

Are they “Legitimate” or “False” Prophets?

While it is true that ‘the prophets’ are not explicitly described as ‘false’, it is clear from the context that false prophets are in view (the term ‘false prophet’ is not found in the OT; it is determined only from context that the prophet is ‘false’). First, their activity is associated with ‘the unclean spirit’ (v. 2). Secondly, the prophets are described by their own parents as having ‘spoken a lie in the name of the LORD’ (v. 3), which readily identifies them as false. Thirdly, while their attire is that of the true prophet (e.g. 2 Kgs 1:8; 2:8, 13), it is worn specifically ‘in order to deceive’ (v. 4). Fourthly, the wounds of v. 6 suggest self-inflicted wounds as the result of activities such as those of the false prophets on Mount Carmel in Elijah’s day (1 Kgs 18:28; cf. Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6). Fifthly, the judgment in v. 3 reflects the judgment of the law on false prophets found in Deut. 13:6–11.

One difference between the two passages is the nature of the judgment: stoning in the law, and piercing in Zechariah. In both cases, however, the emphasis falls upon the penalty of execution rather than the means, and it may be that Zechariah has drawn upon the piercing language of 12:10 (using the same verb *dāqar*) to make a comparison between the sinful piercing of God and his king that results in cleansing, and then the cleansing that will come through the sinful (prophets) being pierced. Another possibility is that there is an echo of Phinehas’s action in Num. 25:7–8, when he pierces (same verb *dāqar*) the Israelite and Midianite woman who blatantly sleep with one another in the camp.

While the penalty sounds severe, the force of the promise in v. 3 that the parents of the false prophet will pierce him through when he prophesies is well captured by McComiskey (1998: 1220): ‘Nothing will stand in the way of the complete elimination

of false prophecy—not even an emotion as strong as parental love.’ Three further points that indicate false prophecy and not prophecy in general is in view is that Zechariah himself is described as a prophet (1:1, 7), and it would be incongruous, to say the least, if he saw his ministry being removed along with idols and the unclean spirit so as to cleanse the land.

Secondly, those who argue that it is talking about the demise of prophecy in the fifth century BC fail to recognize that it is not speaking about contemporary events, but what will happen ‘on that day’. Finally, the translators of the LXX understood it to refer to false prophets (see ‘Notes on the text’).¹

‘the prophets’: LXX is ‘the false prophets’ (*tous pseudo-prophētas*). So too, Targum and Syriac.²

What about these wounds?

Some have argued that the ‘wounds between your hands’ (v. 6) are a reference to the suffering Messiah (Pusey 1907: 325; Samaan 1989: 118). However, the idiom ‘between the hands’ elsewhere seems to refer to the upper torso (i.e. the part of the body that joins the hands or ‘arms’). In 2 Kgs 9:24, an arrow is shot into this part of the body and pierces the heart. Merrill (1994: 332) also cites a parallel in the Ugaritic Ba‘al epic that supports this. Calvin (1986: 393) states in characteristic style, ‘Some apply this to Christ, because Zechariah has mentioned wounds on the hands; but this is very puerile; for it is quite evident that he speaks here of false teachers, who had for a time falsely pretended God’s

1 Anthony R. Petterson, [Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 274–275.

2 Anthony R. Petterson, [Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 270.

name.’

The wounds their body bore as a result of false prophetic activity (cf. Deut. 14:1; 1 Kgs 18:28; Jer. 16:6) is explained in another way: ‘I was struck in the house of the ones who love me’ (v. 6).³

The exact meaning of this statement is difficult to determine. It has been understood as the discipline of parents (Keil 1949: 395), the result of drunken brawling or as an accident with friends (Ackroyd 1963: 654). Any of these are possible explanations. Another suggestion is that the ‘lovers’ are illicit (cf. Hos. 2:5, 7, 10, 12–13; Ezek. 16:33, 36–37; 23:5, 9, 22), and that it refers to pursuing foreign gods or idols as lovers (Conrad 1999: 188). Yet it is difficult to understand how this would function as an excuse. As Meyers and Meyers (1993: 383) state, ‘it would make no sense to have a person disclaiming the role of false prophet to be admitting to another unacceptable activity’.⁴

3 Anthony R. Petterson, [Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 275.

4 Anthony R. Petterson, [Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 275.