

Who or what is a Prophet?

Study 1: 1 Kings 16:26-17:24

How can this study help me?

Throughout history there have been many people who claimed that they spoke for God. Many people have followed them. Often the results have been nothing less than tragic.

Just because we are alive today doesn't mean that we are any the wiser. There is no shortage of false prophets today and no shortage of people prepared to believe and follow them. We neglect the frequent warnings in the New Testament about false prophets to our peril. Spiritual discernment is an acquired skill. This is what John is talking about when he says "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

How do we know, when someone claims to speak for God, if they are worth listening to? A part of the answer is a growing love for Jesus the greatest Prophet, so that no one can substitute for him or supplement his voice. Another part of the answer is to recognise that anyone who speaks for God must do the things God does: create out of nothing and raise the dead.

Carefully read the section from 1 Kings 16:29-17:24.

How does it naturally divide into three parts or movements?

The Prophet – a person for a specific moment

Elijah's sudden appearance signals that there is a crisis.

- What specific actions of King Ahab signal an unprecedented crisis? (1 Kings 16:30-33)
- What is the problem with everything associated with the idol Baal?
- The prophet's first recorded words are anything but complimentary. In a land "flowing with milk and honey", what was a prolonged drought a symbol of? (Deut. 28:15-24) How could God do this to his covenant people?

Look at a good map and work out where Elijah goes when he leaves the brook.

- Why is an obscure village in the land of the Sidonians an unexpected and thus good hiding place? (1 Kings 16:31 Hint: Where did Jezebel come from?)

Read 1 Kings 17:7-16. It seems an incredible story that faith in the word of the Prophet Elijah meant a never-ending supply of basic food for the widow's household.

- Can you think of another earlier story where a prophet is connected with a never-ending supply food for God's people? (Hint: think of the wilderness.)
- Can you remember anywhere in Jesus' story where he is linked to an apparently never-ending supply of food? (Hint: think about hungry crowds.)

Read 1 Kings 17:17-24.

- Can you think of any precedent in the OT for what we might call a resurrection from the dead?
- Later on, which other prophet also raises the son of a widow from the dead?
- What associations do the people attach to Jesus as a result of this, almost unprecedented, act? (Luke 7:11-17)

What about us – here and now?

It was widely recognised by the Jews that only God could create out of nothing and only God could raise the dead. Moses, Elijah and Jesus are all prophets and all show their connection to God by making/supplying never-ending food. But only Elijah, and then Jesus, raises the dead.

- Why must a Prophet authenticate his words by doing what God does?
- Why are there no prophets of the calibre of Elijah and Jesus today?
- What are the practical implications of this?

Elijah and Jesus both appear at times of religious (and national) crises.

- Why do people start well with God and then go off the rails and require a Prophet to call them back?
- Are we any different today?

So what can I do?

- If only Elijah and Jesus made food from nothing and raise the dead, is it worth trusting yourself to anyone who does less than this?
- What are you lovingly going to say to someone who thinks they ought to trust the words of those who claim to communicate with the dead or are a source of healing?
- What makes us think that false prophets only suck in other people and we are immune?
- What difference would it make to our prayers if we really believed "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8)?