

# Attributes of a False Prophet

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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**Crossroads Ministries**  
301 S. 8th Street  
Opelika, Alabama 36801

**Website:** [www.fbcopelika.com](http://www.fbcopelika.com)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers)

Tonight from the book of 1 Kings 13, we're gonna deal with the subject matter of false prophets and any time you use the phrase "false prophets" it conjures up all kinds of ideas and such, but this is very pertinent because each and every one of us at some point in our life has known somebody or even ourselves who have fallen for the snake oil salesman of the world. It's also pertinent for us because the day is coming at some point in the future where the ultimate false prophet and the messiah will descend on humanity and his deception will be such that according to 2 Thessalonians 2, much if not most of the world will fall for it.

Here in 1 Kings 13, we have the story of a false prophet, but before we begin to read beginning in verse 1, I want you to notice something, that the person who falls for his message is called a man of God. The man who falls for his deception is one who, as we're about to read, does miracles on behalf of God. Why is that critical? Because as oftentimes it goes as you see these individuals who rise up and we would declare them biblically false prophets, oftentimes it is very educated, very well-meaning, very interested in the things of God people who fall for their traps and what I want you to see here in verse 13 or chapter 13 is if this person can fall for a false prophet, so can we if we're not discerning.

Beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. 3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 4 And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could

not pull it in again to him. 5 The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6 And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. 7 And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. 8 And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: 9 For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. 10 So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. 11 Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel: the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. 12 And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. 13 And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the donkey. So they saddled him the donkey: and he rode thereon, 14 And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. 15 Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. 16 And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: 17 For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. 18 He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. 19 So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.

For the sake of time allow me to share with you the end of the story. On his way home, a lion eats him and his carcass is on the side of the road protected by the lion as a testimony to all who would fall into the same trap.

Do you find it interesting, here is a man who was called by God, here is a man who cared for the things of God that spoke a sign and saw it take place, here's a man who rejected the entreatment of the king. Now Jeroboam was the king of the north, Rehoboam the king of the south. The kingdom had been divided at this point. He told the king no, but he told the prophet yes. He fell for the lie of the prophet even though he stood for the truth in the presence of the king. How is it that this happens in our lives? How is it that people, well-meaning people, well-desired people, well-educated people can fall for the lies of false prophets?

Tonight I want to address this subject matter somewhat topically but based on this passage and I think the first thing that we need to address is the power of prophecy. The power of it. When someone tells us that something is looming, when somebody shares with us that there's information or insight that no one else has access to, it excites us, does it not? And yet when you look throughout the Scriptures and you look at prophecy and as it's laid out, there are certain elements to prophecy that we would see in no way, shape or form can happen in the manner in which it took place here in our everyday lives and they be of God. For example, when you look at the prophecies in the Bible, more often than not the fulfillment of the prophecy in relationship to when it was spoken, the prophet was dead by the time it took place. Why do you think there's that blank page between your Old and New Testament in your Bible? That represents 400 years. In other words, there's no self-fulfilled prophets. You go to Revelation 19:10 it says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. In other words, through all the teachings and through all the miracles and all the healings, it's the very fact that 48 statements were made about his life, his death and his resurrection that could not be fulfilled about his own power and being were spoken hundreds of years in advance.

Any time we hear someone speak words of what we might call prophecy, there's a certain element of not just enticement but there's power there because we realize that in our own human nature we don't have the ability to truly prophesy. We don't have the ability to look out decades or centuries ahead and declare truths of places that don't yet exist and people who have yet to be born, but yet that's what happens in this story. The man of God even prophesies of one who will be born to bring revival later in their life and yet he falls for the old prophet who had lied. So I think we need to recognize that these false prophets, they're using an element that all of us are very much attracted to.

The second thing I want you to understand is that Jesus communicated to each of us that as we get closer to his return, that the false prophets will grow exponentially. In Matthew 24, Jesus is proclaiming this very second coming-ish message. It's there in chapter 24 and 25 of the book of Matthew and there in chapter 24, verse 24 he says, "And there will arise many false Christs and many false prophets who if it were possible would deceive even the very elect." What he is saying is as we get closer to his return, as we get closer to the events of the end of the Bible, that we can expect those who are false prophets to become more numerous, more vocal, and shall we say, even more voluminous in their speech.

One of the big questions we have to ask ourselves is how do we recognize a false prophet, how do we know? When someone makes these declarations, when somebody claims to have insight, when somebody says that they have a corner on the truth, how do we know? Well, I want you to go back to the book of Deuteronomy 18 in the Old Testament and the Lord was wise to give us very clear simple instruction. I don't know if you've realized this about yourself but at times we don't always think clearly, do we? At times we can get a little foggy-headed, and so the Lord has come very clearly in Deuteronomy 18, beginning in verse 20 and I want you to hear what he says about false prophets and about prophets in general. He said,

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. 21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

Here's what they're asking, "How do we know, God? How do we know if this guy's real?" Look at verse 22,

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Let me interpret that for you: a true prophet of God never misses. Isaiah never missed. Jeremiah never missed. Ezekiel never missed. Habakkuk never missed. And yet in the year 1988, we had a man write a book entitled "88 Reasons Jesus is Coming Back in 1988." The next year he wrote a book, "89 Reasons Jesus is Coming Back in 1989," and people bought it. Why? Because it goes back to the power. We want to have extra insight, do we not? We all want to have a corner on the truth. We all want to know something nobody else knows. He said, "You'll recognize them because if they miss just one, they're a false prophet."

I remember some years ago I was watching "Christian television," I have to put quotes around that at times, and there was a person on the television screen that was claiming to be a prophet and they had the audacity on the script below, kind of the lower third, to declare that over 80% of his prophecies had come true. I was questioning why he was even on the program. They were actually declaring that he was a false prophet. And so tonight as we gather around 1 Kings 13, I think we understand the power of prophecy, I think we realize Jesus said that they would continue and become even more exponential, and I think we'd even say we'd recognize that if they missed one, they shouldn't be followed, so I want to ask a very important question: why do we? Why does humanity continue to fall for these individuals who are selling them a false bill of goods? Why do they continue to fall for the deception, the lies? Many of you may have known individuals who have given large sums of money to these people, who have entrusted them with estates and such. Why does humanity do so?

I want you to look back at verse 14 of 1 Kings 13. I want to look at just some of the qualities that this false prophet had and I think you'll understand why humanity is so easily deceived. It says, "And he went after the man of God." False prophets are always on the hunt. They're always pursuant. They are always seeking and talking others into what they're selling.

I'm gonna share a story that took place in my life some years ago. You know, every now and then I have the privilege of saying if you've heard this story anywhere else, they got it from me, you'll understand that in just a moment. The year was 1993. In the spring of that year, you and I, those of us that were alive, those of us who were cognizant of life

were exposed to a little even that took place in Waco, Texas. I happened to be a resident in Waco, Texas at the time and what you and I know as the compound of the Branch Davidians and David Koresh was a news story to you, it was everyday life for me. I'll never forget the day that that event broke forth. It was on a Sunday. I won't go into all the color commentary, all I know is this, that when you're in the middle of an 11 o'clock worship service at a church and you see two men who you know work for the FBI stand up, stare at each other and run out the back door, something's happening. The pastor at the time that I was serving under had the wisdom to say, "I don't know what's going on but it's big. Let's just pray."

There about 20 minutes before the service was to end, he began to pray and we could hear the sirens begin to go off. Over 50 municipalities in the state of Texas emptied out on Waco, Texas that day. Every road from Dallas to Austin and everything in between was blocked. It just so happened that my roommate, one of my many roommates, I lived with three other guys, one of them had gone back home to the Dallas, Fort Worth metroplex that weekend to do what all college students do when they go back home and that's to eat free food and wash their clothes. That's what he had done and so he had gone home and he was on his way back and I want you to remember the year. This is the year 1993. It was the day before text messages. It was the day before cellphones were prevalent. It was a day where communication was received primarily either through a radio, a television or a telephone/landline.

Well, on his way back from the Dallas, Fort Worth area is when all this had taken place. He was not privy to all that had happened and a drive that should have taken him about 90 minutes took about 4 hours, all of the roadblocks, all of the identification. I don't know why he didn't think of turning on the radio to find out all that was going on but he didn't. When he finally arrived at our apartment, we were doing what you were doing, we were glued to the tv, were we not? What was happening in Waco? What was going on? And we were watching all these imageries and these interviews and all the events and mourning the loss of life. It was a tragedy. I'll never forget when he walked in the back door of our apartment that day. He walked in, said a few niceties and he looked at the television set and he said, quote, "Why is he on tv?" What do you mean why is he on tv? We said, "What do you mean why is he on tv?" He said, "I had dinner with him, Wendy's Friday night." I said, "What?" He said, "That guy tried to talk me into moving to what he, where he is, some compound he has. Why is he on tv?"

Folks, that's a real story. You can't make that stuff up. Two days before that went down, David Koresh was at a Wendy's in Waco, Texas trying to talk college students into joining him, and if you look at those that were in his compound, they were highly educated, highly respected seekers of the things of God kind of people. They were not what we would call fools.

Over the course of time and when the events began to play out, we began to ask him, we said, "Well, what was it like?" And he said he was a nice guy. He said he was very slick of tongue and very convincing. He even had his business card that he had given him in case he was curious to follow up.

You see, false prophets, we don't just land in their proverbial lap, they always come seeking, do they not? They always are out trying to peddle what they're doing. They're pressing in. They're pushing us. They're pursuant. Notice here that this false prophet heard there was a real prophet and he went after him. He sought him out much like the story of Samson and Delilah, they will nag you until you're tired of it and you'd rather die than hear it again.

The second thing we discover about false prophets is they have magnetic personalities. We gravitate to who they are. You say, "Well, how do you know that?" Look in verse 18, "I'm a prophet and I heard from an angel." Here was a man of God who saw a sign of God who rejected the entreatment of the king and he fell for it. How did he fall for it? Because that which was spoken to him was so magnetic in nature. Just think about the modern day travesties of false prophets just in our culture today. Whether it's David Koresh in Waco, Texas or Jim Jones in South America, why did people follow them? Why did people get caught up with them? Every single person who's ever gotten caught up with somebody who we by the Bible would call a false prophet talks about how they could listen to him for hours and hours and hours. Here in verse 18, how does a man talk a prophet of God into doing something he knows he shouldn't do when the king couldn't do it? There is a magnetic persona, there is something that took place in that conversation, he began to draw him with his words.

The third thing that false prophets specialize in is they have presentations of great magnitude. In other words, they come declaring truths that are supernatural. They're impressive. Notice what he says here, "An angel has spoken unto me." You know, it's interesting when you begin to study the Scriptures and you begin to look at the person who we readily refer to as the antichrist, you see in 2 Thessalonians 2 that when he comes, it says he comes with lying and signs and wonders. You go to Revelation 13 and you see the same thing, that he works through wonders and signs and the miraculous and the supernatural. Oftentimes false prophets, they declare that they've heard a word from God that nobody else has. You need to be very leery when there's not a secondary witness. You need to be very cautious when they're the only one who saw it or the only one who heard it. How many times in the Bible does even Jesus say, "Out of the mouth of two or three witnesses"? That was not only in the Old Testament in the Levitical law, that's in the New Testament, it's even in the Sermon on the Mount.

And yet oftentimes even in this case, this false prophet says, "I saw the angel." Not "we." I mean, think about this biblically when Abram and Sarah, this is before Isaac the son of promise is born, and they're struggling with having a child very much in age. Do you remember the story in Genesis when the three angels come to them? Came to them, plural. You had the witness of Abram. You had the witness of Sarah. Later you would have the witness of Lot and his two daughters. You had a multitude of people who could declare they had a conversation with those supernatural agents. Yet here what do you have? You've got one guy, one angel, and nothing to verify it. Impressive presentations. Why? Because don't we all want a corner on the market of a presentation? Don't we all

somehow, somehow, want to be able to say that this is different than what everybody else has experienced?

And the fourth reason that people fall for them is they feed our preferences. They feed our preferences. They don't tell us what we need to hear, they tell us what we want to hear. Remember in 2 Corinthians 11, that was a part of our reading plan the last couple of weeks? It says that Satan himself and his false prophets, they transform themselves into angels of light. They change themselves. They appear to be the good guy. They appear to be the person of God when they're actually an agent of the enemy. How does that happen? They feed what we want to hear.

When you get to 2 Peter 2:1, it says that false prophets specialize in the message – listen to this – of damnable heresies. In other words, errors of information that are so grave that if we adhere to them, our souls will be damned in an eternity a place the Bible calls hell. That's pretty serious. I want you to think about what the false prophets of today preach and how oftentimes it's what we so desperately want to hear. False prophets today teach the lie of pluralism. It doesn't matter what faith system you're a part of, if you're faithful to it, we all end up in the same place. We're all just on different paths headed up the same mountain. No, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," not a way.

There's other more sophisticated prophets that will teach the lie of syncretism which basically says, "Oh, there's really no difference between Christianity and other faiths. They're just saying the same thing a different way." If you've ever read any sacred book other than the Bible, you'll discover that that is a heresy, that is an error, there is nothing truthful at all about that.

Oftentimes there's the heresy of what we might call universalism. "Don't worry about it. It's not that big a deal. Everybody's gonna end up in heaven anyway."

Do you know what the worst heresy is in the world? Now this is a Meyersism, this doesn't come from the Bible but it's based on the Bible, I call it Timexism. You say, "What's Timexism?" One of the worst heresies that false prophets teach is, "Well, if this doesn't go well, when you die you'll get another chance." No, you don't for the Bible says it is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment. Oftentimes what they say is, "Hey, jump on board. Sail this ship with me and if it doesn't go well, don't worry, you'll get another shot. It's okay."

Isn't that the things that we want to hear? We want to hear that we're all on the same boat. We want to hear we'll all be on the same path. We want to hear we're all gonna be okay. And what we really want to hear is if it doesn't turn out well, we'll get a second shot at it. That's just a collective teaching of what these guys do.

Now we know false prophets more for the television documentaries, the burned down compounds, the hundreds dead of Kool-Aid in South America, but you know behind that were their teachings that are lining up exactly with what happens here in 1 Kings 13.

Last but not least, I'd invite you to turn to Matthew 7, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gives us incredible insight in verse 15 about false prophets and I want to close with this because I think it's worth as our take-away. Listen to what Jesus says in verse 15 of Matthew 7,

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

If they are promising the lie of false prosperity, ask them for the financial records. If they're peddling the lie of false healings, ask for the doctors' reports. In other words, Jesus says if you want to know if these guys are legit, don't listen to what they say, don't hear their extravagant stories or fall for their promises, but ask for their fruit.

Now I don't have a degree in agriculture, in fact, I would claim that when it comes to agriculture in general, I'm just not real good at it, but I want to tell you one thing I do know, that anytime that a fruit tree is planted, it takes usually an elongated period of time for fruit to be born, correct? Sometimes multiple years. What did Jesus say? Why don't you look back not just at the last week, not just at the last month, not just at the last crusade, not just at the last large gathering, why don't we look back three years, five years, 10 years, and let's see the fruit of what they've been selling. Oftentimes when you begin to go back in time, you'll discover that names have been changed, locations have been moved, and documents have been altered. Why? Because ultimately the fruit of their lives will catch up with them.

Back in 1 Kings 13. A man who according to the Bible is called a man of God falls for a false prophet because the fruit that he inspected was about an hour old. He had had a conversation, he'd entreated him, he had gone into his home, and that was the end of the story. Little did he know that it was spoiled on the vine and that his carcass would be on the side of the road the very next day. How many people in our own culture have become carcasses of the enemy because they fell for the silver-tongued sales pitch of somebody who promised them a whole lot of something but has never really delivered anything? Even the Jim Jones's, the David Koresh's, and the other ones that are namesakes in our homes, when you look back they never produced anything but hot air, false promises, hopeful expectations, fanciful possibilities. And yet when you look at the list of those who perished with them, they had educations similar to you, they had backgrounds similar to you. They would have been the ones on a Sunday evening who would have been in a church service like this and so lest any of us fall for them, may we always return to the fruit of the word of God. What did God say to this man of God in chapter 13? Don't go into anybody's home. Anybody means anybody, even if he claims to be somebody who's on the right side.

We could share stories untold tonight of those who we've known and loved who've emptied their bank accounts, who've left their jobs, who have divided their families because they wanted to follow the snake oil salesman of the latest one promising a bunch of empty promises. May we never fall for anybody who peddles anything that cannot be verified by the Bible, even if they claim to be a preacher. If it cannot be verified by Scripture, if they claim they got it somewhere else and there's nobody there to witness it, run and run fast. In 1 Kings 13, there is a man called a man of God that if he could testify to you today would say, "I should have run but I fell for it too."