

## **Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 8**

### **Prophetic Message and T/F Prophets**

#### **c) Political Issues**

We're looking at the message of the prophets centering in four areas—we looked at Religious-Theological and Morality-Social Relationships, and that brings us to c., "Political issues."

#### **1. Israel**

##### **a) Samuel**

Prophets speak very frequently on political issues. In this country, church and politics are kept apart. But there were two different focuses you might say, of the prophets when they spoke on political issues. One was internal politics and that particularly concerns the relationship of the king to the covenant and whether he was fulfilling his role as a true covenantal king. If you go back to the history of kingship particularly you will remember that kingship was established by a prophet, Samuel. He anointed first Saul, and then later after the word of the Lord rejected Saul, the Lord told Samuel to go and tell Saul "Because you've rejected me, I've rejected you." Then he sent Samuel to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, where he anointed David to replace Saul as king. So, from the very beginning the king was subject to the word of the prophet. The prophets did not hesitate to go and confront the kings when they went astray from their covenantal responsibilities.

##### **b) Elijah – 1 Kings 17**

So, a prophet like Elijah, in 1 Kings 17, goes out and confronts King Ahab. We're looking at 1 Kings 17:1, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'" That's typical of the prophets. They're fearless when it comes to confronting the kings.

### c) Isaiah 7

Isaiah does the same with Ahaz in Isaiah 7:3, “The Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerwoman's Field.’” That’s out in a public place, “‘Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ‘Let us invade Judah.’’” That was when Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria threatened to replace Ahaz on the throne of Judah. In other words, the northern kingdom was allied with the Syrians, or Aram, to get rid of Ahaz on the throne of Judah. Now what’s Ahaz do? He goes around behind Rezin and Pekah to the Assyrians and makes an alliance with Assyria. The Assyrians come down and relieve the pressure on Ahaz, and it looks like it might have succeeded. But that’s not what the Lord wanted him to do. He says, here in verse 7, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘It will not take place, it will not happen, for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.’” God is saying they are to trust in him. “I will deliver you from these people,” and Ahaz refused to do that. He preferred to trust in Assyria rather than in the Lord. So, the prophets confront the kings when the kings go astray.

### d) 2 Kings 19 & 22 Hezekiah and Josiah

Sometimes, the kings seek the word from the prophets. In 2 Kings 19, Isaiah is called by Hezekiah about the situation he faced and what he should do. In 2 Kings 22, Josiah seeks Huldah—that’s when the book of law was found in the temple—and he takes it to Huldah to see what she would say from the Lord. So,

there's this relationship between the king and the prophets.

If you look at page 7 in your citations, Vos says this, "To this kingdom-producing movement, the rise and development of prophetism attach themselves. The prophets were guardians of the unfolding theocracy, and the guardianship was exercised at its center, the kingdom. The purpose was to keep it a true representation of the kingdom of Jehovah. It sometimes almost appears as if the prophets were sent to the kings instead of to the people." The king was the leader. The king was responsible to give the kind of leadership that would call the people to obedience to the covenant and if they didn't, the prophets confronted the kings. So that concerns what you might call "internal issues" politically.

## 2) Foreign Relations

As far as foreign relations were concerned, the prophets also had a lot to say. Here what they did was oppose alliances with heathen nations.

### a) Ahaz Made an Alliance with Assyria

Ahaz made an alliance with Assyria, which is condemned by Isaiah. If you look at Isaiah 30 verse 1, Isaiah says, "'Woe to the obstinate children,' declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.'" In other words, where was Israel to find her security? In alliances with heathen kings and nations, whether it's Assyria or Egypt? No. You are to trust the Lord, walk in the way of the covenant and the Lord himself will be their protector. So, Isaiah says, "Woe to you who look for help from Pharaoh." It's very similar to chapter 31, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord." So, the prophets denounce foreign alliances. Often foreign alliances involved religious compromise

because often the deities of these foreign rulers would be brought into relationship with Israel and that would compromise Israel's trust in the one and only true God.

#### b) 2 Chronicles 16:7-9

Look at 2 Chronicles 16:7-9, "At that time, Hananiah the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him, 'Because you relied on the King of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.'" Then he says in verse 8, "Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand." If you rely on the Lord, there is where you will find deliverance, security, and protection—not from foreign nations. Verse 9, "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth and strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." What was Asa's reaction? Asa was angry with the seer because of it. He was so enraged he put him in prison. That was not what he wanted to hear.

#### 3) Rise and Fall of Nations

Beyond foreign alliances the prophets also often spoke about the rise and fall of many foreign nations. You get oracles about Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Edom and Moab, particularly in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The main point there is that the destinies of all nations are subject to God's sovereign power. So, the enemy powers of Israel, whether Babylon, Assyria, Egypt or Aram, are all regarded by the prophets as simply instruments in the hands of God to carry out his purposes—sometimes in judgment on his own people as when Assyria attacks the Northern Kingdom. It's for that reason when you get to Jeremiah that he has no sympathy for those that want to throw off the yoke of Babylon and resist the Babylonian oppression because Jeremiah says that this is God's purpose, his will for them is to be subjugated to Babylon. This is God's judgment. But then we know later that

after Judah does go into captivity in Babylon, the Lord raises up Cyrus, the Persian ruler, and then Cyrus becomes the instrument of redemption in God's hand. God's going to allow his people to return and reestablish themselves. So those are brief comments about political issues.

#### d. Eschatology and Messianic Expectations

d. "Eschatology and Messianic Expectations." In very broad terms the prophets speak about a future in which, in the day of the Lord, judgment will come on all the ungodly and there will be a future of joy and peace for God's own people under the rule of the messianic king. So there's that long-term eschatological vision that ultimately all of human history will come to, a point of consummation in which the messianic king reigns over all of the earth. The curse will be removed and peace and harmony will be created, swords will be beat into plowshares and things of that sort, Isaiah says.

#### 1) Freeman: Nation and Suffering Servant

In Freeman's *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* he speaks of two streams of messianic prophecy that develop out of that promise to Abraham way back in Genesis 12:1-3. In Genesis 12, the Lord, you remember, says to Abraham "I will make of you a great nation" and then he goes on to say, "In you and your seed all of the nations of the earth will be blessed." Freeman says there's these two streams of prophecy that are rooted back in that promise to Abraham. The one stream speaks of a future for the nation of Israel, "I will make of you a great nation." That nation will be ruled over by the Davidic monarch or the messianic king who will come. The other stream of prophecy emphasizes the work of the messiah as the suffering servant; the one who will bear the sins of his people, in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed, through the work of that suffering servant. I think there's something to that. Think about those two streams of prophecy. You see the one, the work of the suffering servant; the focus

there is on the first advent of Christ and all that was involved in the first advent of Christ—in particular his atoning sacrificial death on the cross. That is clearly the message of those passages, the climax of the book of Isaiah, in chapter 53 of Isaiah, where you have an amazing description of the suffering servant bearing the sins of those who have broken God’s commandment. But the other stream of prophecy is about “I will make you a great nation.” Those prophecies are concerned with the second coming of Christ, when that great messianic king will subdue the ungodly and establish his kingdom over all the earth.

Now, at this point, I’m not going to discuss any of the issues concerning how you work out the inter-relationships between these two streams of prophecy; whether you look for that fulfillment of that second stream, Israel as a great nation; whether you look for that in some reestablishment of Israel, and the millennial kingdom here on this earth. These are difficult questions. But, certainly, the prophets did spend a fair amount of time addressing eschatological issues and the way in which God’s purpose has played out beyond the time of the Old Testament period in the first and the second advent of Christ.

## 2) Vos

I think what Vos says is that the prophets impress their message through the heart for the center of the kingdom, which was given to the person of the king. The priest would be the one responsible for conducting the sacrifices, tradition, and the Levites for teaching the role that they had. The Levites were involved in instruction and the priests were officiating in the ceremonies. We have examples of abuse in that way and the prophets do speak about the dangers of the wicked forms and rituals without a proper heart attitude toward God. There’s a clear example when Eli and his sons are judged for their abuse of the sacrificial system.

## 6. True and False Prophets

### a. The Statements of a Prophet – Thus Saith the Lord

Let's go onto 6., "True and false prophets," and a. "The statements of a prophet." We alluded to this earlier, the fact that true and false prophets exist—does that not raise the responsibility of the Israelites who pay attention to the true prophets and not the false prophets? We've also said earlier that the prophets themselves had a very immediate and certain knowledge of the fact that the message they spoke was not their own but it was God's message. They could distinguish between their own words and the words of the Lord. We can see illustrations of that. So a prophet had certitude when he spoke that this is the word of God. He could know that without any shadow of doubt what he was saying was the word of God. But that's not the case with the people to whom the prophets speak. How could the people know if what the prophet said really had divine origin, and if what the prophet claims was really true, namely that he was speaking for God? You might ask, isn't the self-witness of the prophet sufficient because the prophets repeatedly say that their message is from God? That is important, and I don't want to minimize that. They always introduce their message, "thus saith the Lord."

b) Ezek 13:6

But the problem is there are also those who come along and say that they have a message from God and even used that language, "thus saith the Lord," when the Lord hadn't sent them. Look at Ezekiel 13:6, where Ezekiel says, "Their visions are false, their divinations a lie." Who are these people? If you go back to verse two, "Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, 'Hear the word of the Lord!' This is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirits and have seen nothing.'" And in verse six, "Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. They say, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them, yet they expect their words to be fulfilled." So the false prophets come along, and the false prophets are no less definite in their claims to be a mouthpiece for God than are the true prophets. So you have to put

yourself in the position of the ancient Israelites, where you can go out and you hear a prophet saying, “thus saith the Lord.” He gives a message, and then another prophet comes along and says, “thus saith the Lord” and he gives an opposite message. Then you have to sort out which one’s the true prophet, or are neither of them true prophets?

That raises then this question, how could the Israelites then distinguish between true and false prophets? That is not just a theoretical issue because it would affect the way in which the Israelites would live. How were they to respond to the message they heard? Then we go back to Deuteronomy 18, that passage where the whole prophetic movement is established and is explained in advance of what it was to be. Deuteronomy 18:19 says, “If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.” So the Israelite was accountable to God to listen to the words of the prophet and to behave in the way the prophet said that he should. What was the Israelite to do when two contradictory messages that advocated opposite courses of action, and both of them are represented as the word of God?

#### c) Jeremiah 27

A classic example of that, we already looked at earlier, is in Jeremiah 27 and 28, where a prophet named Hananiah is coming along saying, “Thus saith the Lord, cast off Babylon’s yoke, resist it,” and promises that the Lord will help and within two years, the vessels of the Lord’s house, will return to Jerusalem. At the same time, Jeremiah comes along and says the opposite, “Submit to Babylon, what Hananiah says is not going to happen.” Both prophets use the name of the Lord—that gives sanction to their message. So you get this issue, how do you sort out the difference between true and false prophets? That issue was already envisioned in Deuteronomy 18, in that passage where the prophetic movement is established. In verses 21 and following of Deuteronomy 18 you read, “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when the message has not been spoken by the



Lord?”” That, of course, is the question. What follows is one way to distinguish between the true and false prophet. Verse 22 says, “If what the prophet proclaims in the name of Lord does not take place or come true, that is the message the Lord has not spoken.” I think it’s quite clear that if the prophet says something’s going to happen, then it turns out that it doesn’t happen- that prophet is not delivering the word of the Lord but delivering a false word. It can’t be from the Lord. But the problem is, that only speaks of the things that will happen in the future and then only after whatever is envisioned either happens or doesn’t happen. So there needs to be some other ways in addition to that in which that question can be addressed and sorted out.

#### b. Validation Criteria for True Prophecy

Let’s move on to b., “Validation criteria for true prophecy.” I think when we look at the whole situation there are at least five considerations that play an important role in enabling the Israelites to distinguish between true and false prophecy. I want to look at the five that are listed there under validation criteria. I think when you look at each one of these we have to say that they do not work in isolation. In another words, these criteria functioned in combination, to provide the ancient Israelite with a means to discern between the true and false prophets. So what are some of these things that enabled the Israelites to make that distinction?

##### 1) The Moral Character of the Prophet

First, is “The moral character of the prophet as observed in his daily conduct.” That’s often been pointed to as something that plays a role. I think sometimes it has been over-emphasized. If you look at page eight in your citations, notice Hobart Freeman says, “False prophets were characterized by their low morality; hence, true and false prophets could be distinguished by a personal or extrinsic test. The false prophet was a mercenary who prophesied for hire (Micah 3:5, 11); he was a drunkard (Isaiah 28:7); he was profane and wicked (Jeremiah

23:11); he conspired with others to deceive and defraud (Ezekiel 22:45); he was light and treacherous (Zephaniah 3:4); he committed adultery, walked in lies and supported the evildoers (Jeremiah 23:1); and he was generally immoral in life conduct (Jeremiah 23:15).” Now you look at all those references, all those things it says; yes, they’re there. You can see it does not depict an upright godly type of individual. He goes on to say, “The false prophet was, moreover, a religious opportunist prophesying only what the degenerate people would wish to hear, he proclaimed an optimistic message of peace and prosperity; he often practiced divination, and prophesied lies out of his own heart.” See the bottom line, “The moral character of the prophet himself would attest to his authority. He who professed a divine commission from the holy God of Israel must reflect the conduct and character consistent with that claim.” Mathew 7:15-20 says, “By your fruit you shall know them.” So there is bad fruit and good fruit. So by their fruit you shall know them. We can look at the moral character of the prophet and that is an aid in distinguishing between the true and the false prophet.

Now I think that consideration is important, but I think Freeman clearly overstates the case here. The reason I say that is that even though you find these references to immorality among the false prophets, there are other false prophets depicted in the Old Testament of which nothing of that sort is said. Now we don’t know a lot, about Hananiah, for example; nothing is said about his moral character. I think it’s possible that some false prophets would live exemplary lives as far as their moral conduct was concerned. So that’s one side of the coin.

The other side is we shouldn’t exaggerate the flawlessness of the moral character of the true prophets because the true prophets were not sinless. I think what Freeman says, in general, is true—that the true prophets are depicted as godly, pious people who lived godly lives. However, what do you do with Balaam? He was true prophet, but he is not depicted as a godly individual; he was a heathen soothsayer. What do you do with the old prophet who deceived the man of God out of Judah in 1 Kings 13 who came up to prophesy against the altar of

Jeroboam of Israel. This old prophet lied to that prophet to help to get him to come home and have a meal with him. But that prophet that lied also gave a true message from the Lord. So I think the moral character of a prophet needs to be taken into consideration, but in and of itself it is not sufficient to provide a basis for discerning between a true and a false prophet. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It’s not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” So yes, moral character of a prophet, there are many texts that suggest that in general true prophets were godly people, and false prophets were not. But this is not something that is airtight; it must be connected to other things as well.

## 2) Performance of Signs and Wonders

The second consideration or criteria is, “Performance of signs and wonders.” Often signs and wonders are pointed to as an important validation criteria for distinguishing between the true and false prophet. If you look at the way signs and wonders function in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, you will find signs and wonders are given primarily to authenticate the word of prophet and to show that the prophet is truly giving the word from God. The signs and wonders attest to the authenticity of the message. In that way, the signs and wonders are an aid to belief, that what the prophet is saying is truly a word from God. In Luke 10:13 Jesus says to the inhabitants of Chorazin, “If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” See the miracles there were aids to belief. In John 20:30-31 it says, “Jesus performed many other miracles that are not written in this book, but these are written,”—why do we have some miracles described?—“in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.” The miracles authenticate his message. John 14:11 says, “Believe me when I say I am

in the father and the father is in me, or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” So signs and wonders can perform a function in authenticating the words of a prophet.

Go back to the Old Testament to Exodus chapter 4. The Lord called Moses in chapter 3 to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, but Moses objects in chapter 4, saying, “They won’t believe me or listen to me, they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” Moses is thinking, “How can I counter that? I come saying, ‘This is what the Lord says,’ They say, ‘I don’t believe you.’” “The Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff,’ he replied. The Lord said, ‘Throw it down.’ Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake and he ran from it. The Lord said, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.’ So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it became a staff in his hand.” Notice in verse 5, “‘This,’ said the Lord, ‘is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—has appeared to you. Then the Lord said, ‘Put your hand in your coat. So Moses put his hand into his coat, and when he took it out the skin was leprous and it became as white as snow. ‘Now put it back in your coat,’ he said. So Moses put it back into his coat and it was restored like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, ‘If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile, pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from river will become blood.’” So you see what Lord is telling Moses here is—he will enable him to perform miraculous signs and wonders that will authenticate that what he is saying is coming from him. And of course, what follows in the aftermath of that is the question in chapter 5 commanding Pharaoh to let Israel go into the wilderness to worship the Lord. And Pharaoh says, “I don’t believe in the Lord. Why should I let you go worship the Lord?” Then you get a whole series of miraculous signs, the ten plagues. With the statement all the way through “in order that you may know that I am the Lord.” So those miracles become the authenticating signs that Moses is

speaking for Yahweh and that Yahweh exists and that what he is saying is indeed from Yahweh.

I think what you find is at crucial points in the history of revelation and redemption, there are turning points, at which times I would say signs and wonders are multiplied to give authentication of the word of the prophet, in this case for Moses. So signs and wonders are significant and we should not minimize their importance.

But then at the same time I think we have to recognize that a sign or wonder in itself is not sufficient to separate true and false prophets. The reason for that is Scripture also recognizes that false prophets are capable of performing signs and wonders. Even the Egyptians could duplicate the first three plagues. They couldn't go beyond that. But look at Matthew 24:23. This is speaking of the second advent of Christ, "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible." Paul, in speaking of the anti-Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says that his coming "is in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders." They have counterfeit miracles.

You go back to Deuteronomy, this time to chapter 13. In verses 1-4, Moses says, "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you miraculous signs or wonders, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and the prophet says, 'Let us follow other gods that you have not known and worship them.' You must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere." Then verse 5, "That prophet or dreamer must be put to death because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God." That passage in Deuteronomy 13 is saying that false prophets can also perform signs and wonders, but you are not to be misled by them. I think what the Bible

suggests is that signs and wonders play a very important role in distinguishing between true and false prophets but in isolation signs and wonders are not decisive. You need to actually look at the message as well. You see, if a sign or wonder comes in connection with a message to go serve other gods, you know that is not a word from the Lord, and that sign or wonder is not a manifestation of God's power. So you don't want to minimize the importance because they often are presented in Scripture as aids to belief and as means of authenticating God's word as being truly from God. But you have to be aware at the same time that there is the possibility of signs and wonders performed by a false prophet masquerading as a true preacher.

### 3) Fulfillment of Prophecy as a Criteria to Distinguish the True and the False Prophets

#### a) Deut. 18

Let's go onto the third, "Fulfillment of prophecy as a criteria to distinguish the true and the false prophets." We already saw that in Deuteronomy 18 that if it does not come true then it is not from God. And that's certainly a valid criteria. It's only in a negative sense even though it's not from God, and it can only be applied in the future when whatever has been predicted happens or doesn't happen. So you don't want to minimize the importance because they often are presented in Scripture as aids to belief and as means of authenticating God's word as being truly from God. But you have to be aware, at the same time, that there is the possibility of signs and wonders performed by a false prophet masquerading as a true prophet.

#### b) Isa. 41:22

You find that as well as in the Old Testament. Look at Isaiah 41:22, "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Can an idol predict the future? Tell us what the former things were so that we can consider them and know their final

outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be filled with fear.” Go down to verse 26, “Who told of this from the beginning, so that we could know beforehand so we could say, ‘He was right’? No one told of this, no one foretold this, no one heard any words from you.” Look at Isaiah 48:3, “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them, my wooden image and medal god ordained them.’ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them?” Jesus said in John 13.19, “I am telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am he.” See there’s the positive presentation of fulfillment of prophecy as evidence of the truthfulness of what he said.

Now texts like those suggest that God alone has the necessary knowledge of the future so that he can tell in advance about things that are to come to pass with accuracy and consistency. That accuracy and consistency is important. I think that it is only God who can consistently and accurately speak about things that are to happen in the future. So I think fulfillment of prophecy is presented as an important means of validating divine revelation.

### c) Deut. 13

But it also has its limitations. It is not decisive in itself and it is not decisive in isolation. You notice in Deuteronomy 13 that we looked at under signs and wonders. Certainly predictions are to be included there “if a prophet or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder takes place,” in other words, if what he predicts actually happens. “But he says, ‘Let’s go worship other gods,’” you can

be certain that he is not one whose message is from God.” I think it is certainly possible in certain situations where even soothsayers and diviners were able to give a true prediction. Acts 16:16 says, “Once when we were going to a place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’” I think it’s possible for this satanic world of spirits being what it is, within certain limited parameters, to have knowledge of the future. You may find occasionally that a heathen soothsayer actually does predict something. So in isolation a prediction isn’t proof that the prophet who makes it is guaranteed to be a spokesperson from God.

The other thing about this is, as we talked earlier in Deuteronomy 18, if it doesn’t come to pass it doesn’t come from God. You can only apply that in the future and if the prophecy is something of a distant future then nobody that hears the original message will be around. So non-fulfillment is important but it has its limitations.

I’ve used the early chapters of Job to think about this where the Lord puts Satan on a leash but within certain parameters. Satan is permitted to do what he chooses to do. He can’t take Job’s life, so he’s on the leash. But within those parameters he can know in advance what he is going to do, so he’s not omniscient. But there is limited knowledge of the future.

In the Mari tablets the prophets were not predicting the future. Part of the problem was that the outside of the Bible you do not find any other collection of prophetic predictions that is so extensive and that is sequential over centuries of time with a coherent strain of movements from century to century. It grows and develops. There is nothing comparable and that itself is an evidence, I think, for the truth of what the Bible claims.

#### 4. The Conformity to Previous Revelation



I think here is the crucial validation criteria, and that relates to 4., “The conformity to previous revelation.” There is this progression. So new prophecy can only build on what has gone before and cannot contradict it. The prophet Hanaiah comes and says “peace,” but Israel cannot expect peace because they are not following after the Lord and should expect judgment. It’s not consistent with previous revelations. We begin to get something that, put in combination with some of these other criteria, will give the means to distinguish. But with Hananiah there is that short term prediction and with two years Hananiah would be.

#### 5. The Enlightenment by God’s Spirit Which is Also Essential

It’s the way these criteria work together that goes along with 5., “The enlightenment by God’s Spirit which is also essential.” We’ll look further at numbers 4. and 5. next time.

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