

1 [Why does the Torah call this person, who encourages the worship of alien gods, "a prophet,"¹ when clearly he is an impostor? Ramban gives two explanations:]

Scripture calls him *a prophet* in conformity with his own (false) description of himself, "השם דבר עמי בהקיץ ואני נביא שליח לכם שתעשו כן" – for he says, "God² spoke with me while I was awake³ and I am His prophet, sent to you to command that you do this (worship false gods)." – But it is also possible that Scripture is alluding to what is in some sense true, כי בנפשות

for in the souls of some people there is a prophetic power through which they know the future. – The person himself does not know from where [this power] comes to him, "בקה יהיה לעתיד לבא" – but he secludes himself and a spirit enters him inducing him to say, "This is what will happen in the future regarding such and such a matter." – The philosophers call [such a person] "*kahin*."⁴ – The cause for the phenomenon is not known; nevertheless, the matter has been verified by observers. – Perhaps the soul of that person, in its acuity,⁵ clings to a "separate intelligence,"⁶ to which it is directed to know the future. – And this person is justifiably called a "prophet," because he does prophesy in the sense that he foretells the future,⁷ – and this is why *the sign or wonder that he told you comes about* (v. 3).⁸

Ramban Devarim 13:2

2 A prophet may possess the spirit of prophecy for his own sake alone, to broaden his mind and increase his knowledge so that he may know that which he did not know of certain great matters, or he may be sent to a nation of among the nations of the world, or to the inhabitants of a city, or to a government to establish them righteously, to instruct them what to do, or to restrain them from the evil deeds on their hands; and when he is so sent he is given a token or miracle so that the people may know that he is in truth the messenger of God. Nevertheless, not every one who delivers a token or performs a miracle should be believed to be a prophet; for only such man whom we knew heretofore to be worthy of prophecy, both by his wisdom and by his conduct, in consequence whereof he was above all his associates, and walked in the requisite ways of prophecy, in its holiness and self-denial, if, thereafter, he came and delivered a token and performed a miracle and said that he is a messenger of God, it is a mandatory commandment to hearken unto him, for it is said: "Unto him ye shall hearken" (**Deut. 18.15**). And yet, it is even possible that one such will deliver a token and perform a miracle and not be a prophet; as for the token, it might contain some doubtful matter; notwithstanding this, it is mandatory to hearken unto him; for, seeing that he is a great man, wise and worthy of being a prophet, he must be sustained on the presumption that he is a prophet. In this we were commanded to do as we were commanded to base a legal decision upon the testimony of two proper witnesses, even though they may have testified falsely, yet, because we consider them to be proper, their testimony must stand upon their fitness, and concerning this and like matters it is said: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children" (**Deut. 29.28**); and it is said: "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (**I Sam. 16.7**). Rambam Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:7

3

[The idea of God putting a man to a test is a difficult concept. Surely God knows the extent of a person's righteousness without having to resort to testing him! Ramban explains:]

ענין הנסיון הוא לרצותי - The following is, in my opinion, how we should understand the matter of God subjecting a person to a test: בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו - Whereas a person's actions are completely within his own control, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה - i.e., if he wants to do a certain act, he will do it, and if he does not want to do it, he will not, יקרא "נסיון" - [God's command to a particular person] is called a "test" from the point of view of the tested party. אבל המנסה יתברך וצוה בו להוציא הנדבך מן הכח אל הפועל - But the Tester, Blessed be He, commands [the tested party] to perform a certain act in order to bring forth the matter of that person's righteousness from the potential to the actual, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב - so that he should have the reward of having done a good deed, and not only the reward of having had a good heart.

Ramban Bere-shit 22:1

4

The sole object of all the trials mentioned in Scripture is to teach man what he ought to do or believe; so that the event which forms the actual trial is not the end desired: it is but an example for our instruction and guidance. Hence the words "to know (la-da'at) whether ye love," etc., do not mean that God desires to know whether they loved God; for He already knows it; but la-da'at, "to know," has here the same meaning as in the phrase "to know (la-da'at) that I am the Lord that sanctifieth you" (Exod. 31:13), i.e., that all nations shall know that I am the Lord who sanctifieth you. In a similar manner Scripture says:--If a man should rise, pretend to be a prophet, and show you his signs by which he desired to convince you that his words are true, know that God intends thereby to prove to the nations how firmly you believe in the truth of God's word, and how well you have comprehended the true Essence of God; that you cannot be misled by any tempter to corrupt your faith in God. Your religion will then afford a guidance to all who seek the truth, and of all religions man will choose that which is so firmly established that it is not shaken by the performance of a miracle. For a miracle cannot prove that which is impossible; it is useful only as a confirmation of that which is possible Guide to the Perplexed 3:24

5

ר' יוסי הנגלילי אומר - It was taught in a Baraisa: ר' יוסי הנגלילי אומר - THE TORAH UNDERSTOOD WELL THE MINDSET of the prophets OF IDOLATRY, and realized that they would find ways to delude people into accepting idolatry by performing "wonders" through sorcery. לכן נתנה תורה ממשלה בה - THEREFORE, THE TORAH GRANTED DOMINION IN THIS, i.e. the Torah spoke of the prophets of idolatry as being able to perform great wonders in support of their cause. This is meant to warn us שאתוילו מעמיד לה חמה באמצע הרקיע - THAT EVEN IF [THE IDOLATROUS PROPHET] MAKES THE SUN STAND STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SKY, אל תשמע לו - DO NOT OBEY HIM, for his is not the word of God.^[26]

The Gemara cites a dissenting view:

ר' אקיבא - It was taught in a Baraisa: ר' אקיבא - HEAVEN FORBID THAT THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED IS HE, WOULD MAKE THE SUN STAND STILL FOR THOSE WHO WOULD TRANSGRESS HIS WILL! אלא בגון חנניה בן עזריה - RATHER, when the Torah speaks of a subversive prophet who has performed a miraculous sign, the reference is to someone SUCH AS CHANANIAH BEN AZUR, WHO WAS ORIGINALLY A TRUE PROPHET, and who performed a sign at the time of his verification as a prophet, ולבסוף נביא שקר - BUT who IN THE END became A FALSE PROPHET and now prophesies for idolatry.^[27]

Sanhedrin 90a

הִנֵּה-אַלֶּה רָשָׁעִים וְשֹׁלְגֵי עוֹלָם הַשְּׁגוּרֵי-חַיִּל:

Such are the wicked; ever tranquil, they amass wealth. Tehillim 73:12

וַיִּבְּאֵל-הָגָר וַתֵּהָרָה וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ וַתִּקַּל גְּבוּרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ:

He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. Berachot 16:4

"Her mistress was despised in her eyes" (Genesis 16, 4). — This Sarah is not the same underneath as she is outside. She behaves like a righteous woman but she is not really righteous. For she has not merited conception all these years, whilst I have become pregnant the first time.

(Rashi)

I note that you condemn us on account of poverty and misfortune. But surely the great men of these nations prided themselves on just these things. For do not the Christians glorify in him who said: He who smites thy right cheek let him smite the left one. He and his disciples achieved wonderful things after hundreds of years of suffering and scorn and this is their glory. The same applied to Mohammed and his disciples (who were also persecuted and suffered). It is of these individuals that they boast and on which they pride themselves and not on haughty kings of mighty empires and wonderful chariots.

Kuzari:
R' Yehuda Halevi

Abravanel points out, *truth does not stand or fall by outward manifestations of success or otherwise, but by its own inner essence. Truth depends on no majorities, miracles or success for its confirmation.* This is in conformity with the Gemara's statement:

quoted in Netham Lebowitz
S.D. in Devarim pgs 133