

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Do Not Despise Prophetic Utterances**

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:20-22**

#### **Part 3**

How is God communicating to us today? What should our expectations be? Is He communicating with us in the same way that he was communicating to the early church? The passage we are now considering **1 Thess. 5:20-22** gives us the opportunity to consider the answer to these questions. Let me read these verses for you out of the NAS **“Do not despise prophetic utterances. (21) But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; (22) abstain from every form of evil.”**

What is a prophetic utterance? A prophetic utterance is simply a communication directly from God to a person or persons through a medium of a prophet (**Ex. 4:1-6, 7:1**). The message that I gave to you last week and the message I am sharing with you this week, though I have prepared prayerfully, and I believe is a message from the Lord to your lives is not a prophetic utterance. Why? Because this message did not come from God to me and then to you. This message has come from God to the apostles and prophets then to me and now to you. I am not a prophet but a teacher.

A prophet receives God’s message directly from God and a teacher receives God’s message indirectly from Him as he prayerfully studies the writings of the apostles and the prophets as contained in the Bible.

In the time period that this epistle was written the apostles and prophets were very active in the church. Why did they have such a prominent role within the church? The early church did not have a completed Bible as we do. In fact the Thessalonian Church most likely has no written scripture at all. The Holy Spirit obviously had given the gift of prophecy to certain members of the Thessalonian Church and would speak God’s message through them.

Paul is commanding the Church at Thessalonica not to “despise” or show contempt for these “prophetic utterances.” How might they do this? The next verse helps us to see the problem... **“Do not despise prophetic utterances but examine everything carefully .....”** If a Thessalonian believer stood up in their assembly and represented himself as speaking for the Lord, the congregation was to examine what that individual had to say seriously before they either rejected it or embraced it. If they did not examine carefully everything that individual said before rejecting or embracing it, they would be guilty of what? **DESPISING PROPHETIC UTTERANCES!**

But how were they to go about examining what had been said? The passage does not tell us. Therefore we would have to assume Paul had already communicated this information to them. But how about ourselves, how can we do this? How can we demonstrate our personal faithfulness to this command?

First of all we need to understand that the work of the Apostles and the prophets was a foundational ministry. In Eph. 2:19-20 the apostle Paul stated this very clearly, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household (20) having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”**

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We at Valley Bible Church have chosen to believe that the Lord has completed laying that foundation long ago and that there is no longer any need for prophets. But even though we believe this to be true there are still people who are representing themselves as prophets and these “so-called prophets” are continuing to communicate “so-called prophetic utterances.” How can we, if presented with the opportunity, examine those utterances “carefully?”

### A TRUE PROPHET SPEAKS WITH CONFIDENCE

A true prophet must speak with confidence when he speaks in the Name of the Lord. **Deut. 18:20** tells us this very clearly .... **“But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak ... that prophet shall die.”** To presume something means to “take for granted, assume, or suppose.” A true prophet of God who is speaking in the name of the Lord doesn’t think or suppose he is speaking in the name of the Lord. He knows that he is speaking in the name of the Lord.

If a person represents themselves as a prophet or who represents themselves as speaking prophetically and I ask him how does he know this, he had better give a very good answer. If I cannot be convinced that a particular person is truly a prophet of God and is in fact speaking prophetically I have no obligation to accept what He says as a prophetic utterance.

### PROPHECY MUST BE REPRESENTED AS COMING FROM GOD THE OF THE BIBLE

A true prophet must represent his prophesy as coming from the God of the Bible - **Deut. 18:20** .... **“But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”** Since there is only one true God, any person who spoke for a God other than the God of the Bible would be false.

And how is God revealed in the Scriptures? He is revealed as a personal divine trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the eternal unity of God Himself, and in His work. This was the teaching of the apostles and this has been the position of the church throughout the centuries. People may go around and say that they are a prophet of God and speak in the name of that God but if they are speaking in the name of a God other than the God of the Bible that prophet should be rejected as false.

### PREDICTIVE PROPHETIC UTTERANCES MUST BE FULFILLED

In **Deut. 18:22** it says, **“When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken ....”** Certainly I cannot say that the scriptures categorically tell us that every prophet will actively speak of future things. But if and when a so-called prophet speaks of future things those future things must come true.

A good example of someone who confirmed himself to be a prophet in this way is Samuel. You might remember that before Saul was anointed king of Israel by Samuel that he and his servant were looking for some donkeys that had strayed away.

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And they could not find them. And after experiencing total futility the servant turned to Samuel and said in **1 Sam. 9:6**, “**Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; all that he says surely comes true. Now let us go there, perhaps he can tell us about our journey on which we have set.**” Later after having met Samuel this prophet of God demonstrated this very ability when he said to them in **1 Sam. 10:2**, “**When you go from me today, then you will find two men close to Rachel’s tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, ‘The donkeys which you went to look for have been found.....’**”

But what happens if a person who claims to be a prophet does not engage in this form of predictive prophecy? Is there any other way for them to confirm themselves as a prophet of God?

A TRUE PROPHET WILL VERY LIKELY HAVE MIRACLES ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR MINISTRY

The Lord did not expect people to believe so-called prophets without some way to have it confirmed. One of the most dramatic ways for this to be done perhaps even more so than having prophetic utterances fulfilled, such as with Samuel, was the use of miracles.

Moses’ miracles confirmed for Israel and for Pharaoh that he was divinely appointed. This is clear from **Ex. 4:1-17**. There Moses was instructed to use his staff to perform signs and wonders for the purpose of confirming God’s message.

Elijah's miracles confirmed the words that he spoke as being from the Lord. In **1 Kings 17:24** it tells us after Elijah raised to life the son of the widow of Zarephath she said “..... **Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.**”

Christ’s miracles confirmed His message. In **John 10:24-25** it says, “**The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ (25) Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father name, these bear witness of Me.’**”

The miracles of the apostles confirmed their message. Consider **Heb. 2:1-5**. In **V. 1** it says, “**For this reason** (What reason? That Jesus is superior to angels) “**.... we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.**” More spiritual problems are caused by neglect than perhaps by any other failure on our part. We neglect God’s Word, prayer, worship with God’s people and other opportunities for spiritual growth, and as a result, we start to drift. We must understand that there are serious consequences for neglect.

Look at **V. 2-3** “**For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense (3) How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord.**” (Old Testament saints did not escape the consequences of disobedience when they drifted away from the Law as delivered by the angels. Therefore we should certainly not expect to escape the consequences of our disobedience when we drift away from the message as delivered by Christ.

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But how could these readers be assured that the message that they were given was the message that Christ had delivered? The passage goes on to say, **“After it was first spoken through the Lord it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (4) God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will.”** The Lord does not want us to guess if a particular so-called prophetic utterances are genuine or not. He will therefore frequently if not always use miracles to confirm a message that He has in fact delivered through a prophet. Certainly we can say this dogmatically in respect to the apostles.

We need to understand that the Lord never intended for His children to simply embrace whatever a so-called prophet said blindly as coming from Him. But He has given us ways to carefully examine prophetic utterances. The person speaking in the name of the Lord must know that he is speaking in the name of the Lord. The person speaking in the name of the Lord must be speaking in the name of the God of the Bible. The person speaking in the name of the Lord must confirm his message as true through some form of supernatural manifestation and that manifestation must be convincing. This can either be a convincing manifestation of fulfilled predictive prophecy or a convincing manifestation of miraculous power. **BUT BEYOND EVEN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL THE LAST TEST MUST BE PASSED.**

### A PROPHETIC UTTERANCE MUST AGREE WITH ALL PREVIOUS REVELATIONS

This particular test is clearly brought out in **Deut. 13:1-5** which says **“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, (2) and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you , saying, “let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ (3) You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (4) You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him (5) But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.”** It certainly is clear from what is stated here how important this particular test is. A man might claim to speak for the Lord, might perform what appeared to be a miracle, and might make a prediction that would come true, and still be a false prophet. It is the duty of God’s people to check carefully the content of any revelation and see whether it is in line with what God has revealed previously.

Paul brought out the importance of agreement with previous revelation very clearly in **Gal. 1:8**, **“But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”** This particular test of a so-called prophetic utterance certainly requires a significant commitment to study. This particular test of a so-called prophetic utterance certainly demands that we take very seriously the need for us to become more acquainted with God’s Word. In fact this test is the most difficult to apply. But though it is the most difficult to apply because of the personal study that is required it actually takes precedent over every other test.

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These are the tests that we need to apply to any so-called prophetic utterance. And because of this you can see how difficult it would have been for an individual to be recognized as a true prophet. And the same criteria if faced with a so called prophet today should be applied.

But now let us go on in the passage. What happens after this careful examination? After the examination either the prophetic utterance will be deemed to be the very utterance of God or it will not.

If it is determined that the prophetic utterance is true then it should be embraced. Look at the end of **V. 21 “... hold fast to that which is good.”** The word “hold fast” (KATECHETE) means “to actively hold on to it.”

But if it is determined that the prophetic utterance is not true then it should be rejected. Look at **V. 22 “Abstain from every form of evil.”** False prophetic utterances are a form of evil, and as a form of evil we must abstain from them. The word “abstain”(APECHESTHE) means “to actively hold off from it.”

### CONCLUSION

Are there prophets today? We do not think so. If we however happen to come across an individual who represents themselves as a prophet and who ventures to speak a so-called prophetic utterance, we need to “examine everything carefully.”

In doing this we need to examine the confidence level of the so-called prophet. Does he represent himself as thinking that this is a message from God or does he know it? And if he represents himself as knowing it we need to examine how he has come to know it.

We also need to examine the nature of the God he is speaking for and determine if he is speaking for the God of the Bible or rather a god of his own invention.

In addition to this we need to examine the manifestation of the supernatural. We need to be able to see a very convincing display of predictive prophecy being fulfilled and /or the presence of convincing miraculous activity.

And finally, whatever the so-called prophet represents as a prophetic utterance must be in agreement with all previous biblical revelations.