



Deuteronomy 13:1-5
How to Spot a False Prophet

NKJ Deuteronomy 13:1 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,

2 "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,'

3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

4 "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

5 "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

In chapter 13, God deals with three potent forces that may cause someone to turn away from following the Lord and go after false gods which would take them out of the way of salvation, and bring judgment and destruction down upon the nations. **The first force which will deal with today, are false prophets or religious leaders, the second are relatives and family members, and the third are national leaders in the city and community.**

To avert this situation, God first warns his people how to spot these rebels, and then what to do. So here we will be discussing the first category – false prophets, and how to spot them - The flip side of this message, how to spot a *true* prophet will be found in Deuteronomy 18:9-22 and so if you want to learn that, you will have to hang in for the next 5 chapters.

Now it would indeed have been easy for Moses to say, don't trust any prophet or dreamer of dreams, just listen to me, but Moses knew all too well that the day of his death was coming, and that Yahweh would still be revealing himself to his people

False prophets are easy to spot, they have tall pointy hats, and ride brooms. No wait that's not it, they have a pointy hat with a "D" on it and they wear a sign that says "FALSE PROPHET." No wait, that's not it. It's that they never do anything cool, they are really boring, and they don't do any signs and wonders on TV. No wait that's me. What was it again?

Well brothers and sisters, its not how they look or what they do or the signs they perform or their popularity, the way to spot them will be to see if what they say squares with the word of God and most importantly, does it lead men to worship God?

Does their message square with the Shema?

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

As soon as they hear that they are to follow other gods, alarm bells should ring, for this would be to deny the first commandment in the Decalogue - "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Now does verse 3 indicate the possibility that a false prophet might be given the power to make a true prediction or do a true miracle? Commentators are split on this point, Calvin says yes, and points for instance to Balaam saying:

"Thus I resolve the difficulty, God's claiming to Himself the glory of foretelling events does not prevent Him from occasionally conferring even on the ministers of Satan the power of prophecy respecting some particular point. Balaam was worse than any hireling crier, wishing as he did to frustrate the eternal decrees of God, and yet we know that his tongue was directed by the divine inspiration of the Spirit so as to be the proclaimer of that grace which he had been hired to quench. There is, therefore, no inconsistency in this, that a man should be a perfidious impostor, and still endowed at the same time with a particular gift of prophecy, not so as always to deliver true revelations, (as, for instance, Caiaphas, who prophesied correctly once, was not always veracious,) but in so far as by God's permission it shall be given him to foreknow this or that, so that one example of truth-telling may be the cloak for many falsehoods."

Matthew Henry however does not believe this to be possible, but indicates that the miracles are counterfeits or delusions that God allows men to be taken with: ***"We cannot suppose that the God of truth should set his seal of miracles to a lie, to so gross a lie as is supposed in that temptation, Let us go after other gods. But if it be asked, Why is this false prophet permitted to counterfeit this broad seal? It is answered here (v. 3): "The Lord your God proveth you. He suffers you to be set upon by such a temptation to try your constancy, that both those that are perfect and those that are false and corrupt may be made manifest. It is to prove you; therefore see that you acquit yourselves well in the trial, and stand your ground."***

Regardless, the way to spot them will be the same, they teach falsehoods, they contradict God's word, and they lead people to rebel against Him, and the answer to what they say will be the same do not listen to them, ignore them and then put them away or purge them out. In Moses day, this meant putting them to death.

Their willingness to do this, would be the correct outcome of the encounter and would prove their love to God and the faithfulness to His word. They would through the test stronger.

Now in our time, we see this and we are horrified, how intolerant! How Barbaric!

1) ***To tolerate the false prophet would bring God's curse on the nation.*** It was the undoing of Israel in the OT, it was not the Babylonians that did them in, it was their own false prophets. Have we not seen this in the history of the church again and again?

2) *To go after other gods was gross ingratitude*, no other god led them out of Egypt or sustained them

3) *To desert God was to cut them off from the source of their salvation*. As Christopher Wright puts it *“Yahweh was not merely “their God,” but their saving God. Where would they turn for salvation if they abandoned God?”*

If they will not do this, the false prophet will bring destruction that is not only temporal but eternal, these men MURDER men’s souls, and therefore they were subject to the death penalty.

In the NT period today – How does the NT counsel us to spot and guard against False prophets –

1) *The signs they produce will not be the be all and end all of knowing they are false:*

Mat. 24:24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2) *Neither will it be that they are unpopular, false prophets are generally always popular:*

Luke 6:26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

These teachers will tell the people what they want, to hear – The people will say as they did in the time of Isaiah: *Isa. 30:10 Who say to the seers, "Do not see," And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.*

11 Get out of the way, Turn aside from the path, Cause the Holy One of Israel To cease from before us."

3) *They will ignore sound doctrine, will teach against it and condemn it, but will go after fables and false doctrines:*

2 Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

4) *They will come from within the church, and will speak strange new doctrines:*

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

5) *They will encourage the people to sin and lawlessness:*

Mat. 24:11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

13 "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

6) *The Fruit they produce will be bad:*

Mat. 7:15 " Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16 "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 "Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

7) *Regardless of who they are, if they Gospel they preach does not square with the old paths, the true Gospel, it is accursed:* Gal. 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

So if any man tells you to go after another Gospel... How must we respond? Well we are no longer in a position to put away the false teacher by putting Him to death, but the answer is still to put them away via church discipline. Purge them out of the church:

1 Cor. 5: 6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

...

12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

Story from 1 Kings 13:18 "18 He said to him, "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' " (He was lying to him.)" - **stick to the old paths, if the Lord has said it, although another may arise claiming to be a prophet don't go against what God has said.**