

The Making of a Prophet

A Sermon by Grayson Stewart Gilbert

INTRODUCTION

I. The Four Basic Qualifications of a True Prophet (Deut. 18:18-22)

A. Qualification One: The True Prophet is Called by God (Deut. 18:18).

1. The prophet is “raised up” from among his countrymen.
 - a. The idea here is that the prophet is uniquely made a prophet by God; they don’t just decide by themselves that they can go and become a prophet.
 - b. The prophet was raised up from the Israelites because he represented the true God of Israel.
 - i. The prophet may have gone into other nations to denounce their wickedness and acts of aggression, but they would always be a Hebrew.
 - ii. The reason for this is that in various other nations, you had those who functioned as prophets.
2. The prophet is set apart and appointed to this unique task before birth (Jer. 1:5ff).
 - a. What we know from this verse can be applied to all of the prophets because of what we just learned from Deut. 18 – God raises up the prophets for this purpose.
 - i. This is the actual call of Jeremiah though; to give you a little bit of an idea here, Jeremiah is probably about 17 years old here as he’s being called to be a prophet.

- ii. God tells him, “I knew you in the womb. Before you were even born this was the purpose, I had for you.”
 - iii. If that’s not clear enough, God tells Jeremiah he’s been appointed for this task.
- b. The call of the prophet then is one decided long-beforehand.
 - i. Think of it in terms of your own calling with respect to salvation in Christ.
 - ii. This is all part of the grand narrative of Scripture, which records God’s dealings with mankind and His plan to make all things right through Christ.
 - iii. The prophet then, is one who comes on the scene at the specific time God has appointed them to arrive in order to deliver His message to mankind.

B. Qualification Two: The True Prophet is Given God’s Word with the Intent of Delivering It (Deut. 18:18-19).

- 1. The prophet does not speak on his own accord, but on behalf of God.
 - a. The prophet is acting as God’s ambassador to His people to reiterate God’s covenant stipulations and further expound on the plan of God.
 - i. What this very simply means is that the prophet reveals with great detail exactly how man is supposed to relate to their Creator.
 - ii. Moms and Dads – this is so much like when you set up the rules of your household for your kids.

- b. The words of the prophet were to be taken as if God Himself were speaking to His people face to face.
 - i. God put his words in the prophet's mouth (Deut. 18:18; Jer. 1:9-10).
 - ii. To refuse the prophet was to refuse God (Deut. 18:19).
- 2. The prophet primarily received the Word in a few different ways:
 - a. The Word could come through dictation.
 - i. The phrase "Thus saith the Lord" occurs over 400 times from the time of Moses all the way through the book of Malachi.
 - ii. The phrase itself is a formal declaration of the very words of God delivered directly to the one speaking them.
 - b. The Word could come through sign acts.
 - i. The prophet would be commanded to take an object and do something strange with it before a group of people (Jer. 13:1-10; Jer. 27:2-11; Jer. 32:6-15).
 - ii. People tend to try and pack all sorts of symbolism into these sign acts, but the key to understanding them is that they are the occasion for the message – not the message itself.
 - c. The Word could come through dreams and visions (Jer. 1:11-16).
 - i. Like the sign acts, people want to ascribe all sorts of symbolism behind what appears in these dreams.
 - ii. In the same sense as before, God reveals the meaning of these dreams and visions to express what is going to happen.

- d. The Word would come through previous revelation (Scripture).
 - i. The prophets weren't in some sort of vacuum where they had no concept of the writings of Scripture. They would be diligent students of the Pentateuch.
 - ii. The prophets were constantly reminding the Israelites of God's covenant with them and the consequences to their disobedience (Deut. 21:16-22, 32:1-47).

C. Qualification Three: The True Prophet is Loyal to God and His Word.

- 1. The prophet doesn't speak a word contrary to what God has already revealed (Deut. 18:20).
 - a. The false prophet was one who did not speak for God, but presumptuously spoke on his behalf anyhow.
 - i. The false prophet here then is the one who speaks words the Lord has not commanded him to speak, or leads the people of Israel into pagan religions.
 - ii. What that means for the true prophet is that he simply expounds the consistent message of Scripture and unfolds the progressive revelation of God.
 - b. His exposition is with the intent of drawing the people to love the Lord their God and heed His commands (Deut. 6:4-5).
 - i. He knows that there is only One God in all the earth and that the Israelites shall not have any other gods before them.

- ii. He also knows the great task of God's people is to not only know that the Lord their God is the only God to be praised, but that they are to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength.
- 2. We also see that the prophet is grieved when the people of God do not worship and love Him with all of their being (Jer. 9:1-2).
 - a. Jeremiah embodies the very heart of the Lord toward His people who are under the judgment of God.
 - b. Not only is there profound sadness, but there is righteous anger and the desire to separate from their wickedness.

D. Qualification Four: The True Prophet is Authenticated by God (Deut. 18:21-22).

- 1. In some instances, the message of the prophet would be authenticated through miracles.
 - a. Example: When Elijah calls down fire upon the altar at Mount Carmel to show the validity of his commission as a prophet (1 Kgs. 18:20-38).
 - b. Miracles were not the sole means of validation though, as Deut. 13:1-4 assumes one can perform miracles, but still mislead the people of God.
- 2. In every occurrence though, the prophet would be validated because their prophecy would eventually come to pass.
 - a. We tend to think of prophecy as predicting the future – in reality, it is simply revealing what is going to happen according to the sovereign pleasure and will of God.
 - b. At the time the revelation was given, the outcome could still be unknown or unseen in the prophet's lifetime.

3. The prophet who was inauthentic was to not only be disregarded but put to death (Deut. 13:5).
 - a. The reasons for this are quite simple because false prophets spoke falsely of God.
 - b. By virtue of the office and its intent, the modern-day notion of a prophet in certain circles is rather silly.

II. The Life of the True Prophet

A. The Call to be a Prophet was a Call to Total Abandonment.

1. The call to be a prophet meant that one's former life was left behind.
 - a. Amos was a shepherd prior to being a prophet; Ezekiel was a priest; Obadiah was the servant of King Ahab before he left to become a disciple of Elijah.
 - b. What is clear though is that once called as a prophet, the call was irrevocable.
2. The call to be a prophet meant one's new life was entirely devoted to Yahweh and a life of little to no earthly comforts.
 - a. Jeremiah is famously called the "weeping prophet" for this very reason.
 - b. Yet Jeremiah is not the only prophet who lived a miserable life in many ways.
 - i. Hosea is called by God to marry a woman whose life would be marked out by her unfaithfulness to him.

- ii. God tells Ezekiel that He is going to take his wife away from him and yet he is not allowed to mourn or weep or let a single tear escape from his eyes (Ez. 24:15-16).

B. The Call to be a Prophet was to be Despised of Men.

1. You had essentially two classes of prophets during the days of the kings:
 - a. One was on the payroll of the king and would be well taken care of for his services.
 - b. The second would be those commissioned by God to be His prophets, who would speak true words that God had given him to speak.
2. The man of God was a true outsider in every nearly every respect.
 - a. He was hated by the people of Israel for calling them out on their unfaithfulness and idolatry.
 - b. He was hated by the pagan nations for denouncing their wickedness and idolatry.

C. The Call to be a Prophet was Almost Certainly a Death Sentence.

1. You were almost guaranteed to be killed by those who hated you.
 - a. The Old Testament attests to this reality, as does extra-biblical literature (2 Chr. 24:21; 1 Kgs. 18).
 - b. In His oracles of woe, Christ speaks of the prophets broadly when he condemns the religious leaders for the guilt of their fathers in killing the prophets.
2. If you managed to not be killed by the people, you might just get killed by God (1 Kgs. 13).

- a. In 1 Kings 13, we find the story of a prophet who isn't killed because he was persecuted by the king, he's killed for his disobedience to the Lord's direct command to him.
- b. What this episode shows us is that if you're a prophet and the Lord gives you specific directions, you had better follow them.

III. The World was not Worthy of these Men (Heb. 11:38)

A. These Men are Recorded of in the Famous "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11:32-38.

- 1. Their example is given to us for our benefit.
 - a. We benefit by seeing the gracious provision of God.
 - b. We benefit by seeing their humanity on full display.
 - c. We benefit by seeing their faith as they laid down their lives for the sake of God's Kingdom.
- 2. Their example shows us that we desperately need to get beyond the desire to be liked by men, and embrace the fact that if we are to be faithful, men will despise us.
 - a. We are, by nature, those who seek the approval of men.
 - b. We need to be a people who seek the approval of God above all else.
 - c. This undoubtedly requires sacrifice, courage, but most of all, affection for God.

B. They were All Commended for their Faith, yet None of them Received What had been Promised

1. It was by faith in what was to come that the prophets endured all of their hardships and preached to a people who simply wished they would go away and die.
 - a. All of the prophets suffered and led a hard life.
 - b. It is not, however, the intensity of one's faith that saves, but the Object of one's faith.
2. They preached a message of judgment and repentance, but also of salvation and a future reward.
 - a. In many ways, prophets acted as pastors do today.
 - b. They preached a unified message of the coming Messiah.

CONCLUSION