

A Biblically based commentary on current issues that impact you:

The Pitfalls of False Prophets

Why the Predictions of Errant Prophets are Worthless by Bob DeWaay

On December 31st, 1997 a modern prophet by the name of Bob Jones said this: I have been tellin people for a year to get out of Los Angeles. They tell me they are really brave out there. I am not that brave. Cause that bravery is against God. If I lived in Los Angeles I would get out. I am gonna tell you something. That earthquake is not the only thing you have to worry about in Los Angeles. I am not sure it will be first. In a vision I saw suit cases being smuggled in by terrorists, into California. They had nuclear bombs in em.¹

He goes on to predict the breaking of the Hoover dam and the west coast falling into the ocean. He emphasized that Christians must flee these areas. My question is, should they do so? There are other similar prophecies by others, some of which are making their way around the world via email.

There are a number of problems with predictive prophecies such as this one. In the above article I dealt with Biblical issues, showing that there are no prophets to nations in the Old Testament sense. In this article I will deal with the practical problems created by extra-Biblical, predictive prophecies. Those prophecies are given as the Word of God to contemporary Christians, forcing their hearers to make difficult decisions with no basis for action.

Which Prophets are We to Heed?

A huge problem is which prophet to believe. It is not as if there is a clearly designated prophet from God whose words are authoritative. There are many prophets clamoring for our attention and they often present different if not conflicting messages. For example, Bill Hamon (see CIC issue 66) claims to be a prophet and apostle and he is predicting a glorious near future in which, possibly in his lifetime, the church shall prevail over the nations.² Others prophesy apostasy and doom. There is no uniform message in this prophetic

movement except that we need prophets and there are supposedly many legitimate ones around. How do we decide which ones to listen to?

Some propose signs and wonders as the criterion. The ones who do the most remarkable signs should be considered the true prophets. The problem with that is that the Bible predicts that **false** prophets will do signs and wonders (**Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9**) with the intention of deceiving the elect. Though there is a lot of talk about supernatural signs among the followers of modern prophets, the actual signs themselves in most cases are lacking or questionable. The most common one seen on Christian TV broadcasts is people falling over. Benny Hinn seems to be a master at that one. Whatever the cause of people falling over, which can be debated, it is hardly decisive. This happens regularly at various meetings and provides no help to the Christian who must decide which of the conflicting prophets are truly speaking for God. The same goes for claims of healings. These men are all claiming such powers, so one can hardly determine if Bob Jones or Bill Hamon is right in their conflicting scenarios based on claims of healings.

Some use supposedly supernaturally gained information about people to prove their prophetic legitimacy. Is that decisive? I have a video tape of an expose done by a TV network in which they went with hidden cameras to a meeting like that. The evangelist and his wife mingled with the crowd that was coming into the meeting, listening, watching, etc. They even had plants in the public restrooms listening to conversations. The information was fed to the evangelist who later called out people in the crowd, asking if they knew him or if he knew them. When the answer was no, he proceeded to tell them things about themselves supposedly by supernatural revelation that he could not have known such as names, what brand cigarettes they smoked, who they came with, etc. All of this information was gathered by very natural means before the meeting, therefore the whole thing was a scam. But even if some person did have actual supernatural information, that would still not prove the person to be truly from God. Occultists and psychics do the same.

There is no prophet today who can prove that he is THE true prophet from God based on signs and wonders. This much is clear. So this criterion does not help us.

Another proposal is the degree of accuracy of prophetic predictions. On the audio tape cited at the beginning of this article, Rick Joyner makes the claim that Bob Jones who predicts the imminent destruction of the West Coast of America is the most accurate of prophets alive today. First, is this true? How many Christians alive today have ever heard of Bob Jones, much less have valid information about what all he has predicted over the years and which of these things has come true? Very few if any. Am I to take the word of one prophet who proclaims another prophets accuracy as reason to accept what he says as the very word of God? There are associations of prophets who endorse one another. This seems rather self-serving. Bill Hamon claims to be an apostle because prophets say he is. This proves nothing. These people's authority only exists in the minds of their circles of followers, however large or small these circles may be.

The Bible tells us not to fear prophets who make false predictions (**Deuteronomy 18:22**). Fear is a favorite tool of those who presume to be God's spokesmen. Fear of catastrophe, fear of being judged, fear of missing out some great move of God, fear of coming under a curse and many other fears motivate people to keep listening to modern prophets and keep funding them. The fact is we have no reason to fear them. They have no authority claiming to speak for God when they do so beyond the authority of Scripture.

Many of the supposed prophets allegorize scripture when they use it at all. Bob Jones, in the same message where he told people to leave Los Angeles, claimed that the white horse (**Revelation 6:2**) has been riding since 1975 and that it is heroin and crack cocaine.³ There is no way to derive that information from **Revelation 6** by using any reasonable hermeneutic. It is pure subjective, personal speculation on Jones' part and the Biblical reference lends no support to it. If we accept the authority of Scripture, then these prophets have no authority at all over us because their words have nothing to do with God's infallible Word.

So, we have no way of knowing which of the many claimants are the true prophets. In any regard their words have no authority. None of them even claim to have been one hundred percent accurate, so they can not claim to be infallible spokesmen for God. When they speak they may or may not be speaking for God, and they may or may not be accurate in their predictions. The Bible cannot help us decide because they do not use the Bible in any literal way if they reference it at all. The Bible does not tell us such things as whether suitcase nuclear bombs are going to blow up the West Coast before or after the big earth quake drops it into the sea. So those exploited Christians who listen to these prophets have an awful burden to bear.

Why the Predictions of False Prophets are Damaging

There are many people who do take the predictions of modern prophets seriously. The problem is how does one decide whether to take action? For example, consider Bob Jones' prediction about the destruction of Los Angeles and his command for Christians to leave there. Any Christian living in Los Angeles who believed Jones to be a prophet from God would face a very difficult decision. Does one quit a job (or ministry), sell a house, up root a family, give up a Christian witness in that community and leave because of such a prophetic warning? When making the decision, one has to decide if the prediction is accurate. Jones' claims to have made some accurate predictions in the past (only his closest followers who actually heard the predictions before the event know if this claim is true), but does not claim 100% accuracy. So Christians in Los Angeles know this Los Angeles may or may not fall into the ocean anytime in their lifetime. This is a true statement. However, it is definitionally true and would have been true had no prophetic utterance ever been given. The prophecy did not change the fact that it might happen and it might not happen. The prophet says it will happen but the prophet has been wrong before and might be wrong now.

How do they know if Jones is right? The only way is to wait and see. If Los Angeles and the rest of the west coast is destroyed, then he was right. This still has added nothing to their knowledge base. Before Jones gave his prophecy,

they would not know whether Los Angeles will fall into the ocean until after it either happens or does not happen. After Jones gave his prophecy we still will not know whether or not Los Angeles will fall into the ocean until it happens if it ever does. So, logically, they have gained nothing by hearing the prophecy except fear and consternation.

The added problem with all this is time frames. How long do they have to wait to decide whether Jones is wrong? Since the prophecy was given in 1998 and it has not happened, do they now decide he is wrong? The original message gave a nine month time frame and implied that these things would happen before the year 2000.⁴ If this was intended, then Jones has already been proven wrong.

In many cases these prophets avoid saying when their predictions are supposed to come true. This creates another dilemma- those who hear them have to wait and wait and wait, wondering when the catastrophe will come. They never know when they can quit worrying and fearing the sudden destruction. What if it does not happen for ten years, or for twenty, or for thirty? If it does not happen for seventy years, anyone who was old enough to hear and comprehend the prophesy will likely not be alive long enough to find out if it was true. Actually, if it doesn't happen anytime soon, what good was the prophecy?

The false prophets are full of caveats to get themselves off the hook. They claim that predictions are conditional, and that if nothing happened then enough people in Los Angeles evidently repented so it did not happen. God decided to delay things for some reason. They claim that they are not 100% accurate **yet** in their prophetic ministries because they are still learning and growing.

All of this does not erase one glaring fact God is portrayed as a liar when someone claims to be speaking direct revelation from God, in His name, and what they say is false. False prophecy is hugely damaging in many ways: lives are uprooted, fear instilled and God's name is blasphemed. This is a very serious thing and it is disturbing how blithely some are willing to pronounce, thus saith the Lord. People are looking to a man to be an infallible spokesman for God when only the inspired Scripture is inerrant and infallible.

Hearing from God

For many, going to prophetic meetings and conferences has kept them away from sitting under solid, exegetical Bible teaching because it has been put aside for the new revelations of man. This creates immature and unstable Christians. Sadly many are starving to death for solid Biblical teaching in churches claiming to be seeking a great move of God. In the audio tape quoted in this article, Bob Jones talks about a hunger for God's Word, but he was not talking about Bible teaching. The hunger is for personal, subjective revelations.

People want to hear from God. To receive this in their churches they should demand verse by verse expository preaching that delves deeply into the text of the Bible, bringing it to bear on the lives of the hearers. Then they will have heard from God. Paul said, *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1Corinthians 1:21)*. The message preached, as seen in the context, is the message of the cross.

It is saddening how the gospel is being set aside for the revelations of man. I recently spent an evening watching hours of video tapes of preachers on a new satellite network that beams Christian broadcasting to home dishes. I was appalled. I heard a preacher who was basically giving a motivational seminar on how to be successful in business. I heard two prophetesses who bound all the demons and sent them to the abyss, telling them not to come out again (oddly, they do that every week; it must not work). One person was selling holy water that would heal people from a well that God supposedly told him to dig. I heard the most pompous, arrogant preacher I have ever seen browbeating a huge church full of people and using himself as the ultimate model of a great man of God. I saw overly dressed, jeweled, and made up, men and women sitting on gold thrones claiming unlimited portions (evidently of money). I saw people being knocked over and left to lie on the floor as preachers strutted around, evidently gaining more credibility as the piles of bodies deepened. What I did **not** hear was the gospel: nothing about God's grace, nothing about the substitutionary atonement, nothing about the resurrection of Christ, none of the topics that are found in **every** sermon recorded in the book of **Acts**.

Brothers and sisters, this is not revival, it is apostasy. The prophets are lying to us and refusing to do such a simple thing as preach about the love of God shown through the gospel: revealed through the cross, demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and offered as a free gift that will bring salvation to those who believe. What a travesty that millions of dollars from Christian offerings goes to produce TV broadcasts that deceive people rather than preaching the simple gospel and teaching the Word of God. Paul wrote: *How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!"* (**Romans 10:14,15**). We need to send preachers of the gospel, not self-proclaimed prophets who apparently are so caught up in their own revelations that the *sure word of prophecy* (**2Peter 1:19** KJV) is laid aside.

Conclusion:

What kind of prophet tells people to save themselves from an earthquake that might happen but does not tell them how to be saved from eternal damnation? Furthermore, he tells Christians to leave their ministries and Christian witness in areas of the country where he thinks lives will be lost. Do not the people in Los Angeles all the more need to hear the gospel if they are potentially going to soon be headed into eternity, many with no knowledge of Christ? Nowhere in the Book of **Acts** did anything like this happen. When Paul was warned by a true prophet, Agabus, about what would happen to him if he went to Jerusalem, Paul determined all the more to go. Here is what happened: *And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (**Acts 21:12,13**). Nothing was more important than the witness of the Gospel. May God deliver us from the fear-instilling false prophets and instead grant that we hear preaching from God's inerrant Word that will instill godly reverence for Him and His truth.

End Notes

1. Bob Jones, [Audio Tape] Word for the Coming Days - Rick Joyner & Bob Jones; this message was given on December 31st, 1997. On the tape there is a reference to 9 months which gives the impression of a prediction of the time. Jones and Joyner were openly rebuked for this prophecy and how they later handled it. See <http://www.harvestnet.org/index.html> Choose the link to: PROPHETIC MANDATE -- LEVELS OF INTEGRITY, TRUTHFULNESS, AND RESPONSIBILITY; Please note that this particular Bob Jones has no relationship to Bob Jones University.
2. Dr. Bill Hamon, Apostles Prophets and the Coming Moves of God, (Destiny Image: Shippensburg, 1997).
3. op. cit. Jones.
4. See a discussion on this at <http://www.harvestnet.org/index.html>; and the link to the Prophetic Mandate article. The authors of this article criticizing Jones and Joyner believe a time frame was included with the prophecy.