

Text: 1 Jn 4.1

For today's "Ask the Pastor" message, I have a question that you might find amusing, but it is prompted by something on the internet (among other places), so you know what that means...

The question came something like this: "Have you heard about strange sounds coming from the Euphrates River? Some people say it is noise made by fallen angels."

Now... what do you think of that?

I went to Google and typed in "weird noises euphrates river"

Here are some of the sites:

The first ones I found are YouTube videos:

MYSTERIOUS SOUNDS IN EUPHRATES RIVER: Are They Fallen Angels or Something Else?

(The video debunks the claims)

Sounds Of Fallen Angels Under The Euphrates River?

This guy uses it to get followers, I think, for his prophecy teachings.

There are more like this.

There are two verses in Revelation that mention the river Euphrates

Rev 16.12 ¶ The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

Earlier in the book, this is said:

Rev 9.13-15 ¶ Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,¹⁴ one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."¹⁵ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.

Here is the sound as I recorded it with my phone off one of the videos.

[Play clip]

With those prophecies and that sound, it isn't hard to see how people might use it to stoke fear and get subscribers.

The sites that play up this sound are not "mainstream sites," and some of them are clearly trying to exploit people's fears.

Some might object: "Exactly, the mainstream sites *don't want you to know* what's going on."

Which brings me to my title:

Memes, Schemes, and what "They" are doing to Us

There are sounds that come from the earth, some of which have a natural explanation, like under ground explosions, release of gases, etc. I'm pretty sure that fallen angels (spirit beings) aren't making noises in our physical world.

Whatever those fallen angels are, they are under God's control and will be released when God says so. People looking for signs are not using the Bible correctly.

But what about all those things you read on the internet?

What about all those memes that people share, making big claims about any fear-inducing topic you can imagine?

- Climate change/anti-climate change
- The sins of Joe Biden/the sins of Donald Trump
- The lies about Covid/the lies about lying about Covid
- Lies about politicians/well, those memes are true...!! (kidding)

In a world of claims and counter-claims, what should we believe? What should we focus on?

That brings us to my text this afternoon:

1 Jn 4.1 ¶ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Proposition: Our focus needs to be on the truth of God's word. Leave the lies to the world.

I. The spirit of suspicion

A. Our text says, do not believe every spirit

1. Many Biblical warnings

Pr 14.15 The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.

Jer 5.31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their *own* authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?

Mt 7.15 ¶ “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Mt 24.4-5 And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you.⁵ “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.

2. The reason: all statements are spiritual

“behind every statement is a spirit, a *pneuma*, but not every spirit is the Spirit of God”¹

- a. We might think, “Oh, he’s a Christian, he wouldn’t lie”
- b. But remember, Christians are subject to deception — they might repeat something they’ve falsely believed
- c. Some professing Christians are deceivers: they are false prophets

B. Most of the false messages in the world come from unbelievers

1. People pursuing power
2. People who delight in gaining a following
3. People with anti-God agendas

This is true, even for most conservative politicians. You may agree with many of their policies, but their solutions to worldly problems is usually rooted in worldly philosophy.

Consequently, it is wise to be very cautious about any of the claims people push at you, even well-meaning Christians...

¹ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, The New American Commentary, v. 38 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 2001), 170.

Test and verify...

By the way, Snopes.com and similar sites are good for evaluating truth claims (they have an agenda, it is true, but you can read their evaluations with discernment and give some evaluation of the topics they are discussing).

II. The obligation for testing

A. This obligation is on us all “test the spirits”

1. Second person plural imperatives (assuming a “you all” subject)
2. We can’t rely on someone else to do the testing for us

B. There is an obligation to keep silent on untested claims (that is, don’t spread them)

1. If you don’t *know* something to be true
2. And you can’t *show* something to be true
3. You should keep it to yourself until you are certain

Don’t protest, “oh just watch this video” or “just read this site” — if you can’t show factual evidence that something is true, don’t pass it along

The sounds on the River Euphrates are *claimed* to be recordings from that site.

In a separate case, someone from Alberta one night recorded a video from the balcony of her apartment while playing in the background weird sounds from some hoax video and uploaded it to YouTube as being “strange sounds over Edmonton”²

² Mike Ross, “Strange Sounds in Edmonton Sky Part of Viral Phenomenon | GIG CITY,” accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.gigcity.ca/2012/01/25/strange-sounds-in-edmonton-sky-part-of-viral-phenomenon/>.

III. The recognition of deceivers

A. The reason for suspicion and testing is that false prophets are real

¹ Jn 2.18 ¶ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

Mt 7.15 ¶ "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

¹ Tim 4.1 ¶ But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

² Tim 3.13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad to worse*, deceiving and being deceived.

B. Some of the claims I've mentioned are relatively innocuous

1. The sounds in the River Euphrates, whether true or not make little difference to how you should live your life
2. There are other claims made that are much more serious
 - a. People claiming to be Christians will deny key doctrines of the Bible
 - b. Some of them deny the need for salvation
 - 1) Deny hell
 - 2) Deny the seriousness of sin
 - 3) Deny the judgement of God
 - 4) Etc.

C. The Bible warns against two kinds of false prophets

1. Those who say a thing will happen and it doesn't happen (Dt 18.22)

Dt 18.22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

2. Those who use impressive signs or seeming credibility to lead you away from God (Dt 13.1-5)

Dt 13.1-5 ¶ “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ “You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.⁵ “But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

Conclusion:

You might think that the question that started this message is amusing, and in a way it is.

Unfortunately, many Christians show a strong gullibility for all kinds of claims that just aren't so. Here is what we need to do:

1. We must determine to hear both sides of every argument
2. We should determine to value truth and objective evidence
3. We ought to respect our opponents and treat them charitably
4. We must submit every thought to the scrutiny of Scripture (through constant personal Bible study)
5. We must trust that God is working things out according to his will³

Proposition: Our focus needs to be on the truth of God's word. Leave the lies to the world.

³ These points summarized from Mark Snoeberger, “Conspiracy Theories in the Church Today,” *FrontLine*, January 2023, 27.