

“THE PROMISED PROPHET.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

December 6, 2015, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: Deuteronomy 18:9-22

Introduction.

We have a new year quickly approaching. How many of you would like to know what's ahead in the New Year? It's human nature to want to know the future. We have a strong drive not just to know the future, but to influence or control the future if possible.

The Greeks consulted oracles. The superstitious look to the stars, or tea leaves, or lines in their palms. More modern and rational people use statistics and math and probability predictions.

There are countless books on the market now breathlessly telling us of new insights and new revelations about the future that are hidden in the pages of Scripture.

Our text this morning has a context that rises out of a strong inclination to try to gain insight into the future. The Israelites were surrounded by nations that all practiced magical and superstitious arts, ways of trying to communicate with the gods and gain knowledge of the future.

Deuteronomy 18:10-14 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer 11 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, 12 for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you.

Today we can add to the list, consulting tea leaves, palm reading, tarot cards, fortune cookies, horoscopes, visiting psychics or mystics or occultists, using crystal balls, casting spells, wearing charms, amulets, bracelets for protection from evil or good luck, Ouija boards, séances, deep magic or dark magic, ESP or Psi wheels or telekinetics.

All of these practices are condemned by God in Scripture and called an *abomination*. That's a very strong word in Scripture for something God despises. They are ranked right beside the practice of burning children in sacrifices. Why the strong warning?

The spiritual realm is real, there are supernatural forces and powers. Whatever is not of God, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, belongs to the realm of evil and Satan. You should never open yourself up to such powers or forces. They are ungodly and godly and God-fearing people ought to have no part in them.

All of these practices belittle God and rob God of His glory, by exalting some human practice, by turning to some man-made source for what we should seek only from God.

They are a form of pride as we try to break free from our finitude and look into things that are not for us to know. It is trying to get wisdom and power that belongs to God, in a sense to become like God, or to know what God knows.

Even the most innocent of practices can be an expression of rebellion, of pushing past our God-given and God-assigned limitations.

So what were the Israelites to do? Are they cut off from all communication with the supernatural, with the divine, with God? No, God gave them the prophets.

When God wants to reveal something Israel wouldn't need to go in search of some pagan practice, God would raise up a man from among them, and He would put His words in His mouth.

False prophets and True Prophets.

Prophets are very important. They exert great influence over vast populations. Prophets are meant to be listened to and followed. So it makes all the difference in this world and in the world to come who you listen to and who you follow. The first problem we face with prophets is distinguishing between true and false prophets.

II Peter 2:1 But *false prophets* also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Five times a day every day from speakers placed high up in Minarets at Mosques all across the eastern hemisphere, stretching from Albania in eastern Europe, across the Balkans, across Turkey, Northern Africa, all through out the Middle East, Syria, Jordan, the entire Saudi Arabian peninsula, across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Northern India, across SE Asia, especially Indonesia, five times a day a muezzin calls Muslims to prayer by crying out the Shahadah, the great creed of Islam, "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Those are the first words a baby hears, the first words a child memorizes, the first words recited in prayer every day and the final words spoken at death. The Shahadah is the Arabic that is printed on the flags of several Muslim nations including Saudi Arabia and also on the Hamas flag. "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Is Mohammed a true prophet or a false prophet? Is he the great prophet or is there another?

The criteria for true and false prophets isn't signs and wonders (Deut. 13), but his words, are they true, do they harmonize with the Word of God previously spoken and do they come true and bear good fruit?

Allah is a false God and Mohammed is a false prophet of a false God. By this prophet has come a very great darkness that has spread across nearly a quarter of our planet. By this prophet has come hatred, war, terror, slavery, oppression, deception, lies, fear and death.

A prophet is a true prophet if they point to the true God and do not promote any false gods, if everything they say is in agreement with Scripture and their prophecies are all true and accurate, and they don't practice any dark or magical arts and their character is in keeping with their teaching.

The Promised Prophet.

In Acts 3 Peter quotes our text in a sermon and applies it to Jesus. In Hebrews 3 the writer shows how Jesus is greater than Moses. I want us to see the uniqueness of Jesus as the final promised prophet, as the consummation of the prophetic office.

When Moses and the prophets prophesied their words were not original to them. They could only speak what God communicated to them. They began all their proclamations the same way, "Thus says the Lord."

Jesus is the unique and final prophet because He is the originator and source of the words Moses and the prophets spoke. No one ever spoke like this man.

Jesus spoke with an authority never heard before. Whenever a rabbi or teacher spoke they always quoted an ancient source, or another rabbi. "According to Rabbi Hillel" or "there is a teaching that says ..."

But Jesus spoke with His own authority. Never once did Jesus begin to speak saying, "Thus says the Lord." Remember His words in the Sermon on the Mount. "You have heard it said, but I say to you."

Matthew 7:28-29 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Jesus is unique not just as the source of the prophet's word, but as the source of the prophetic gift. Moses had no control over receiving the gift or where God would send the gift next and on whom. Jesus is the giver of the spiritual gifts whenever and to whom and how many.

Jesus is unique because He removes the distance between us and God. Prophets were human mediators between us and God, but now the Son of God is our mediator and intimacy with God is restored. When we hear the words of Jesus we are hearing the voice of God.

Finally, Jesus is unique among the prophets in suffering. All the prophets were despised and rejected and treated with contempt. Some of them were exiled, and others killed.

But none were despised and rejected and killed the way Jesus was. He suffered more than any human ever could.

Christ is better in every way. He is God Himself, He is the source of the truth. He doesn't just speak for God, He is God. He doesn't say, "Thus says the Lord." He says, "I say to you."

Hebrews 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Jesus so perfectly fulfills the prophetic office that we have never any need of another. He is not just another prophet, He is not just the greatest prophet. He is the Word made flesh, the very embodiment of all of God's revelation, God Himself. He is sufficient, we need turn nowhere else for any secret knowledge.

The future of prophecy.

We live in desperately evil days and we desperately need to hear from God. We need to know His will and His ways and what He is doing in our time and history. We need truth, we need wisdom, we need discernment, we need help.

The coming of Jesus doesn't mean the end of our need for teachers and preachers.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The prophetic ministry of Christ continues to this day. He maintains His prophetic ministry in His church. But its different. In the NT there isn't a prophetic office but a prophetic gift. There are not prophets who give us inspired Scripture. There are none who say, "Thus says the Lord." The Bible is finished and closed.

Now prophecy is a speaking gift. If you remember our sermon series on the spiritual gifts over a year ago I defined prophecy as the Spirit-given special ability given to some to serve and strengthen the body of Christ by speaking God's truth in ways that challenge, comfort, guide, warn, or reveal sin in a way that leads to repentance and spiritual growth.

We are all like prophets whenever we speak the truth in love, whenever we stand up for what is true or right or righteous, whenever we warn someone of the danger of sin. Prophets are salt and light in their community and to the world.

True prophets warn us of great danger and to lead us away from or out of great danger. They confront and correct and rebuke and exhort and call us to the truth. The first word of every prophet is **repent**, take seriously our sins and our rebellious offense against God and turn from our sin.

They tell us to stop following the ways of the world and follow Jesus. Stop listening to all the recommendations of the world and start following the commandments of God. Repent, before you to perish like those who resisted and rebelled and ignored and even killed the prophets.

We are like prophets when we declare our faith, what we believe, when we defend our faith from attack or ridicule.

I am God's instrument to preach and proclaim God's Word to you. My presence among you is a sign of God's favor and provision. God wants you to know the truth, and knowing the truth to obey and do the truth.

Implications and Application.

The first thing Jesus did when He began His ministry on earth was go into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and take the scroll and open it to the prophet Isaiah and read:

Luke 4:18-21 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Because He is the promised Prophet, we can trust Him. We know what He says is true and that which He has revealed to us about the Father is irrefutable. He has revealed the will of God concerning our salvation.

We don't need to read palms, we don't need to know the future, we need to know the one who holds the future in the palm of His hand.

Do you want guidance, do you feel the need for direction or help in knowing what to do or where to turn? Seek the Lord with all your heart. Ask, seek, knock, pray, wait on the Lord, trust and obey, cast your cares on Him.

Do not even desire to determine the will of God for you or your life in any other way than directly through the holy and inspired Word of God. Teach this to your children.

No man ever spoke like this man. He is true. He is who he said he was. Christ continues to speak to us by His Holy Spirit through His Word and the sacrament. Come, eat, drink, trust, find in him eternal joy.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The flesh became broken for us.

The promised prophet calls us to repentance and faith through the Word and the Sacrament by His Spirit.

He who has ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, let him hear.