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## School Time with Kris Vallotton Training for the Role of a Modern-Day Prophet

by M. Kurt Goedelman

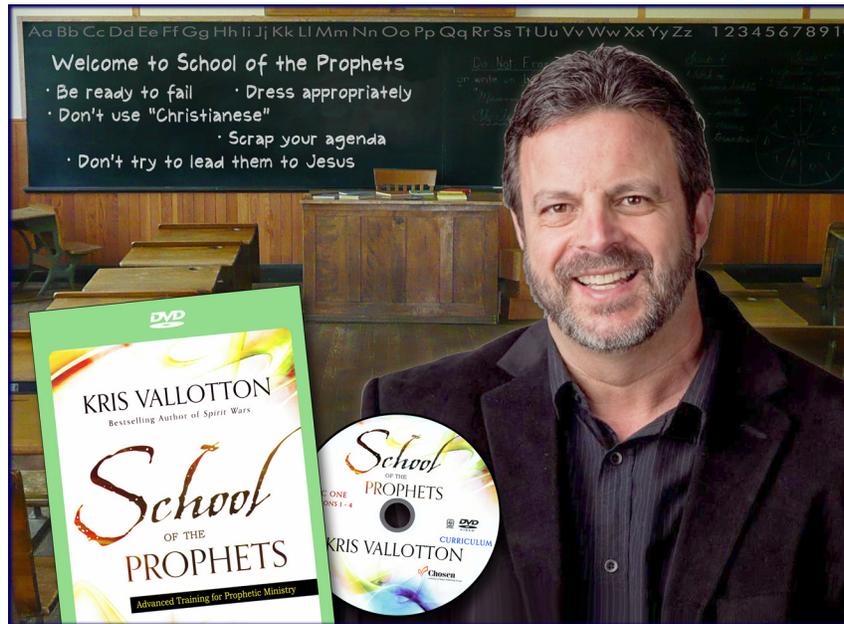
People attend schools, colleges, and universities to be educated and to gain skill and training for nearly all of life's callings. And in many cases, those chosen vocations require investing of a great amount of time and expense — be it doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, and even pastors. However, most people would think it a bit odd for one to have to go to school in order to learn how to be a prophet. Yet "advanced training for prophetic ministry" is exactly what's being promoted by some within the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement. While those within this assembly would probably never say they are pursuing a bachelor's (BA), master's (MA), or even a doctoral (PhD) degree in prophecy, the implications of developing and training prophets to prepare the way for their

modern-day apostle counterparts, in order to establish the Lord's Church, are not only abnormal, but unbiblical.

The NAR movement is a coterie of self-proclaimed apostles and prophets who no longer find themselves on the fringes of Christianity, but have gained a significant measure of prominence and influence across a wide spectrum of not only charismatic and Pentecostal churches, but mainline and evangelical ones as well.<sup>1</sup>

While the NAR is not a coordinated and unified body under the direction of a single organizer, it does have its advocates that are notably conspicuous in promoting the doctrines and practices

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# Editorials

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## GENEALOGIES, GRAVES, AND THE GROTESQUE

The Apostle Paul, in writing to his protégé, Timothy, told the young pastor that he should teach those under his care not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:4).

Tracking one’s genealogy has become all the rage in the twenty-first century. But where genealogies go off the rails can be clearly seen in Scripture. If genealogies are viewed as a gateway to some kind of spiritual privilege, the pursuit becomes obviously wrong. Elitism divides. Some Jewish legalists of Jesus’ day reveled in the fact that Abraham was their ancestor (John 8:39), which in their thinking afforded them added spirituality and spiritual superiority. A connection to Abraham may have been seen as a way to exert power over others. Privilege, pride, and pomposity were wrong and sordid. Genealogical attachment to someone important provided imaginary superiority from Jesus’ time to the present day.

Yet, the search for our ancestors in and of itself is a neutral exercise. So what was the Apostle Paul referring to when he cast a totally negative light on genealogies? Looking again at Paul’s words, “nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith,” we see that the genealogies addressed by Paul were endless fables. Likewise, Paul instructed Titus, “But avoid foolish

disputes, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless” (Titus 3:9).

Why would Paul come down so hard on genealogies? What is wrong with searching into our ancestral heritage? The problem is easily solved when we realize that Paul was not talking about simply looking into one’s ancestry as many are doing currently. Paul was addressing an evil that was creeping into the Church. Linguist W.E. Vine explains that, “Amongst the Greeks, as well as other nations, mythological stories gathered round the birth and ‘genealogy’ of their heroes. Probably Jewish ‘genealogical’ tales crept into Christian communities. Hence the warnings to Timothy and Titus” (*Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, pg. 262).

Real factual genealogies were both good and important in Bible times. Godly lines could be traced and established. Priestly lines could be proven. After all, the lineage of the Messiah was traced through genealogies (see Matthew 1 and Luke 3:23-38).

In the early 1990s genealogical connections took a bizarre mystical turn. There began to be claims of spiritual attachment and spiritual lineage to long dead preachers of past eras. Depending on who you asked, those specially anointed preachers and teachers were said to be John Knox, Smith Wigglesworth, Alexander Dowie, John G. Lake, Kathryn Kuhlman, Charles Finney, Aimee

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## ROUGH WATERS AT WILLOW CREEK

The past year has been tough for Willow Creek Community Church and its leader Bill Hybels. In the fall of 2017, the senior pastor of the Chicago-area megachurch announced his plans to retire and named his successors. The transition was to occur in the fall of 2018. But six months into the transition process, after it was revealed by the *Chicago Tribune* that a group of former pastors and staff members had accused Hybels of sexual misconduct and harassment, he abruptly resigned. Two weeks before resigning, Hybels told cheering Willow Creek members, “I will do my level best if you allow me to continue to serve here until October when I will retire. I’m going to serve my heart out.” While Hybels was cleared in the investigation, he said that the proceedings had taken their toll on him and he stepped down as pastor.

According to the *Christian Post*, “Hybels staunchly maintained his innocence, calling some of the allegations ‘misleading’ and others ‘entirely false,’ but said he has been ‘sobered’ by the accusations. He admitted to being sometimes naïve in his relations with others and noted some of his actions were misinterpreted.”

In a video posted on the church’s website, Hybels said, “The lies you read about in the Tribune article are the tools this group is using to try to keep me from ending my tenure here at Willow with my reputation intact. Let me be clear: None of these allegations are true.”

Last April, Heather Larson became lead pastor and Steve Carter assumed the role of lead teaching pastor. Their time in those positions lasted only a few months, as Larson admitted, “That plan fell apart.” In early August, Carter, Larson, and the church’s elder board announced their own resignations. Carter resigned Aug. 5, Larson on Aug. 8, and the members of the elder board said they would do so by the end of 2018. The group claimed that their resignations were the result of the way that the investigations of the allegations against Hybels had been mishandled.

According to a report in *Christianity Today*, “elder Missy Rasmussen said she and other church leaders had been blinded by their faith in their founding pastor and had failed to hold Hybels accountable. ‘We trusted Bill, and this clouded our judgment,’ she said.” The magazine further reported that, “Rasmussen also called on Hybels to repent of his actions. ‘We believe that [Hybels’s] sins were beyond what he previously admitted on stage, and certainly we believe that his actions with these women

were sinful,’ she said. ‘We believe he did not receive feedback as well as he gave it, and he resisted the accountability structures we all need.’”

The resignations of the pastors and elders came upon the heels of additional accusations being made against Hybels. One of those was from a former assistant to Hybels, who said that he had repeatedly groped her. “When the first allegations surfaced, the elders, Larson, and Carter all backed Hybels. The church labeled the allegations as lies being spread by disgruntled former church staffers. As more accusations surfaced, the church admitted Hybels had ‘entered into areas of sin.’ All told, 10 women have accused Willow Creek’s founder of misconduct,” *Christianity Today* reported.

Then, less than a week after Larson’s and Carter’s resignations, the *Chicago Tribune* dropped another bombshell, revealing, “Willow Creek Community Church agreed to pay more than \$3 million to settle lawsuits over the sexual abuse of two developmentally disabled boys by a church volunteer, court records show.” The newspaper disclosed that in 2017 the church paid \$1.5 million to a victim who had been abused by the former volunteer and that a second, larger, settlement of \$1.75 million was made to another victim in February 2018.

The newspaper said there was no evidence that Hybels had any connection to either of the two victims, but rather that church policy — which stated that there are to be at least two adult volunteers with any single child — was not followed. Additionally, the lawsuit stated, that in 2013, another church worker had raised concerns that the perpetrator was “emotionally unhealthy” and should be removed from serving, but that he remained with the program.

—MKG

## WATCHTOWER SILENCES SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS

As the outcry against the Roman Catholic Church mounts for the decades of sexual abuse at the hands of its priests, the Watchtower Society continues to receive only a minimal amount of exposure for the same. For all the enmity Jehovah’s Witnesses have expressed against Catholics, the sins of pedophile priests have allowed — to a certain extent — the Watchtower’s own pedophile leadership to remain in the shadows. Yet every now and then, the transgressions by Jehovah’s Witnesses are picked up by the news media.

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# MUSLIM DREAMS AND VISIONS

## Is Jesus Appearing to Muslims Across the World?

by Gary E. Gilley  
and Dennis McBride

In recent years the stories of Muslims responding to the Gospel, either directly or indirectly, as a result of dreams and visions have been abundant. In these dreams it is reported that Jesus (or Isa as the Muslims call Him) appears and then directs the individual to someone who will share the Gospel with them, or on some occasions Isa will preach the good news directly. The opening story in Rick Kronk's book, *Dreams and Visions, Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus*, is representative. We will quote it in part:

"While I napped, I began to dream, and then suddenly that dream was interrupted and I found myself surrounded by bright light and white clouds. Everything seemed so inviting and tranquil. Then I saw beams of light streaming past me from behind. I felt welcoming warmth upon my back from the light. I turned, and to my astonishment, I saw Jesus Christ looking with intense fondness at me. I not only saw Him, but I also felt in the warmth around Him, His deep love for me. Words could not describe this incredible love

and fondness that I felt He had for me. It was the most powerful sensation I had ever experienced. It was so powerful that it drained all the energy from my body."

"I wanted to run to Him, I was eager to get to Him, but the intensity of His love for me drained me of my energy, and I fell to the ground, still yearning to be with Him. As I lay on the ground, the huge but gentle hands of Christ swept me up and pulled me in to Him. I felt His embrace. I felt His deep love and longing to be with me. I enjoyed it thoroughly and never wanted to leave. The love of Christ is expressed in the crucifixion of Christ, but the love of Christ I now experienced in this dream was all encompassing."

"This enthralling embrace seemed to last for a time immeasurable. And as I looked back over His shoulder, there suddenly appeared a television screen. As I continued hugging Christ, I witnessed on the television screen pictures of everything I had been doing wrong. I saw the promiscuity and the

partying, and I felt the guilt all over again. But this time I could not deny it, nor did I want to deny it. Instead, I wanted to confess it and withdraw from Christ's love because of it. ..."

"Jesus refused to look at the television screen. Instead, He kept His gaze upon me and smiled in a very understanding way. He said to me in such a kind and gentle tone. 'Brett, don't you understand? I knew about those things, and that is why I died for you.' ... Then I understood. This is a God of grace! I threw my arms around Him and hugged Him again, and He smiled and enjoyed it as much as I did, perhaps even more."<sup>1</sup>

The man giving this testimony declares that his life was changed and he is now a pastor in Minnesota. Such stories could be multiplied by the hundreds, but we think this one fairly represents many others. A Muslim encounters Jesus in a dream or vision; they are overwhelmed with the love of Christ; they either claim to become followers of Him at the time of the dream or shortly thereafter; and in

many cases their lives are radically changed.

All who love the Lord are thrilled at the conversion of anyone, no matter what the means and most of us have witnessed Christ bringing people to Himself through the strangest of instruments including poor presentations of the Gospel, egotistic evangelists, manipulative circumstances, and the like. We are overjoyed to see our sovereign, all-wise Lord use even what appears to be inferior methods to bring people to saving grace. But results do not justify the use of unbiblical means or messages in the presentation of the Gospel. Nor do testimonies and stories determine truth.

As we approach this subject we praise the Lord for Muslims who are coming to Christ, but the issue that must be critiqued is whether the stories concerning dreams are valid. Of even greater significance is whether Scripture or experience carries final authority in our lives. Experiences are not only subjective and prone to misinterpretation, but they are also not valid in and of themselves. In support of this statement all we must do is note that nearly every false religion from Buddhism to spiritism and many prominent cults from Mormonism to the New Age movement all claim dreams, visions, and messages from some deity as foundational to their belief system. Each of these will offer abundant testimony of how divine encounters changed people's lives for the better. But, when examined in the light of Scripture, both the doctrines of these religions and cults and their experiences are proven invalid.

So how does one explain these stories that are all declared to be true, but many cannot be? Do we declare the dreamers of dreams delusional? Do we claim they are liars and deceivers? Surely not, for while some are deeply confused, and others are false witnesses, many others are sincere. This conundrum leaves many biblically based Christians scratching their heads. How do we explain all of these experiences? We believe the best approach is to realize that we are

neither called nor able to explain everyone's experience. We are called, however, to examine all things through the lens of Scripture. We will turn soon to the Bible to analyze the dream claims of Muslims, but first let's look closer at some of the support given for these modern occurrences.

## SUPPORT FOR MUSLIM DREAMS

The major enthusiasm for Muslim dream encounters with Isa (Jesus) is certainly pragmatism. After centuries of largely failed efforts to evangelize Muslims, suddenly many seem to be coming to Christ and a large percentage of these as a result of supposed visions of Jesus. Tom Doyle, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, has written a book that has been endorsed by the likes of Anne Graham Lotz, Charles Dyer, and Janet Parshall entitled, *Dreams and Visions, Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*

He is convinced that one-third of all Muslims come to Christ as a result of such dreams.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of how one views these dreams, students of Scripture and Church history have to admit that what is being asserted is unique. While the Bible details several dreams and visions and while some have claimed visions of or from the Lord since the closure of the canon (often leading to heretical theology, such as those within Roman Catholicism and the cults — which is a subject for another day), nothing like the proclaimed frequency of Muslim dreams has ever been observed in the past.

Scattered testimonies of visions and dreams are not uncommon, but to declare that the Lord has singled out the adherents of a world religion and blitzed them with visions of Himself in order to bring them to salvation is exceptional to say the least. This is not the paradigm found in Scripture, nor in post-biblical times. If the Lord is appearing to Muslims, as many believe, why is He doing so and why now? Doyle suggests a number of possibilities:

- Dreams are an accepted form of communication within the Muslim community. Indeed the Muslim reli-

gion was started by a dream to Muhammad.<sup>3</sup>

- Muslims have believed in the visits of jinn, or genies, for centuries, although they are considered the foot soldiers of Satan.<sup>4</sup>

- Much like the story cited at the beginning of this article, dreams are viewed as ways for the Lord to express His love and protection and to open hearts to the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

- It is like Jesus to reach out to the hated and despised of society as the Muslims are at this time.<sup>6</sup>

Rick Kronk goes to great lengths to attempt to prove that the Lord is accommodating the Eastern worldview of Islamic people. His argument is that because Allah is a distant and transcendent deity, the Muslim people are driven to invent intermediate quasi-divine beings who "give meaning to and answer the questions of the everyday routine of life. ... the Islamic faith becomes a natural breeding ground for intermediate, superstitious, and folk elements of which dreams and visions are primary."<sup>7</sup>

What does this mean for Christians, especially those who have a Western worldview? Kronk continues:

"[A Christian] cannot afford to ignore the unique pattern of folk Islam adopted by his Muslim friend. For unless the Christian can explain to his Muslim friend the person of Christ and His finished work on the cross from within the context of his particular folk Islamic worldview via the appropriate means, symbols, and language, the gospel may not be fully nor accurately understood and genuine opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel cannot be said to have occurred."<sup>8</sup>

To this Kronk adds:

"...the Western mind more readily accepts as true that which is repeatable and verifiable and mistrusts that which is not. The Muslim on the other hand, more readily accepts as true that which he can experience."<sup>9</sup>

What Kronk is proposing is that in order to reach Muslims for Christ, both communication and worldview gaps must be bridged, and dreams and visions bridge that gap far better than proclamation of the Gospel. For this reason, he suggests God has chosen at this time to reach out to Muslims via dreams of Isa (Jesus) rather than through the biblical proclamation that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Of course, one does not have to think too deeply to realize that this is pure conjecture based upon anecdotal accounts and apparent success and not on Scripture. Without biblical warrant it is a dangerous step to declare that God is doing something that He has never done before. And the danger of addressing people in accordance to their worldview, instead of challenging them by a biblical worldview, should be obvious.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

In examining any worldview or any experiential claims, including encounters with Jesus and supposed additional revelation, it is important that we start with the teachings of the Scriptures themselves. In regard to the present discussion there are two primary issues we should inspect: claims of visions and dreams of Jesus, and the matter of revelation apart from Scripture.

The biblical record reveals that the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, has always existed and on occasion has taken a physical form and appeared to people. In the Old Testament most Bible scholars believe that He often took on the pre-incarnate form of the Angel of the Lord. If so, from the time of the fall of mankind to the completion of the Old Testament, He appeared on a number of occasions stretched out over about 4,000 years.

The title “Angel of the Lord” itself is found 55 times, although unique appearances would be fewer because some of those mentioned are found in the same incidents. There are 19 unique appearances of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament era,

that would mean He appeared in His pre-incarnate form once every 211 years on average — not often. Of course, at the incarnation Jesus took on human form and for 33 years or more “tabernacled” among men (John 1:14). At His ascension He physically left the earth, promising to return at a future date. The question we need to address is, what can we expect in the meantime regarding His appearing to people today? Does the Bible answer this question or does it leave us guessing? We believe several texts make it clear that Jesus no longer appears to humans today. These include:

**1 John 1:1-3** — John opens his largest epistle, one written as much as 50 years after the ascension, by discussing the person and message of Christ. He writes:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Here John repeatedly states that he and others (note “we” in the text) have seen Jesus Christ. It is this same Christ whom he has seen and heard which is proclaimed to his audiences. His readers had obviously neither seen nor heard Jesus personally or through visions and so they needed to rely upon John’s testimony if they were to have fellowship with Him. Personal visits from Christ were unnecessary; the witness of the Apostle John through his epistle inspired by the Holy Spirit was enough.

**1 Peter 1:8** — Peter commends his readers by stating, Jesus Christ “whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet

believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” Peter, like John, had seen Jesus. As a matter of fact, in 2 Peter 1:16, Peter says that he, James, and John “were eyewitnesses of His majesty” at the Transfiguration. Peter would apparently have one more vision of Jesus in Acts 10:11-20. But the first century Christians to whom he was writing had not personally seen Jesus in the past or in the present, yet they loved Him and believed in Him. Peter did not urge his readers to seek personal encounters from Jesus. As with John’s audience (see above), Peter’s could love and believe in Him as a result of his Holy Spirit-inspired testimony.

**1 Corinthians 15:8** — In providing supporting evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul mentions a number of appearances that Jesus made after His resurrection, including those to Cephas (Peter), the apostles, five hundred brethren, James, and “last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” While Jesus’ other appearances happened prior to His ascension, He appeared to Stephen (Acts 7:55-56) and to Paul (Acts 9:1-6; 16:9) after His ascension. Paul says clearly that he was the last individual to have such an experience.

It should be mentioned that John would see Jesus, as recorded in the book of Revelation, after Paul saw Him. John, however, had seen Jesus on many occasions. But Paul was the last person to have had that privilege. There is no biblical evidence that anyone has seen Christ after the completion of the New Testament, nor does the New Testament predict such encounters prior to the return of Christ. As a matter of fact, Matthew 24:5, 23-24 warns that false christs will arise to deceive the world prior to the Second Coming. Add to this that the angels clearly indicated to the disciples at the ascension, that they were not to look for future visions of Jesus, but to watch for His return (Acts 1:11).

## CAUTIONS GIVEN

Not only is there no biblical evidence of Jesus appearing to any other

individuals after Paul and John, but the New Testament warns of the dangers and limits of seeking such experiences.

**Colossians 2:18-19a** — Rather than commending the Colossians for desiring visions and dreams, Paul cautions them of the dangers:

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head” (NASB).

These believers had put themselves in the position of losing rewards (being defrauded) and losing their focus on Christ because they were chasing after ascetic and mystical experiences. They were taking their stand on visions rather than on Christ and they were the losers for it.

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15** — Here Paul warns believers of satanic deception:

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

This description of Satan’s methods should be taken seriously by those looking to dreams and visions, rather than Scripture for their source of truth and knowledge. It is interesting that many of the Muslim dreams include a “being of light” who speaks to them and gives them feelings of warmth and love. It should come as a shock to no one that the devil will attempt to counterfeit every aspect of the person and work of Christ. Because someone has had an experience which they interpret as seeing Jesus does not mean that their interpretation is correct. They may very well be encountering a satanic counterfeit.

**Luke 16:27-31** — One of the arguments as to why the Lord would be

visiting Muslims in dreams and visions is that by this means He will persuade them of who He really is and of His message of redemption. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus disagrees. When the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus from paradise to his brothers, assuming that someone who had returned from the dead would be an outstanding witness, Abraham refuses and tells the rich man that they have Moses and the prophets that they could read. The rich man does not see the Old Testament Scriptures as that convincing so insists that Lazarus resurrect and evangelize his brothers. But Abraham retorts, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (16:31). The clear implication is that there is far more power in the Scriptures than in experiences, even supernatural ones, in opening people’s eyes to the truth of the Gospel. Later Paul concurs, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

## THE MATTER OF REVELATION

Of even greater importance is the issue of authority and revelation. Upon what do we base our lives? How do we know truth? What is the final authority for all we know and do? If it is experience, as has long been at the heart of the Eastern worldview and has infiltrated the West in more recent years, we have the problem of deciding whose experience is authoritative. Is it my experience, or yours, or Muslims, or atheists, or \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank]?

Faced with this dilemma, many have opted for so-called postmodernism, which says that there is no such thing as universal, authoritative truth. You are welcome to your own truth claim, and you can stake your life on it if you like, but your truth is not necessarily truth for me. With this mindset, if enough people from the Muslim community claim to be receiving visits and messages from Jesus, then it does not matter if these things really happened; it is reality for them. And it is even better if pragmatic and beneficial results occur in

connection with the experiences. In other words, if good things happen; if people actually get saved; then the experiences are self-authenticating.

Such might actually be the case if we had no higher source of truth, but the Scriptures make the claim of being God’s revelation of truth. And this truth determines, trumps, and critiques all other truth claims. This means that all experiences, philosophies, and worldviews must pass the test of Scripture or they are not true. And if they are not true, by process of elimination, they are false. Jesus not only declared Himself to be the truth (John 14:6), He also declared God’s Word as truth (John 17:17). And equally important, Jesus affirmed that “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Jesus did not introduce this concept. In Psalm 19:9 David says that the “judgments” (a synonym for Scripture) of the Lord are true. In Psalm 119 we read, “Your law is truth” (v. 142), “Your commandments are truth” (v. 151), and the “entirety of Your word is truth” (v. 160).

Turning to the epistles we find this same idea laced throughout. Ephesians 4:15 informs us that our spiritual growth is dependent upon “speaking the truth in love,” and 1 Timothy 3:15 reminds us that the Church (the New Testament people of God) is “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

It is when people “turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:4) that they stray from the ways of God. No wonder, given the importance of the truth of Scripture, that Paul challenges Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

As an apostle moved by the Holy Spirit to communicate truth and write most of the New Testament epistles, Paul could say to Timothy, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me” (2 Timothy 1:13) and “the things that you have heard from me among many wit-

nesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2) and "continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

There is not even a hint in Paul's final letter that Timothy or others should look to experiences and visions and dreams as an additional source of truth. Timothy (as are we) is pointed to the Word of God, that which has been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16) and handed down to us in the written revelation of the Bible. It is these same Scriptures that are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (v. 16). And when they have done their work in our lives, not only do they lead us to salvation (v. 15), but they make us "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (v. 17).

What need is there for additions to the Word of Truth in the form of new scriptures, prophecies, dreams, visions, experiences, human wisdom, and philosophy in order to either lead us to salvation or equip us for godly living? After all, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). It is no wonder that the very last chapter of the New Testament warns us not to tamper with God's Word:

"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

Some supporters of Muslim dreams affirm that divine revelation ceased with the completion of the canon of

Scripture. They see no contradiction in those positions because they don't view these dreams as ongoing revelation. Isa (Jesus), they say, isn't adding to Scripture, He's merely reiterating what has already been revealed (i.e., Scripture verses and biblical principles). However, the cessation doctrine (no ongoing revelation) affirms that Christians have no message from God apart from the *text of Scripture*. In other words, Scripture *alone* is God's verbal communication to mankind, which excludes *all* other supposed communication from Him, including Jesus speaking in contemporary dreams and visions. Therefore, one can't affirm both cessation of divine revelation and Jesus personally communicating with Muslims (or anyone else). They are mutually exclusive doctrines.

Claiming that these dreams aren't intended to add to Scripture doesn't change the fact that they are appeals to divine revelation. Content aside, the encounter itself, if true, is revelatory. It is God revealing Himself personally beyond His self-disclosure in Scripture. Therefore, any personal encounter with God is rightly considered ongoing revelation.

Additionally, in Muslim dreams Isa (Jesus) is reportedly communicating not only Bible verses, but also messages of encouragement, instruction, exhortation, prophecies, and other information not included in Scripture. That's ongoing or additional revelation, especially because it reportedly comes from God Himself. Granted, it's not intended to be canonized, but it is divine revelation nonetheless. When Jesus Himself speaks, how can it be anything *less* than authoritative divine revelation? Fact is, far from being non-revelatory, these hundreds of appearances of Isa (Jesus) suggest a contemporary period of divine revelation rivaling the New Testament era itself.

We are often asked, especially in light of our views that the Lord communicates to us since the completion of the canon exclusively through the Word of God and not through extrabiblical sources, how we should understand these claims. If, in fact,

Jesus is showing up on a regular basis to Muslims, as many think, then why not to others? What about the claims of extreme Charismatics and Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Mormons, and multitudes of others who say they have seen Jesus, talked with Him, been guided or encouraged by Him? On what basis are we to accept Muslim dreams and visions, but reject those of Word-Faith adherents or spiritualists?

If Jesus is speaking apart from Scripture to Muslims, then the doctrine of cessationism (that He speaks today only in His Word, and that prophecies, visions, words of knowledge, etc., have ceased for this age) is nonsense. He either speaks to us exclusively through Scripture in this age, or He is giving additional revelation at this time. There is no third option.

It is deeply disturbing that many who would defend the inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and centrality of the Scriptures would so easily give ground to Muslim revelations and dreams.<sup>10</sup> There seems to be little evaluation of the subjective nature of mystical encounters in general, or specifically the worldview of Muslim people who value experience over propositional truth. Many of those who are accepting of Muslim visions would be in full agreement with the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics" which affirms in Article XXV, "We deny that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture."

But for many, pragmatism trumps all else. If Muslims say they are seeing and hearing from Jesus and some of them might even be getting saved, then who can reasonably question that these encounters are genuine. The logic is that God must be doing a new thing — a new thing that has no biblical example, warrant, or support.

## ADDITIONAL MATTERS

*Can God communicate the Gospel supernaturally?* Does Scripture disallow Jesus (post-ascension) personally communicating to unbelievers to prepare them to receive the Gospel?

That's a fair question, but we think the more appropriate question is: Where does Scripture teach that He *will* do that? And do the biblical accounts of visions serve as parallels or patterns for what is occurring today in some Muslim communities?

Before answering those questions, we want to comment on the hypothetical question of whether God *could* communicate His Gospel apart from human instrumentality if He chose to do so. The answer, of course, is: Yes, He could. However, He has already decreed both the *end* and the *means* of salvation, and has revealed His decree in Scripture. The *end* is that all the elect will be saved and none lost (John 6:39-40); the *means* is through faith in Christ in response to the Spirit-empowered Gospel proclaimed by human instrumentality (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:36-40; Romans 1:16; 10:13-15).

Jesus personally communicating the Gospel at this point in redemptive history would be outside His revealed decree, which would be a highly exceptional situation. That raises the questions of what aspects of Muslim evangelism constitute a highly exceptional situation that would require God to work outside His revealed decree and if there is clear scriptural support for Him doing so.

Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples He had to leave so the Holy Spirit could come. And He told them the Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and would guide people into all truth. He would also reveal the things of Christ, impart illumination and saving faith and regenerate human hearts (cf. John 16:5-15; 1 Corinthians 1:12-16).

We know from Romans 1:18-20 and 2:14-15 that general revelation (external creation and internal conscience) is God's self-revelation to everyone; that's why all are without excuse and accountable before Him (Romans 2:20; 3:9). Also, general revelation is how He pre-conditions His elect to the Gospel. Those, who by grace, respond to general revelation receive additional (special) revelation through

God's Word and the Spirit's ministry. Why then is it necessary for Jesus to make personal appearances to prepare someone to receive the Gospel when that's the specific role of the Holy Spirit?

All unbelievers are equally lost and can be saved only if the Father grants them faith (John 6:65), draws them (John 6:44), opens their hearts to the truth (Acts 16:14), and teaches them (John 6:45). That's how every unbeliever comes to faith. There is no unbelief that is beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit's convicting and regenerating power and which requires personal visitations from Jesus to convince it of the truth of the Gospel.

*Does a failure to evangelize Muslims necessitate dreams and visions?* Some say that Jesus has to intervene personally because the Church has failed to evangelize Muslims. However, that could be said of any people group in any area at any time in Church history and even of individuals in our own culture who haven't heard the Gospel because a Christian friend failed to share it. If that were the case, dreams and visions would be commonplace.

Our main point here is that failure on the Church's part doesn't necessitate Jesus personally intervening through dreams and visions, because it's the Holy Spirit's role to direct the elect to the Gospel and the Gospel to the elect. Could the Spirit prompt unredeemed elect individuals to dream about Jesus and use those dreams to open their hearts to the Gospel? Of course He could. But that's not what's being claimed. To have a dream about Jesus, even a Spirit-directed dream, is different from Jesus revealing Himself in a dream. One is natural, the other is supernatural. One is a natural dream; the other is a divine revelation. Those distinctions must be understood and maintained.

*What did Jesus say about His future appearances?* Immediately after Jesus ascended into heaven, two men (angels) said to the onlookers, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who

was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). And when He does come to earth again, it will be "in the glory of His Father with His angels" (Matthew 16:27). Jesus warned about any supposed appearances prior to that time (Matthew 24).

Those passages refer specifically to Christ's physical return to earth at some future point in time, but do they also preclude Him appearing in dreams or visions prior to that time? We can't answer that question conclusively from those texts, but we *can* conclude that the only teaching Jesus gave concerning His future appearances on earth relate to His physical return. Therefore, we mustn't conclude that other appearances are permissible unless Scripture elsewhere permits us to do so. With that in mind, we recall our brief discussion above of the relevant New Testament passages, all of which gave a red light to modern-day appearances of Jesus in dreams or visions.

*Does Scripture encourage expectations of personal visitations from Jesus?* Faith based on God's Word (spoken or written), not personal divine visitations, has been the biblical requirement and standard since the birth of the Church. In fact, with the exception of Paul on the road to Damascus, there is no biblical record of Jesus appearing to any unbeliever following His ascension. And Scripture nowhere encourages or even suggests praying for divine appearances as an evangelism strategy or a means of comforting persecuted Christians during the Church age. That is utterly foreign to Scripture. Yet the challenges to propagate this phenomenon continue.

*Is Isa's (Jesus') message consistent with Scripture?* If Jesus was appearing to unbelieving Muslims, it follows that His message would be consistent with His message to unbelievers while on earth. But that is not the case. As one reads the various accounts of dreams, they will be faced with the impossibility of testing them according to Scripture because their extrabiblical content is so extensive and varied. Many of the dreams contain a verse or two

of Scripture, along with encouragement to seek the Savior spoken of in the verses. In many, Isa either identifies himself as Jesus or is assumed to be Jesus by the dreamers.

Reportedly, some of the dreamers had no prior exposure to the Bible or the Gospel, but most of the accounts that are recorded indicate the dreamers had some prior exposure to the Bible and/or Christians. Other accounts don't comment on that aspect of the story.

Most of the content of the dreams relate generally to the circumstances of the various dreamers (e.g., encouragement in trials or rescue from danger, which are common themes). That kind of content can't be tested by Scripture except by broad measurements such as "Does it encourage faith in Christ?" or "Is it generally consistent with biblical principles?" But those are vague and inadequate tests for determining the divine origin of a dream or vision, as will be explained below.

However, of equally grave concern is not only what Isa (Jesus) reportedly says, but what Isa *doesn't* say. Although the encounters are said to prepare the dreamers for the Gospel, there is little or no mention of sin, repentance, confession, righteousness, or forgiveness and no presentation of God's holiness or justice. Simply put, the *need* for salvation isn't clarified (or in some cases even mentioned), yet that was at the heart of Christ's communication with unbelievers when He was on earth. Isa's "gospel" is minimalistic and devoid of any clear and concise call to repentance. Gospel clarity and precision would be especially important for those Muslims who don't have a biblical background to draw from and who would therefore need to understand what God requires of them.

### DOES ISA PASS THE TEST?

Jesus used a variety of approaches when speaking with unbelievers, depending on the individual or group (e.g., Nicodemus, rich young ruler, woman at the well), but typically He identified who He was, confronted their sin, called them to repentance,

called them to believe in Him, cautioned them to count the cost of discipleship, and admonished them to take up their crosses daily and follow Him. He didn't state all those elements in every case, but collectively they constituted the thrust of His message.

By way of contrast, Isa typically identifies who he is (or the dreamer instinctively knows who he is) and tells the dreamer he loves him and wants him (the dreamer) to follow him (Isa). Sometimes the dreamer is overwhelmed with a sense of love and peace just by being in Isa's presence (which was *never* the case with unbelievers in the presence of Jesus). So the message that emerges is one of believing in Isa and following him apparently apart from the Holy Spirit convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

That is the pattern that is seen throughout the accounts of these dreams and visions. Consequently, the discerning Christian must question the substance of the message Isa is delivering and the substance of the Gospel some of these Muslims are affirming. That's not to say their conversions aren't genuine, especially given the fuller Gospel presentation that some receive subsequent to their initial dreams. But it *is* to say that the message Isa is giving falls short of the message Jesus typically gave to unbelievers while on earth. That shortcoming is a major point of consideration in discerning if this really is Jesus speaking to these people.

Again, it is understood that the position is being set forth that Isa isn't sharing the Gospel, but is merely preparing dreamers for the Gospel that is to come in greater fullness via a human evangelist. But it still must be questioned that there are stark inconsistencies between Jesus' preparation of unbelievers while on earth and Isa's preparation via dreams. Also, in some of the accounts, Isa does, in fact, call on the dreamers to believe in him. So the claim that he merely prepares them to receive the Gospel isn't always consistent with the testimony record.

Additionally, we would ask why Jesus *wouldn't* share the Gospel with Muslims if He were appearing to them. He's the most capable and powerful Evangelist the world has ever known. Yes, Romans 10:13-15 says salvation comes by hearing the Gospel preached by a human, and that is part of the divine decree mentioned above. But those who affirm that Jesus is appearing to Muslims also affirm by implication that God isn't confined to His own decree in these instances, so why would the human evangelist be necessary at all except in a follow-up capacity?

In the end, there are more questions than answers on the subject of Muslim dreams and visions.

### CONCLUSION

Muslim dreams of Isa (Jesus) have baffled and divided Christians. Interestingly Tom Doyle believes these appearances by Jesus will be short-lived and once Muslims are significantly evangelized, Jesus will move on to another religious group such as the Hindus or Buddhists or even atheists.<sup>11</sup> How he knows this is undisclosed. Many mission organizations ministering in the Islamic world view these events as undeniable<sup>12</sup> and are actively asking for people to pray for more visions among Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

If Muslims were having dreams about Jesus, which resulted in opening their hearts to the Gospel, we would say, "Praise the Lord," because it is possible for the Holy Spirit to use natural dreams to convict people of their need for salvation and direct them to the Gospel if He so chooses. However, the reports we are hearing and reading claim that Jesus Himself, in the person of Isa, is appearing to Muslims in dreams. We must reject the accuracy of those claims for all the reasons outlined above, and conclude that such dreams and visions lack biblical authority and must therefore be viewed as extrabiblical experiences generated from sources other than the Holy Spirit.

Believers should continue to pray that the Gospel of Jesus Christ — not dreams and visions of Isa — will permeate Muslim communities

throughout the world for the glory of our Lord and the salvation of many precious souls.

### Endnotes:

1. Rick Kronk, *Dreams and Visions, Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus*. Italy: Destiny Image Europe, 2010, pp. 10-11.
2. Tom Doyle with Greg Webster, *Dreams and Visions, Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012, pg. 127.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 130.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-132.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 132.
7. *Dreams and Visions, Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 71.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 73.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 74.
10. Evangelical apologist John Ankerberg is an example of this. In his television series, "When Muslims Meet Jesus," he opens the initial program by saying, "And we're talking about what God is doing in calling people to Himself in a place you wouldn't think that He would be working. He's working in the Muslim countries, and He is giving dream experiences, real

visions and real experiences of Jesus showing up to Muslims across the world." (See, The John Ankerberg Show, "When Muslims Meet Jesus/Program 1," 2013. Transcript accessed at: [www.jashow.org/articles/when-muslims-meet-jesus-program-1/](http://www.jashow.org/articles/when-muslims-meet-jesus-program-1/).)

11. *Dreams and Visions, Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*, op. cit., pg. 245.
12. *Dreams and Visions, Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 95-110.
13. *Dreams and Visions, Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*, op. cit., pg. 199.

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## KRIS VALLOTTON

(continued from page 1)

that define the movement. One of these entities is Bethel Church in Redding, Calif., which is under the leadership of senior pastor Bill Johnson and senior associate leader Kris Vallotton. Although, when asked about his connection with the NAR, Johnson asserts, "I'm not completely clear on what it is."<sup>2</sup> However, as *Charisma* magazine points out, Johnson has "a ministry where miracles, signs and wonders are common" and "Bethel has established a worship community that sets the stage for the supernatural."<sup>3</sup> The church claims that at various times its services have had "gold dust" falling from the ceiling, along with the appearance of "angel feathers" and a "Shekinah glory cloud." In addition, "Bethel leaders have been said to practice 'grave sucking' or 'grave soaking,' purportedly a means of absorbing the spiritual anointing of deceased Christians by lying atop their graves."<sup>4</sup> All these claims and events are clearly some of the basic distinctives which mark the NAR.

### BETHEL'S HISTORY

Bethel Church began in 1952 and shortly thereafter became affiliated with the Assemblies of God. For a number of years the church was pastored by Johnson's father, Earl. In 1996, Bill resigned as pastor of Mountain Chapel in Weaverville, Calif., to come to Redding to succeed his father as pastor of Bethel. In coming to

Bethel, Johnson laid down one rule: his message would always be about revival and that message would never change. Vallotton notes that when Johnson became pastor, nearly half of the congregation departed — about 1,000 people, while another 1,000 remained.<sup>5</sup> Today the church boasts a weekly attendance of more than 8,500.

Two years after coming to Bethel, Johnson, along with Vallotton, established the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry. *Christianity Today* describes the school as "an unaccredited program where students are trained to become 'revivalists'" and says that while starting in 1998 with 36 students, "today more than 2,000 from 57 countries and 45 states are enrolled."<sup>6</sup>

A decade after Johnson took the pastoral reins, the membership of Bethel Church voted unanimously to withdraw the church's affiliation from the Assemblies of God and to become a non-denominational church. According to *Charisma* magazine, "Today, Bethel has become a true movement in the body of Christ with the local church, the school of ministry, a media group, Bethel Music and a network of thousands of congregations around the world."<sup>7</sup> Vallotton says, "Yes, I'm a leader at Bethel and ... I am the senior prophet of the Bethel movement."<sup>8</sup>

### THE CALLING OF A PROPHET

Like many others within the charismatic fringe, Vallotton builds his calling into a prophetic ministry from a personal encounter he claims to have had with Jesus Christ:

"So [I'm] just laying in the bathtub, just reading my Bible, nothing extraordinary. I've never had an extraordinary experience. ... I'm there and I'm reading and suddenly I have this experience and I look up — I kind of hear this noise — and I look up and Jesus walks through the wall and into the bathroom. And He's standing next to me and He's staring at me. And He begins to talk to me about my future. You know, I guess you shouldn't be shocked when you're praying and Jesus shows up, you know. I think that's what's supposed to happen."<sup>9</sup>

Vallotton then offers some details of what the Lord allegedly told him during the experience:

"And Jesus begins to tell me things like — He — one of the things He said to me, He said, 'I've called you to be a prophet to the nations. And you're going to travel the world. And you're going to speak to kings and presidents and mayors and governors and prime ministers and queens. And I'm going to take you all over the world and you're going to guide nations through the prophetic wisdom that I give you.'"<sup>10</sup>

He explains a bit further the duration of his divine encounter and emphasizes that the occurrence was not merely a metaphysical episode:

"And the Lord begins to talk to me about this stuff. Now it goes

on for a half an hour — it's just a long experience. And I see the Lord with my eyes, so it's evidently an open vision."<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Vallotton admits that the vision occurred when he "was one year out of a three-and-a-half-year nervous breakdown."<sup>12</sup> Following his bathtub encounter, he says:

"I never shared anything with anyone for one year. And for a year nothing changed. Like you would think that after an encounter like that angels would show up repeatedly, you know, blue angels would fly over you."<sup>13</sup>

However, a year following his purported vision, Vallotton maintains that it "felt" as though there was a "magnet" on him which "drew prophetic words" to him:

"I'm sure this is exaggerated because perspective is an odd thing, but it seemed like everywhere I went — and whenever we had a guest speaker [at Bethel] — they would specifically call me out and they would say, 'God has called you to be a prophet to the nations.'"<sup>14</sup>

Even though he claims to have received the grandiose designation of a "prophet to the nations," Vallotton appeared to have been clueless as to what it all meant. Based upon his own admissions, it was a make-it-up-as-you-go calling. And despite his divine mission as a prophet and having become a part of the leadership team at Bethel, he discloses that the staff of the church was not too sure of him because of his role as a "prophet," and that it caused "a very uncomfortable situation." He says:

"They all liked me, but, you know, Bill's telling them 'I'm a prophet,' and they're not really sure what to do with that. And I'm not really sure, like what does a prophet actually do? Like, you know, I don't know what a prophet does. I checked out the Old Testament, I didn't think any of that would work too well at Bethel."<sup>15</sup>

But in the end, it all worked out for Vallotton. Because, as he explains, there is a crucial distinction between being called and being anointed:

"When God calls you, when it's time for Him to anoint you for that position, He will create some kind of sign, some kind of wonder, ... some kind of place; something that says to the rest of the people who you're supposed to be influencing and leading, this person, this woman, this man ... is called for this time to this people for this ministry. And I think ... there is a lot of confusion over, 'Hey, ... God spoke to me. I'm called.' It's like, okay you're called but are you yet anointed? And when you're anointed God will create a pathway from the promise — if you will — to the palace. And when He does that, you know that not only are you called, but you're anointed for a time like this."<sup>16</sup>

And it appears that Vallotton is not just satisfied with being "the senior prophet of the Bethel movement." At the close of one of Bethel's worship services, he said:

"I was remembering several years ago, I was laying on the floor ... I was asking God if I could have the mantle of William Branham. ... Bill [Johnson] has a series of ... old videos of William Branham and I just watched one of them where he called out about 40 people in a row and he said, 'Your, your name is like John, your doctor's name is Dr., you know, Henry and you have cancer of whatever. And your sister Mary told you to come here.' And he did that with about 30 or 40 people on this video. So, I got done watching that video and I'm like, 'Oh my goodness, I don't even have a prophetic gift.' And so, I was in the prayer chapel, laying on the floor and I said, 'God would you give me the mantle of William Branham?' And He said, 'How could I do that? If I do that, it — it would destroy you.' And so, I was laying there, it was like the Lord

asked, 'How could I do that?' And so, then I said — I waited about a few minutes — and I was thinking about it and I said, 'Well, you could put the same mantle on a whole generation then we wouldn't stand out from one another.' He said, 'All right, I'll do that.' Isn't that awesome? That's what the Lord wants to do."<sup>17</sup>

It's difficult to understand why someone would desire the mantle of William Branham. Branham was a man whose life and ministry was filled with false prophecies, heretical doctrine, and bogus and/or exaggerated miracles. Even some in charismatic and Pentecostal circles denounce him as heretical.<sup>18</sup> The "generation" of prophets, of which Vallotton speaks, should tell him, "No thanks!"

### NOTHING NEW UNDER THE CHARISMATIC SUN

If there is one constant within the charismatic camps, it is the promised hope of the last great revival — marked by signs, wonders, miracles, and prophetic utterances — that is now on the horizon and is ready to burst forth. Those who gravitate toward this charismatic worldview never seem to tire of being strung along, year-in and year-out, with the promise of supernatural faith and the final great awakening.

Writer Jennifer LeClaire proffers this well-worn strategy in her cover story article for *Charisma* magazine:

"At a time when some prophets are cursing America, a new breed of prophetic people — some younger, some older — are declaring and decreeing the greatest-ever great awakening. It's an awakening that will spill over America's borders and touch the nations of the earth with great signs, wonders and miracles that demonstrate Jesus is alive. These prophets are equipping a generation of prophetic people who see, hear and say what the Lord is doing in their cities and regions — and have the persistence to contend to the end."<sup>19</sup>

So, too, is the idea of teaching, training, and mobilizing believers into “a new level of prophetic anointing.” It’s a market-driven charismatic concept that’s been around for decades. For example, in 1999, C. Peter Wagner (who is viewed as being the individual who was most instrumental in developing the NAR) hosted his National School of the Prophets Conference which featured such modern-day “prophets” as Cindy Jacobs, Rick Joyner, Mike Bickle, Bill Hamon, and Ted Haggard.

Some may say that the term “school of the prophets” is a biblical concept being repeatedly mentioned in Scripture (1 Samuel 10:5, 10; 19:20; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 2 Kings 4:38). However, Scripture does not set forth the concept suggested by these modern-day charismatic leaders. Nearly every English translation of the Bible — including the 1611 King James Version — renders the phrase as “company of prophets” or “band of prophets” or “sons of the prophets.” There is no hint that there was a “school” in the sense of an institution where someone would go to be trained as a prophet. Samuel, Elijah, and other Old Testament prophets never offered a curriculum for “advanced training for prophetic ministry.” Rather, the word “school” — used by some Bible commentators and students — carries with it the meaning of a “collected body” (like a school of fish).

In this regard, commentator Adam Clarke observes:

*“A company of prophets. A company of scribes, says the Targum. Probably the scholars of the prophets; for the prophets seem to have been the only accredited teachers, at particular times, in Israel; and at this time there does not appear to have been any other prophet besides Samuel in this quarter.”*<sup>20</sup>

In fact, this modern charismatic idea of the “school of the prophets” is more at home with the Latter-day Saints who say that while in Kirtland, Ohio, God commanded Mormon church founder Joseph Smith to organize a school of the prophets for the

purpose of training his followers in his restored “gospel.”<sup>21</sup>

Jumping on the “prophets” bandwagon, Vallotton has created his own “School of the Prophets.” For those unable to travel to his ministry school in Redding, he has developed a variety of resources including a 256-page book, an eight-session teaching DVD, leader’s guide, and student workbook. These resources are marketed with tremendous fanfare and incentive:

“Is God calling you to be a prophet? Do you need instruction? Class is now in session! Exploring often-ignored issues, Vallotton provides advanced training on how to grow in your gift; define your sphere of influence; prepare for dangerous spiritual attacks; navigate relational difficulties; and recognize what true prophetic ministry looks like inside — and outside — the church.”<sup>22</sup>

Vallotton’s materials are further touted as, “The Essential Guide for Prophets.”<sup>23</sup> Author and “Apostle” John Eckhardt tells us just how necessary it is that we have prophets:

“When prophetic people speak, something great is released. Before God does anything in the earth, it has to be declared, and prophets and prophetic people are the ones who make that declaration.”<sup>24</sup>

Eckhardt also notes that without prophetic people there is “a real danger of the church growing ‘obsolete and outmoded’ in its methods and strategies.”<sup>25</sup> After being exposed to such propaganda, of just how essential modern-day prophets are, how could one not want to be without Vallotton’s essential guide?

### THE NEW, KINDER, GENTLER PROPHET

Vallotton subscribes to the narrative that this new wave of prophets will not be the judgment-calling, doom-and-gloom guardians of the Old Testament, but rather ones who now speak only mercy and love. LeClaire defines this new attitude:

“The shift in prophetic ministry since [Bill] Hamon and [Cindy] Jacobs pioneered the movement in the 1980s is clear — and timely. If ever America needed prophetic voices declaring God’s heart for a nation, it’s now.”<sup>26</sup>

She also notes:

“While many in the kingdom are hyperfocused on the judgment of God, [Ryan] LeStrange says the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19:10) — and the testimony of Jesus in the New Testament is grace and redemption. To him, that means that the prophetic ministry needs to be rooted in grace and redemption.”<sup>27</sup>

Vallotton agrees and says that “prophecy has moved from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.”<sup>28</sup> He develops this concept by stating:

“Now in [Matthew 5] verse 43, He says, ‘You’ve heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor, but hate your enemy.’ You’ve heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor, but hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’” And then He goes on to say that God makes it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. The first question I have is this: Where did they hear? — remember He’s talking to Jewish people — Where did they hear, ‘Love your neighbor, but hate your enemy’? Where did they learn that? I’ll tell you where they learned that. They learned it from the Law.”<sup>29</sup>

Here Vallotton errs in his exposition and uses that to build his narrative of a transition of prophecy from the Old to New Testaments. In Matthew 5:43, Jesus said, “You have heard it said,” He did not say, “It is written.” There is a difference. The former phrase addresses the oral traditions of the Jews, while the latter phrase encompasses the Scriptures. The words “hate your enemy” are not found anywhere in the Old Testament Law. It is a corruption of Leviticus 19:18 (the command to “love your neigh-

bor”) and which developed into a Jewish ethic held only by some in Jesus’ day. In its annotation of “love your neighbor as yourself” from the Levitical passage, the *NIV Study Bible* notes:

“The stricter Pharisees (school of Shammai) added to this command what they thought it implied: ‘Hate your enemy’ ... Jesus’ reaction, ‘Love your enemies’ [in Matthew 5:43], was in line with true OT teaching (see vv. 17, 34) and was more in agreement with the middle-of-the-road Pharisees.”<sup>30</sup>

Corresponding further to this understanding, Lois Tverberg, who has spoken and written about the Jewish background of Christianity for more than twenty years, explains:

“Many times Jesus uses the phrase ‘You have heard it said.’ It is helpful to know that Jesus was using a rabbinic idiom in that phrase — the word ‘say’ (amar) was used by the rabbis to mean ‘interpret’ in terms of giving the proper interpretation of the scriptures as to how to apply its laws. Jesus often preceded his legal rulings with ‘You have heard it said’ (meaning, others have interpreted God’s word to mean one thing) and ‘but I say unto you’ (meaning, I interpret it differently, in the following way).”<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, Vallotton is resolute in his conviction, even making such outlandish statements as, “This is the Old Covenant. It’s kind of like the jihad of the Muslim faith”<sup>32</sup> and “Your love for God in the Old Covenant was demonstrated by how much you hated the people who hated God.”<sup>33</sup>

Taking his view a bit further, Vallotton then teaches, “So how many understand in the Old Covenant, it didn’t rain on the righteous and the unrighteous? It only rained on the righteous. It didn’t rain on the unrighteous.”<sup>34</sup> He maintains that when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, that God is now sending rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous, it marked a covenantal shift:

“[God] makes it rain on people who deserve it and people who don’t; the righteous and the unrighteous. And suddenly we have a shift, we have a covenant shift and Jesus begins to talk to us about a new way to see the world.”<sup>35</sup>

In that the Law (i.e., Leviticus 19:18) does not teach one to “hate your enemy,” Vallotton must go elsewhere to establish his assertion. He does so by saying the Old Testament presents a God who commands the destruction of those who hate Him. For example, he announces:

“Remember God said to Joshua, ‘Go into the land and kill everybody. Don’t let anybody live.’ And as a matter of fact, when Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites, because they pretended that they were a people from another land, he got in trouble by God because he was supposed to wipe out the Gibeonites.”<sup>36</sup>

Here again Vallotton introduces a false narrative to his listeners. It is akin to those who argue that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful, hateful, angry God while the God of the New Testament is a merciful, loving, kind God. Apologist Josh McDowell corrects such thinking and sets forth a correct biblical understanding:

“The proper Old Testament picture is one of a very patient God who gives these people untold opportunities to repent and come into harmony with Him, and only when they continually refuse does He judge and punish them for their evil deeds. Contrary to some popular belief, the strongest statements of judgment and wrath in the Bible were made by the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 23, for example, He lashed out at the religious leaders of His day, calling them hypocrites and false leaders, and informing them that their destiny was eternal banishment from God’s presence.”<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, a reading of the Old Testament does not support Vallot-

ton’s belief. The God of the Old Testament is the same of the New Testament. Malachi 3:6 declares, “For I am the LORD, I do not change.” As McDowell points out:

“[Jesus] also observed that, in the Old Testament, God had continually desired love and mercy rather than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13; 12:7). This attitude can be seen with statements such as, ‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked ... and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?’ (Ezekiel 18:23, RSV). God would not have destroyed certain nations except that He is a God of justice and their evil could not go unchecked or condoned.”<sup>38</sup>

Jonah is one prophet who knew all too well the mercies of a longsuffering God: “Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (Jonah 4:2). The fact that Joshua led the Israelites into a “land flowing with milk and honey,” a land where “one cluster of grapes” was carried on a pole by two men, and that “Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere,” all clearly show that the God of the Old Testament caused the rain to fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous. There has been no “covenantal shift” in this regard. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was not announcing a “shift” in God’s benevolence and care, but was reminding those who heard His words that God shows His love to all people. Vallotton needs a basic study in common grace — God’s goodness to all in some ways, and special grace — God’s goodness to some in all ways.

## FROM JUDGMENT TO RECONCILIATION

Vallotton further develops his prophetic “covenantal shift” by using the closing verses from the book of Malachi that God would send the prophet Elijah:

“Well, think about this: What did Elijah do on this side of the cross,

on the Old Testament side of the cross? He judged nations, he killed false prophets, he called for a famine, right? This is his ministry on the Old Testament side of the cross. What happens when we get Elijah and we move him to the other side of the cross? How many of you see that his ministry is now the ministry of reconciliation? He will reconcile hearts of sons to fathers, fathers to sons, I'm sure mothers to daughters. The point is, is that instead of judgment now he is reconciling families. This is the ministry of the New Testament prophet."<sup>39</sup>

And he stresses to his students that, "And I'd like to suggest that what's different is the role of the New Testament prophet has little to do with the role of the Old Testament prophet especially, especially as it pertains to judgment."<sup>40</sup> "Our job as prophets and prophetesses, and people who prophesy is to extend mercy to people who don't deserve it," he says.<sup>41</sup>

Along this line, Vallotton adds:

"And the Holy Spirit said, 'I'll convict them of sin, you convict them of the glory they fell short of.' And that's why they fall on their face and glorify God because what they don't know is the secret treasures that have been hidden in the dirt of their life and your job is to find the treasures that are in — that's in the dirt of their lives and go, 'This is what God's actually called you to. And you're acting below your nature because you've been called as a child, a son of God.'"<sup>42</sup>

Vallotton admits that you don't have to be prophetic to find sin in sinners' lives or flaws in people who we live with, but "you have to be prophetic to find goodness in some people's lives."<sup>43</sup> Yet despite all his teaching along this line, he confesses:

"I do have this problem with the New Testament in that there are judgments in the New Testament. ... I have this theological

problem with the fact that there are judgments in the New Testament, in the New Covenant, on this side of the cross."<sup>44</sup>

The resolve, he says, came in that God "showed" him that there is a difference between the last days and the last day. To this he offers:

"Now, I'd like to suggest to you that there's last days and that there is the last day. In fact, I'd like to suggest to you that the last day's mentioned seven times in the New Testament and it's always mentioned as a day of judgment and you're never included in getting to judge. You're never the judge."<sup>45</sup>

Vallotton further clarifies his "never judge" design of New Testament prophecy. He establishes the position that it is in the matter of another's salvation in which prophets are not to judge by saying:

"And by the way, none of us have the right to judge another person. And let me make this clear, we're not talking about judgment — I'm not talking about judgment between right and wrong, 'cause we all have the responsibility to judge between right and wrong. I'm talking about judgment as it reflects condemnation. Like the ability to convict someone and to a sentence of hell or death or punishment."<sup>46</sup>

Even so, Vallotton does not explain in detail the working of his last days/last day template. The methodology he teaches is a patchwork of applying-it-here-if-it-fits or ignoring-it-there-if-it-doesn't. For example, by his own admission, he says that the Old Testament prophet Malachi spoke of the "last day." Yet Vallotton takes the "Elijah" of the book of Malachi and moves him into the "last days." Remember, as noted above, Vallotton has told us that Elijah in the New Covenant has a ministry of reconciliation, not judgment.

Then too, we must conclude that those apostles and prophets who penned the New Testament somehow

didn't get this message. The New Testament Scriptures are saturated with verses that judge — in the harshest terms — a person's lost condition. On a short list, the books of Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 Timothy speak in graphic terms in judging the souls of the ungodly.

Perhaps this is because, as Thomas Edgar points out, there is not the disassociation that Vallotton proposes between the Old and New Testament prophets:

"The same terms are used for *prophet* in the New Testament as in the Greek Old Testament [the Septuagint]. Furthermore, the New Testament refers to Old Testament prophets and prophecies frequently, and uses the same terms that it does for prophets and prophecies given to the church. The examples of prophets in the New Testament bear a similarity to those in the Old Testament. All of these factors suggest that the gift of prophet in the New Testament is similar to that in the Old Testament. This similarity in terms and description presents a definite obstacle to those who argue for distinct differences. Thus the Old and New Testament prophets seem to be virtually equivalent in both terms and actions, and only very clear evidence will demonstrate otherwise."<sup>47</sup>

And there is a further point of disconnect between Vallotton and others in the modern-day prophetic movement who also claim to be "prophets," and who speak doom-and-gloom and judgment on America and the world. Are we therefore to conclude that these men and women who do not "prophesy" according to the perimeters set forth by Vallotton are not true prophets, but false ones? If the Holy Spirit truly revealed to Vallotton this non-judging model of a New Testament prophet, how can we conclude otherwise?

Likewise, these prophets who speak "judgment" will no doubt argue that they are not judging men's souls, but rather warning of the condemnation

that awaits the nations because of their ungodliness. This, in fact, is nothing more than what Vallotton himself has done. In a closing prayer to one of his video sessions, he says:

“We thank you that we get to tell people the good news of the kingdom and the good news of a merciful King. And we also get to warn them about a day that’s coming that if they don’t receive the good news, that there’s some bad news.”<sup>48</sup>

And Vallotton maintains, “there’s a huge difference between a judgment and a warning.”<sup>49</sup> He marks his distinction by exemplifying Elijah in the Old Testament who called for a famine (1 Kings 17:1) to Agabus in the New Testament who saw and announced a famine, not tying it to the sins of the people (Acts 11:28). “We’re not called to judge people, we’re not called to call for judgments on people in the New Covenant. We do sometimes as prophets, we do sometimes have the responsibility to call for warnings,” he tells us.<sup>50</sup> But his mandate cannot be proven by the biblical record.

Another thing which is problematic is that in today’s prophetic landscape it is often difficult to make this Old/New distinction set by Vallotton and numerous other NAR teachers when it comes to “prophets.” Take, for example, Jonathan Cahn. Although Cahn points out that he never calls himself a prophet, Cahn is hailed by many, especially in charismatic camps, as “America’s Prophet.” Cahn strongly denounces certain sins, such as homosexuality and abortion, and warns of the coming judgment on America unless she repents.<sup>51</sup> His good friend, Joseph Farah, founder of World Net Daily (WND), writes:

“There’s timeliness to what Jonathan Cahn writes and preaches: either we take notice and turn from our wicked ways, or face the death of a once godly nation. He doesn’t like to be called a prophet, but if he is not a prophet for our time then I don’t know the definition of a prophet.”<sup>52</sup>

So here we have “America’s Prophet” — who by all appearances is specific in speaking judgment, or, at the very least, is combining aspects of both of “judgment” and “warning.” Perhaps “America’s Prophet” needs to enroll into Vallotton’s school of the prophets to learn how it is done correctly.

### PROPHECY VS. PROPHETS

Beyond Vallotton’s dual dispensation of Old Testament and New Testament prophets, he also says, “there’s a lot of confusion over the gift of prophecy and the office of a prophet.”<sup>53</sup> He tells us:

“The gift of prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, why are [sic] I making that point? Because the office of a prophet is actually a gift of Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

In speaking to the former, he defines what it is, who is involved, and how it is acquired:

“So we’re to build up, and we’re to cheer up, and we’re to call people near. ... That’s the gift of prophecy. ... We’re looking to build them up, ... we’re looking to cheer them up, and we’re looking for prophetic ministry to connect them in a better way to God; be more connected to God ... The gift of prophecy, again, is for every believer. ... So these are gifts of the Spirit. ... They’re there by your choice, ... God chooses everyone to have gifts; so, your choice in the sense that you ask for them. You have a choice to ask for them.”<sup>55</sup>

While not in full agreement with Vallotton, it should be noted that there are those within evangelicalism who would agree, in part, with the distinction of New Testament prophets and prophecy. Theologian Walter Kaiser explains:

“Many interpreters divide the New Testament prophetic phenomena into two classes: (1) the authoritative prophecies demonstrated by the apostles and their associates who functioned much as the Old Testament prophets did; and (2) a type of prophetic

activity that made no claims to being the very word of God, but which was for the ‘strengthening, encouragement and comfort of believers’ (1 Cor. 14:3). It is this second type of prophetic activity in the New Testament that has drawn so much current interest, especially if the argument also holds that this gift of prophecy is still operative in the church today.”<sup>56</sup>

And another evangelical writer has this to offer:

“A pastor/preacher who declares the Bible can be considered a ‘prophesier’ in that he is speaking forth the counsel of God. With the completion of the New Testament canon, prophesying changed from declaring new revelation to declaring the completed revelation God has already given. Jude 3 speaks of ‘the faith which *was once delivered* unto the saints’ (emphasis added). In other words, the faith to which we hold has been settled forever, and it does not need the addition or refinement that comes from extra-biblical revelations. Also, note the transition from prophet to teacher in 2 Peter 2:1: ‘There *were* false prophets among the people, even as there *shall* be false teachers among you’ (emphasis added). Peter indicates that the Old Testament age had prophets, whereas the church will have teachers. The spiritual gift of prophecy, in the sense of receiving new revelations from God to be proclaimed to others, ceased with the completion of the Bible. During the time that prophecy was a revelatory gift, it was to be used for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of men (1 Corinthians 14:3). The modern gift of prophecy, which is really more akin to teaching, still declares the truth of God. What has changed is that the truth of God today has already been fully revealed in His Word, while, in the early church, it had not yet been fully revealed.”<sup>57</sup>

Yet Vallotton significantly deviates from the positions of the evangelical writers above by saying that the gift of prophecy is for every believer and that it is by our own choosing. What Vallotton suggests is contradicted by Scripture. First Corinthians 12 tells us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed “to each one individually as He wills” (v. 11), not by our choosing or desire. Additionally, Paul is specific in his charge that “to one is given” a certain gift, while “to another” is given a different gift (vv. 4-11). Nevertheless, while Vallotton maintains that every believer can have (or should have) the gift of prophecy, he says the gift (or office) of prophet is not for all:

“Over here is the office of a prophet. It’s a gift of Christ. It’s not a gift of the Holy Spirit. I’m not sure why the Bible makes that distinction, but the Bible specifically calls the five-fold ministry, which is the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor and teacher, the Bible makes a point to say these are actually gifts that God gave to the body of Christ. So they are gifts of Christ. ... This is a great distinction; I don’t get to ask to be a prophet or prophetess.”<sup>58</sup>

So how does a person get to be a prophet? Well, for Vallotton, it was his “bathtub experience” with Jesus. He explains:

“How do I know if I’m a prophet? How do I know if I’m a prophetess? How do I know if I’m just moving in the gift of prophecy? ... One way that you’ll know is that you’re called by God, you’ll have a bathtub experience, you know. You may not be in the bathtub, but God calls you. The second thing is that you have to have favor with man. Right? Jesus, ... He grew in favor with God and with man. It’s a little strange when like, ‘I am a prophet’ and nobody follows you, because the nature of a prophet is that you are a leader.”<sup>59</sup>

Yes, Moses had an encounter with the burning bush and Paul was con-

fronted with a heavenly light on the road to Damascus. Yet Scripture never establishes these experiences as a standard for one who is called to be a prophet. Neither does having favor with man have biblical protocol for that of a prophet. And Vallotton further derails from a biblical track as he says:

“You may be called as a prophet, but how many of you know until you’re anointed by the people ... but until God gives you a people, ... you’re not a prophet to anybody. And I think this is a big, a great challenge for a lot of people who actually are called.”<sup>60</sup>

To this he adds:

“God often calls us and later people often recognize that call and anoint us. And I think we have to be anointed by God and we have to be anointed by man. ... If people aren’t following me, it doesn’t matter that I’ve had a bathtub experience because until majesty — if you will — true authority from God is on my life, it matters not that I have five experiences with God, that angels tell me that I’m a prophet, whatever. Until God anoints the eyes of the people and the people go, ‘That’s our leader, that’s our prophet, that’s our equipper.’ How many of you understand, I have favor with God, but I don’t yet have favor with man? And so, it’s really important that we wait, if we have, if we’ve had a private encounter with God. It’s important that we wait till we have the public, also public anointing.”<sup>61</sup>

### **THE GAME OF PROPHECY, METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING**

Vallotton continues with his philosophical distinctions saying, “I believe there’s a difference between prophetic ministry and a prophetic community.”<sup>62</sup> The former, he says, is people prophesying and sharing words of knowledge over people and their lives. The latter is a prophetic culture where believers are equipped and we have “coaches and referees who actu-

ally help us to — if you will, metaphorically speaking — learn the game of prophecy.”<sup>63</sup>

What Vallotton is setting the stage for is exactly what authors Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec outline in their biblical exposé of the NAR movement:

“Though NAR leaders acknowledge that Old Testament prophets had to be one hundred percent accurate in what they predicted, many of them also claim that the same fulfillment test doesn’t apply to NAR prophets. They claim this is because prophets in the New Testament are extended more grace.”<sup>64</sup>

Along this line, Vallotton further explains:

“It’s okay for leadership to actually critique ... how we’re doing. And I think feedback is the way we grow. So, you know, when we’re come into a prophetic culture, a prophetic community, and we prophesy, there’s somebody that should be listening to our prophecies — remember, ‘let two or three prophets speak, let the others pass judgment’ — and people are actually giving us feedback. ‘Cause how many of you understand, if you’re prophesying the wrong way, or out of the wrong heart, or out of the wrong spirit, or the wrong direction, or — you know — only part of the prophecy is God, and you never get feedback, it never occurs to you that you’re actually doing it in the wrong way. And I think we also need referees. We definitely need referees in the body of Christ. We definitely need referees in the community of prophetic people. Referees who can call fouls and say that was a foul, that was a judgment.”<sup>65</sup>

In the end, it all becomes a subjective game for Vallotton and those who subscribe to his guidelines. We are to accept what “feels like the Lord” and reject that which does not. There is no biblical mandate for be-

lievers to subjectively sift through prophetic words, accepting what they think are the “good” portions and seeing them as being from God and rejecting the “bad” portions and categorize them as the product of wrong heart or a wrong spirit.

Pastor and seminary teacher O. Palmer Robertson speaks well to this issue and its implications:

“Can you sense the instability that would be created in the lives of God’s people by this dubious approach to New Testament prophecy? On the one hand, prophecy is said to be based on a revelation that comes directly from God, uncovering the truth about persons or situations that otherwise could not be known. But on the other hand, these revelations are delivered by the prophet in such a garbled manner that the person addressed may choose to ignore them altogether if he wishes. For it is stated that even those who are not quite sure if they have received a revelation should be encouraged to go ahead and speak out in the manner of a prophet.”<sup>66</sup>

### FAILURE IS AN OPTION

And in Vallotton’s prophetic world it gets even worse. Those believers who follow his teaching demonstrate just how low a standard has been set for them in their pursuit of discerning their callings and using their spiritual gifts. Vallotton’s method in teaching how one is to develop the “gift of prophecy” closely resembles psychic gimmicks and parlor games. In fact, with Vallotton, you must fail in order to get a passing grade. In detailing the operative of moving into the prophetic at his school of ministry, students sharpen their skills by “taking a risk,” which is practicing words of knowledge. He explains the procedure:

“And I say to them something like this — every single year for 16 years: You have to fail at least three times to pass this class. Unless you fail at least three times, you cannot graduate from

this school. And then I say, ‘Okay, it’s Day One, everybody stand up.’ ... And I say, ... ‘We’re going to give words of knowledge to one another.’ ... And I tell them very simply, I say word of knowledge is information you got by the Spirit — you could have got it some other way, but you got it by the Spirit, that’s currently true about somebody. So you know their name, or you know where they grew up, or you know their age, or their social security number, or their phone number, or something. Like you have a word of knowledge; this is not prophecy, this is word of knowledge. So it can be instantly judged, because you’re either right or you’re wrong.”<sup>67</sup>

Vallotton continues his description:

“So I say, ‘Okay, I want you to break up in groups of two with somebody you don’t know,’ which is pretty easy on Day One. So they do that. I go, ‘Don’t do anything, just, just face each other.’ So they face each other. I say, ‘Hold hands,’ they hold hands. I say, ‘Okay, I’m going to pray and you’re going to have plenty of time — you’re going to have 30 seconds — and I want you to get their mother’s name or where she was born. Okay, you have 30 seconds to do it. And there’s only one rule, you can’t say, “I didn’t get anything.”’”<sup>68</sup>

Vallotton then tells us:

“So inevitably, somebody will raise their hand — I know the questions, and I could answer the question before they ask, not because I’m prophetic, just because I’ve been doing it for a long time. And they’ll raise their hand, and I go, ‘Uh, yeah, if you don’t get anything, guess. Because I know that that’s the question: ‘What if I don’t get anything?’ ‘Guess.’ They’re like, ‘Huh, I don’t know if I like this school, guessing at prophetic words.’ And someone else will go, ‘Guess?’ I’ll go, ‘Well just make one up.’ ‘Oh, this is worse.’”<sup>69</sup>

All of this, we are told, is “because actually the lesson isn’t about word of knowledge and prophecy at all — it’s about taking a risk.” “In fact,” Vallotton says he prays, “Holy Spirit don’t give anybody anything.” He alleges that “sometimes they get it right, that really just messes my whole exercise up.”<sup>70</sup>

What Vallotton describes above is so completely foreign to the Scriptures and demeaning of the biblical gift of prophecy. The tragedy beyond Vallotton teaching such absurd and frivolous exercises is that there are those who follow his instructions and think they are receiving advanced training for prophetic ministry.

Notwithstanding the actual method used to gain these “words of knowledge,” we must ask what do mothers’ names or childhood hometowns or social security numbers or ages have to do with biblical sanctification and true biblical prophecy? Believers rightly denounce psychics and palm readers with their alleged psychic knowledge, but some have become naive, undiscerning, and unwilling to do the same when faced with a “Christianized” version of this same activity. As pastor and teacher John MacArthur articulates:

“Put simply, modern prophecy is no more reliable in discerning truth than a Magic Eight Ball, tarot cards, or a Ouija board. And, it should be added, it is equally superstitious. There is no warrant anywhere in Scripture for Christians to listen for fresh revelation from God beyond what He has already given us in His written Word.”<sup>71</sup>

And MacArthur adds:

“By contrast, *true* prophecy does not come to mind through psychic intuition or New Age mysticism, and it is not discerned by guesswork. ‘No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1:20-21). Those who

equate their own personal impressions, imaginations, and intuition with divine revelation err greatly. The problem is magnified by the common charismatic practice of knowingly permitting someone who has prophesied falsely to continue to claim he or she speaks for God. To say it as simply and plainly as possible, this approach to 'prophecy' is the grossest kind of *rank heresy*, because it ascribes to God that which did not come from Him."<sup>72</sup>

### EXTOL BUT DON'T EVANGELIZE

In closing out his video series, Vallotton maps out some further protocols for those in the role of a prophet as they stand before and minister to a leader of a city or country or the head of a large corporation. As he is engaged in such situations, rather than saying he's a "prophet," he tells the leader that he's a "futurist," which is "somebody who knows the future and knows what you should do about the future."<sup>73</sup> For those who have similar opportunity, he then offers the following guidelines:

"Dress appropriately. Don't use 'Christianese.' Scrap your agenda and just love them. And this one will offend a few people, and we're not going to edit this out, don't try to lead them to Jesus unless He's told you to."<sup>74</sup>

Vallotton relates that as he speaks to these leaders, he tells them, "God says you're amazing. I'm here to tell you how proud He is of you. ... I start just talking to them about the little boy that's in there that God is proud of; the little girl in there that God is just full of joy."<sup>75</sup> But he wants you to know:

"I'm not talking about flattery by the way, I'm asking Holy Spirit, 'Holy Spirit how do you see this person?' I'm not just talking about words of encouragement that I get from my human spirit. I'm actually talking about 'Holy Spirit, give me words that when I

leave this place, this woman, this man, is encouraged."<sup>76</sup>

### WARNING AGAINST A SUBSTANDARD PRODUCT

In closing, there is a "warning" that must be expressed — and one need not be a "prophet" to declare it. It goes without saying that the New Covenant is better in every way from the Old. Yet there is a key element to that which is missed by many. The network of New Testament prophets (and prophecy) suggested by Vallotton and the other NAR teachers, in the end, is grossly deficient to that of its Old Testament equivalent. To this, Palmer Robertson observes:

"If the new covenant in every way is 'better' than the old, it rightly could be expected that every part of the new covenant would be better than its old covenant counterpart. Christ on the cross is better than the brazen serpent on a stick. Resurrection from the dead is better than exodus from Egypt. Baptism is better than circumcision, and inheriting the new heavens and the new earth is better than possessing Palestine. In this context of comparisons between the old covenant and new, it would seem strange indeed if new covenant prophecy took on a form that was significantly weaker in manifesting divine perfections than its old covenant counterpart."<sup>77</sup>

But a weaker and defective form of prophecy is exactly what is being put forward by Vallotton.

Although just a repeat of the NAR party-line, the prophetic ministry and teachings of Vallotton are dangerous and aberrant. He opens his students and practitioners to confusion, chaos, deception, disappointment, mysticism, subjectivism, and perhaps even worse. He entices his flock to believe myths and engage in unbiblical practices. He presents a loose template in defining prophets and prophecy and lacks sound biblical interpretations. Apart from the written Word of God, God isn't telling Vallotton anything.

What he is telling his students that God has told him is merely Vallotton speaking from his own heart and imagination.

Vallotton offers a muddled view of knowing and communicating with God, working up a great mystical experience to satisfy or assure us that we have a relationship with the Sovereign Lord. But the Christian has what he (or she) needs and it's not seeking after prophecy or the office of a prophet. The Bible is enough, as the psalmist declared: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

In addressing those who were truly apostles and prophets, Peter Masters and John Whitcomb remind us:

"This group of apostles and prophets is a limited, special, chosen group that constituted the revelatory foundation of the Church in Holy Scripture. There can be no more of them for they are the foundation. A building can have only one foundation, and this must be fixed, stable, complete and secure before the building is erected. Therefore, there can be no other apostles and prophets besides those who are called in Scripture — *the foundation*."<sup>78</sup>

And further comments by Masters and Whitcomb speak well to Vallotton and his NAR counterparts and provide a fitting conclusion:

"The only biblical response to such an attitude is to say — 'You may not have that privilege. You have not been specially chosen by God to be part of the foundation of His Church. The foundation is long since finished. You are now in the superstructure phase of church history. You can never have special revelatory privileges. It has nothing to do with whether God has the power to do it, or whether you have the faith to receive it. It is all to do with the fact that God has not planned that His Church should have 14, 15 or 20 different foundations, or 75 or 156 different apostles and prophets. There are

no more apostles and prophets." 79

### Endnotes:

1. For a fuller critique of the New Apostolic Reformation, see Gary E. Gilley, "Peter Wagner and the Modern-Day Apostles," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2018, pp. 1, 12-21.
2. Martin Wendell Jones, "Kingdom Come in California?," *Christianity Today*, May 2016, pg. 36.
3. Jennifer LeClaire, "Born for Revival," *Charisma*, August 2016, pp. 20, 23 (quotations taken from photo captions).
4. "Kingdom Come in California?," op. cit., pg. 33. For more information on this bizarre and unbiblical practice, see the accompanying editorial in this issue of *The Quarterly Journal*.
5. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 1, "Discovering Your Divine Call," timemark: 17:15. (Time-marks are cited to closest five-second interval.)
6. "Kingdom Come in California?," op. cit., pg. 33.
7. "Born for Revival," op. cit., pg. 22.
8. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 6, "The Role of the Prophet," 14:00.
9. "Discovering Your Divine Call," op. cit., 1:35, 2:00.
10. *Ibid.*, 3:15.
11. *Ibid.*, 4:15.
12. *Ibid.*, 3:00.
13. *Ibid.*, 7:00.
14. *Ibid.*, 8:15.
15. *Ibid.*, 14:45.
16. *Ibid.*, 22:30.
17. Vallotton in Bill Johnson, "The Real Jesus - Part 4," YouTube video posted Sept. 2, 2010, 6:40. Video accessed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=433&v=vHcRI60j0HI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=433&v=vHcRI60j0HI).
18. See further, J. Greg Sheryl, "The Legend of William Branham," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2013, pp. 1, 10-20.
19. Jennifer LeClaire, "God's Wake-Up Call," *Charisma*, November 2015, pg. 20.
20. Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, pg. 303, italics in original.
21. There are Christian organizations and institutions that also utilize the term "school of the prophets," but with a different concept than proposed by Charismatics. For example, School of the Prophets Institute, offered through Louisiana Baptist University, has a course under that title. However, this study is not a training to be a prophet, but rather a teaching of the fundamentals of Bible prophecy. This organization, through LBU, also offers both a master's (MA) degree and a doctoral (PhD) degree in advanced prophetics. (See "School of the Prophets" at: <http://schoolofprophets.org>.)
22. Advertisement for *School of the Prophets* on Christian Book Distributors (CBD) website. Document accessed at: [www.christianbook.com/school-prophets-advanced-training-prophetic-ministry/kris-vallotton/9780800796204/pd/796204?event=ESRCG](http://www.christianbook.com/school-prophets-advanced-training-prophetic-ministry/kris-vallotton/9780800796204/pd/796204?event=ESRCG).
23. *Ibid.* This assertion is also found on the back cover of Vallotton's book, DVD case, leader's guide, and student workbook.
24. Eckhardt in "God's Wake-Up Call," op. cit., pg. 22.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 2, "New versus Old Testament Prophets," 3:25.
29. *Ibid.*, 3:50.
30. Kenneth L. Barker, general editor, *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008, note on Leviticus 19:18, pg. 172.
31. Lois A. Tverberg, "Amar — You Have Heard It Said," En-Gedi Resource Center, 2005. Document accessed at: [www.egrc.net/articles/Rock/HebrewWords2/AmarHeardItSaid.html](http://www.egrc.net/articles/Rock/HebrewWords2/AmarHeardItSaid.html).
32. "New versus Old Testament Prophets," op. cit., 6:40.
33. *Ibid.*, 6:50.
34. *Ibid.*, 8:30.
35. *Ibid.*, 8:50.
36. *Ibid.*, 4:20.
37. Bill Wilson (compiler), *The Best of Josh McDowell - A Ready Defense*. San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1990, pg. 407.
38. *Ibid.*, ellipsis in original.
39. "New versus Old Testament Prophets," op. cit., 15:40.
40. *Ibid.*, 17:30.
41. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 3, "Two Different Dispensations," 1:20.
42. *Ibid.*, 11:00.
43. *Ibid.*, 12:10.
44. *Ibid.*, 13:10, 14:05.
45. *Ibid.*, 15:00.
46. *Ibid.*, 15:50.
47. Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregal Resources, 1996, pp. 64-65, italic in original.
48. "Two Different Dispensations," op. cit., 24:35.
49. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 5, "Prophecy versus Prophets," 17:45.
50. *Ibid.*, 19:25.
51. J. Greg Sheryl has written three full-length reports on Jonathan Cahn for *The Quarterly Journal*. See, "Jonathan Cahn: Man of Mystery" (April-June 2015, pp. 1, 12-21); "Is the Bible a Book of Mysteries?" (April-June 2017, pp. 1, 12-20); and "The Paradox of *The Paradigm*" (April-June 2018, pp. 1, 10-21).
52. WND Exclusive, "Cahn the 'definition of a prophet'," posted on World Net Daily website, Oct. 10, 2015. Document accessed at: [www.wnd.com/2015/10/cahn-the-definition-of-a-prophet/](http://www.wnd.com/2015/10/cahn-the-definition-of-a-prophet/).
53. "Prophecy versus Prophets," op. cit., 0:25.
54. *Ibid.*, 1:50.
55. *Ibid.*, 4:10, 4:50, 5:15, 5:55.
56. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. in Walter A. Elwell, Editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996, pg. 646.
57. S. Michael Houdmann, "What is the spiritual gift of prophecy?," Got Questions website. Document accessed at: [www.gotquestions.org/gift-of-prophecy.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/gift-of-prophecy.html).
58. "Prophecy versus Prophets," op. cit., 6:15.
59. *Ibid.*, 10:50.
60. *Ibid.*, 11:40.
61. *Ibid.*, 12:50, 13:50.
62. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 7, "Building a Prophetic Community," 0:30.
63. *Ibid.*, 1:00.
64. R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *God's Super Apostles*. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book Company, 2014, pp. 70-71.
65. "Building a Prophetic Community," op. cit., 3:40.
66. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word*. Carlisle, Penna.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993, pp. 90-91.
67. "Building a Prophetic Community," op. cit., 16:00.
68. *Ibid.*, 16:55.
69. *Ibid.*, 17:20.
70. *Ibid.*, 17:45.
71. John MacArthur, *Strange Fire*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013, pg. 115.
72. *Ibid.*, pg. 128, italics in original.
73. Kris Vallotton, *School of the Prophets*, DVD Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Chosen Books, 2015, Session 8, "Standing Before Kings and Noble Prophets," 15:45.
74. *Ibid.*, 17:00.
75. *Ibid.*, 18:35, 18:45.
76. *Ibid.*, 19:00.
77. *The Final Word*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.
78. Peter Masters and John C. Whitcomb, *The Charismatic Phenomenon*. London, England: The Wakeman Trust, 1988, pp. 44-45, italics in original.
79. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.



Semple McPherson, William Branham, and C.S. Lewis. It did not seem to be a problem that some of them were doctrinally unsound.

Claims were made that these past preachers had great supernatural “anointings” that remained with them even after death. In other words, the “anointing” was taken to the grave by these men and women. Even more outlandish was the claim that some of these “anointings” could be retrieved by visiting, sitting, or lying on the grave. Supposedly some kind of bizarre, occult attachment made the grave visitor a recipient of a direct, supernatural, spiritual, and powerful genealogical connection. The practice is called “grave soaking,” “grave sucking,” or “mantle grabbing.”

Who was the culprit that started this bizarre and unbiblical practice? It’s probably difficult to determine, but in the early 1990s faith healer Benny Hinn claimed supernatural anointings from the graves of Kathryn Kuhlman and Aimee Semple McPherson. (See further, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*, pp. 211-223.) Because of his popularity and wide exposure, Hinn introduced the macabre practice to a large audience. It was from his own wild imagination and not from Scripture. Jeremiah warns of prophets who are “prophets of the deceit of their own heart” (Jeremiah 23:26).

The prophet Isaiah condemns such things as grave soaking, calling them rebellion and deeds that result from one’s own thoughts and imaginations, not from God’s will (Isaiah 65:2). He also says that these things provoke God to anger (v. 3), as they “sit among the graves” (v. 4). Then, we are told, these practitioners of the occult assert, “I am holier than you” (v. 5). So the connection makes them superior, or so they allege.

In Numbers 19:16, Moses tells God’s people that if they touched a grave they were unclean for a week. And if that happened, there was an elaborate ceremony that had to be performed (vv. 17-19). If the ceremony of the red heifer was not carried out in a week’s time, the person would be cut off from the assembly (v. 20). We could call it “grave” consequences.

*Christianity Today* reported that Bethel Church in Redding, Calif., (pastored by Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton) experienced Shekinah glory clouds, angel feathers, and gold dust at its meetings (“Kingdom Come in California?,” May 2016, pg. 33). The article goes on to detail how “Beni Johnson (Bill’s wife) and other Bethel leaders have been said to practice ‘grave sucking’ or ‘grave soaking,’ purportedly a means of absorbing the spiritual anointing of deceased Christians by lying atop their graves” (ibid.).

More recently, *Charisma* writer Michael Brown interviewed Johnson and one of the concerns that Brown questioned Johnson about was the criticism being leveled

at Bethel because of the “grave sucking.” Johnson denied that they practice it. Perhaps, Johnson is finding that he needs to backpedal because of the fallout on this one. He claims that he and/or the Bethel staff do not practice “grave sucking.” However, it is interesting to note that in the whole of his response, he does not denounce it as unbiblical. He says they don’t endorse it.

And detrimental to Johnson’s current contention is that one can easily find online a copy of Beni Johnson’s Facebook entry with a photograph of her lying atop the grave of C.S. Lewis with the caption that reads, “Senior Pastor Beni Johnson ‘grabbing some’ at the grave of C.S. Lewis.” So what Bill is now saying about visiting graves doesn’t at all look like the photograph that his wife posted on Facebook.

The weakest link in “grave sucking” is the appeal by its proponents to 2 Kings 13:20-21. It describes an event that happened long after Elisha’s death and burial. Of course, not everything that is reported in Scripture is commanded. To put it another way: narrative is not always normative — that is, normal practice. Some events describe, but do not prescribe.

It is reported in the 2 Kings passage that some pall bearers, while taking the body of an unknown and unnamed man to be buried, encountered a group of Moabite raiders. These men quickly deposited the corpse in Elisha’s cave tomb. When the dead body touched Elisha’s bones, the dead man was resurrected. From that point on we hear no more about the resurrected man.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament* makes a good case that the miracle of resurrection in the 2 Kings 13 account was a one-time event and ultimately for the encouragement of weak King Jehoshaphat. That understanding makes sense. And there are some important things to remember.

First, there was direct contact with the bones of Elisha. This is a major difference. In “grave sucking” there is no direct contact with the body or bones, but rather by spiritual osmosis it is said that an anointing is received through a casket and six feet of dirt.

Second, a resurrection occurred at the tomb of Elisha. There are no resurrections by those practicing “grave sucking.”

Third, if “grave sucking” was necessary for the Christian life and spiritual growth, it would be commanded somewhere in the New Testament as a necessary church practice.

Finally, every believer has an abiding anointing according to 1 John 2:20, 27. We don’t have to travel to a cemetery. Why chase a supposed God-given anointing when we already have one according to Scripture?

This practice is not about anointings, the Bible, or deeper spirituality. It’s a sad day when those who want attention, fame, and fortune focus on death rather than life and on graves and the grotesque rather than growth

in Christ and biblical sanctification. Moses told God's people to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). However, for whatever reason, some would rather choose death, decay, and the delusion of "grave soaking" and "grave sucking." Even *Charisma* magazine, which is often eccentric and over-the-top with its reporting and solicitation of the outlandish, appears to be crying "foul" on "grave soaking" in an online article by Joseph Mattera.

We have every reason to believe that "grave soakers" are not in touch with the Holy Spirit, but rather an unholy spirit. The Holy Spirit is preoccupied with Jesus. The Holy Spirit does not point to Himself or others, but to Jesus. He testifies not of graves, but of Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14-15).

In the end there is no blessing or anointing in "grave soaking." It is clearly an unbiblical game of show-off and superiority where some that are unscrupulous can pretend to have more unction, more of the anointing, more spiritual pedigree, and more spiritual clout. Death and decay are not where real blessings are found.

Pastor and teacher John MacArthur observes:

"It is deeply ironic that a movement supposedly devoted to honoring and emphasizing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in fact treats Him with such casual contempt and condescension. In practice, charismatics often seem to reduce the Spirit of God to a *force* or a *feeling*. Their bizarre practices and their exaggerated claims make Him look like a *farce* or a *fraud*. The sovereign glory of His holy person is exchanged repeatedly for the hollow shell of human imagination. The result is a movement whose most visible leaders — televangelists, faith healers, self-proclaimed prophets, and prosperity preachers — boldly claim His name while simultaneously dragging it through the mud" (*Strange Fire*, pg. 5, italics in original).

—GRF

—MKG

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

In November, actress and ex-Scientologist Leah Remini called attention to the Watchtower's abuses on a broadcast, "Scientology and the Aftermath: The Jehovah's Witnesses' Special Event," which aired on the A&E network.

But overall, the lack of substantial reports is due in large part to the Watchtower's control over its members, particularly its silencing the victims of sexual abuse. Insiders and victims all testify to an organization that polices itself and stresses that members are to avoid any interaction with authorities apart from its own leadership. In a news article from the United Kingdom, *The*

*Guardian* stated, "When a Jehovah's Witness experiences sexual abuse they are supposed to report it to elders, who are always men, who will take further action if there is a second witness to the offence. The perpetrator will then be called before a judicial committee if they admit abuse or if there is a second witness." The news agency further revealed, "It has been reported that the headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK, the Watch Tower, holds a database of abuse allegations made within the organisation but has yet to hand it over to authorities."

And now it appears that the Watchtower is taking its coverup to a new level. Last summer, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* disclosed, "A Jehovah's Witnesses official delivered an urgent message to a group of elders at a 2017 seminar in Britain: The time had come to rethink the record-keeping policies of the organization, which has come under fire for its handling of child sex abuse complaints." The report was based upon a video recording of the seminar that was posted online by an anonymous insider. The video was of Shawn Bartlett, who serves as a record management overseer for the organization.

The *Inquirer* said that Bartlett "explained that handwritten notes and drafts of internal documents needed to be destroyed because of the potential legal harm they posed to the organization." On the video, Bartlett says, "Well, we know that the scene of this world is changing, and we know Satan's coming after us, and he's going to go for us legally. We can see by the way things are shaping up. So the organization has said, 'We've run into difficulties in the past because of the records we have.'"

According to the newspaper, "The Witnesses declined to make Bartlett available for an interview, or to discuss his comments from the video. The footage is no longer available on YouTube. A message on the website notes that the material was removed at the request of Watchtower."

## MOORE TWEETS BAND MEMBER'S CONFESSION

Popular Bible teacher Beth Moore took to Twitter to highlight what she called the "most powerful moment" from her Living Proof Live event held in Chinle, Ariz., on Oct. 6. The social media post by Moore showed one of the members of her worship band kneeling, repenting, and asking for forgiveness on behalf of all men to the group of Native American women who were present at the conference.

While Moore loves to play to her audiences, her latest endeavor shows a lack of knowledge of biblical doctrine by both her and her band member, Kevin Jones. One report headlined its description of the incident as, "The Most Controversial Thing Beth Moore Has Done Lately."

According to [ChristianHeadlines.com](http://ChristianHeadlines.com), in an online article, Moore has become “more outspoken” in addressing “actions of many church leaders toward women” and for “her stances on the Me Too movement and social justice.” The news report also cited what Moore apparently thought was her own victimizing, “She spoke of a male theologian who looked at her and told her she was prettier than another well-known female Bible teacher.”

While Moore believes Jones’ action “brought a sense of healing to women at the event,” it did so at the expense of sound biblical doctrine. Jones’ corporate confession does not deal adequately with sin. Biblical confession and repentance necessitate a change of mind concerning the sin (or sins) one has committed, and with that a sincere desire to forsake the sin. These must be the actions by the one who has sinned, addressing the one who was sinned against. Jones cannot do that for those who have truly committed sins against women.

As news of Jones’ exploit, and Moore’s tweet of it, caught the attention of the news media, the pair received a great deal of adverse reaction from blogs calling Jones a “moron” and a “nitwit” to saying, “He wasn’t being led by God. He was being led by Beth Moore.”

—MKG

## DON'T CALL THEM MORMONS

Claiming that God is behind a move to stop people from using the terms “Mormons” and “LDS,” Russell M. Nelson, current president and prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said, “The Lord has impressed upon my mind the importance of the name He has revealed for His Church, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have work before us to bring ourselves in harmony with His will.”

Corresponding to Nelson’s revelatory announcement, which came last August, the church updated its style guide, which is provided for the news media and the public. It now says, “The term ‘Mormonism’ is inaccurate and should not be used.” Additional revisions in the style guide included:

“While the term ‘Mormon Church’ has long been publicly applied to the Church as a nickname, it is not an authorized title, and the Church discourages its use. Thus, please avoid using the abbreviation ‘LDS’ or the nickname ‘Mormon’ as substitutes for the name of the Church, as in ‘Mormon Church,’ ‘LDS Church,’ or ‘Church of the Latter-day Saints’” and “When referring to Church members, the terms ‘members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ or ‘Latter-day Saints’ are preferred. We ask that the term ‘Mormons’ not be used.”

This is not the sect’s first attempt in moving past the “Mormon” and “LDS” nicknames. According to a report by the Associated Press, “In 2001 — ahead of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City — the church issued a similar call asking the media and people to refer to the church by its full name, rather than the Mormon church. But this new request takes it a step farther by asking to not use Mormon or Mormonism. In the 2001 request, the church said calling members Latter-day Saints was preferred but that Mormons was acceptable.”

And while the move to drop those informal titles is supposedly at the Lord’s direction, comments made by church insiders seem to indicate it was more Nelson’s than God’s. Patrick Mason, who is the chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University in California, told the AP that prior to becoming church president, “Nelson has long insisted on using the full and proper name during his three decades on the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.”

Dropping those abbreviations and nicknames may be more challenging for the church itself than for the public and news media. The term “Mormon” has long been a staple for the church’s various entities, including the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, its LDS Business College, its 2014 documentary “Meet the Mormons,” its recent “I’m a Mormon” ad campaign, and the addresses for its websites which use Mormon as part of the URL.

Nevertheless, the sect is making good on holding to the new standard. In October, it announced that the “Mormon Tabernacle Choir” was being renamed to “The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square.”

But the name change will not be without complications. For example, according to the *Deseret News*, the Christmas special which aired in December 2018, still identified the choir as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Likewise, the companion book, CD, and DVD from the special also bears the Mormon Tabernacle Choir name. And there are other sticky issues: “The choir will maintain some licensing arrangements under the classic name to retain ownership of it,” the newspaper reported.

Ron Jarrett, president of the church’s choir, said, “Changing a name is even more difficult than changing a logo. It will take a great investment of time, effort and maybe even money to re-embed a new name in people’s minds outside of the church.”

Those “outside of the church” also have their opinions. The AP noted that according to David Margulies, president of a Dallas public relations firm, “Rebranding a business or large institution is a difficult task that usually costs millions of dollars and often takes generations to take hold.” Margulies added that, “The term ‘Mormon’ is engrained in American culture and has a lot of good equity that the faith would be losing by shifting away from using it. ... there’s a ‘very slim’ chance the name change will catch on.” And he observed, “Changing the name sounds like you’re covering something up.”

—MKG



# Books in Review

## BELIEVE

by Randy Frazee (General Editor)

Zondervan, 520 pages, \$24.99

The late apologist Walter Martin often reminded his audiences that Christians know what they believe, but they don't know why they believe it. All too often those professing the Christian faith spend too little time in Scripture. Knowledge of doctrine, for many, is drawn not from the Bible but from the books they read, sermons they hear, and music they listen to. Because doctrine affects and shapes how we live, Randy Frazee's *Believe* is a book worth reading. As the book's back cover says: "one simple truth will become undeniably clear: **what you believe drives everything.**"

Frazee is the senior minister at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, where he leads in partnership with pastor and author Max Lucado.

A key distinctive that separates *Believe* from other general theological works is that the bulk of its content is cited Scripture (NKJV). Frazee's introductory remarks, transitional statements, reflection questions, and summations make up a smaller part of the publication. God's Word takes precedence in this book. Frazee writes that his transitional statements "have been carefully crafted to avoid telling you what to believe; it is important that the Scripture itself be the driver of what you decide to believe" (pg. 10).

The book is divided into three 10-chapter sections: Think (*What do I believe?*), Act (*What should I do?*), and Be (*Who am I becoming?*). This is a volume that provides both doctrine and practice. The book first surveys ten important beliefs of the Christian faith, and then takes the reader through "ten key Practices of a Jesus-follower, and the ten key Virtues that characterize someone who is becoming more like Jesus." It is a resource for the new believer or the longtime believer who never really grasped why he or she believes the doctrines they do and/or how these doctrines work out in life.

Each chapter is introduced with a "Key Question," a "Key Idea," and a "Key Verse" which is followed by "Our Map," a boxed inset that accents the belief, practice, or virtue about to be explored. It is a brief overview of the chapter and its contents. As Scripture is presented (some

are extended passages, others are brief), the main ideas or core truths of the biblical text are given in bold to convey "the essence of the message" and help the reader "understand why that particular passage was selected."

Within the first section — *What do I believe?* — some of the doctrines which Frazee covers includes God, salvation, the Bible, the Church, and eternity. In the chapter which examines God, the key aspects studied are God revealing Himself through natural revelation and then specifically (through Scripture) as One God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the second section — *What should I do?* — Frazee explores topics such as worship, prayer, Bible study, spiritual gifts, and evangelism. In his analysis of spiritual gifts he offers a more generic approach, arguing neither a cessationist nor a continualist position. Citing passages from Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, he invites his readers to highlight the gift(s) they believe they possess.

In the third section — *Who am I becoming?* — Frazee draws from the fruit of the Spirit (in Galatians 5:22-23) and underscores the manifestations of love, joy, peace, self-control, and patience. (To bring his total to 10, Frazee includes hope and humility.) Frazee reminds us that, "Mature fruit on the outside gives evidence to the health of the branch on the inside" (pg. 347).

Yet the book is not without a few ambiguous remarks and the critical reader will no doubt hit a speed bump here and there. Two examples are Frazee's statements that: "Before the creation of the world, God had a Plan B in place for humanity to be in relationship with Him. Sure enough, Plan B became necessary when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, ushering in sin and death to all" (pg. 63) and "Prayer is a conversation between God and His people" (pg. 201). Concerning God having a "Plan B," Frazee here goes astray from the thinking of most evangelical and reformed theologians. God is not only omniscient, but infallible. Hence, He had no backup plan; Jesus was His plan from eternity. Scriptures such as Acts 2:23; Ephesians 1:4-5; and 1 Peter 1:18-20 all speak to the fact that from before the creation of the world, Christ's sacrifice on the cross was God's plan. Additionally, concerning prayer being a "conversation," it is not. Prayer is our outward and upward expressions to God, not a two-way conversation, as Frazee implies.

Taking into account these words of caution, because of its rich vein of Scripture there is much helpful and rewarding content that can be mined from *Believe*.

—MKG

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