

OUR GOD IS A TESTING GOD!

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

Tal Brooke is the editor of the SCP Journal, a publication of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, which is dedicated to analyzing and discerning the inner workings of new spiritual trends. Their latest project was analyzing the whole New Age philosophy. In the current issue Brooke wrote a very insightful article, entitled "Preparing for the Cosmic Millennium and the Coming Global Church," (1) on an event I mentioned in the first message in this series. (2) This event was a celebration at Grace Cathedral on June 26, 1995, held in conjunction with the fiftieth birthday of the United Nations. Behind this celebration was the hope of many of the world's political and spiritual leaders that these events would open the doors to one world government and religion all headed up by what they called "the Cosmic Christ."

In his article Brooke gave a little more background: "The Planetary Mass at San Francisco's immense Grace Cathedral claimed to be an early preview and invocation of the coming global millennium due to intersect history at the year 2000 earth-time. This sacrament, the Planetary Mass, was seen as a pinpoint of light that would help catalyze the earth's ignition of consciousness. Similar devotionals would fuse to form a spiritual sunburst, inaugurating the long awaited New Age."

Behind the scenes was Matthew Fox, "the renegade New Age Catholic priest who was silenced and recently excommunicated by the Church of Rome." (3) In his book *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Fox made these statements about Jesus Christ: (a) "The Cosmic Christ is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ (but by no means is limited to that person)." (b) "Divinity is found in all creatures. The divine name from Exod. 3:14, 'I Am who I Am,' is appropriated by Jesus who shows us how to embrace our own divinity. The Cosmic Christ is the 'I am' in every creature." (c) "There is a real sense in which the Cosmic Christ is not born yet. Even in Jesus the Cosmic Christ has yet to come to full birth, for those who say they believe in Jesus have scarcely brought forth the Cosmic Christ at all on the mass scale that Mother Earth requires." (4) The reason Fox and his New Age followers would say these things about Jesus is that they believe he is only one of the many expressions of God, and only when all the world religions come together will the world finally bring forth "the Cosmic Christ" in all his wisdom. Fox believes that there is a need to shift from the quest for the historical Jesus to the quest for the Cosmic Christ. "This shift requires making mysticism central to our faith once again. What the human race needs today is mystical solidarity." (5)

Talk about a modern false prophet! I was intrigued that his name is Matthew ("A gift of Jehovah") Fox. The Lord God told his prophet Ezekiel to speak out against the false prophets of Israel in his day (13:2-4): "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! Your prophets, O Israel, are like jackals [foxes] among ruins.'"

On the subject of false prophets, I was reminded once again of our loving and awesome heavenly Father as he sought to warn Israel about the many false prophets who would come into the camp to lead his people astray. This same care was demonstrated by his precious Son Jesus in relationship to his disciples in the church. As the earthly ministry of Jesus was drawing to a close, he gathered his disciples together on the Mount of Olives and spoke of the end times. One of the statements he made to them is very relevant to our study today: "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect---if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time" (Matthew 24:23-24). Whenever you have a true prophet, the false prophets are not far behind.

In Deuteronomy 12:1-30:20 Moses began his third and final message to the second generation of Israelites after the Exodus, as they stood on the eastern shore of the Jordan River and looked westward into the promised land of Canaan in 1401 BC. He had just finished telling them about the laws of God concerning the proper place and form of the worship they should perform in the presence of Elohim. He had also warned them about the gods and perverted worship ceremonies of the Canaanites, which were an abomination in the sight of God (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 18:9-13).

In Deuteronomy 13:1-5 Moses warns God's people about the false prophets who will come in among them. At the same time he tells them how to discern between that which is true and that which is counterfeit.

Our God is a testing God! In that light, therefore...

Beware of false prophets

Deuteronomy 13:1-3a:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer.

We are to first check out the character of the messenger. Remember, in this context the Jews did not have the written word of God. So God would speak to his prophets directly as he did to Moses at the burning bush and on Mount Sinai. At other times he would speak to his prophets through dreams as he did to Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. God stated to Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12:6),

"When a prophet of the Lord is among you,
I reveal myself to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams."

Thus a prophet who had godly dreams was called a dreamer.

A prophet in that culture was a person on whom the Spirit of God rested and through whom God spoke his mind and counsel to both believers and unbelievers (see Numbers 11:17-29). Moses was a prophet and the symbol of the Prophet to come whose name would be Jesus: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18).

There were prophets outside of Israel like the false prophet Balaam of Moab (see Numbers 22-24) as well as within the nation, like Moses. The test of a true prophet is found in Deuteronomy 18:22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken."

A false prophetic of our time is Barbara Marx Hubbard, who inherited the Marx Toy fortune. According to Brooks Alexander of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project in an article about Hubbard entitled "Last Exit before Judgment," in her book *The Revelation* she says that "classical Christianity and its believers are unfit to enter the New Age, and that both will therefore have to be extinguished before the New Age can properly begin.⁶ Alexander continues, "...She serves up a high-octane mixture of evolutionary mysticism and her own 'inner voice' of revelation that claims to come from 'Christ' Himself." (7)

In addition to checking out the character of the messengers that roam our society and the Christian churches, we are to check out the source of power behind miracles. God warned Moses forty years earlier about the magicians of Egypt and how they could perform some of the same signs that Moses could. Exodus 7:8-13: "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, "Perform a miracle," then say to Aaron, "Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh," and it will become a snake.' So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his

officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said."

Signs and wonders in the Jewish context denote a miraculous or divine token of some future event---something extraordinary. The rainbow was a sign to Noah that the world would not experience another flood. At the same time, when a prophet like Elijah or Elisha was involved in giving signs and wonders, it was proof of the divine Presence. All of Jesus' thirty-four recorded miracles were signs that he was the Messiah (see John 20:30-31). But a miracle in itself is not sufficient to identify a true prophet.

The precious Son Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves...Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:15, 21-23.) "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect---if that were possible." (Matthew 24:24.)

A nobleman came to Jesus one day and asked him to heal his son who was dying. The Master responded, "Unless you people see signs and wonders you simply will not believe" (John 4:48). The cover of the April 10, 1995 issue of Time Magazine read, "Can We Still Believe In Miracles?" When Time asked in a recent poll whether people believe in miracles, 69% said yes. (8) The fastest-growing churches in America are the charismatic and pentecostal congregations whose worship revolves around "signs and wonders." (9) But just as a miracle is not sufficient in itself to identify a true prophet, neither is it always sufficient to produce believing faith in Jesus as the Son of God, now risen and King of kings.

Finally, we are to check out the content of the message: "And if...he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer." Back to the bottom line: God, like a husband who has taken a wife, made a covenant with Abraham; it was like a marriage between God and Israel. And now the tempter has come along to seduce Israel away from her husband. She was tempted as a nation to commit spiritual adultery. There were many prophets outside the nation of Israel as well as within the nation of Israel. Some were true prophets and some were false. Years earlier Moses had encountered the famous but false prophet named Balaam of Midian and his talking donkey. King Balak of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel. But each time he tried, God caused him to speak blessings, and magnificent blessings, even the coming of "a star rising out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17; see also Jude 1:11). But eventually he sought to lead Israel into sexual immorality with the women of Midian and was later slain in battle (see Numbers 22-31). God would judge the false prophets outside the land, and he gave the Israelites permission to judge the false prophets among themselves.

The precious Son Jesus one day said to the false prophets of his time, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

The apostle Paul wrote to his beloved Corinthians some fifteen hundred years after Moses' time and warned them about false prophets with false messages filled with God-words: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4). And then he went on to show them the source of this deception: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve" (2 Corinthians 11:13-20). The content of their message is directed by the "angel of light," the master counterfeiter.

The late mystic Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) is held up by the New Age community as the father of the rising spiritual and political globalism. In his book *Christianity and Evolution* he states, "After what will soon be two thousand years, Christ must be born again, he must be reincarnated in a world that has become too different from that in which he lived." He also states in another book, *How I believe*, "...I can be saved only by becoming one with the universe." (10) He was exactly the kind of false prophet whose words we are not to listen to.

We are to check out the character of the messengers that roam our society and the Christian churches, the source of power behind the miracles, and the content of the messages. The best way to do that is to...

Examine your own heart

Deuteronomy 13:3b-4:

The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.

P. C. Craigie writes, "The words emphasize God's sovereignty and permission. The temptation would test the true disposition of the hearts of the Israelites, and while the temptation was genuinely dangerous, the overcoming of that temptation would strengthen the people in their love of God and obedience to his commandments. The sovereignty of God is also seen in another manner: The performance of a sign or wonder did not mean that the gods advocated by a false prophet or dreamer had any real power, but only that the true God would permit certain things to happen in order to test and thereby strengthen his people. Moses then stresses once again God's basic requirements of his people." (11)

In Job 1:7-8 God initiated a conversation with Satan in which he gave that angel of light permission to test his servant Job, who was "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." When God appeared on Mount Sinai in the midst of the thunder and lightning, the people were terrified. Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (Exodus 20:20). The prophet Isaiah spoke to a sinning Israel on behalf of God (48:10),

"Behold I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

We are encouraged by the apostle Paul to test ourselves at times: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5) Peter told the suffering Christians of Turkey, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...." (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The precious Son Jesus, who was tempted to worship Satan, responded with the words from Deuteronomy 6:13: "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" He is the same Lord who said to Peter and the other disciples just before his trial and death on the cross of Calvary, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brother" (Luke 22:31-32).

"It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him." Herein are six steps of sincere love for the Lord: (1) "It is the Lord your God you must follow...." Moses is saying, "Your parents were so tempted to follow the gods of Egypt, and this was quickly seen when they arrived in the wilderness and built a golden calf to worship. You as their sons and daughters will also be tempted to follow after the nongods of Canaan who will promise you life, but in the end faith in them will produce death. There is only one living God, and you must by the power of the Holy Spirit within you make a choice to follow him when you come into the promised land."

(2) "...Him you must revere." Moses continues, "For it is Elohim-Yahweh who loved your fathers and who loves you. It is he who rescued you from the slavery of Egypt, and guided, protected, and provided for you in the wilderness. That same God who is your personal God will be with you in the land of Canaan. So show him honor, respect, and reverence out of a heart of love and appreciation."

(3) And with this same heart and the power of the Holy Spirit, "Keep his commands...." Moses says, "for they are for your good and not your evil. They are not a burden, but they are 'holy, righteous and good' [Romans 7:12]. They are not given to restrict your life but to save your life as you live in a fallen world and society."

(4) "...Obey him...." Moses is saying, "Develop a heart that wants to shâma', a heart that is willing not only to listen to him but to obey what you hear."

(5) "Once you have a heart to obey him," Moses continues, "show it by being willing to '...serve him....' in acts of righteousness, especially toward the fatherless, widows, and resident aliens."

(6) "And finally," Moses says, "in the midst of this great temptation to follow after other gods, remember how Elohim-Yahweh has committed himself to you the way a husband holds fast to a wife. So you as the wife '...hold fast to him' in the midst of the temptation to take another husband (other gods)." Hebrews 13:8-9 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings."

The precious Son Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:9-12).

We are to check out the character of the messengers that roam our society and the Christian churches, the source of power behind the miracles, and the content of their messages. The best way to do that is to test our own hearts to see if we are sincerely in love with Jesus Christ, the beloved and now risen Son of God. Now---

About those false prophets

Deuteronomy 13:5:

That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

God will later speak to the issue of false prophets to the people of Israel: "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). Keep in mind that Israel was what we call a theocratic nation--they were governed directly by God himself. All false prophets had to appear before the elders of Israel, and their death sentence was handed down by the spiritual leaders of God's people (never by private individuals).

The first charge against them is that they "...preached rebellion against the Lord your God...." This is what the parents of this people did when they refused to follow the advice of Joshua and Caleb and wanted to be led back to Egypt (see Numbers 14). Moses is speaking here of false prophets who want Israel to follow after other gods, or in terms of marriage, to commit adultery and run away from her faithful Husband with her new lover. "But," he says, "your Husband is the one who freed you from your enslavement in Egypt. And now you are being tempted to go back into that enslavement in the kingdom of darkness and develop a spiritual relationship with Satan himself!"

The second charge reveals the more hurtful offense: They try to turn them away from their first love, Elohim-Yahweh, the one and only living God who made a loving covenant with Abraham and his seed. Paul later told the elders of the church in Ephesus: "Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock...I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

"You must purge the evil from among you," Moses concludes, "so that as a community you can stay in love with the one and only living God." Paul encouraged the Corinthians to turn over to Satan the man who was sleeping with his father's wife (see 1 Corinthians 5). Peter told the same Christians (1 Peter 1:14-16), "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

How many cults, New Age seminars, books, and retreats have we been tempted to attend, read, or participate in, respectively? How many psychics have we become curious about to the point of finding ourselves calling or visiting them on a regular basis? How tempted are we to try to discover the secret of their power, to be included in possessing their secret wisdom and knowledge? How tempted are we to become a member of their secret societies and their inner circle, acquiring power and rank among their disciples? And all along we proclaim ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, the only living Son of God. We must know this, that in the midst of these temptations the Lord God is testing us to see if we love him with our whole heart.

Our God is a testing God, and one of the ways he tests our love for him is to allow false prophets to come among us. This has been true since Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden and they fell into sin. And temptations from the evil one will continue until the second coming of Jesus Christ. So false prophets like Teilhard de Chardin, Matthew Fox, and Barbara Marx Hubbard, not to mention Robert Muller, who is one of the chief false prophets of our times, Alice A. Bailey, and M. Scott Peck, are all followers of the "angel of light" and have the spirit of antichrist. They will come among us with exciting new visions as well as signs and wonders. Many of us will be tempted to follow after them because they use so many good-sounding God-words like "Jesus," "gospel," and "Holy Spirit." And many of these false prophets of the New Age will ask us to join them so that by the year 2000 we can help bring the political and spiritual forces together to be led by the wisdom of the "Cosmic Christ."

In light of that spiritual reality, what has God called us as his disciples to do about those false prophets? Our personal responsibility as we trust the Holy Spirit in our lives is to check out the character of the messenger, check out the source of the power behind the signs and wonders, and check out the content of the message. We need to examine our own hearts. And when false prophets come into our community, we must realize that our Lord God is testing us to see if we love him with our whole being. If we do love him, then he will find us in the midst of the test following him with respect and awe, walking in his commandments, listening to his voice, serving him with a worshipful heart, and clinging to him as a wife holds fast to her beloved husband. As for the false prophets and all they believe in, "purge the evil from among you." For "the Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Notes:

1. *SCP Journal*, Volume 19: February 3, 1995, pp. 4ff.
2. There Is Only One Living God, Discovery Paper 4447. The event was covered in the San Francisco Chronicle under the headline "Religions of World Celebrate with Prayers to Dozen Deities."
3. Brooke, p. 4.
4. All three quotes from "Matthew Fox on the Cosmic Christ," *SCP Journal*, 19: February 3, 1995, p. 26.
6. *SCP Journal*, Volume 19: February 3, 1995, p. 3.
7. *Ibid.*

8. Nancy Gibbs, "The Message of Miracles," April 10, 1995, p. 64.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Quoted by Tal Brooke, "Preparing for the Cosmic Millennium and the Coming Global Church," p. 10.
 11. P.C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (The New International Commentary of the Old Testament Series).
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Catalog No. 4452
Deuteronomy 13:1-5
Sixth Message
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August 20, 1995

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