

Prophecy

In an NFL football game, the average difference in the final score is three points. NFL teams also historically score somewhere between twenty to twenty-eight points a game. This means that when you're predicting the score of a game, you will likely be fairly close if you predict a final score of 20-23, 21-24, or 24-27, etc. In fact, in last year's Superbowl, someone accurately placed a \$25 bet on the Chiefs to beat the 49ers by the exact score of 25-22 (three-point difference). At 170/1 odds, the wager paid out \$4,275. When predicting an NFL score, even though the odds are against you, it doesn't take a prophetic word from God to be right sometimes.

Real prophecy however, actually does require that a person hear directly from God. So, what is prophecy and why should anyone care? Throughout the ages, people have claimed to be prophets who have heard from God; believing that they themselves were God's mouthpiece. These prophets would most commonly do one of two things; give godly counsel to rulers, or, be the "representative of God" in starting a new faith/religion. In the Bible, we see the first example; prophets giving godly counsel to rulers. The Old Testament in particular is full of examples; two of which are in 2 Samuel 12:1, "***The Lord sent Nathan to King David***", and Isaiah 39:3, "***Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah.***"

Outside of the Bible, history records many self-proclaimed prophets who have risen through the ages, seeking to start a new faith/religion. For example, Muhammed, born in 570, claimed to be a prophet of God for the start of the Islamic faith. Joseph Smith, born in 1805, claimed to be a prophet of God for the start of the Mormon faith, also known as the Church of Latter Day Saints. Charles Taze Russell, born in 1852, claimed to be a prophet of God who founded the faith that would eventually be known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. These examples of global faiths are rooted in the prophecy of their founders. However, in order for prophecy to be credible, it must be without error; 100% accurate every time.

Here's what the Bible says when considering whether someone is a legitimate prophet or not. Deuteronomy 18:20-22, "***But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.***" And, Deuteronomy 13:1-3, "***If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 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,' 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.***" And 2 Peter 1:20-21, "***But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***"

A prophet is a person chosen by God, to speak for God. A prophet sent from God will give a fact about what will happen on a future date; often as a warning or caution. A prophecy is not at all subjective, but it's clearly a matter of fact. For example, if I said, "God told me that on December 13th, 2024, you should avoid driving on Route 192, because a sinkhole will open up on Highway 192 at the 180-mile marker, causing many vehicles to crash and numerous fatalities." That's the type of precision that is needed for a prophecy from God; what and when. Now consider a real prophecy that God spoke through Moses, as Moses warned Pharaoh in Exodus 11:4-7, "***Moses said, 'Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again. But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.'***" Notice the detail about man and beast, time of day, and the distinction between Israelites and Egyptians. These events took place exactly as Moses had prophesied, and nobody in Egypt considered these things to be a coincidence. Everyone knew Moses was a prophet of God, and could be trusted!

Recently I'd had lunch with a man who practiced and taught the Jehovah's Witness (JW) faith. I challenged him with facts about the JW faith being founded on false prophecy. I showed him many documented examples of these false prophecies from JW founders. In his defense of the JW faith, he explained to me, *"Anyone can misinterpret Scripture. That's all this was, simply misinterpreting Scripture. Pastors do this all the time."*

I had to call him out on his misrepresentation of prophecy. Interpreting Scripture and making a prophetic statement are not the same! Remember what is written in 2 Peter 1:20-21, ***"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*** I explained to him that false prophecy cannot be misrepresented as simply failing to accurately interpret the Scriptures. For example, if a pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible, like Revelation, which has much symbolism, and the pastor states, "I think this verse means..." and if his interpretation is wrong, this is not at all an example of false prophecy. A prophecy requires someone to say something that's not in the Bible, and is a matter-of-fact statement about a future event, describing clear details which are not up to interpretation.

An example of false prophecy is when JW founder Charles Taze Russell declared that Jesus's second coming would happen in the year 1874. That's a prophecy because it provides a specific "what" and "when" regarding a future event. Of course, he was wrong, and established himself as a false prophet. After that prophecy failed, Russell embarrassingly later changed the date of Jesus' second coming to 1914, but this time, he claimed that Jesus wouldn't come as the Bible said, in a physical body, but would instead come invisibly, as an unseen spirit. This is a sad way to dodge accountability; by declaring Jesus' return in a manner which nobody could actually verify. Eventually, Russell died in 1916, and in 1917, the JW's appointed a second president, Joseph Franklin Rutherford. Rutherford prophesied that, "Millions now living on earth will never die", and also prophesied an earthly resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to occur in 1925. These were prophetic statements that gave details of "what" and "when". Of course, all of his prophecies failed too. None of these have anything to do with simply misinterpreting the meaning of a Bible verse. The bottom line is that the Jehovah's Witness faith has to redefine what false prophecy is, in order to blur the fact that their own founders were false prophets. I believe the man I was eating lunch with has been deceived, which is why I believe it's so important to share the truth with him.

Before the Superbowl, when a person places a bet on the final score of the game, and if the bet is correct, it's seen as a coincidence. We'd be silly to think he's a prophet from God. However, if a person were to make a Superbowl bet and predict 300 specific events from the game, including the outcome of every single play, and exactly what twenty-two players would be on the field in each and every play; if he was right, we'd assume he was a prophet from God! There'd be no other way to explain that degree of insight. This is actually what we have with the Bible. The Old Testament gave over 300 prophecies about the coming Savior, and centuries after they were spoken, all of them were exactly fulfilled by Jesus. The exact amount of Messiah prophecies is somewhere between 300-456, depending on how similar prophecies are viewed, as some scholars consider certain prophecies to be the same, just restated in a different verse. At any rate, the odds that even 8 of these prophecies could come true in a single man are 1 in 10^{17} or 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. That's one in one hundred quadrillion! But, the odds of over 300 coming true, is unfathomable. Prophecy matters. Prophecy determines the credibility of a person or a manuscript. Any faith that can be shown to have been founded on false prophecy ought to be utterly dismissed. Truth matters. I say again, truth matters.