

## False Prophets Are Ungodly Leaders

Why do people fail? Unfortunate circumstances? Sometimes. Poor training and lack of experience? Sometimes. Lack of sufficient finances? Often.

The famous self-help book *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill, lists 30 reasons why people fail. His list includes these four reasons. However, he did not identify one prominent reason for failure, following faulty leaders. Following faulty leaders? Yes, many times, and more than we want to admit.

Unqualified leaders have no trouble attracting followers. I know, I fell for them often in my youth, especially professing Christian leaders. So much so that I created a policy to protect me from following the wrong people. I decided to raise a “red flag” whenever I observed a Biblically faulty trait in a leader, no matter how seemingly insignificant.

Sometimes it was a non-essential factor which would not exclude that person. But sometimes the red flags revealed a serious Biblical fault and/or they accumulated which resulted in my rejecting that leader. I continue this practice to this day. It has spared me from those who would lead me astray into sin and heresy.

Without a doubt, following faulty “Christian” leaders results in more failures than we want to admit. After all, we fall in love with those whom we follow. Since they give us what we want, we have great difficulty dismissing them. We rationalize their behavior even in extreme circumstances, turning errors into benefits.

How do you decide which Christian leaders you will follow? How many false prophets in the Church of Jesus Christ can you identify? None? One? Several? In fact, with few exceptions, false prophets inhabit every Christian congregation. They fool the unwary and gain leadership positions even as pastors in assemblies of believers by deceit, prestige, and promises.

The Bible describes many faulty leaders and the false prophets that accompany and support them. They directed their followers into disaster every time. Examples abound in every Biblical era. For instance, the times of the Kings provide clear illustrations.

After the death of King David, the Old Testament records disaster after disaster because of faulty, unGodly leaders. King Solomon started well but soon fell into debauchery and idolatry.

After his death, the Kingdom split into two separate kingdoms, the northern Kingdom and the southern Kingdom, because of the influence of false prophets. The northern Kingdom never had a Godly king and followed false prophets. This sinful pattern soon resulted in their captivity to their enemies.

The southern Kingdom had mixed leadership, but Godless kings together with sinful prophets overruled the Godly ones. They, too, ended in captivity to their adversaries.

Starting with the warnings from Christ, the New Testament alerts Christians to the presence and danger of false prophets. In that day as well as in our day, false prophets and leaders confuse people and lead their followers into sin.

The Body of Jesus Christ faces a crisis in leadership today. Many evidences confirm that false prophets exist today. For example,

- Even a casual observer sees spiritual decline in the Church and in the lives of believers.
- Believers evade walking in holiness and conform themselves to the world.
- Preachers concentrate upon psychology and the emotional ills of mankind which turns the Bible into a psychology textbook.
- Preachers disregard theology and doctrine. The importance of Biblical doctrine has fallen into disrepute.
- Omitting the challenges and corrections of sound doctrine, pastors instead emphasize a feel-good religion centered upon humanity and emotional feelings rather than about God and His righteous demands upon us as His creation.
- Those who attempt to bring correction to the leadership of the Church today suffer condemnation as out of step, rocking the boat, creating dissension, and causing confusion in the Church.

### **False Prophets are UnGodly Leaders**

False prophets and their failures play a significant role in the spiritual decline of the congregation of the

righteous. These errors grieve the Spirit of God and quench His work among Christ followers. We lack God's glorious presence, and the supernatural authority and ability that only His Spirit can bring to His people.

The Bible provides an account when the Children of Israel followed faulty, unGodly leadership. They had fled Egypt by God's strong hand. They saw His glorious presence on Mount Sinai. Then, Moses went to meet with God and stayed there for 40 days. In his place, Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the people. (1)

While Moses talked with God on the mountain, the Children of Israel down below went into idolatry. They turned aside from God Who had displayed Himself on the mount and had revealed Himself to them with His law, and in physical, tangible ways. They turned and demanded an idol.

*“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

*And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.*

*And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

*And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” (2)*

### **Aaron Dreaded Man.**

Although this circumstance does not describe the totality of Aaron's leadership, it describes how easily one can become an unGodly leader, a false prophet, even for a short time of life. Aaron displayed a dread of man.

Although Moses left both Aaron and Hur in charge when he went up the mount, the text refers only to Aaron. What happened to Hur?

The Scriptures do not describe for us what happened to Hur. However, Jewish historians describe what they believe happened to Hur. When the children of Israel rebelled and wanted to make an idol, they went to Hur first.

But, he stood up for God, refused to make their idol, and in his actions said, “No. We worship God. We will not make an idol contrary to God's law. We will not disobey and rebel against God and form an idol.” As a result, the people killed him.

Next, they came to Aaron and gave him the same message, “Make us gods.” Aaron gave in to their demands, making the idol they demanded.

Whether this account of Hur occurred or not, Aaron displayed a dread of man. Because of his dread of man, Aaron fell into a snare. Ultimately, he made an idol for the people, the famous Golden Calf.

### **Aaron Doubted God.**

Aaron showed another characteristic of false prophet's faulty, unGodly leadership: he doubted God. Aaron failed to trust Him. In those six verses describing Aaron's plans, he fails to mention God at all. He did refer to the idol as though it was God.

Prior to this occasion, Aaron participated in numerous examples of God's miraculous power alongside Moses. He was Moses' spokesman. But, as far as making any reference whatsoever to the almighty, true, and living God on this occasion, Aaron did not refer to Him.

### **Aaron Depended Upon the World's Methods.**

To satisfy the crowd, Aaron devised a plan to get gold for the idol. Then, he used his own skills and abilities to make the idol. Finally, he tried to imitate reality by calling the idol, God, as if it came into existence by miraculous means.

Throughout the whole experience of Aaron with the Golden Calf, he relied upon the world's methods and means. He simply followed the world's way of doing things, the manners and practices of the world, perhaps ones he learned in Egypt.

He doubted God. Instead, he looked upon the world's methods that would somehow solve the problem.

### **Aaron Departed From Truth Into False Doctrine.**

Aaron exhibited another characteristic of a false prophet's faulty, leadership: departure from truth into false doctrine. Towards the end of the text he declared, "Tomorrow is the feast unto the Lord. These gods brought you out of Egypt. We will worship this god."

A few commentators describe the idol as one of the many idols that the Children of Israel saw in Egypt. Aaron copied it to comfort them. Others explain the idol as an attempt by Aaron to make an image of the true God.

In either case, like all false prophets, Aaron led the people into false doctrine in their disobedient worship of the idol.

### **Aaron Displaced The Truth For The Sake Of Peace.**

Aaron wanted peace at any price, even when it required that he sacrifice the truth about God. He wanted unity, not contention and strife. Therefore, Aaron set aside the truth to avoid controversy.

However, neither peace nor unity resulted. Instead, the Children of Israel fell into debauchery. They made a mockery of worshiping God, giving glory to a dumb idol.

The peace that Aaron sought turned into chaos and riot.

## **What Purpose Did These Events Afford For The Children Of Israel?**

Prior to the people's demand for an idol, God revealed to the Children of Israel His demands upon them. Since God redeemed them out of Egypt, He asserted His rightful status above them. Genesis 20.1-17 records the 10 commandments that God required of them.

### **God Commanded Israel To Have No Other Gods Except Him. (3)**

In making the Golden Calf, Aaron and the people denied the exclusivity of God. God Who delivered them from Egypt and Who revealed Himself to them in miraculous ways now demanded His sole status as their God.

He required the Children of Israel to reject all other gods including the ones they saw the Egyptians worship.

They must worship Him and Him alone.

### **God Commanded Israel Not To Make Any Images Of Worship Nor To Bow Down To Them. (4)**

When Aaron made the Calf for the Children of Israel to worship, he violated not just the first commandment, but also the second commandment. God decreed that they not make an idol in the form of any of God's creatures: neither animals, flying creatures, nor creatures in the waters.

In obvious disobedience, Aaron made a likeness of a cow. The fact that he made it of gold did not somehow make it acceptable.

This command included a warning of long-lasting judgment upon Israel's children, the children's children, and unto the third and fourth generation. In fact, Biblical scholars describe the punishing plague that God sent upon them for their disobedience as lasting for generations.

When Aaron made the Golden Calf to meet the people's demands, he facilitated their disobedience of the first two commands which led to God's judgment upon them.

## **God's Purpose**

What purpose did these events have for Israel?

- It reminded them of God's exclusive claim upon them. He demanded that they worship and revere

Him to the exclusion of all other gods.

- No mere replica of one of God's creations could ever reveal the totality of God and thus become worthy of worship.
- Further, God used this occasion to teach them the danger(s) of following unGodly leaders, false prophets, who will lead them astray from His commands into sin.

### **What Correlation Do These Incidents Have Upon You And Me?**

At first glance, you may doubt that any correlation exists between then and now. Our “enlightened” times entice us to think that we surpass those days. Today’s technological and educational advances have transformed our world in significant ways beyond the days of Aaron.

However, we share similar dangers from the rise of unGodly leaders. In fact, with few exceptions, false prophets inhabit every Christian congregation. They fool the unwary and gain leadership positions even as pastors in assemblies of believers by deceit, prestige, and promises.

How do you decide which Christian leaders you will follow? How many false prophets in the Church of Jesus Christ can you identify? None? One? Several?

#### **False Prophets Dread Man.**

Like Aaron, they fear mankind and adopt practices to relieve that fear. Fear of man appears in different forms:

- **a physical fear**, where we fear for our very lives. We dread that some kind of physical harm could come to us, perhaps even death. That is a very real kind of fear. Perhaps Aaron felt this kind of fear.
- **an emotional, psychological fear**, prevalent in the Body of Christ today. It reveals itself in this fashion. Our leaders today, like false prophets, display a fear of man that causes them to give in to mankind’s demands because they do not want to lose friendships or families from the congregation. They want a crowd, so they will yield whenever they need to yield in order to encourage people to stay and visitors to come.
- **A conformity to culture**. Too often Christian congregations yield to the siren call of culture out of fear. In a misguided belief, unGodly leaders adopt the fallacy that to win unbelievers to Christ requires compliance with the culture. These influencers fear culture’s influence upon people and modify the gospel to suit the world’s impact.

The Scriptures remind us,

*“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” (5)*

False prophets display a fear of man which affects their leadership and leads them into unGodly ways. The dread of man has reared its ugly head. That describes a very real, common experience in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

#### **Like Aaron, False Prophets Doubt God.**

The Scriptures tell us frequently that when we rest upon the arm of the flesh we sin against God, doubting Him. God reminded His children of this truth in Isaiah 31,

*“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help.” (6)*

In Scripture, Egypt always pictures the world and the flesh. “Don’t go down to Egypt for help,” He said. “They have horses, yes. They have manpower, yes.” However, God in essence said, “I am your defender. I am your protector. I am your provider. Trust me.”

Trust in God demands that we seek Him. Perhaps you, like many people today, emulate the Church and

false prophets that pay lip service to seeking after God. We start all of our services and meetings with prayer. After all, this is a church function, and we should pray.

Therefore, we give God His due, almost like a pledge of allegiance to the flag. We will say our one or two minutes of prayer, which describes lip service. God told His people to seek Him with all their hearts:

*“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” (7)*

To trust God and to find His presence and plans, we must seek for Him with all of our hearts. God does not reveal Himself to the flippant. He reveals Himself to the sincere in heart, those who come to Him seeking Him with all of their hearts.

False prophets reveal their unbelief when they fail to take time to seek God for themselves and on behalf of those whom they lead.

### **False Prophets Depend Upon The World’s Methods.**

Aaron’s solution to the demands of Israel followed the world’s pattern. Come up with an exciting plan, convince the people to accept it, then they will give to make it happen. It worked, but God was not in it.

Like Aaron, false prophets trust the world’s methods when they emphasize worldly schemes in place of Godly measures. They develop their plans according to the world’s patterns. They leave God out of the picture, and that describes Aaron’s sin.

Thus, they lead Christ’s followers to trust the ways and means of the world. They think that if it works in the world, it will work for the Church. As a result, we follow these false prophets and adopt the world’s practices.

Then, we ask God to bless our efforts, and attempt to give God the glory. When it works, we attempt to give God glory for our success. But, at no point do we truly trust God and seek His will and purpose. As a result, God did not/does not bless methods that He did not/does not order.

False prophets stress the world’s methods without seeking God’s plan(s) and purpose(s).

### **False Prophets Depart From Truth Into False Doctrine.**

Aaron erred when he taught Israel that the Golden Calf depicted the god that brought them out of Egypt. His delusion led them astray into sin and God’s judgment.

False prophets today follow the same pattern. It often begins when they water down the truth so that they might appeal to the crowd. They fear that if they stand for the truth, they will offend people. Then, people will leave, because they dislike the preacher and his messages. They will not respond to him.

This fear causes false prophets to set aside the truth. Instead, they cater to mankind because of fear, and they want to satisfy the crowd instead of God.

Today, many church leaders display this clear sign of an unGodly, false prophet. They fail to adhere to God’s truth, giving way to popular, but unbiblical false doctrines.

### **Like Aaron, False Prophets Displace The Truth For The Sake Of Peace.**

Today, false prophets lead Christians into false doctrines in the same fashion as Aaron did. They push for peace at any price, even if it means sacrificing the truth. Many leaders push for unity and want it so badly that they set aside truth to get it. We do not want contention and strife.

Therefore, we set aside the truth to avoid controversy and contention. However, neither unity nor peace occurs. It is merely a cessation of strife. When you set aside the truth, you lose the basis for unity and true peace, which rests upon the truth.

Righteous ends do not sanctify nor make holy unGodly means to attain them. Scripture shows that Jesus did not make peace at any price. In fact, He often brought division among people by inserting the truth.

Jesus said,

*“I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (8)*

The Lord Jesus demands the truth. Granted, the search for the truth and insistence upon it might bring temporary discomfort. However, God’s truth ultimately brings freedom, peace, and unity based and founded

upon the truth, not a false foundation of peace at any price.

The Scriptures confirm this certainty. The Lord Jesus warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees, the false prophets of His day, talking about their false doctrine. He said,

*“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.”* (9)

The false doctrines of the Pharisees infected the whole culture of Christ's day. He did not cater to it. Instead, He declared the truth, even when it meant that the crowds left Him. (10)

False prophets disregard doctrinal truth and replace it with popular but unbiblical commentary that they vainly believe will promote peace.

## Summary

Because he dreaded man, Aaron satisfied the cries of the Israelites by following the world's methods. His doubt led him to fail to trust God. His departure from the truth caused him to take a further step from God when he fashioned an idol for them to worship.

Our text reveals a clear picture of false prophets and their faulty, ungodly leadership, which brought about the horrible circumstances of Israel and the Golden Calf. Aaron's faulty leadership permitted it to happen and contributed to it.

The Body of Jesus Christ today is satisfied with an Aaron, an unGodly false prophet. Believers want someone who will give them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. Therefore, they suffer.

The intrusion of false prophets and their false doctrines into the Church requires Christ followers to reject them and their insidious errors.

In His letter to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, Christ praised the Ephesians, because they put out those from among them who followed error and false doctrine. They stood for the truth and received commendation for it.

Later in that same chapter, the Lord Jesus pronounced judgment upon the Church of Thyatira. They permitted false doctrine to exist within the Church. God does not want peace at any price. He wants the truth first. Then, unity and peace will come as consequences of the truth.

That, however, runs contrary to the Church today. Following the lead of false prophets, we want peace and unity at any price. We even call those who demand the truth troublemakers. Instead of welcoming those who stand for the truth, we often times want to remove *them* out of the congregation instead of rejecting the false prophets and their ruinous doctrines.

If you have done any baking, you know the effect of a small amount of yeast. When you put yeast—just a very small amount of yeast—into a baking recipe, it affects the whole recipe. And it doesn't take very much.

The Scriptures warn us that a little leaven, a little false doctrine, leavens the whole loaf. When we permit false doctrine to permeate the congregation, it affects the whole body. Following false doctrine evidences the presence of false prophets in leadership.

The book of Jude calls Christ followers to contend earnestly for the truth. (11) We must stand up for the truths of God's Word and resist false doctrine.

Further, the Scriptures tell us that we are to speak the truth in love, not anger, or contention. Rather we stand for the truth in love, demanding that our leaders speak the truth. We must hold Church leaders accountable as God holds them accountable to the truth. We must require them to teach us the truth, calling to their attention their failure to lead us into the truth.

The Church of Jesus Christ must reject false prophets and follow godly leaders, without dread for man, who trust God, and who will lead us and guide us into the truth. The Church must avoid false prophets and choose leaders who will tell the truth and minister God's truth with love.

We can learn from Israel's failure how to spot false prophets and refuse to follow them.

## References

1. Exodus 24.12-15.

2. Exodus 32.1-6.
3. Genesis 20.1-3
4. Genesis 20.4-6
5. Proverbs 29:25.
6. Isaiah 31:1.
7. Jeremiah 29:13.
8. Matthew 10:34.
9. Matthew 16:6.
10. John 6.66.
11. Jude 3.

### **Questions For Reflection and Application**

1. What prompts false prophets in the present Church to challenge believers today? Why do they do that?
2. Aaron displayed a dread of man when the people of Israel demanded an idol. Have you ever experienced fear of man in a church setting? How did you deal with it?
3. At this time, Aaron also failed to trust and believe God. Most believers experience doubt at some time in their spiritual journey. What do you do when your faith is weak?
4. Spiritual leaders face many problems and temptations. What can you do to encourage your pastor to trust in God?
5. What do you think is the role of the love of money in relation to false doctrine taught by false prophets.
6. If the church's desire for peace and unity is leading to false doctrine, what should believers do? How can they demonstrate love without compromise?

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