

# Editorial: What does a prophet look like?

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On the way to a meeting this morning, I heard the news. Greta Thunberg is *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year for 2019.

Many consider her a modern-day prophet, but others just can't see her that way.

I've seen the memes and the [satire](#). A large number of people think Thunberg is crazy. Some think she is whiny. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro thinks she's a "[brat](#)." Maybe she is. I don't really know since I haven't hung out with her.

Some who despise the Swedish way of doing things wonder if anything good can come from Sweden. Others wonder why anyone would take a 16-year-old seriously.

From where I sit, the reactions to Greta Thunberg are revealing. I look at the situation from the perspective of someone who reads the Bible, has taught it and preached it, and who believes the Bible is true. The Bible portrays some unbelievable characters we know as prophets but who we wouldn't believe if we could see them now.

## Some crazy people we take seriously

Right off the bat, I think of Jesus. Jesus came from Nazareth, from where [nothing good](#) comes. When Jesus was [12 years old](#), he had the nerve to "school" those at the temple who had far more schooling than he had. And they were thoroughly impressed.

Jesus was far more than a prophet, and Thunberg is far less than Jesus—as we all are. Even so, I see the reactions of some Christians to Thunberg and marvel that any of us believe the stories about Jesus.

Then there's John the Baptist. We hold up that John as a biblical hero for calling the religious leaders “vipers” and fulfilling prophecy by preparing the way for Jesus. However, if he stood in front of us today, we would call him nuts. We might even shred him with memes and satire.

John set himself apart from the establishment in his dress, speech and residence. He called out their sins and called them to account. To those who followed him, he was like Elijah. To those he chastised, he was a crazy man. A crazy man who baptized Jesus, who pointed his followers to follow Jesus instead, who ended up imprisoned and decapitated for his stance on sexual affairs.

John the Baptist wasn't a Swedish teenager, and Thunberg isn't calling out the religious establishment for their sins ... or is she?

God told Isaiah to [strip and go naked](#), which Isaiah did for three years. Imagine taking him seriously in that condition. Yet, Jesus frequently quoted Isaiah, as do we. It's Isaiah who wrote of the one who would be “[despised and rejected](#),” the one whose wounds would heal us. We take Isaiah very seriously, maybe because we don't picture him naked.

[Amos](#) was a shepherd God sent to afflict the comfortable, the “[cows of Bashan](#)” he called them. A shepherd calling the elites “cows.” That's funny. Not nice, but funny. But only because he wasn't talking to us ... or was he?

## **Serious people we think are crazy**

If we step back and look at ourselves looking at the Greta Thunbergs of the world, we may see something ironic. We may see we have an exceedingly

difficult time taking a prophetic person seriously. The irony is we are able to take prophetic people in the Bible seriously. Or are we?

This should give us pause.

When confronted with unpleasant information, when accused of wrongdoing, we feel compelled to decide quickly between legitimate counsel and hogwash.

In our current climate, if the messenger looks like us, votes like us and holds a respectable position (like us), we are more apt to take that person seriously. But if the messenger doesn't look or sound like us, doesn't vote like us, comes from somewhere we despise and speaks from a low position, it's just too much to believe; it's hogwash.

We shouldn't necessarily take Greta Thunberg and others like her at face value. We do have to be discerning. However, while we can't believe every supposed prophet, we do need to be careful how we respond to them.

If we are willing to take the likes of Amos, Isaiah, John the Baptist and Jesus seriously, then we should be able to give some consideration—prayerfully, thoughtfully and compassionately—to the person whose face we see now.

On the flip side, if we ridicule, mock and deride those like Thunberg as coming across like whiny brats, we need to re-examine the way we engage and understand Scripture. We may not believe the Bible after all.

If we reject every prophetic voice of our time whose message conflicts with our accepted truth, we will dull our senses to all truth. The Bible helps us learn to discern.

Should Greta Thunberg be the *Time Magazine* Person of the Year for 2019? Does she warrant such accolades? I don't know enough to make that

determination.

Is Greta Thunberg a prophet? I'm not ready to say she is.

What I can say is we've been given enough grace to be gracious to her and others like her. We can listen. We can appreciate their concerns. And most importantly, we can look for God's voice and guidance in whomever God decides to send to us.

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