



Deuteronomy 18:15-20

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CW 281

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Biblical Prophecy

+ a matter of life and death +

✠ **for the ancient assembly at Horeb (vv.15,16)**

✠ **for modern masses yearning to be free (vv.17-20)**

In the name of Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate – in human flesh and blood, dearly redeemed:

The way most Americans treat **Biblical Prophecy** might be illustrated by a little story. And since it's off the Internet, you just know "it's gotta be true," right?

Three prosperous sons were discussing their gifts for their elderly mother. The first said, "I built Mom a huge house." The second, "I had my Mercedes dealer deliver her an SL600." The third smiled, "I've got you, both beat. You know how Mom loved her Bible before her eyes got bad. I sent her a parrot that can recite the whole Bible. It took twenty preachers twelve years to teach him. I had to pledge \$100,000, but it was worth it. Mom just has to name chapter and verse, and the parrot will recite it." His brothers were impressed. In her thank-you notes Mom wrote: "Milton, the house you built is so large I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house. Thanks anyway." "Marvin, I'm too old to travel, so I never use the Mercedes. The thought was good though. Thanks." "Dearest Melvin, you were the only son to give such thought to a practical gift. Thank-you so much. The chicken was delicious."

Biblical Prophecy in America? *Daniel* they perverted into a sitcom about a messed up Episcopal priest. Cancelled? Yes, but Hollywood keeps churning out more mediums and witches. Is there a spiritual reawakening in America today? One commentator offered Christian "mega churches" as proof, but are they? Today we need the Holy Spirit to teach us how **Biblical Prophecy is a matter of life and death.**

✠ **for the ancient assembly at Horeb (vv.15,16)**

Moses was preaching his last sermons to the people of Israel about to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. For them it would be much like people coming to America today. They would find the Canaanites getting their information from all sorts of sources. Rumor, like today's Internet, could only carry the news so far. Wanting to see beyond time and cyberspace, people naturally look for a special connection. A USB hub would not do; sorcery and divination got people's attention then and now.

"But not for you," Moses told God's people. "***The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.***" Critics might accuse Moses of trying to protect his legacy. But Moses already knew God would not allow his 120-year-old body to enter the Promised Land. What sense would it make for the nation's greatest prophet up to that time to be loyal to a made-up god who denied him the Promised Land after forty years of leading God's people? Why point to someone 1500 years off as the only Prophet worthy of their listening ears? John's Gospel in particular and the New Testament Book of Acts point to Jesus as the direct fulfillment of Moses' prophecy and show how eagerly the ancient Jews kept waiting all those centuries for the living Word of God.

Sometimes we Christians get so depressed and confused we wish we could just sit down and talk face to face with God. But how close could we get on our own? The LORD warned the Israelites through Moses, "***For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.***" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29) There aren't many lessons we can learn from soap operas, but maybe this is one. The Hebrew word for "***jealous***" (אנף) pictures the red hot jealousy of a husband who discovers his cheating wife alone with

another man. Strangely, anq is also the word from which “Canaan” comes – Canaan where Israelites fell to worshipping the sexual idols of their Canaanite neighbors instead of the one true God who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. Long story short, if you or I tried to approach God alone, He would look deep into our hearts at every time we felt more like a movie than hearing His Word. Each time we tried to solve our own problems instead of praying first to Him would be like jet fuel on a blazing fire. No spark is needed to set Him off. That happened at Adam’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden. The Israelites felt the heat at Mount Sinai in the blazing thunder and smoke that rattled Moses down deep in his bones. Looking at Mount Sinai no one can doubt that **Biblical Prophecy is a matter of life and death. The ancient assembly at Horeb** cried out to Moses: *“Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”* That was one of the rare times God said, “They’ve got the right idea, Moses. You talk to me. If I deal directly with rebellious sinners my holiness will destroy them.” You and I might think we could set out a chair for God to sit and chat, but our sinful nature could not survive God’s anger at sin. The New Testament says, *“Our God is a consuming fire.”* (Hebrews 12:29)

† for modern masses yearning to be free (vv.17-20)

Right here most American want to get off. And I know how they feel. House of God too big? Live in your own room and complain about the dirt in church. Too old or too busy to drive your new Mercedes to worship? Stay home and let the TV preachers or Hollywood mediums bring groceries for your soul. If the Bible is your Book, but your eyes are too tired or your schedule too full to read it, ignore the cassettes, CDs and MP3-ways of listening. Take a big bite out of it every now and then and keep the rest sealed tightly in the cold refrigerator of your heart. You don’t want to spoil the great taste of chicken!

Is it any wonder that **modern masses are yearning to be free**? Americans partied while the *Titanic* sank. Are we surprised to find clones of ancient Greek hedonists still living for pleasure today? “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!” Buy faster snowmobiles while others complain of “global warming” in Minnesota’s warmest January on record. Be independent at least in your own mind. But how safe can our nearsighted imaginations keep us if we keep ignoring **life and death**? To adulterous Israel, God said, *“Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.”* (Amos 5:6 NIV)

As soon as we admit our sin, the God of the Bible surprises us with love like a loyal husband whose mercy triumphs over judgment. Knowing well the rebellious heart of His Jewish bride in the ensuing centuries, the LORD nevertheless said to Moses, *“What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. 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.”*

Did you catch that? **Biblical Prophecy is a matter of life and death** for preachers. Pastors in mega churches whose Baptist teachings turned off too many Lutherans and Catholics repackaged their “non-denominational” message. But envious preachers in traditional mainline churches miss the mark if they merely criticize the hot new entertainment. Look past the bright lights and listen to the message. Is Christ proclaimed as the Prophet – crucified and risen? Is Christ’s institution of Baptism for people of all ages practiced or denied? Where is the real presence of God’s holy Prophet in His own Sacrament of the Altar? Does the authority of the LORD’s Christ correct and rebuke the sins of pastors and people alike? Or are they just making God more jealous by copying the zeal of Canaanites still living in the land?

At the cross God’s kindness is so attractive. He comes as the Prophet and heavenly Bridegroom. Jesus frees His bride from the slavery of sin and clothes her in His own righteousness. God’s grace, His undeserved love, compels Jesus to claim sinners as His own. Your heart **yearning to be free** can see the heart of God through the smiling eyes of His own dear Son. Jesus Christ is the Prophet who conquered **death** to give you **life**. Listen to Jesus and never doubt God’s tender, loving care for you. Amen.

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