

How Can I Distinguish between a True Prophet and a Fraud?

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When judges or attorneys enter a courtroom, they realize it will be necessary to determine if the witnesses involved are telling the truth. To do so, courts use generally agreed-upon criteria for identifying who is telling the truth and who is not.

Religious books may be approached the same way. We can apply reasonable standards that will allow us to determine which writings are trustworthy and which ones are not. Objective criteria help us distinguish between a true prophet and a fraud.

Although this is not widely known, the Bible itself provides us with the criteria we should use to determine who is a real prophet and who is a fake. The Bible additionally warns us to “beware of false prophets” (Matthew 7:15). And just as judges and attorneys apply certain standards to distinguish between true witnesses and liars, we too should apply the standards the Bible has given us to determine who is a real prophet and who is a fake.

Exodus 14:3 includes one such standard: “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.”

We can here see that by the sensational miracle of the Red Sea crossing, God demonstrated to the Israelites that He and He alone is God, and that Moses was His trusted spokesman, His trusted prophet. This additionally meant that the Israelites were rejecting the false gods that many of them had followed in Egypt as well as rejecting the prophets of those false gods.

They did so based on important and very practical criteria for identifying true prophets, namely:

- Only the true God can accomplish the kind of miracle the people witnessed at the Red Sea.
- The prophet who told the people of this true God was a genuine prophet of this one true God.

God gave His chosen people other standards to use as well. There are ten such biblical criteria for true prophets, which apply to those living in both Old and New Testament times:

1. The one true God performs astonishing miracles.
2. True prophets promote worship of the Lord God, the one true God, and Him alone.
3. True prophets agree with the teachings of Moses.
4. The predictions of true prophets always come true.
5. True prophets proclaimed the coming of the promised Messiah and/or traced the line of descent from Adam and Eve to the Messiah.
6. True prophets exposed false prophets and false gods.
7. True prophets were quoted or referenced by writers of the New Testament.
8. The writings of true prophets were accepted as authoritative by the faithful religious leaders of their time.
9. True prophets stated that the information they were writing had been given to them by the Lord God.
10. Because Christianity is largely based on history, it is possible to evaluate and confirm many of the historical details that the true prophets of the Bible provide.

By applying these criteria, readers of the Bible can recognize not only the true prophets, but also the One concerning whom they wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Allen Quist is author of Evidence That the Bible Is True: The Apologetics of Biblical Reliability, which explains these ten criteria in greater detail.

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