

Scriptural Criteria

In the Word of God we are told also what are the *criteria* by which we are to judge of prophecy, and hence, able to judge of prophecy, we are also able to judge of the Word of God of which it is the seal.

First of all, let us note most carefully the scriptural teaching on this subject.

In Deut. XVIII: 15-22 we have a significant passage of scripture with regard to the great coming representative Prophet that was to be in the likeness of Moses. In the 21st verse, the hearer or the reader is supposed to ask that natural and legitimate question, "How shall we know the word which the Lord hath *not* spoken?" Or, as Jeremiah puts it positively (XXVIII:9), "How shall we know the word which the Lord *hath* spoken?" And here is the answer: "When the word the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him." Here it is taken for granted that any sensible and rational man, when he hears a prophet professing to speak in the name of God, will challenge him: "How am I to know that the word you speak is the word of God?" If that which he prophesies comes to pass, we shall know that God has spoken; if not, we shall know that God has not spoken.

There is, however, one qualification of this test, and that is stated in the 13th chapter of Deuteronomy,—not very far off, so that even such a test as this may be closely linked to its proper qualification (XIII: 1-5.):

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them. Thou shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you (puts you to the test.)

Mark this condition: even though a man should perform a miracle of utterance in prophecy, or a miracle of performance in action, *if he is at the same time teaching doctrine contrary to the Word of God*, we are not to heed him. There are some things greater than miracles, as testimonies to God, and He distinctly tells us that a true prophet must be known by two great criteria: (1) the harmony of his predictive teaching with historic events; and (2) the higher harmony of his preceptive teaching with the mind and will of God as already revealed in scripture.

(The Bible and Spiritual Criticism—Being the Second Series of Exeter Hall Lectures on the Bible by Arthur T. Pierson, New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1905, 29-31; Text modified)