

Is A Prophet a Messenger of God?

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A reader asks, "Is a prophet a messenger of God?" What does the Bible say?

The Hebrew word commonly translated "prophet" in English translations of the "Old Testament" of the Bible is נביא (*nabi*), from a root word meaning to utter, or speak.

The English word "prophet" is from the Greek προφήτης (*prophētēs*), meaning "one who speaks forth" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). A true prophet "declares the mind (message) of God, which sometimes predicts the future (foretelling) – and more commonly, speaks forth His message for a particular situation" (*HELPS Word-studies*).

True prophets speak under God's direction, being given his word through the inspiration of the Spirit of God (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 51:16; Ezekiel 1:3). "Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21, NET; compare 2 Timothy 3:16).

The word spoken, or written, by such prophets is a message from God, and hence, they are messengers of God (Isaiah 44:26; Haggai 1:1, 13; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:9-10).

In a sense, anyone who speaks, or sings, or writes, under the guidance or inspiration of God's Spirit is "prophesying" (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29; 1 Chronicles 25:1-3; Exodus 15:20-21; Judges 4:4-7; Revelation 1:1-3, 19; 22:18-19). However, in the Bible we read of individuals given the office of a "prophet," who were recognized as having been designated as spokesmen for God with a specific responsibility to act in that capacity (1 Kings 1:8; 16:7; Ezra 5:1; Isaiah 37:2; Jeremiah 1:5; Ezekiel 2:3-5; Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-5; 21:10; 26:22-23; Romans 1:2).

Yet many among the people of ancient Israel and Judah who claimed to be prophets were not faithful, and were false prophets, who spoke lies (Isaiah 9:15-16; Jeremiah 2:8; 5:13, 31; 6:13; 14:14-15; Zephaniah 3:4; Zechariah 13:2-3; Acts 13:6-10). Though looked to as "prophets," they were not God's messengers, but deceivers.

In the same way, many who claim to be "apostles," or "ministers" of God, entrusted with God's word, are not faithful, but are deceivers (1 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1-3). We are warned in Scripture many times to beware of those claiming falsely to be "prophets," or claiming title to other offices as spokesmen for God, but teaching deception (Deuteronomy 13:1-4; 18:20-22; Matthew 7:15; 16:12; 24:11; Mark 12:38-40; Colossians 2:8; 1 John 4:1; Jude 1:3-4).

We are to test by the standard of God's word, the Bible, the claims of would-be prophets, apostles, ministers or others who claim to speak for God (1 Thessalonians 5:21; Revelation 2:2).

If they would lead you to worship another god, including themselves, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 13:2-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 Corinthians 3:7, 21; 4:6; 2 Corinthians 11:18-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 4:5).

If they teach lawlessness, contrary to the commandments of God, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 13:4; Jeremiah 23:14-17; Matthew 7:13-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8; Jude 1:4; 2 Peter 2:18-22; Revelation 2:14-15, 20-23).

If they substitute their own commandments for the commandments of God, they are to be rejected (Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:5-13).

If they teach lies, fables, the imagination of their own hearts, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 14:14-16; 23:30-32; 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:1-2, 7; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Titus 1:13-14).

If they pervert or misuse the word of God, they are to be rejected (Matthew 23:13-33; Acts 13:10; 2 Corinthians 4:2-4; 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:14-15; 2 Peter 3:16-17; Jude 1:4).

If they do not faithfully teach the word of God, the holy Scriptures, they are to be rejected (Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 23:25-28; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:15-16; 4:1-4; 2 John 1:5-11).

Scripture makes clear that it is the responsibility of each individual to test, by the standards listed above, those who claim to speak for God or who claim to be teachers or ministers of God's word. Failing this, even those sincerely desiring to have a meaningful relationship with God may be misled, and deceived. You must choose whether you will hear and believe the truth in accordance with God's word, or something else.

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