



Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

P.O. BOX 21, PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263-0021

FALSE PROPHETS

by Ralph Woodrow

Soon after Barack Obama won the presidential election in November 2008, the following “prophecy” (summarized) made the rounds on the Internet. The writer, claiming a heavenly encounter with Jesus Christ, said:

Based on my heaven experience, last Tuesday’s election was the LAST presidential election we will ever experience before the rapture. There will be no more!

In January, due to a “problem,” Obama will NOT be sworn in as the next president. He will *never* take that office. Why? I don’t know.

Bush will be forced to *extend his presidential term* until this “problem” can be resolved. Jesus told me, “The president you know right now [meaning Bush] will be *the last president* you will know at the time of the rapture.”

World War III will erupt. All the nations will turn against this nation, blaming Bush for this “problem.” But by the time the world realizes that Bush was not to blame, it will be too late. Missiles will be dropped on cities on the east coast, then the west coast, making 9/11 look very minimal. Our nation will lose this war badly. It will be the end of the United States. At this time the one world government and the Anti-christ will take over.

Jesus also told me, “As horrible as these events may seem, these events must happen in order for the rapture to take place.”

Did World War III erupt while George Bush was president? Did the rapture take place? Did some problem prevent Barack Obama from being sworn in as president? It did not take long for *this* prophecy to prove false!

Foolish prophecies like this are nothing new. After Gerald Ford became president (because of the resignation of Richard Nixon), a prophecy made the rounds that “the United States

will *never* have another *elected* president.” It certainly sounded like everything was about to fall apart—never another *elected* president! It didn’t happen.

An article I received in the mail in 1985 said: “The Pope of Rome is moving his headquarters to Jerusalem!....Intensified Middle East conditions will result in using limited nuclear weapons, bringing panic to the world. Then *our next president*, *Mario Cuomo*, who is Roman Catholic, will force the issue of placing the Pope in Jerusalem as the religious and peace keeping agent of the world.” It didn’t happen.

A few weeks ago, a pastor in the Philippines wrote to me about his church being torn apart by wild “end times” speculation. Several, he said, believe that Barack Obama is the Anti-Christ, that Jesus Christ will return in 2012—things like that.

After John McCain announced that Sarah Palin would be his running mate, the following message, as though a divine revelation, was widely circulated on the Internet:

A noted pastor, while watching this announcement on television, noticed a clock that said: 4:44. When he asked the Lord what this meant, he was directed to Ezekiel 44:4:

“He brought me by way of the *north gate* to the front of the temple; so I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.” [The “north gate” was taken to mean Alaska!]

Thus, the choice of Sarah Palin brought the United States into a new level of alignment with the Lord and his purposes. Like “Esther,” she had come to the kingdom for such a time as this. At age 44 she would become the 44th vice president, and ultimately even president!

As is often the case, such “prophecies” are flawed right on the surface. For example: Had the McCain/Palin ticket won, McCain would have become the 44th president. *But* Sarah Palin would have become the 47th—*not the 44th*—vice president.

The way events have played out, there have been more vice presidents than presidents. It may be of some general interest to include the following paragraph listing the 47 vice presidents of the United States:

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Aaron Burr, George Clinton, Elbridge Gerry, Daniel Tompkins, John Calhoun, Martin Van Buren, Richard Johnson, John Tyler, George Dallas, Millard Fillmore, William King, John Breckinridge, Hannibal Hamlin, Andrew Johnson, Schuyler Colfax, Henry Wilson, William Wheeler, Chester Arthur, Thomas Hendricks, Levi Morton, Adlai Stevenson I, Garret Hobart, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Fairbanks, James Sherman, Thomas Marshall, Calvin Coolidge, Charles Dawes, Charles Curtis, John Garner, Henry Wallace, Harry Truman, Alben Barkley, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Spiro Agnew, Gerald Ford, Nelson Rockefeller, Walter Mondale, George H. W. Bush, Dan Quayle, Al Gore, Dick Cheney, Joe Biden.

Humans make mistakes. But if something is indeed a revelation from *God*, HE would know how many vice presidents there have been!

Please be assured our purpose is not to reflect on any political party or candidate, one way or the other. Instead these examples serve to illustrate biblical teaching.

Prophecies that do not happen are false: “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which *the Lord has not spoken*, but the prophet has spoken it *presumptuously*” (Deut. 18:22).

Another scripture warning, not as well-known, shows there can be circumstances in which a prophet speaks, and *even if it comes to pass*, he is not to be followed (Deut. 13:1-3). Under the Law of Moses, there was a death penalty for anyone who claimed to be a prophet, who spoke in the name of the Lord, if what he said was not what God commanded (Deut. 18:20).

“Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!...saying, the Lord says, and the Lord has not sent them” (Ezek. 13:1-7).

Years ago there was a fine little Christian lady my mother helped, took her shopping for groceries, etc. Back at that time, some of the preachers this lady listened to on the radio would make great claims about prosperity and other blessings for those who would send them money. She sent an offering to one of these men. When she received a letter back, he gave her a “prophecy” that went something like this:

“Yea, thus saith the Lord unto thee, my child: If thou wouldest be blessed, you must give to my servant [his name]. Give sacrificially to my servant and I will open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing there will not be room to contain. Yea, I say unto thee, then your prayers will be answered, your unsaved loved ones will come to me,” etc.

Suddenly the prophecy was interrupted, the page torn in two! A note explained that if she wanted the other half of the prophecy, which would include a personal word from God to her, she must *send another offering right away*. This little lady, for whom life was hard, and who had never received much education, did not feel right about this. Fortunately she was sharp enough to recognize a phony. That same would-be prophet later went to prison for mail fraud. The Bible warns about those who prophesy “for money” (Micah 3:11).

“I have not sent these prophets...I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied...they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart...Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He says” (Jer. 23:21-31). This was back at the time of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. Peter, in the New Testament, wrote: “There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers *among you* who...will make merchandise of you” (2 Peter 2:1-3). For this reason, we must “try the spirits whether they are of God: because *many* false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Because there has been so much that is false, some have concluded that God *never* reveals *anything—to anyone—any-more!* I am *not* in this camp. If there is a “false,” does this not imply there is a “true”? Otherwise everything would be false.

Billy Graham, who has probably preached to more people in person than anyone in history, has stated he believes the primary way God speaks today is through the preaching of the word. *But* he does not rule out special times when God reveals things supernaturally. He cites the case of Hans Egede (1686-1758), the pioneer missionary to Greenland, who prophesied the coming of a vessel with food at a time when starvation was close at hand. And the vessel came just as it had been revealed to him. Graham goes on to say: “I would not wish to rule out such occurrences as impossible to a sovereign God” (*The Holy Spirit*, p. 139).

As Paul wrote, “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20, 21 NKJV). We are not to despise prophecies, but we must prove or test all things and hold fast that which is true and good.

If someone comes to me with a word they claim is from God, I will not despise it. But to prove all things, I would question: Is it scriptural? (Acts 17:11). A true word or prophecy will glorify Jesus Christ (John 15:26; Rev. 19:10). Also, among believers, when one gives a word to another person, generally speaking, it serves *as a confirmation* for what the Lord has *already revealed* to that other person.

One night after I spoke at a church in Oregon, three men—the pastor and I, and another man, who was also in Christian ministry—were sitting around a table visiting. The pastor mentioned an incident that occurred some years before—back before he was married. As a young single man, he pastored a church in Missouri. A woman in his church said that God told her the two of them were to get married! His response was that God had not told *him* that!

The other man at the table said, “You should have *re-buked* her in the name of the Lord!” “Yes, I guess so,” the pastor responded, with a little smile on his face. “But it’s hard to criticize someone *who has such good taste!*” ☺

It does not take long for some prophecies or teachings to prove false. This is especially true when some would predict the outcome of an election, or set dates for certain events to occur. Remember the booklet *88 Reasons Why the Rapture*

Will Take Place in 1988? I heard someone say recently, “I don’t suppose they sold very many copies of that booklet in 1989”!

Another teaching that has repeatedly proved false is the “Never-Die” doctrine. Over the years I have known several people who were taken in by this. With the passing of time, *all of them have now died!*

For those who may not know about the Never-Die teaching, it is this: If one has enough faith, it is claimed, he can attain an immortal, resurrection body NOW—and never die. The Israelites ate manna in the wilderness and died—died *physically*. But, as John 6:58 goes on to say, those who partake of Christ, the true bread, will *never die*. This, according to the teaching, means they will not die *physically!*

At a meeting in Arkansas where I spoke some years ago, during a time of testimonies, one woman said: “God told Pastor [whatever his name was] to preach the Never-Die message. He has passed on now, but at least he preached what God gave him!” Does that make sense? Evidently, despite all the evidence to the contrary, she still believed it! I am not aware that anyone else at the meeting believed that way.

Years ago, as a young evangelist, I had some ministry involvement with a pastor whose dedication to God is not in question. I did not know him too well—I spoke at his church one time—but I can still recall things like how he constantly memorized scriptures while driving his car, etc. Some years later, I heard from a reliable source, he began preaching the Never-Die message. Eventually this caused a real dilemma: his grown daughter, who still lived at home, became sick and died. They kept her in an upstairs bedroom while members of the church came hour after hour, day and night, to pray for her to be raised from the dead. This went on for some time until the body was decomposing. Finally, in great grief and embarrassment, they gave in and phoned the mortuary.

Extreme teachings like this tend to discredit the good and true things Christians stand for.

Back in the ‘60s, I knew an elderly woman named Missy quite well. What a dear saint of God! One day she told me this story which begins in Missouri. She was a young Christian woman at the time, raising her family, and with her husband was involved in a struggling ministry. Somehow he came into the Never-Die teaching (which ties in later in the story).

As her husband sought the Lord, a word seemed to come to his mind: “coma.” Over the weeks that followed, it went through his mind over and over: “Coma! Coma!” Eventually, based on this, he thought God was directing them to move to *Tacoma* (Washington) and start a church. Preparing for the move, he built a home-made camper on the back of a truck body. From the photo Missy showed me, I would say it reflected the poverty in which they lived.

They made the move to Tacoma, but all efforts to establish a church went down in defeat. Eventually he had a stroke, followed by a coma, and died. (She later wondered if the Lord was trying to show him he would have a *coma*, not that they

were to move to *Tacoma*.) Because he believed the Never-Die teaching, he had told her that *if* he did die, to put these words on his gravestone: “HE MISSED ETERNAL LIFE.” But she never did.

A few months ago while in the Tacoma area, I told this story to a friend of mine. His response was this: “Surely if the Lord wanted him to go to Tacoma, he could have said ‘Tacoma,’ not ‘coma’!”

Sometimes a person who truly loves God, in his zeal to serve Him, may get off on some fruitless teaching. I have no desire to make light of anyone like this. To his own master he will stand or fall, and God is able to make him stand (Rom. 14:4). But we can learn from the mistakes of others and hopefully not make similar mistakes (1 Cor. 10:11).

Let me tell you about a fine Christian woman I met over 40 years ago, whom I will simply refer to as Peggy. Her sincerity and love for God are not in doubt. I relate the following story, as she told it to me, to illustrate how even good people can be deceived and taken in by false prophets.

A preacher who held meetings in her town (Modesto, California), said God’s judgment was going to *soon* fall on California, that God was calling his true followers to flee from the state. Because of this, the preacher was developing a Christian commune back in one of the New England states. It sounded like a wonderful place to live and great blessings were promised to those who would heed the warning. Peggy decided to make the move, taking her two nearly-grown daughters along, even though her “skeptical” husband refused to go.

A few weeks later, an old bus belonging to the group, was sent to pick up those in California who had decided to go. Some others followed the bus in their own cars as they ventured eastward across America to what they believed would be their city of refuge. About half way, the bus developed a problem, so they stopped by a park with lawn and trees. There Peggy saw squirrels scampering about. It brought to mind a dream she had some time before with a very similar scene. It *seemed* to confirm that she was following God’s directive!

Meanwhile two of the men who had been following the bus in a car, headed back into town to get help. On the way, they were in a head-on wreck; both were killed. Things went from bad to worse, and even after arriving at what had been described as “Paradise on Earth,” it was a disappointment. Within a few months, most of the people, having been deceived and hoodwinked out of their money, left. When Peggy and her daughters arrived back in California, her husband had moved in with another woman, never to return to her. Much hurt followed.

The warning of Jesus comes to mind: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves....By their fruits you shall know them” (Matt. 7:15,20).

Finally, I would say in the words of Paul: “Despise not prophecies,” *but* in so doing, “prove all things” and only hold on to that which is “good” (1 Thess. 5:20,21).



Arlene, Florence, and Ralph Woodrow

Florence, Ralph's mother, passed peacefully from this life on January 25, 2009 at the age of 92. The many kind cards and letters that have been received are appreciated very much. Photo taken in 2003.

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RALPH and ARLENE WOODROW

P.O. Box 21

Palm Springs, CA 92263-0021

Toll Free: (877) 664-1549 Fax: (760) 323-3982

E-mail: ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net

Website: www.ralphwoodrow.org

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