

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

December 4, 2016

Unmasking False Prophets

by Frank Himmel

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

The problem of false prophets was not unique to John's day. It was an ancient one, and unfortunately it still has not gone away.

Jeremiah lived in the 7th century B.C. While warning Judah of God's coming judgment, he constantly battled pretender prophets and their false message of peace. Three times in Jeremiah 23, God declared Himself against the false prophets. In so doing, He exposed three of their practices. Awareness of these will help us guard against being duped by pretenders.

Mixing Truth and Error

"Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,' declares the Lord, 'who steal My words from each other'" (v. 30). Having no words of God of their own, the false prophets stole some from legitimate prophets to give their message credibility.

Pure falsehood is easily recognized. Falsehood mixed with a bit of truth is far more subtle and therefore more powerful. Nothing makes error look better than

when its proponents cite Scripture in its defense. Of course, context and other truths are often ignored, but no matter. Error now wears the cloak of legitimacy.



As a listener, be discerning. Be like the Bereans, who, while eagerly listening to Paul preach, nevertheless "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11, NIV).

Attributing Man's Notions to God

"Behold, I am against the prophets,' declares the Lord, 'who use their tongues and declare, "The Lord declares'" (v. 31). Folks, anyone can begin his sermon with, "The Lord gave me this message." That does not make it so!

Every preacher needs to be careful about confusing his opinions with what God's word actually says. In our study we may do a good bit of "reading between the lines." That, mixed with a little prejudice or personal preference, can result in definite views about things the Bible does not explicitly say. Brother, preach the word. Keep your personal judgments to yourself.

Substituting Tales for Truth

"Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,' declares the Lord, 'and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command ▶

them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,' declares the Lord" (v. 32).

God in those days did occasionally reveal something in a dream, but not every dream was a message from Him. The false prophets filled their preaching with stories of their dreams. Doubtless these were entertaining, but the Lord said they did not furnish the slightest benefit.

God's word is like fire, like a hammer which shatters a rock (v. 29). It is inherently powerful. It does not need "spicing up" with endless personal anecdotes. God's word, not our stories, establishes truth. "Telling a dream" might make for good entertainment, but that should not be confused with effective preaching. "What does straw have in common with grain?" (v. 28).

Conclusion

Ultimately, the false prophets' success in Jeremiah's day was due to the fact that they preached what people wanted to hear. It was a message of reassurance despite their sins instead of repentance from their sins. That raises perhaps the greatest challenge we all face as hearers: the challenge of being honest with ourselves. ■

Understand The Will of the Lord



by Frank Himmel

"So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). Consider three points this simple verse makes.

First, we can understand the Lord's will. If not, God here commands us to do the impossible. God has revealed His will to us in His word (1 Thessalonians 2:13), and His word is understandable.

Second, we must focus on what the will of God is. Some are stuck on what it *used to be*, not realizing that the Old Testament is no longer in force (Hebrews 10:9). Others mostly focus on what the will of God *might be*, basing their conduct on what God did not say ("Where does the Bible say not to...?"). And some act as though the verse tells us to understand what the will of God *ought to be*; in practicality, that is our position whenever we allow our own wisdom to supplant plain Bible statements.

Third, ignoring God's will is foolish. My own I-think-so's, majority opinion, human experts, etc., are no match for God. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25a). What could be more foolhardy than to ignore the only instruction which provides for us the best life now and also prepares us for eternity? ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Bruce Williams	Carlos Garcia	Greg Winget
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	Bruce Williams	Albert Harrison Sr
OPENING PRAYER	Jason Chandler	Adam Gibson	
LORD'S SUPPER			
BREAD	Greg Winget	Greg Winget	
CUP	Mark Clifton	Mark Clifton	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Ron Cunningham		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	Bruce Williams
CLOSING PRAYER	Josh Baucom	Lee Davenport	Adam Wilson