

CHAPTER FOUR

HEADING THE WRONG DIRECTION

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- Write the Key Verse from memory.
- Identify non-Biblical methods of seeking guidance.
- Distinguish between false and true prophets of God.
- Define the word "emulations."

KEY VERSE:

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

INTRODUCTION

It is just as important to know how not to do something as it is to know how to do it.

A great inventor in the United States named Thomas Edison conducted over 1,000 experiments which failed before he perfected the light bulb. When asked if he regretted all that wasted time, he said "No. I discovered over 1,000 ways NOT to do it." In the future, he did not have to waste time using methods which did not work.

In the Bible God warns of ways you should NOT seek guidance for your life. If you heed these warnings, you will not waste time with non-Biblical methods of guidance of which God does not approve. This will prevent you from making bad decisions and heading the wrong direction in life.

In other chapters you will learn how God revealed His will in the past and how He speaks to men in present times. But first, we must eliminate the negatives. These are the ways you should NOT seek guidance.

THE OCCULT

There are numerous Satanic practices grouped under the heading of the occult. Many of these practices are used to determine guidance. Occult practices vary from nation to nation but they include such methods as witches, shamen, sorcerers, magicians, fortune tellers, astrology, horoscopes, the reading of tea leaves, crystals, cards, and the palm of the hand. Occult

practices include any form of supernatural involvement which is not of God. Such practices are motivated by Satan.

God warned His people not to deal with occult practices. You can read these warnings in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and Exodus 22:18.

Witchcraft is the practice of witches including white and black magic, sorcery, astrology, voodoo, use of potions, spells, enchantments, and drugs. It includes all similar Satanic practices and worship. Witchcraft and other such Satanic practices are spiritual rebellion against God:

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. . . (I Samuel 15:23)

The Bible records that sorcerers tried to turn people away from the Gospel:

But Elymas the sorcerer . . . withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. (Acts 13:8)

Witchcraft deceives people:

. . . for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. (Revelation 18:23)

Sorcerers will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven:

For without are. . . sorcerers. . . (Revelation 22:15)

The book of Revelation reveals the end of those who use such Satanic practices:

But. . . sorcerers. . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. . . (Revelation 21:8)

No true child of God should be involved in any way with occult practices for purposes of guidance or any other reason.

METHODS OF CHANCE

Casting lots was one method of seeking guidance used in the Old Testament. You can read about the use of this method in Leviticus 16:7-10; Numbers 26:55; 27:21; and Joshua 18:10.

The casting of lots was a method of chance. The belief was that God controlled the outcome of the lot which was cast. Casting of lots was similar to the rolling of dice or flipping of a coin today.

This method of seeking guidance from God was acceptable in the Old Testament. The only New

Testament use of casting of lots by believers was prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles of Jesus were seeking to fill the vacancy left by Judas who had betrayed Jesus and later committed suicide. Two candidates were nominated for the position:

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:26)

Matthias, the man picked to replace Judas, is never again mentioned in the New Testament record. It is the Apostle Paul who actually fills the vacancy among the Apostles. Matthias was man's choice by casting lots. The Apostle Paul was God's choice by the Holy Spirit.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit (recorded in Acts chapter 2) casting of lots was not used by believers as a means of determining direction. The guidance of the Holy Spirit replaced this Old Testament method. You should not use any method of chance to determine God's will. You must know God's voice and be led by the Holy Spirit.

FLEECES

There is one Old Testament record of the use of something called a "fleece" to determine God's will. You can read the story of Gideon's fleece in Judges 6:36-40.

God spoke to Gideon and revealed His will. To confirm what God said, Gideon put out a fleece of skin on the ground. One day he asked God to let the dew fall all around but not on the fleece. On another day He asked God for dew on the fleece and for the surrounding ground to remain dry.

There is no verse in the Bible that instructs believers to do as Gideon did during this terrible national crisis when great responsibility rested upon him. This event occurred only once in the Bible and, as casting of lots, was used only before the New Testament outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We are not to seek God's will by putting out a fleece. Modern putting out of a fleece is usually done by saying, "If a certain thing happens, then I will know it is God's will"--but our fleeces are often things that could occur naturally.

In the one case of a "fleece" recorded in the Bible, Gideon already knew God's will. He had heard the voice of God. The fleece was used as confirmation, not for direction. It was also something that could be answered only by supernatural means.

In New Testament days when Zacharias asked for a sign to confirm God's message about the birth of John the Baptism, he was stricken dumb. This was because he did not believe the voice of God and sought a sign (Luke 1:18-20).

Jesus said that "an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Matthew 12:39). A fleece can be a sign of unbelief or unwillingness to do God's revealed will. Fleeces which can be answered through natural means can be deceptive and misleading.

On occasion, God has graciously answered those who have asked for some indication of what they should do by a fleece or sign. This practice, however, has been the exception rather than the rule for seeking guidance in the lives of great saints of God. Remember. . . God wants men of faith, not of fleeces. He wants men and women who know His voice when He speaks and have no need to test it by confirming signs.

FALSE PROPHETS

The Bible records the stories of many prophets of God. It reveals that God sets leaders in the church known as prophets, and explains the spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit known as prophecy (Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:10).

To "prophecy" is to speak under the special inspiration of God. It is a special ability to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to His people through a divinely-anointed utterance. The words spoken by a prophet under divine inspiration are called prophecies. To prophesy means to declare openly words from God that exhort, edify, and comfort:

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation, and comfort. (I Corinthians 14:3)

Prophecy never replaces the written Word of God. The Bible says prophecy will cease, but the Word of God abides forever (I Corinthians 13:8 and I Peter 1:25).

In the Old Testament people went to prophets for guidance because the gift of the Holy Spirit infilling was not yet given. It is no longer necessary to go to a prophet to receive spiritual guidance. This is one of the functions of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Each believer should learn to be led by God's Spirit.

The New Testament gives no record of believers seeking guidance from prophets after the gift of the Holy Spirit was given, but God still uses this gift to confirm the future. You can study such an example in Acts 21:1-14. Agabus gave Paul a personal prophecy, in that it was given specifically to Paul.

Paul already knew what awaited him in Jerusalem. The prophecy only confirmed what would happen there. It was not a prophecy of guidance telling Paul whether or not to go to Jerusalem.

The Bible warns of false prophets in the world (Matthew 24:11, 24: Mark 13:22). Because of this, God has provided ways to identify true prophecies. The Bible states:

**Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.
(Romans 12:6)**

The phrase "in proportion to faith" means in right relation to the faith. The way to recognize true prophecies is by whether or not they are in harmony with the Bible. The Bible states:

**Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the other judge.
(I Corinthians 14:29)**

We are told to judge prophecies. The standard for judgment is the Word of God.

God has provided many ways to recognize false prophets. False prophets are known because what they speak does not come to pass:

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?

**When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.
(Deuteronomy 18:20-22)**

Study the following references in your Bible which explain other ways to recognize false prophets:

-False prophets do not confess the deity of Jesus Christ: I John 4:1-3

-False prophets teach false doctrine: II Peter 2:1-3

-False prophets lead people away from obedience to God's Word: Deuteronomy 13:1-5

-False prophets deceive people with miraculous signs: Matthew 24:11-24

-False prophets make false claims: Matthew 24:23-24

-Their fruit reveals their error: One of the best ways to distinguish false prophets from true prophets is to observe their lives. The Bible says that by their "fruits"

you will know them. False prophets do not have evidence of spiritual fruit in their lives: Matthew 7:16

Because there are false prophets in the world, you must exercise caution in accepting prophecies. Prophecy often has been misused to direct and control believers. When personal prophecy is given it should be examined in relation to the Scriptures and it should agree with the written Word of God. In regards to guidance, prophecy should be confirming, not directing or controlling.

Because of misuse of this spiritual gift some believers reject it totally. They will not accept the miraculous gift of prophetic utterance. But you should not reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit because you witness a few carnal examples in a human vessel.

WRONG COUNSEL

No man can determine God's will for someone else except in matters specifically revealed in the Bible. For example, we know it is God's will that all men come to repentance, for this is taught in Scripture.

Spiritual counseling by Godly leaders has a definite place in the guidance of a believer, but no counselor has the right to control another person or determine God's will for him in matters not dealt with in the Scriptures.

When the Apostle Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem, his friends at Caesarea tried to prevent him from doing so. They warned of the serious trouble which might befall him there. When Paul rejected their counsel and went on to Jerusalem, they accepted his decision stating:

The will of the Lord be done. (Acts 21:14)

They realized that even though it was their personal desire that he should not go, Paul must determine God's will for himself.

It is important that you come to know God's voice for yourself. You cannot trust others to guide your life because there are evil spirits in the world whose intent is to deceive. We are warned:

**Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.
(I John 4:1)**

When you receive counsel from another person, that guidance should be tested against other methods of determining God's will which will be detailed in a later chapter of this study.

EMULATIONS

Emulation is listed as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. The works of the flesh are various sinful conducts which are not pleasing to God.

Emulation is the desire to copy others and to equal or excel them. It stems from a spirit of rivalry and is a form of jealousy. Some believers emulate the successful ministries of others instead of seeking God's plan for their own lives. No two believers have the same work to do. The Holy Spirit calls people into specific ministries:

**As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.
(Acts 13:2)**

The Bible states that believers have differing spiritual gifts:

There are diversities of gifts..but all these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. (I Corinthians 12:4,11)

Although we are told to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (I Corinthians 12:31) and to "desire spiritual gifts" (I Corinthians 14:1), it does not mean we are to imitate others who have significant ministries. When Peter was concerned about John's ministry, Jesus said:

What is that to thee? Follow thou me. (John 21:22)

God gave Noah the plan for an ark. He gave Moses the plan for the tabernacle. He gave Solomon the plan for a great temple of worship. Nehemiah was given the plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. God has not told you to build an ark, construct the temple, or build walls around the city of Jerusalem. But God has a special plan for you! If you fall into the sin of emulations and imitate others, you will miss His plan.

When you pattern your life after the lives of others, you become engulfed by human tradition-- and human tradition conceals divine revelation.

SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verse from memory.

2. What does the word "emulations" mean?

3. Read the statements below. If the statement is TRUE put the letter T in the blank provided in front of it. If the statement is FALSE write the letter F in the blank in front of it:

- a. _____ The Bible teaches it is acceptable to seek guidance through occult practices.
- b. _____ If you cannot get guidance for yourself from God, it is safe to depend on other people to guide your life.
- c. _____ You should always accept what a prophet says to you as truth and God's will for your life.
- d. _____ Human tradition conceals divine revelation.
- e. _____ "Casting of lots" and other methods of chance are good ways to determine God's will.
- f. _____ The Bible teaches putting out a fleece is one sure way to determine God's will.
- g. _____ One of the best ways to distinguish false from true prophets is to observe their conduct.
- h. _____ True prophecy always agrees with the written Word of God.
- i. _____ Personal prophecy should be for confirmation only, not direction or guidance.

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Bible records the stories of great men of God who headed the wrong direction because they did not listen to the voice of God. Read and summarize what you learn about. . .

King Saul who went to a witch for guidance: I Samuel 28.

Manasseh who consulted sorcerer: II Chronicles 33:16.

An unnamed man of God who listened to a man who claimed to be a prophet instead of obeying what God told him to do: I Kings 13.

Balaam who listened to wrong counsel of man: Numbers 22.
