

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 30, Number 40

October 6, 2013



## A False Prophet Cannot Deliver What he Promises

*These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:17–19, KJV 1900)*

If we were chasing the question of whether these false prophets in Second Peter 2 are elect or not, our present study passage would obviously push the envelope toward the negative side. In the gospels, Jesus often spoke to public groups who gathered to hear or interact with Him. Some of them believed on Him, and some didn't. As we read Jesus' words on these occasions, we can detect the people whom He addressed through the sentiment that He spoke. Part of what He said was to believers and part to those who rejected and despised Him.

I suggest that we should apply a similar perspective to our present study. Under the broad category of false prophets, no doubt some false prophets are children of God who refuse to add those seven fruitful habits to their faith, inevitably taking them to the unfruitful and forgetful state described in 2 Peter 1:9. These people need the solemn warning that Peter directed to them in the verses following, "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence...." Further, based on Jesus' own words, as well as Paul's, some false prophets are wicked to the core and pursue their deceitful and beguiling course out of an evil passion for their "father." (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15) Rather than detour from Peter's primary objective, the danger and the wicked deceit of false prophets, into the red herring logical fallacy of chasing who is and who is not a child of God, we should stay the course in our examination of Peter's instruction on the character and behavior of false prophets.

As I ponder the verses before us, the obvious point becomes quite clear. A false prophet must promise more than he can deliver to entice people to believe his error and to follow him. Thus, consistently promising more than one can deliver becomes a revealing clue to warn sincere believers of the false prophet's identity and error. In Peter's words, these false prophets promise fresh, delicious water from a pure well, but, upon examination, the well is dry. They convey the image of heavy clouds during drought, giving the dry and thirsty souls under their influence hope for rain, but the dark clouds just hover without a drop of rain falling to the scorched ground below. They use "...great swelling words of vanity" to tickle the imaginative lusts of

their followers, promising them health, wealth, and the ideal good life, but they cannot deliver.

My parents told of an incident in the community where they lived when they were first married that illustrates this deceitful dilemma. During a cold winter season, a local church of what today is identified as "Charismatic" beliefs hosted a weeklong meeting of evening services. Being the good neighborly type, though neither Mom nor Dad believed what these people taught, they decided to attend one of the services. On the night they attended, the primary speaker became emotionally charged over his claimed ability to heal people of their physical problems. They referred to their practice as "Faith-healing." As the man reached his emotional crescendo, he urged people in the congregation with physical or health problems to come forward. He said that he would lay his hands on them and give them healing. An older lady whom my parents knew quite well had cataracts and wore thick, strong prescription eyeglasses. She stepped forward and explained her vision problem to the speaker, who immediately placed his hands over her eyes, prayed a prayer, and shouted that he had received God's answer. Beware when a man claims, "The Lord revealed to me...." God reveals His truth in Scripture, not in private revelations. He said that the woman was healed. Truly believing the man, this lady walked over to a window, opened it, and threw her thick lens glasses outside, saying, "I'll never need you again!" The next morning my parents needed to go to the store for supplies. As they drove past that church, they sadly noticed this old lady down on her hands and knees, desperately trying to find her glasses. She was not healed. Imagine her disappointment when she awoke that morning and realized that her vision was just as bad as it had been the day before. Big promises and little results seem to be a major theme that Peter identifies as a trait of false prophets. In a recent chapter on this theme, I mentioned hearing a sermon from a false prophet on "Joy," but the sermon contained no joy, and the man's life shows no joy. Even in such a simple thing as spiritual, godly joy, this man's false beliefs robbed him of his joy in God, and he blindly sought to rob his hearers of their joy, even as he promised

them joy only by believing and living by his example.

...they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. Not a one of us has wholly tamed the carnality that lives within, even after the new birth and our best efforts to submit to the teachings of the gospel. And wicked people in our world, along with false teachers, find ways to tickle our sinful appetite, using our own sinful inclinations against us to draw us under their influence. When Paul wrote, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33), he nudged us to consider more than just the words of evil communications. What is the source of an evil communication? Someone speaks those words. The warning puts both the evil communications and the evil communicator on our spiritual radar and warns us to avoid both. Sooner or later, if we ignore the warning, the evil content to which we expose our minds will seep into our thoughts and corrupt us, even as we think ourselves immune from them. Jesus made the same point when He warned the disciples to take heed both "How" and "What" they heard. (Luke 8:18; Mark 4:24) When sincere, hungry believers ignore godly discernment and listen to or read from any teacher who happens to entertain them, they risk crossing this line that Scripture draws in warning us against both the "How" and the "What" that we allow into our minds.

Parents wisely warn their children to avoid the company of other children whose actions manifest their sinful appetite. Not only does associating with these children give a good child a bad reputation, but the bad behavior will slowly make its way into the good child's mind and conduct. The warning that parents give to their young children is a warning that adult believers need to heed just as carefully as their children. I have known more than one preacher whose careless association with false prophets gave him a bad reputation. Whether the man believed the ideas of the false prophet or not, his blind association with the false prophet blackened his reputation. We cannot ignore Scripture's warnings without reaping the destructive results of our flawed judgment.

Interesting, Scripture covers this warning more thoroughly than we often think. Consider this passage.

*A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10-11)*

The man in error should be confronted and admonished, but not with endless confrontation and admonition. This passage may include two guards, not one. You confront and admonish the heretic, the false prophet, once or twice. If he repents, praise God. If he refuses to repent, reject him and

avoid him. (Romans 16:17) The first warning goes to the false prophet. Refusing to continue with him in his error puts him on notice that his influence has not touched you. Secondly, by refusing to continue with him insulates you from his eroding and continuing efforts to invade your beliefs with his error. When we study Scripture broadly and rightly divide its meaning, we learn that it is consistent in all contexts. All the pieces that we discover in various contexts link together in harmony.

It seems that both Peter in our study passage and Paul in the verses cited above presume that the false prophet continues in his errant course. Sadly often in my observations over the years, this stubborn attitude seems to be the most frequent course. However, Scripture does offer a brighter side to the scenario. If there is no hope for the false prophet, the "heretick" as Paul describes him, why bother to admonish him at all? I could go into extensive details of my personal interaction with two men whom I would classify as false prophets based on our study passage, and they consistently and stubbornly held to their error. However, I could also give similar details regarding men who, for a time, slipped into errant thinking, but, when admonished, they responded with grace and repentance. When you confront and rebuke a brother in error, you always hope and pray for his repentance. And, if he repents, you also pray for the grace to forgive him and help him find healing from his error. But the passages that we here examine consistently warn us. If he refuses to change—if he persists stubbornly and refuses to repent—we must respect and obey the teachings of these passages in rejecting and avoiding the man. So long as a false teacher sees growing numbers embrace his error and follow him, his ego grows, and he becomes increasingly bold in his error. When he faces growing numbers who admonish and then avoid him, his error leaves him lonely and with sufficient time to ponder the evil fruits of his error.

In the two cases of the unrepentant false teachers in my experience, I erred from these Scriptures' teachings. Rather than one or two admonitions, I continued over time and many repeated efforts to reach the man. The longer I labored after the first two admonitions the more the man became stubbornly entrenched in his error. As I ponder these two experiences and try to learn the Biblical lesson, I acknowledge that one or two admonitions would have been a far wiser course than my extended efforts. I loved both men deeply and desired their repentance, but I learned by disappointing experience that Scripture contains God's infallible revelation and should therefore always be respected and obeyed. To this day, I pray for these men that they would repent. But now I leave them in the Lord's hand instead of trying to admonish them beyond Scripture's teachings. God reveals His will and truth in Scripture, not in private "Revelations," and we do well to respectfully follow that revelation alone.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday      10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder                      Pastor