

Beware of False Prophets, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 7:15–20

Code: 2254

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 7:15–20, the text that we are examining, says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them." The emphasis of that text is in the first few words: "Beware of false prophets"

A. The Tragic Commentary of a False Prophet

In our lifetime, an incredible tragedy occurred. It has simply become known as Jonestown. If anyone needs an illustration of a false prophet, Jim Jones is the person to look at. In him, we see the character, teaching, lifestyle, and approach of a false prophet. Unfortunately, not all false prophets are so obvious. That's why Hebrews 5:14 talks about the need for us to have our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." False prophets aren't always patently obvious like Jim Jones, nor do they all work the same way. Jim Jones reached out to downandout people; other false prophets reach out to welltodo and middle class people.

The greatest tragedy of Jonestown is not that nearly a thousand people died. Everyone dies anyway. The tragedy is that they died and went to hell thinking they were serving God and on their way to heaven. It's sad that they had untimely deaths, but even more so that they are in timeless eternity. Jim Jones fooled people into thinking that he represented God and Christ. His followers thought they were serving the Kingdom of God, but they are in hell now. Satan is a liar and deceiver, as are his emissaries, who masquerade as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14–15). Jim Jones isn't the only false prophet there is. Jesus said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Mt. 24:24). Jude wrote, "... there are certain men crept in unawares ... turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness ..." (v. 4). False prophets will always be around. Jim Jones was just one of them. Not all false prophets are like Jim Jones in their modus operandi. He reached out to poor people; other false prophets go for rich people. Jim Jones practiced blatant, flagrant authoritarianism; some false prophets are more subtle. He was outwardly vile; others appear almost virtuous. False prophets come in all kinds of packages. However, their hearts are always the same: They have the heart of the devil.

B. The Three Categories of False Prophets

There are three kinds of false prophets. The first two kinds are ...

1. The Obvious

First, there are heretics. They openly defy the truth. Paul said that they should be admonished and then put away (Tit. 3:10). Heretics pit themselves against the Bible. They are flagrant and don't fool anyone. Second, there are apostates. They know the truth, but turn their backs on it. They too are flagrantly against the truth. The third kind of false prophets fit into the category of ...

2. The Obscure

These false prophets are what I call the deceivers. They never openly admit that they are against the truth. They will not accept the fact that they are heretics or apostates. Deceivers are wolves wearing a shepherd's garments. As Jude 4 says, they creep among us when we're not aware. Some of them may be found out in the end, like Jim Jones. They stand at the crossroads where people make a choice between the narrow gate that [leads](#) to life and the broad gate that leads to destruction. While the Spirit of God calls men to the narrow gate, false prophets shove them onto the broad way that leads to hell. The deceivers vary in how sophisticated they are, and have different levels of education. They wear all kinds of clothes and ecclesiastical trappings, but they are all the same. When our Lord said, "Beware of false prophets ...," He had in mind the Pharisees and scribes. He saw them as false prophets. They acted religious, and tried to keep every minute aspect of the law. The scruples they maintained for their religion were beyond imagination. They assumed that their religiosity would put them in the highest level of the Kingdom of God. Yet Jesus called them false prophets. Vance Havner said, "You can dot all your i's and cross all your t's and not spell the word right." In a sense, the Pharisees and scribes kept all the jots and tittles of the law, but didn't spell Jesus. They were acting religious, yet they damned their followers to hell. So, Jesus is saying, "In your effort to enter the narrow gate that leads to life, beware of the emissaries of Satan. They will try to deceive you." False prophets aren't at the crossroads saying, "Hey, everybody, let's go to hell!" They are saying, "This is the way to heaven."

REVIEW

There are two words in our outline for Matthew 7:15-20. The first one, which we looked at in the last chapter, is ...

I. WARNING

Men and women all over the world are standing at the crossroads before the narrow gate and the wide gate. False prophets stand there trying to deceive them. We have to preach the truth; we must warn people about false prophets. To find out more about them in the last lesson, we looked at ...

A. The Definition

The Greek word for "prophets" is *proph^et^es*, which means "those who speak forth or speak before." False prophets are found in the Old Testament. True prophets were known by two things: They had a divine commission and a divine message. They spoke for God, and spoke from Him. False prophets didn't have a divine commission or a divine message. They stood on their own authority and spoke their own false messages. False prophets were addressed by the Greek words *pseudoproph^et^es* (false prophets; Mt. 24:11), *pseudochristos* (false Christs; Mt. 24:24), and *pseudoadelphos* (false brethren; 2 Cor. 11:26). The Greek prefix *pseudo* means "false." Next, we looked at ...

B. The Danger

Verse 15 starts with the word *beware*, which in this context means "to hold your mind back from." In other words, don't expose yourself to false prophets. Jude 23 says that if you try to reach out to people under the influence of a false prophet, do it with fear, because that false prophet could subtly influence you.

1. Declared
2. Defined
3. Depicted

Second John 7 illustrates the danger of false prophets: "For many deceivers are entered into the

world, who confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh [i.e., they do not hold a biblical view of who He is and what He did]...." What are you to do if you meet such a person? Recognize that "this is a deceiver and an antichrist" (v. 7). Verse 8 continues, "Look to yourselves [examine yourselves], that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." In other words, if you are deceived by a false prophet, you won't lose your salvation, but you will forfeit the reward you've already earned by your service to Christ. Verse 10 says, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine [the doctrine of Christ; v. 9], receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed." Don't expose yourself to false prophets, and don't wish them well. They are so wretched and deceitful that you shouldn't even welcome them. You can deal with a heretic or an apostate, but you can't deal with a deceiver without getting stained by his filthiness.

4. Destroyed

What is your protection against that danger? Second Timothy 3 talks about that:

a. By Comparison Concerning false prophets, verse 8 says, "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses [they were false prophets in Moses' time], so do these also resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." What are we to do about those evil men? We must recognize that they will be judged (v. 9). They don't believe what we believe. Then Paul says to Timothy, "... thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, [and] patience" (v. 10). Paul was saying, "You know that I am different from false prophets. You know how to distinguish between them and those who are right." Paul then said, "... evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (v. 13). Some false prophets are deceived themselves. Someone once asked me, "Do you think false prophets really know they are false prophets?" Some do and some don't. They continue in satanic delusion, and draw others into it.

b. By Consecration In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Paul says more about how to protect yourself against false prophets. You must hold your mind back from them. However, your mind cannot be in a vacuum. You've got to put something in it: "... continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (v. 14). Remember godly people and what you've learned from them. Paul says to Timothy in verse 15, "... from [when you were] a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Verses 16-17 continue, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Give yourself to studying Scripture. Hold your mind back from false prophets, and fill it with the Word of God. Have your mind on God (Isa. 26:3). Peter said, "... gird up the loins of your mind ..." (1 Pet. 1:13). Keep your mind on God and the Scriptures, because if you don't, a wolf in shepherd's clothing will tear you apart in a ferocious, devouring manner.

Third, we looked at ...

C. The Deception

False prophets wear sheep's clothing (the wool garment that a shepherd wears). You may think you can spot them, but you're going to have to look very carefully. They aren't outwardly manifest. Many Christians are fooled by false prophets, but don't know it. Many Christian leaders work with them for common causes. False prophets are deceitful.

The last thing we examined was ...

D. The Damnation

Jude 13 says that false prophets will be condemned to "the blackness of darkness forever." The Lord will say to them and their followers, "... I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:23).

So, we've looked at the warning. The second word in our outline is ...

II. WATCHING

Let me say something that is important in this day of compromise: Many false prophets today are claiming to be Christians, and many true believers are linking arms with them. Since we have been warned, what do we watch for? How do we recognize false prophets? What are their characteristics?

A. The Measure of False Prophets

1. The Passages

God didn't just instruct us to beware of false prophets; He helps us recognize them. Because of how dangerous they are, He helps us understand what to look for. Matthew 7:16 says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits...." That is not a command; it is an assurance. Verse 20 says, "Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them."

2. The Precaution

There is an old proverb that says, "Like root, like fruit." The Jews, Greeks, and Romans all said that a tree is judged by its fruit. If you want to know whether a prophet is true or false, look at what he produces. Be careful: just because a person is associated with Christians doesn't mean that he can't be a false prophet. Christians are deceived by false prophets. Matthew 7:16 identifies them as grapes stuck on thorns and figs stuck on thistles. Grapes don't grow on thorns and figs don't grow on thistles, but you can stick them on. Only close examination will reveal that a thorn didn't produce a grape and a thistle didn't produce a fig. There are Christians who unwittingly attach themselves to a false teacher who appears to be a Christian.

3. The Principle

A simple principle is presented to us in verses 17 and 18: Good trees make good fruit, and bad trees make bad fruit. That is simple. A bad tree will have bad fruit and bad sap. That doesn't mean the tree and its fruit will look wretched and shriveled. Both a good tree and bad tree look alike. It's not until you taste the fruit that you are going to be able to distinguish between them. It's easy to be deceived. That's why when God evaluates men, he looks at their hearts, not their outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7). So, when you look at a false prophet, you might see real fruit attached to him, but it's only stuck on a thorn or a thistle. The fruit that he really produces is going to be bad no matter what it looks like on the outside.

B. The Makeup of False Prophets

What are you looking for when you examine a person's fruit? There are four things to look for in false prophets. First, you look at ...

1. Their Character

When you examine the life of a person that might be a false prophet, ask yourself these questions: What kind of character does he have? What is his personality like? What are his attitudes and actions like? Look at his motives, thoughts, and perspective toward life. Examine his lifestyle: watch how he thinks and acts. Character is the first element that manifests fruit. The Bible confirms that. Let's look first at the fruit of ...a. Actions1) Of True Believers a) Their Occurrence In Luke 3:8, John the Baptist said this to a group of scribes and Pharisees: "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance" He was saying, "You say that you have repented and committed yourselves to God. Let's see the fruit." Starting with verse 10, we read, "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do, then? He answereth, and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do the same. Then came also tax collectors to be baptized, and said unto him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (vv. 10-13). John the Baptist was telling those people that the fruit of repentance included giving to someone in need and not taking more than you deserve. Fruit is an action; it is a lifestyle. Some people have thought that the fruit in that passage is manifest in doctrine, but it is really manifest in action. Another example of fruit manifest through action appears in John 15:8. Jesus said, "In this is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" How do we bear fruit? By

keeping God's commandments (v. 10). Fruit is obedience; it is action in response to God's commands.

b) Their Origin Fruit is not only your actions, but also the attitudes behind your actions. Galatians 5:22-23 says that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] selfcontrol" Ephesians 5:9-12 talks about the fruit of light. It is the light of God in your heart that produces certain kinds of attitudes. Philippians 1:11 refers to our actions and attitudes as "the fruits of righteousness" Colossians 1:10 talks about "being fruitful in every good work" Fruit includes both actions and attitudes. So, the first test of a false prophet is his character. Watch his actions. True righteousness can't come from a rotten tree. Check a person's lifestyle, because whatever is in his heart is going to come out (Lk. 6:45).

2) Of False Prophets

a) The Internal Reality Speaking of false prophets, Peter said, "... Spots they are and blemishes, reveling with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery ..." (2 Peter 2:13-14). They go after their lusts all the time. Peter also called them covetous, cursed children (v. 14). They hunger for money. They are lascivious, brute beasts.

b) The External Image False prophets won't always look like that outwardly. They can cover themselves with ecclesiastical robes and a supposedly Christian lifestyle. They make themselves look good by belonging to Christian organizations; working with Christian leaders; and talking about the Bible, Jesus, and salvation. False prophets hide the truth about their moral lives. A man may appear to be living out the gospel when in reality he isn't. Sometimes you can't detect a false prophet by his actions. The Pharisees looked good, didn't they? They didn't openly murder and commit adultery. They fasted, prayed, and tithed. They appeared to live good lives. But if you examine false prophets carefully, you'll find many skeletons in their moral closets. There will be wretchedness, greed, or immoral women in their lives. If you can't find wrong actions in the lives of false prophets, then examine their ...

b. Attitudes Often, false prophets can suppress their vileness. Their evil may not be obvious by their actions. That's when you need to take note of the way they think and their attitudes.

1) The Contrast Second Peter contrasts the attitudes of true believers with false prophets. Chapter 1 verse 4 says that true believers are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." A true believer has received the very nature of God, and escaped corruption. In other words, he is not rotting internally. However, 2 Peter 2:19 says this of false prophets: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption" They have not escaped corruption. However, verse 20 says, "... they have escaped the pollutions of the world" Peter is differentiating between internal corruption and external pollution. He is saying that false prophets have never changed on the inside, but they have externally washed off the ashes of the world. There are many false prophets that deal with the pollution on the outside. They look good temporarily; their actions appear right. You can't find any moral skeletons in their closets. When that happens, you need to go beyond their external actions to their corrupt, internal attitudes. Try to find out the motives for what they do.

2) The Criterion It is important for you to check out suspect prophets not only for your sake, but for the sake of the people who are trapped in their evil systems. If a person's motives do not include a desire to glorify God, magnify Christ, live holy, overcome sin, be humble, and be selfless, then all of his goodness is "as filthy rags [menstrual cloths] ..." (Isa. 64:6). If a person appears washed on the outside, check what he is like on the inside. Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes, "... ye are like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Mt. 23:27). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tried to communicate that it is what's inside you that counts. The Pharisees had managed to get the pollution off on the outside, but they still needed to deal with what was inside of them.

a) The Traits to Analyze When you examine a false prophet, check for the presence of a Beatitude attitude. That's the evidence of internal transformation. Is he poor in spirit and meek (Mt. 5:3, 5)? Does he mourn over his sin (Mt. 5:4)? Does he hunger and thirst for righteousness, and long for mercy (Mt. 5:6, 7)? Is he a peacemaker, and willing to be persecuted for the sake of Christ (Mt. 9:10)? No! False prophets are absorbed with pride, power, prestige, and promotion. They want to be famous and loved, not

persecuted. Second Peter 2:3 says they are involved in religion for money: "... through covetousness shall they, with feigned words, make merchandise of you" Second Corinthians 2:17 says that false prophets are hucksters of the Word. They are not sincere. Such people sell Jesus like He's cheap glass and not a diamond! They're involved with religion for prestige. Second Peter 2 says, "... Presumptuous are they; selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.... they speak great swelling words of vanity ..." (vv. 10, 18). False prophets are self-centered, proud, jealous of others, and impure. You won't find a shred of humility in them. They don't mourn over their sin or stand meek before God. They don't have the same fear before God that Paul had. Commentator Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "A Christian can generally be known by his very appearance. The man who really believes in the holiness of God, and who knows his own sinfulness and the blackness of his own heart, the man who believes in the judgment of God and the possibility of hell and torment, the man who really believes that he himself is so vile and helpless that nothing but the coming of the Son of God from heaven to earth, and His going to the bitter shame and agony and cruelty of the cross could ever save him, and reconcile him to God this man is going to show all that in his whole personality. He is a man who is bound to give the impression of meekness. He is bound to be humble. Our Lord reminds us here that if a man is not humble, we are to be very wary of him. He can put on a kind of sheep's clothing, but that is not true humility, that is not true meekness. And if a man's doctrine is wrong, it will generally show itself at this point. He will be affable and pleasant, he will appeal to the natural man, and to the things that are physical and carnal; but he will not give the impression of being a man who has seen himself as a hellbound sinner, and who has been saved by the grace of God alone" (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977] pp. 258-259). b) The Test to Apply False prophets attract both unbelievers and believers. They appeal to the natural man and look good. Scrutinize their lives carefully. If you can't distinguish them by their actions, look for humility. Jesus said, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory ..." (Jn. 7:18). He also said, "... I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent Me" (Jn. 5:30). If Jesus applied that standard to Himself, we can use that test against any man. John Calvin said, "Nothing is more difficult than to counterfeit virtue." You'll find the truth if you look. The second fruit of false prophets to examine is ...

2. Their Creed

This refers to the teaching of a person. A false prophet's teaching will be wrong. He will also subtly leave certain things out of what he teaches. What he says might sound good because it's what he doesn't say that's really important. Matthew 12 says, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.... For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (vv. 33-34, 37).

a. Discerned Listen carefully to what a person is really saying. Does he speak from the Bible? Does he give the whole counsel of God from beginning to end? Can he say with Paul, "Wherefore, I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Ac. 20:26-27)? Isaiah 8:20 says, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." You show me a man who does not teach from God's Word, and I'll show you a false prophet. Sometimes false prophets talk about the Bible, but not from it. They can't expose their lives to the light of the Word. If a man doesn't teach what Scripture teaches, he is a false prophet. Compare what a person teaches to the Bible, and watch out for what he doesn't say. b. Described You can always detect false prophets because they have a twisted view of Christ's person and work. What was Christ's work? Salvation. When you deal with a false prophet, look at what he teaches about salvation, because that's the issue every false prophet always mixes up. 1) Their Doctrinal Error The Lord said that it's not easy to become saved. He said that you must go through "the narrow gate" (Mt. 7:13). At the end of verse 14, He

said, "... few there be that find it." You must agonize to enter the gate it is a hard way. However, a false prophet doesn't teach that. His doctrine of salvation says that the way to heaven is broad and that everyone can come. He says, "All you have to do is believe in Jesus." He talks about Christ's death and resurrection, and sounds like he is preaching the gospel. But he says that everyone can enter heaven easily. Commentator Arthur Pink said, "False prophets ... are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox and pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation.... the pulpit, platform, pamphlet hucksters [I'm sure he would have added radio and television if he were alive today] have so wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the Gospel in order to make it palatable to the carnal mind" (An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953]). False prophets have a cheap doctrine of salvation. They say that a person can become saved by signing a card, walking an aisle, raising his hand, or loving Jesus. They say it doesn't matter what your life is like.²⁾ Their Deceitful Evangelism False prophets do not teach that there is a narrow gate. The deception is in what they don't say. They don't want to offend anyone. Their message is comforting and happy. They are praised by liberals and sometimes even by evangelicals. False prophets may present Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life ..." (Jn. 14:6), but they won't say anything about the narrow gate. They teach easy salvation: All a person needs to do is come down an aisle and get baptized. Their message emphasizes health, happiness, and positive thinking. They are compromisers. False prophets say everything is fine when that's not true. They don't talk about repentance, judgment, brokenness, a contrite heart, or deep sorrow over sin. Their words are comforting, positive, and lovey-dovey. That's why people flock to them: They like happy Holy Spirit healers, positive thinkers, and cheap grace preachers. Those men say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace (Jer. 6:14). a) Discussed by Martin Lloyd-Jones Martin Lloyd-Jones was right when he said that false prophets are characterized by an almost entire absence of doctrine. They don't want to talk about doctrine or theology. Everything they say is vague and ethereal. False prophets don't speak about holiness, obedience, righteousness, justice, and judgment. They focus on happiness, health, positive thinking, and easy believism. They please men to hell; there is never a call for repentance. Martin Lloyd-Jones said that is unlike the evangelism of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and the Puritans. He said, "John Bunyan tells us in his *Grace Abounding* that he endured an agony of repentance for eighteen months. There does not seem to be much room for that today. Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you are hellbound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest, and the whole world, may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance" (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co. , 1977]). False prophets don't preach like that. They are vague about everything. We had better listen to the true prophets and not the false! b) Discussed by Arthur Pink Arthur Pink said, "Certain it is, my reader, that any preacher who rejects God's Law, who denies repentance to be a condition of salvation, who assures the giddy and godless that they are loved by God, who declares that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the will which every person has the power to perform, is a false prophet, and should be shunned as a deadly plague" (An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953]). How can you detect false prophets? By their fruits. Look at their character and creed. You can also tell by ...

3. Their Converts

When you want to learn more about a leader, look at the lives of his followers. Peter said, "... many shall follow their pernicious ways ..." (2 Pet. 2:2). Part of a leader's fruit is his converts. Paul called converts "fruit" in Romans 1:13. Look at the people following a leader and accepting his influence.

Do you see humility in their lives? Are they striving after holiness and hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Or, are they just on the Jesus bandwagon? Do you see real virtue and godliness in them?

The fourth way you can identify false prophets is by ...

4. Their Consumation

Matthew 7:19 says, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Ultimately, you can tell a false prophet by his condemnation. Why has God allowed false prophets to exist?

God has ordained that false prophets exist. I used to wonder why He would do that, until I learned the answer from Scripture. First Corinthians 11:19 begins, "For there must be also heresies among you" You say, "Why does the Lord allow heresies? Why does the Lord allow false prophets to trouble us? The end of 1 Corinthians 11:19 gives the answer: "... [in order] that they who are approved may be made manifest among you." In other words, heresy is a magnet that draws false disciples and leaves manifest true ones. It's like a wind that blows the chaff away. Error separates the chaff and the wheat. With the existence of both true and false prophets, God reveals whom is genuine. It's true that some true believers associate with false prophets, and that there are unbelievers sown among believers (Mt. 13:25). But generally speaking, false prophets are ordained by God to draw ungodly people to themselves. They damn those who follow them. That's a part of God's judgment.

Second Thessalonians 2:11-12 says, "... for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth" God allows delusion because it attracts those who reject Christ it separates them from the wheat. False prophets are ordained for judgment.

CONCLUSION

A. The Peril

1. The Ways of False Prophets

We've seen the warning, beloved. Watch out for false prophets. Many of them will look like true believers. They will be pleasant, sincere people who talk about Jesus, the Bible, and salvation. They will be inoffensive, accommodating to other people's viewpoints, rarely criticized by others, and praised by many. Large crowds will listen to them and think they are great. It is those people that the false prophets shove onto the broad way that leads to destruction.

2. The Words of False Prophets

Listen carefully, because false prophets don't talk about a narrow way. They talk about God's love, not His wrath. They talk about people being deprived, not depraved. Their message is about God as the loving, understanding Father of everyone. Nothing is said about a holy God whose only children are those of faith in Christ. Their message has gaps; they leave out the truth that saves.

B. The Protection

I want to conclude with Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders in the book of Acts: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and remember, that for the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (20:29-31). The words watch and warn appear there. Paul told them, "I've warned you; watch out for those wolves! They will be in your midst." Then Paul said in verse 32, "And now, brethren, I commend you ... to the word of His grace" God's Word is our protection.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is most tragic about what happened at Jonestown?

2. According to 2 John 7, what is a false prophet? Will you lose your salvation if you are deceived by

a false prophet (2 Jn. 8)? Explain.

3.What should our response be to false prophets who visit us? (2 Jn. 10)

4.How can we protect ourselves from false prophets? Use 2 Timothy 3:8 9, 14-17 to support your answer.

5.How can we recognize false prophets? (Mt. 7:16, 20)

6.How does Matthew 7:16 identify those Christians who are deceived by false prophets?

7.How does one distinguish between a good tree and a bad tree?

8.What did John the Baptist mean when he said to a group of scribes and Pharisees, "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance ..."? (Lk. 3:8)

9.How do Christians bear fruit? (Jn. 15:10)

10.Fruit is not only your _____, but also the _____ behind them.

11.Describe the internal reality and external image of a false prophet.

12.If you can't find anything wrong with the actions of a false prophet, what should you examine next?

13.What does 2 Peter 1:4 say about true believers? What does 2 Peter 2:19 say about false prophets?

14.What is Peter differentiating between when he says false prophets "are the servants of corruption ...," yet "they have escaped the pollutions of the world ..."? Explain. (2 Pet. 2:19, 20)

15.When trying to discern a false prophet, check for the presence of a Beatitude attitude. What are the characteristics of that attitude?

16.What two things characterize a false prophet's teaching?

17.What did Jesus teach about salvation? What do false prophets teach about salvation?

18.What did Martin Lloyd Jones say that false prophets are characterized by? What things do false prophets not talk about? What do they focus on?

19.When evaluating whether or not a person is a false prophet, why would looking at his converts be helpful?

20.Explain why God allows false prophets to exist. Support your answer with Scripture.

21.What did Paul say in his warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-31? What protects us from the danger Paul spoke of (v. 32)?

Pondering the Principles

1. When you listen to someone who professes to teach the Bible, examine him carefully. Just because his teaching sounds good to you doesn't mean that he is a true Christian. Paul used himself as an example for Timothy to compare other teachers to: "... thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, [and] patience" (2 Tim. 3:10). If you had to examine a person right now to find out whether or not he is a false prophet, what specific things would you look for? List them. Now list the things you would look for to prove that a person is a Christian. Compare your two lists, and summarize what you have learned from them.

2.A false prophet's teaching is both wrong and incomplete. Read Romans 16:17-18. Whom should we avoid? How do false teachers "deceive the hearts of the innocent" (v. 18)? Whom does Paul say should be accursed in Galatians 1:8-9? Read Ephesians 4:14. What should we not be "tossed to and fro" by? Using what you have just learned, explain why it is so important to know what the Bible teaches.

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