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Commentary — From the Margins

*The Making of a False Prophet*

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For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:16-21)

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Of the many kings of the northern house of Israel, there was none worse than Ahab and his Phoenician wife Jezebel. Yet, when Jehoshaphat came to the throne of the house of Judah, after fortifying the cities of Judah against Israel’s attacks and after setting garrisons in the cities of Ephraim that his father had captured from Israel, Jehoshaphat made a marriage alliance with Ahab.

Jehoshaphat walked in the ways of David: he sought God and kept His commandments. His heart was courageous in the ways of God, and he tore down the high places and the Asherim. He had the Levites teach the laws of God throughout Judah, and the fear of the Lord fell upon the kingdoms surrounding Judah—these kingdoms made no war with Judah. Instead, some brought presents and paid tribute. And Jehoshaphat built fortresses and cities for storage until he had more than a million men armed for war.

Jehoshaphat had great wealth and great honor; nevertheless, he made an alliance with Ahab through a marriage—and Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to go to war with him against Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire first whether God would be with the allied houses of Israel in this war. Ahab gathered his prophets together, four hundred men, and unanimously, these four hundred said, “Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king” (2 Chron 18:5). But Jehoshaphat was skeptical, and he asked if there were not another prophet

of the Lord of whom they could inquire (v. 6).

What was it about the four hundred prophets that caused Jehoshaphat to doubt their integrity? Why did Jehoshaphat not believe them? These four hundred prophets certainly formed a majority of the advisers whom the allied kings could consult. Ahab was willing to believe them, but Jehoshaphat, a king whose habit was to seek God, was not willing to believe these many parrots telling Ahab what he wanted to hear. Was it because they sounded like parrots?

Ahab told Jehoshaphat there was one additional man of whom they could inquire, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but Ahab warned Jehoshaphat that Micaiah never prophesied good concerning Ahab, but always evil (2 Chron 18:7).

The prophet Jeremiah told the false prophet Hananiah, son of Azzur, “The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet” (28:8-9) ... the prophets of old prophesied about the evil that would befall a nation for the nation’s transgressions of the laws of God. Good news needs no herald.

Before Micaiah was brought in to see the allied kings, he was warned, “Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably” (2 Chron 18:12).

If Micaiah knew what was good for him, he, too, would assure the kings of victory. He would deliver to the kings what Ahab wanted to hear. And he did: Micaiah came in before the kings and said, “Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand” (2 Chron 18:14). Ahab jumped him: “How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord” (v. 15). Ahab did not believe Micaiah, who said exactly what his four hundred prophets were saying. Why? Did Ahab really not believe the four hundred? Jehoshaphat did not believe the four hundred. Did Micaiah serve a different God than did Ahab’s four hundred prophets, who were, most likely, replacements for the priests of Baal Elijah had slain.

Micaiah answered Ahab,

Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all of the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, “Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?” And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, “I will entice him.” And the Lord said to him, “By what means?” And he said, “I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all of his prophets.” And he said, “You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.” Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster concerning you. (2 Chron 18:18-22)

God had already condemned Ahab to death because he had sold himself to evil (1 Kings 21:20). God had already told Elijah to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and Elisha to put to death whomever escaped the sword of Hazael and Jehu (1 Kings 19:15-17). So all that remained was to get Ahab into a place where Hazael and his men could kill Ahab; for Hazael knew that he had been commissioned by God to shed Ahab's blood. Thus, when Israel comes against the Syrian forces, the king of Syria commanded his thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel" (1 Kings 22:31).

However, before Ahab was killed by a randomly shot arrow, Ahab ordered Micaiah thrown into prison, one of his last acts.

But Ahab knew what his fate would be, for God through Elijah had warned Ahab that He would bring disaster upon Ahab, cutting off every male, bond or free, who descended from Ahab. Elijah told Ahab, "Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of heaven shall eat" (1 Kings 21:24).

Ahab did not believe Micaiah because Micaiah served the same God as Elijah served—and what Micaiah revealed to Ahab was similar to what Job revealed about how his trials began when Satan came before God.

The making of a false prophet begins with a lying spirit.

And the principle lie every false prophet or false pundit tells is that endtime prophecies about Israel are about a physical nation or peoples.

- The person who teaches that endtime Israel is the English speaking peoples of the world, particularly the United States, Great Britain, and the British Commonwealth, is a false prophet and has been deceived by a lying spirit.
- The person who teaches that endtime Israel is the modern State of Israel is a false prophet and has a lying spirit.

The Apostle Paul writes, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Rom 2:28-29). The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "Behold, the days are coming, declares [YHWH], when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (9:25-26). The promise to Israel is that when this nation is in a far land and when this nation turns to God to love Him with heart and mind, keeping His commandments and statutes and all that is written in Deuteronomy, God will bring Israel back into His rest and will give the nation circumcised hearts (Deut 30:1-11). Elsewhere Paul writes, "In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised

him from the dead” (Col 2:11-12).

Israel is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that [it] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [it] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). This nation was not before a nation, but has become a people through receiving the mercy of God (v. 10). Israel is not now a nation defined by the mutilation of the flesh (Eph 2:11-22). Rather, in Israel, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, free nor bond, for all of these things pertain to the flesh. Israel is the assembly of new creatures or new selves born of Spirit as sons of God that are now domiciled in tents of flesh. It is a nation without physical substance in this world ... the new creature does not have flesh hung on a skeleton of calcium carbonate bones, but obedience clinging to a latticework of faith grown in grace and knowledge.

The person who would have endtime Israel being a physical nation or people is physically minded. Most who would have endtime Israel being a physical people are lawless and will not submit to the laws of God—they are easy to recognize as false prophets and false teachers. But the theological descendants of Herbert W. Armstrong desire of keep the laws of God; thus, to Armstrong, God sent a lying spirit so that he could not open prophecies that were to remain sealed and secret until the time of the end. He used uninspired history books to insert Rome, the Roman Empire, the Roman Church, and the Roman See into the sealed visions of Daniel. And after inserting an uninspired text into Holy Writ, he announced that Daniel’s visions were no longer secret, a lie for which his name could be expunged from the Book of Life.

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The endtime visions of the prophet Daniel were sealed and secret until the time of the end, that generic period when many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased. These visions could not be understood by anyone prior to this time of the end; so the man or woman who claimed to understand Daniel’s visions earlier than this endtime period had a lying spirit, given to keep these visions sealed. Yes, this means that Ellen G. White in the 19th-Century and Herbert W. Armstrong in the 20th-Century (both of whom claimed to understand Daniel’s visions) had lying spirits given to them. This also applies to all others in earlier generations who have claimed to understand Daniel.

Many Christians will simply refuse to believe that God would use a lying spirit, or would send a lying spirit to someone who had not consigned themselves to evil as Ahab had. They might believe that Micaiah lied to Ahab, or they might believe that Satan sent the lying spirit, but they will not believe that God would lie, and for them, God sending a lying spirit is the same as God lying.

By the fall of 1961, Armstrong knew that he did not have prophecy right, his reason for scheduling the Advanced Prophecy seminar spring semester 1962 and what he told the assembled senior evangelists when he taught the first seminar session ... how did he know he didn’t have prophecy right? What caused Armstrong to realize that his understanding of prophecy was wrong? Was it more than world events not happening as he had prophesied? Did the Holy Spirit tell him (as Paul heard the voice of God from His mouth) that he needed to

correct error? Did he have a sudden, or a slowly acquired awareness that he did not understand what he professed to understand? Perhaps endtime disciples will never know. Regardless, by continuing to teach what he knew wasn't right, Armstrong compromised with "truth." He would later deny he taught that the Church, as he understood it, would go to a place of physical safety—Petra—in 1972. He said he never set dates even though a booklet was published, 1975 in *Prophecy*. Armstrong became spiritually as Ahab was physically, so much so that the photos taken showing him visiting world leaders were airbrushed to remove members of his entourage with him when he met these third-world presidents. In a sermon delivered in Beloit, Wisconsin, Aaron Dean spoke about consciously standing where he could be easily removed thereby making the airbrushed photos show Armstrong meeting alone with these world leaders. The photos were lies, visually told so as to use these allegedly one-on-one meetings with world leaders to leverage greater tithes and offerings from already overly burdened disciples.

It is a harsh comparison: airbrushing people from photos being spiritually equivalent to Ahab's idolatry. But when moving from physical to spiritual, obedience is, again, the spiritual "substance" (an oxymoron) from which sons of God are formed or grown. Deceit "dissolves" obedience into nothingness; deceit kills just as a disrupter killed on the earlier *Star Trek* television series. And the making of a false prophet incorporates deceit in the same way that Ahab's four hundred encouraged the king to attack Syria.

A few fellowships, splinters from the former Worldwide Church of God, that utterly lack an original thought of their own have borrowed Armstrong's prophetic teachings, declaring in hyperbole, that Armstrong was God's essential endtime man; they make Armstrong the last Elijah, ignoring that this former ad-man did not turn the hearts of fathers to their children, or the hearts of children to their fathers—if anything, Armstrong created enmity between the generations without turning "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" (Luke 1:17), the spiritual equivalent to physically turning the hearts of children to their fathers. But for the vast majority of Christendom, Armstrong's prophetic legacy has fallen upon hard times since his death in 1986. These many disciples long believed that Armstrong received a lying spirit from God, but these many are now, with few exceptions, mounds of spiritual corpses, buried in the darkness of forest duff, decomposing in the dampness of disbelief and fallen deeds.

The making of a false prophet begins with a lying spirit and a journey into deceit, a journey of sufficient length to make dishonesty smell like a reasonable response to a difficult situation ... and the marking of those who sigh and cry about the abominations committed in Israel begins in the sanctuary where disciples go when they enter into prayer (Ezek chap 9).

When Jesus' disciples asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and of the close of the age, He told His disciples that they would hear of wars and rumors of wars: "See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet" (Matt 24:6). Wars and rumors of wars about to occur in the Middle East or anywhere else are not signs of the end of this evil age. Nor are physical calamities: hurricanes, earthquakes, volcano eruptions. Nor are social disasters: depressions, famines, ethnic cleansings, genocide against Slavs and Jews. All of these things are physical, and pertain to this physical world and not to a spiritual nation or to a spiritual kingdom. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world or from this world (John

18:36); so why do the false prophets want to make Christ's Millennium reign like another kingdom of his world, like a super-efficient form of the United Nations?

The prince of this world reigns by controlling the mental topography of humankind, consigned to disobedience for a season (Rom 11:32). He reigns as the prince of the power of the air, but he has been disqualified to rule. The Son of Man will receive the kingdom of this world—and when Christ receives this single kingdom of this world (Rev 11:15-18; Dan 7:9-14), He will reign as the Prince of the power of the air; He will broadcast His mind and His spirit to all of humankind. Human nature will be a changed nature. Christ will not rule over a realm of rebels, but over human beings that have the laws of God written on their hearts and minds, that all know the Lord.

But the many false prophets just don't get it: they don't realize that disciples need not be concerned about the physical things that happen at the end of this era, for when the second Passover liberation of Israel occurs, all thoughts will immediately be turned to God. As a woman experiencing hard labor pains is no longer interested in her garden club, or in whether her house is cleaned, or what will be for dinner, the undivided attention of Israel and of the world will be on the things of God; for the second Passover liberation of Israel will come upon the world as the flood of Noah's day came upon the world (in the middle of the second month).

The making of false prophets is necessary to fulfill Scripture ... as Judas Iscariot was called by God as the son of destruction that Scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:12) — this is not how those preach God as love think of God — many disciples will be given a lying spirit so that Scripture can be fulfilled about many coming in Christ's name, saying that Jesus is the Christ, and deceiving many (Matt 24:5); about many false prophets arising and leading many astray (v. 11). Endtime disciples must learn to discern the genuine from the false, for Satan appears as an angel of light and his servants as ministers of righteousness (2 Co 11:14-15). And Herbert W. Armstrong is a reasonable case study of how a man who sought righteousness was overcome by the things of this world, its glitter and its acclaim. Christ will reveal his judgment upon His return. It might well be that he was brought back from death not to put the Church back on track, as he claimed, but to put himself back on track so he could produce fruit worthy of repentance. That certainly should be the hope of everyone who knew or knew of the man.

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