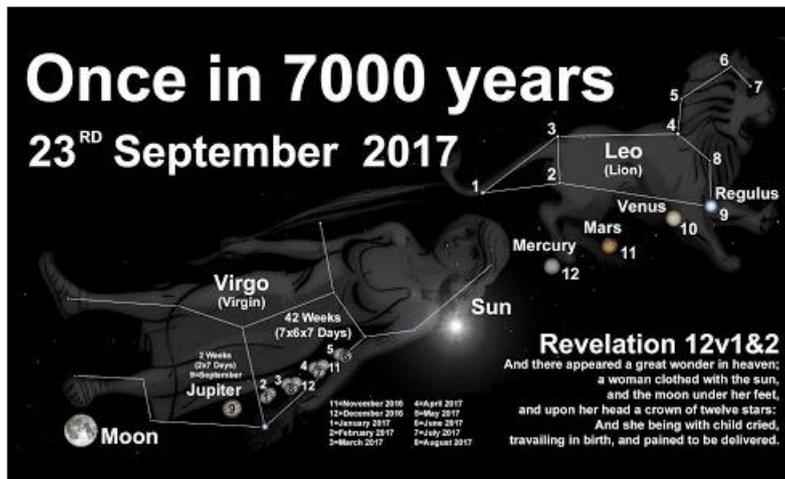


Another end-time prophecy makes us ask:

WILL THE REAL PROPHET PLEASE STAND UP?

12 Characteristics of a True Prophet

Even though INcontext is not a prophetic ministry, we are frequently asked about prophecies, predictions and prophetic interpretations. 23 September 2017 is the latest date connected with an end-time prophecy that has social media buzzing. But instead of addressing this prophecy specifically, this article will attempt to address the role of a prophet and how to discern new prophecies that will no doubt pop up in the future.



THE LATEST PROPHECY

A number of 'prophetic' websites declare that on 23 September 2017, a sign will form in the heavens that fits the requirements of Revelation 12. Many 'prophets' are announcing that this is the only time this astrological arrangement will occur in history, making it the literal "Great Sign of Revelation" that is to appear in the heavens.

Aligning the stars in charts, it is perceived that the 'woman in heaven' is Virgo – the Virgin. The sun 'clothes Virgo' and the moon is actually under her feet. The 'crown of

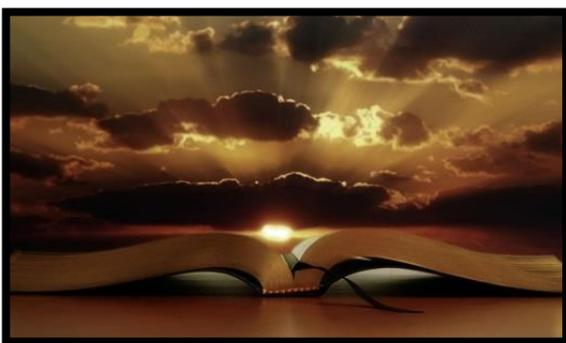
twelve stars' are supposedly the nine stars of Leo with three wandering stars (Mercury, Mars, and Venus) that have been situated within Leo at this time to make twelve. The last element of the sign is that the woman must 'be with child'. Jupiter at this time is in the 'womb' of Virgo.

This might sound fairly complicated to many believers, but there are ministries built on predictions of this nature with many followers. Prophecies of this nature are as old as history, and sadly, many self-proclaimed prophets have led many people astray and left many disillusioned. Just like the Blood Moon prophecies of 2015 (<http://www.incontextinternational.org/2016/10/01/blood-moons-prophecy-revelation-or-speculation/>) and the recent US solar eclipse prophecies, time has revealed the falseness of many of the 'prophets' behind them.

But how do we as believers discern matters of mystery? How are true prophets identified and how are true prophecies interpreted?

THE TWELVE SIGNS OF A TRUE PROPHET

John Dear offers the following twelve signs to help us identify a true prophet:¹



1. A prophet is someone who listens attentively to the word of God, a contemplative, a mystic who hears God and takes God at God's word, and then goes into the world to tell the world God's message. So a prophet speaks God's message fearlessly, publicly, without compromise, despite the times, whether fair or foul.

Most modern-day 'prophets' use this as proof that they are prophets. They proclaim 'God's Word' fearlessly and boldly. But this is only one characteristic.

¹ <https://cac.org/signs-of-a-prophet-2017-09-14/>

2. Morning, noon, and night, the prophet is centred on God. The prophet does not do his or her own will or speak his or her own message. The prophet does God's will and speaks God's message... In the process, the prophet tells us who God is and what God wants, and thus who we are and how we can become fully human.

3. A prophet interprets the signs of the times. The prophet is concerned with the world, here and now, in the daily events of the whole human race, not just our little backyard or some ineffable hereafter. The prophet sees the big picture—war, starvation, poverty, corporate greed, nationalism, systemic violence, nuclear weapons, and environmental destruction. The prophet interprets these current realities through God's eyes, not through the eyes of analysts or pundits or Pentagon press spokespeople. The prophet tells us God's take on what's happening.

This is where most end-time prophets miss the mark.

4. A prophet takes sides [the "bias toward the bottom" or the "preferential option for the poor"]. A prophet stands in solidarity with the poor, the powerless, and the marginalised... A prophet becomes a voice for the voiceless. Indeed, a prophet is the voice of a voiceless God.

A prophet is more concerned about souls than about stars.

5. All the prophets of the Hebrew Bible are concerned with one main question: justice and peace. They call people to act justly and create a new world of social and economic justice, which will be the basis for a new world of peace. Justice and peace, they learned, are at the heart of God; God wants justice and peace here on earth now. And the prophet won't shy away from telling us that if we want a spiritual life, we must work for justice and peace.

6. Prophets simultaneously announce and denounce. They announce God's reign of justice and peace and publicly denounce the world's regimes of injustice and war. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., they hold high the alternatives of nonviolence and disarmament and lay low the obsolete ways of violence and weapons.

7. A prophet confronts the status quo. With the prophet, there is no sitting back. The powerful are challenged, empires resisted, systemic justices exposed. Prophets vigorously rock the leaky ship of the state and shake our somnolent complacency.

8. For the prophet, the secure life is usually denied. More often than not the prophet is in trouble. Prophets call for love of your nation's enemies. They topple the nation's idols, upset the rich and powerful, and break the laws that would legalise mass murder. The warlike culture takes offense, and it dismisses the prophet, not merely as an agitator but as obsessed and unbalanced. Consequently, the prophet ends up outcast, rejected, harassed, and marginalised. And eventually, punished, threatened, targeted, bugged, followed, jailed, and sometimes killed.

9. Prophets bring the incandescent [radiant] word to the very heart of grudging religious institutions. There the prophet confronts the blindness and complacency of the religious leader, the bishops and priests who keep silent amid national crimes; the ministers who trace a cross over industries of death and rake blood money into churchly coffers. A bitter irony and an ancient story—and all but inevitable. The institution that goes by the name of God often turns away the prophet of God.



10. True prophets take no delight in calling down heavenly bolts. Rather, they bear an aura of compassion and gentleness. They are good and decent, kind and generous. They exude joy.

11. Prophets are visionaries. In a culture of blindness, they offer insight. In a time of darkness, they light our path. When no one else can see, the prophet can. And what they see is a world imbued with God's purposes. A world of justice and peace and security for all. A world where all of creation is safe and at rest.

The prophet holds aloft the vision—it's ours for the asking. The prophet makes it seem possible, saying "Let's make it come true and we shall be blessed."

12. The prophet offers hope. Now and then, they might sound despairing, but only because they have a heightened awareness of the world's darkest realities. These things overwhelm us; we would rather not hear. But hearing is our only hope. For behind the prophet's unvarnished vision lies a hope we seldom understand—the knowledge that God is with us, that the kingdom of God is at hand. To realise that hope, we must trust ourselves to plumb the depths and trust God to see us through.

TO SUMMARISE

If a prophecy only focuses on the hereafter – the return of Christ, stars and signs – it is most probably nothing more than a personal interpretation of Biblical prophecy based on planetary alignments. It will only disappoint and disillusion. Prophecies should be identified by calls to justice, voiced concerns for the marginalised, a focus on souls, an interpretation of current global events and the creation of a hunger for God and a thirst for righteousness. Prophecies will always contain elements of hope and hearts of compassion. Anything else is of little spiritual value.



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