

Chapter Five The False Prophet

Have you heard that phrase - *a false prophet*? It's used plenty in religious circles to describe a fallen or failed preacher, leader, prognosticator, guru or fortuneteller. But it has a very specific application in Scripture.

The Little Horn will not achieve his dominance on the world stage without the assistance and acclaim of a religious figure that wields adequate power and prestige to induce people to follow after that charismatic leader. If we've learned anything from the history of humans on Earth, it's that there is no more potent combination of forces than government and religion. And in almost every case it is a combination that results in terror and trouble.

Most folk, satisfied with their own powers of reason and deduction, assume that they would readily recognize the devil or his minions if they suddenly appeared one morning at the breakfast table or on the stage of world events. But, the apostle Paul warned that the subtlety of Satan's methods is such that he can even overtake pulpits and religions without people recognizing the forces at work.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (2Cor. 11:13-15)

In this brief chapter we will consider the character known as "the false prophet." He is a mysterious figure who only appears in the Revelation account. But, he has been prefigured and forewarned against for ages.

For instance, in 1Kings 22 and 2Chronicles 18, we read parallel accounts of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Ahab, one of the most abominable kings of Israel. There had been three years of peace with their great enemy, Syria. Jehoshaphat went to see Ahab and they conspired to start a battle at Ramoth-Gilead in an attempt to regain control of that territory, which Israel rightfully claimed. Jehoshaphat asked King Ahab to inquire of the Lord, via the prophets, to see what God would say concerning this battle. Four hundred prophets of Israel were gathered and they unanimously agreed that the kings would certainly win the day.

Then, Jehoshaphat asked if there were any other prophets whom they could consult. Ahab answered that there was one more man named Micaiah, the son of Imlah, who could inquire of the Lord. But, Ahab hated him. King Ahab complained, "Because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Jehoshaphat was shocked at such impudence, so the king of Israel called an officer to go get Micaiah. Both kings sat on their royal thrones, decked out in their splendor in the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were paraded by them, prophesying good things for the kings and God's certain blessing in their conquests. Meanwhile, the officer found Micaiah and induced him, saying,

"Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably."
(1Kings 22:13)

But, Micaiah responded,

"As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak." (1Kings 22:14)

So, Micaiah followed the guards back to the kings and Ahab asked if they should go up to the battle or put it off. At first, Micaiah tried to play along and said the same thing the other prophets said. But, Ahab goaded him and adjured him to tell the truth. Sure enough, Micaiah responded,

"I saw all Israel Scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace.'" (1Kings 22:17)

"See?" Ahab retorted to the King of Judah,

"Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"
(1Kings 22:18)

At which point Micaiah recounted a most astounding vision -

"Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' The LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice *him* and also prevail. Go and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you." (1Kings 22:19-23)

Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, ran over and slapped Micaiah, chiding him. The king of Israel had the prophet cast into prison, to eat the bread and water of affliction until the king returned from the battle. Micaiah responded that if the king returned at all, he was not a true prophet of God.

As the kings went into the battle, Ahab disguised himself and entered the fray. But a Syrian archer randomly shot an arrow into the air and hit Ahab in the chest. That night he died as his blood ran out into the chariot. Just as Micaiah predicted, a proclamation went out among the armies of Israel that they should return to their cities and their homes. So, Micaiah was not only proven to be a righteous and honest prophet of the living God, but the remainder, over four hundred prophets of Israel, were all subject to the lying spirit that came from God for the expressed purpose of bringing ruin to Ahab.

From this passage we can plainly see God's sovereignty over the heavenly host, good and evil, truth and lying. God was in control of the demonic influence, which overtook the mouths of Israel's seers, and He worked out his foreordained plan through the use of False Prophets.

Jeremiah also dealt with prophets who opposed the word of God as they prophesied good things to the people God had promised to curse.

So the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence."

But, "Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "Look, the prophets are telling them, 'You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place.'"

Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them -- yet they keep saying, 'There will be no sword or famine in this land' -- by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them -- *neither* them, *nor* their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters -- for I will pour out their *own* wickedness on them. (Jeremiah 14:11-16)

Notice God's answer to those who claimed to speak for Him. Not only did God punish the prophets who lied, but also the people who listened to them. That should be a lesson for us. God holds both the liar and the listener guilty when someone falsely claims to speak on His behalf. If we took this warning more seriously, plenty of so-called prophets would find themselves without an audience. And, that would be a good thing.

This was not a strictly Old Testament phenomenon. Jesus warned His followers of false prophets, as well –

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

In Matthew 24, as Christ was listing the signs of His return, He warned -

"Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." (Mat. 24:11)

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance." (Mat. 24:23-25)

These are not merely men who want to appear wiser than they really are. They are not pranksters playing some cosmic joke on the inhabitants of the earth. These false prophets are demonically inspired, possessed of evil. Even the Apostle Paul had to withstand one of them in Acts 13. It is instructive to observe as Paul spoke directly past the mortal man and addressed the demon that drove him -

"When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also *known as* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. (Acts 13:6-11)

And John, the author of the Revelation, wrote in his first epistle -

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1John 4:1)

Likewise, Paul warned young Timothy of just such a danger -

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. (1 Tim. 4:1)

The threat of lying, deceptive prophets filled with pernicious spirits runs through the course of Biblical history. But they find their final, most dangerous descendant in the False Prophet of John's Revelation. After describing the "little horn" that rises up from the sea, which was like a leopard, with a bear's feet, and the mouth of a lion (see chapter 4), and giving a brief account of the beast's blasphemy and vicious persecution of those that live on Earth, John continued -

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. (Rev. 13:11)

He appears like a lamb -- a kind, benevolent religious leader who would not, or even could not, do any harm. But his speech gives him away. He speaks the deceptive religion of Satan. This religious leader draws the people of the nations to exercise obedience and bow down the image of the "little horn" which is erected in the temple -

He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. (Rev.13:12-15)

Much has been said through the years about the "mark of the beast." Speculation abounds concerning what it is, how it works and who will take it. But, the impetus to receive this mark does not flow from the political leader, or little horn. It is the False Prophet who implements this marking -

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. (Rev. 13:16-18)

Several things are worth noting here. Firstly, do not miss the complete inclusion of Earth-dwellers in all these verses. John took great pains to make sure that we understand the scope of these activities. No one is left out. Whether it's worshipping the image, or submitting to the mark, everyone on Earth, every status of individual -- great or small, rich or poor, free or slave -- is subject to the orders of the two beasts. And they will either submit or die.

John wants us to recognize that during the last days there will only be two types of people: marked worshippers or dead martyrs. His description leaves no middle ground. File that fact in your memory bank.

Secondly, numbering is a sign of ownership. God's people are not to be numbered except for God's purposes. In 1Chronicles 21 we read that Satan stood up against Israel and provoked King David to number the people. Joab recognized that the people

belonged to God and feared that it would be a trespass against Israel, but David prevailed. Later, David realized he had “sinned greatly,” and the Lord spoke to David, via the prophet Gad, giving him a choice of three punishments - three years of famine, three months of destruction at the hands of his enemies, or three days of pestilence from God. David chose the third, wishing to be in the hands of a merciful God rather than in the hands of vile men. As a result, God slew 70,000 men, proving to whom they really belonged.

Likewise this mark, which the False Prophet causes everyone to take, is a numbering of ownership. But it has a tremendous inducement attached to it. No one can buy food, pay bills, make their rent, sell their wares or their possessions, or trade in the market without having this mark. In other words, people will have a powerful justification for giving in and taking the mark, even if it does imply worship of the “little horn.” You can hear them now - “How am I going to live? How am I going to feed my children? God wouldn’t want my family to live in poverty! I’ve worked hard for my money and I can only access it if I take the mark!” Justifying their actions, people will willingly line up to receive their mark and get on with the business of day-to-day life. But, they will do so at a horrific cost.

So, what becomes of these numbered people?

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." So the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. (Rev.16:1-2)

But, it’s not just physical punishment that befalls them -

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."
(Rev. 14:9-11)

God holds each individual responsible and unleashes His wrath on those who worship in accordance with the religion of the False Prophet.

We encounter this demonic prophet again as the vials, or bowls, of God’s wrath are poured out on the planet. God has ordained a war between the armies of good and evil and will dry up the river Euphrates to make way for the “kings of the east” to gather for the final conflict.

And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Rev.16:13-14)

In this terrifying verse we meet the un-holy trinity. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rule in the Heavens, the dragon (Satan), the beast (the little horn), and the false prophet rule in the depths of darkness. Satan has always counterfeited the symbols and structure of true Godly worship. Placing himself in the position of the Father, he inhabits a son (the anti-Christ) and sends out a spiritual leader to establish his worship and false religion. They work miracles in the sight of humans and deceive the nations into following them. But, they lead their disciples into destruction.

Still, for all their effort to deceive and to conquer, the un-holy trinity is defeated and ultimately destroyed by the superior might of the God of Heaven and His Lamb.

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Rev. 19:19-20)

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev.20:10)

The devil, the little horn, and the false prophet are all removed from God's creation as He prepares the new Heaven and new earth.

But, what will that earthly cataclysm be like? What will the reign of the beast entail? And, will anyone survive?

That is the subject of our next chapter - The Great Tribulation.

What We Know So Far

- The little horn is supported by a religious leader who appears as a prophet of God although he is demonically inspired.
- This False Prophet causes everyone on Earth, great and small, rich and poor, free and bond, to take a mark in their right hand or forehead without which no one can buy, sell or trade.
- This mark is tantamount to succumbing to the religion and worship of Antichrist.

- Everyone who has the mark is ultimately cast into the Lake of Fire. (Rev. 20:15)
- Satan, the little horn and the False Prophet are defeated by Christ at His return to Earth.
- God retains His unfailing power and sovereign control through all of these earthly events.