

False Prophet

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

From the start, Judaism has been plagued by false prophets. From within and without. Every major Biblical prophet had enemies and opponents, some of whom claimed to be speaking in the name of God. And amongst the non-Jews there have been an endless stream of men including Zoroaster, Jesus and Mohammad who claimed that their gods told them that they had brought news of a new deal that over rode the one God made with us at Sinai. The Torah is quite specific. No matter what signs, miracles or arguments. If the person is saying that we no longer have to keep our covenant with God on Sinai, we must not listen. They are false prophets.

What was the role of the Prophet? It was to convince people to behave in a good and spiritual way. It is true that some of them, particularly in the early days, performed miracles. But Moses is known for his words not the miracles. Besides all the miracles never seemed to have had a long-term effect.

This week we have the law of the false prophet. If someone calling himself a prophet comes and performs miracles and the aim of these miracles is to get us to abandon our religion and our people, we must not listen to him. This is a test of our faith. Very strange. Miracles do not mean anything unless the message is the right one.

What then was the point of the miracles in the bible? There is a difference between God's miracles and those of humans. Human beings are adept at illusion and delusion, tricks that seem like miracles but are not. But people who do not know the tricks can easily be fooled. It is true some people are so insecure they need miracles. But really it is the message that counts.

We do not think people are great because they play tricks or make predictions that may or may not come true. We do not idolize or sanctify. That is why none of the primary figures of other religions impress us. Moses was and is great because of the Torah and it is the Torah that defines us. False prophets pretend to be what they are not. We must beware, even of those who seem outwardly to be religious. As the Torah tells, we need to look beneath the surface.