention of predicting the future:
 - 1) "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken" (v 22).
 - 2) The implication is that if a prophet says something that does come to pass the Lord has spoken through him.
 2. However, the basic meaning of the term "prophet" is a spokesman for God.
 - a. You see that in the call of Jonah to go to Nineveh: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you" (Jon 3:2).
 - b. Over & over in the OT, you find the expression: "Thus says the Lord" in the writings of the prophets.
- C. Moses, as a spokesman for God, was a prophet & he here tells the Israelites of another prophet God would send to the people.
1. In context, Moses is speaking about the manner in which other nations attempted to tell the future: vv 10-12.
 2. God did not want his people following witchcraft to learn what was to be, but he wanted them to turn to him.
 - a. Because God wanted the people to turn to him, God here promises to send another prophet like Moses.
 - b. That other prophet is: A DOMESTIC PROPHET, A DESIRED PROPHET, A DIVINE PROPHET, A DEMANDING PROPHET, A DEAD PROPHET, & A DEMONSTRATED PROPHET.
- D. Before we get into this passage, we need to say a word or two about its Messianic qualities.
1. There is no doubt that this passage ultimately refers to Jesus.
 - a. At the time of Jesus, this passage was understood to refer to the Messiah: e.g., When Jesus fed the five thousand, the people said, "This is indeed *the Prophet* who is to come into the world!" (Jn 6:14).
 - b. Peter informs us that this passage does indeed refer to Jesus: "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people'" (Acts 3:22-23).
 2. While that is obviously the truth, this passage refers to other prophets as well.

- a. As one reads this text, it becomes clear that Jesus is the prophet whom God would raise from the people.
- b. However, this passage also speaks of false prophets. Thus, this evening, as we think about the Prophet Jesus, we also want to look

II. A DOMESTIC PROPHET, vv 15-18.

- A. Twice in this passage, Moses says that the other prophet God would raise up would be an Israelite.
 1. “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers” (v 15).
 2. “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers” (v 18).
- B. Why would God declare to the Israelites that the coming prophet would be from “among their brothers”?
 1. Many societies have looked down upon those who were the least bit different than they.
 - a. Think about all the problems this nation endured during the Civil Rights Movement.
 - b. Obviously, God would not condone any sort of racism, for he created all people in his image (Gn 1:27).
 2. We cannot forget the context of this passage.
 - a. God has just condemned the way the foreign nations attempted to get revelation from him (vv 10-12). Therefore, the coming prophet would not be from a pagan nation attempting to gain divine revelation through witchcraft.
 - b. God desired that his people separate themselves from the pagans around them:
 - 1) Before his people crossed into the Promised Land, God had Moses declare, “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:3-4).
 - 2) We know that when Solomon married pagan wives, he turned from God: “When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Ki 11:4).
- C. What do we need to learn from A DOMESTIC PROPHET?
 1. We must be careful to whom we listen!
 2. Simply because one stands & claims to speak the Word of God does not mean he speaks for God.
 3. Let us pay careful attention to whom we listen!

III. A DESIRED PROPHET, v 16.

- A. “As you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’”
- B. The reference here is to the time God gave the Law from Mt. Horeb—or, as it is more commonly known—Mt. Sinai.
 1. “Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die’” (Ex 20:18-19).
 2. Because the Lord has come to the mountain in such a terrifying fashion, the people did not want to approach God, but they wanted Moses to serve as their intercessor—to come & tell them what God had said.
- C. The point is that just as the people had desired a prophet at Mount Sinai to reveal God's will, the Lord would provide another prophet to do so.
- D. I cannot begin to fathom what it would be like to see God.
 1. We are told that no man has ever seen God (Jn 1:18).
 2. However, people have seen representations of God & they were fearfully afraid.
 - a. The Israelites at Sinai were fearfully afraid when God descended upon the mountain in a cloud.
 - b. When Isaiah saw a representation of God at the temple, he declared, “Woe is me! For I am

- lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Is 6:5).
- c. When an angel—not God, but an angel—appeared to the shepherds to announce the Messiah’s birth, we read: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear” (Lk 2:9). Can you imagine how much more fearful the shepherds would have been if God had appeared?
3. Because the simply the representations of God have been so frightening, we have a Prophet who speaks to us from God!

IV. A DIVINE PROHET, v 18.

- A. “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”
- B. Here we find the idea of “prophet” used in the word’s actual meaning—one who speaks for God.
 1. The OT prophets often claimed to speak a word directly from God. E.g.,
 - a. Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts: ‘O my people, who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians’ (Is 10:24).
 - b. After Pashhur had persecuted Jeremiah, the prophet says, “Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends” (Jer 20:4).
 2. Likewise, the Prophet Jesus would speak the words of God.
 - a. Jesus did not claim to speak on his own, but he claimed to speak the words of the Father.
 - 1) “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (Jn 7:16).
 - 2) “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (Jn 8:28).
 - b. Because Jesus spoke not his own words, but the words the Father taught him, the Father taught his people to listen to the Son.
 - 1) On the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice came from heaven & declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Mt 17:5).
 - 2) The Father put his words in the Son’s mouth & the Son spoke as the Father directed him.

V. A DEMANDING PROHET, v 19.

- A. “Whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”
- B. The coming prophet is A DEMANDING PROPHET in that the Father demands that people listen to him.
 1. People suffered greatly when they did not listen to the OT prophets.
 - a. When Amaziah refused to listen to the words of Amos, Amos declares by the word of the Lord: “Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the word, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land” (Amos 7:17).
 - b. Jeremiah prophesied against Judah & Jerusalem: “Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered” (Jer 35:17).
 2. The word of Christ, the coming Prophet, is to be kept.
 - a. His word shall be our judge at the last day: “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (Jn 12:48).
 - b. The words of Jesus give life.
 - 1) “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (Jn 8:51).
 - 2) The reverse would obviously be truth—the one who does not keep the words of Christ shall not see life.
 - c. Shall we listen to the Prophet of God?
 3. God then turns his attention to prophets he did not send:

VI. A DEAD PROPHET, v 20.

- A. “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die” (v 20).
 - B. God here commands his people to kill any prophet who was not from him.
 - 1. Elijah carried out such a judgment upon the prophets of Baal: After his contest with the prophets of Baal, we read: “Elijah said to the [people], ‘Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there” (1 Ki 18:40).
 - 2. The purpose of this slaughter was not only judgment but it was protection for the people of God.
 - a. Concerning adultery, Moses says, “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from your midst” (Deut 22:22).
 - b. Why was it so important “to purge the evil from [their] midst”?
 - 1) “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor 5:6).
 - 2) We all know the power of an example:
 - a) A missionary went to work on an island in 1848. On the tombstone erected over his grave are these words: “When he landed, in 1848, there were no Christians. When he left, in 1872, there were no heathen.”
 - b) God knew that if he did not have his people kill false prophets, it could very well be said that when they left there were not be any people of God.
 - c. We need to be very careful about those whom we allow to influence us.
 - 1) “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer have with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor 6:14-15).
 - 2) Obviously we cannot pull ourselves out of this world.
 - a) Jesus was accused of being a friend of tax collectors & sinners.
 - b) However, we must always be positive that we are influencing the world & not vice versa.
- C. The instruction of God to kill false prophets also speaks to the judgment God will exact upon those who teach falsely.
 - 1. Who among us would want to stand before God knowing that we have stood before masses & taught error?
 - a. I’ll be honest: I’m convinced that the responsibility laid upon preachers is the greatest weight laid upon any mortal.
 - 1) I couldn’t help but notice as I watch the Presidential Inauguration that when he was still the President-elect, President Obama seemed deep in thought.
 - a) It appeared to me—and to the television commentators—that he felt the full weight of the responsibility about to be laid upon him.
 - b) Who among us wouldn’t have felt great weight as we were about to take the helm of a nation deep in recession & fighting two wars?
 - 2) Yet, the responsibility laid upon the President of the United States is nothing like the weight laid upon those who preach!
 - b. God judges those who preach quite severely.
 - 1) “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Js 3:1).
 - 2) Not only that, but those who teach contrary to God’s Word shall be damned to a devil’s hell! “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).
 - 2. God does not take error lightly!

VII. A DEMONSTRATED PROPHET, vv 21-22.

- A. The word of the prophet was to be demonstrated: “If you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoke?’--when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has

spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”

- B. God has just given his people instructions to kill false prophets.
 - 1. Thus, it was imperative that the people know whom they should kill.
 - 2. Those who are false prophets are those who have spoken presumptuously—who have spoken words that do not come to pass.
- C. Likewise, in the church, God provided a test for his people to know who were true & false prophets.
 - 1. “I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).
 - 2. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ is not from God” (1 Jn 4:1-3).
- D. We must continue to “test the spirits.”
 - 1. While we do not have different spirits operating in the modern world, there is much falsehood.
 - 2. We must, therefore, be like the Bereans: “These Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).