

that he might test the people's hearts (Deut 13:3). However, God also gave guidelines to help his people know the true from the false. False prophets prophesy for personal gain (Mic. 3:5, 11) and tell the people only what they want to hear (1 Kgs. 22:5-13; Jer. 5:31). Their predictions do not come true (1 Kgs. 22:12, 28, 34-35; cf. Deut. 18:22); their 'miraculous signs' are inferior or nonexistent (1 Kgs. 18:25-29; but see also Deut. 13:1-2). Above all, they encourage the people to serve other gods (Jer. 23:13).

God repeatedly warned the people that he had not sent these false prophets, and that therefore they had no message from him. In fact, a false prophet is defined as someone who has not received a message from God, but simply prophesies out of his own mind (Neh. 6:12; Jer. 14:14-15; 23:16-40; 28:15; 29:9; Ezek. 13:2-3; 22:28; cf. Deut. 18:20).

The NT counterparts to the false prophets are 'false teachers' who speak 'false words' and bring 'destructive heresies' into the church (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

*Frequent opposition to the prophets*

Sometimes the people of Israel received and followed true prophets, but often the people were rebellious and did not want to hear God's words of rebuke and warning. Therefore true prophets often found themselves opposed and even persecuted by the people, especially by their leaders; 'but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the LORD rose against his people' (2 Chr. 36:16; cf. 2 Chr. 16:10; 25:16; Is. 30:10; Jer. 11:21, 18:18; 20:2, 7-10; 26:8-11; 32:2-3; 36:20-26; 37:15 - 38:28; Amos 2:12; 7:12-13). Some prophets were even killed (2 Chr. 24:20-21; Jer. 26:20-23). In the NT, Stephen says, 'Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?' (Acts 7:52). In enduring such persecution patiently while being faithful messengers for God, these prophets also foreshadowed Christ, and provided a pattern for Christians to imitate (Luke 13:33; 1 Thess. 2:15; Jas. 5:10).

*Prophecy as a sign of God's favour*

The existence of prophecy among the people of Israel was a great blessing, for it indicated that God cared about them enough, even in a way that was far greater than the OT prophets. While those prophets were messengers sent from God to the people, Jesus is not a mere messenger; he is God himself, and a functioning gift of prophecy is a sign of God's blessing on a church (1 Cor. 14:22).

**Prophecy and prophets in the OT wisdom literature**

Very little is said about prophets in the wisdom literature of the OT. There are only four explicit references to prophecy (Ps. 51 superscription; 74:9; 105:15; Prov. 29:18), plus a reference to Moses as the 'man of God' in the superscription of Psalm 90. The important role of prophecy in rebuking sin and encouraging obedience is emphasized in Proverbs 29:18: 'Where there is no prophecy [or 'prophetic vision,' *hazon*], the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.' Psalm 74:9 was apparently written at a late period when there was no more prophecy, a fact that is seen as evidence of the loss of God's favour and presence: 'We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.'

**Prophecy and prophets in the Gospels**

Many of the themes introduced in the OT continue into the NT, but they are developed further. In many places the gospels show how the predictive prophecies of the OT pointed to Christ and now find their fulfilment in him (Matt. 2:23; 4:14; 26:56; John 12:38; 17:12; 19:36, etc.). Jesus is seen as the long awaited 'prophet like Moses' (John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22-24; cf. 7:37), but he is not often explicitly called 'a prophet', and even when he is, it is usually by those who have little understanding of his person or mission (Matt. 21:11, 46; Mark 6:15; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 4:19; 7:40; 9:17).

This is because Jesus is far greater than the OT prophets. While those prophets were messengers sent from God to the people, Jesus is not a mere messenger; he is God himself,

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