

2. The Quicksand of False Prophecy

Lesson one—*The foundation of True Prophecy*--showed from the scriptures that people must understand that neither prophecy nor its interpretation comes by the will of man, but by the will of God. When the prophets of old, such as Joel, prophesy, the scriptures must interpret their prophecies. When the apostles and prophets of the New Testament prophesy, the scriptures must interpret their prophecies. Since there are many false prophets afoot in the world, there can be no other way to the truth of God's word. Prophecies and interpretation must be from that *faith delivered once for all*. Indeed, prophecies and their interpretations belong to God alone.

Since the foundation of true prophecy is the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, any prophecies coming after the work of these inspired men comes from false prophecies. These prophets are doing the work of their father, the devil. This lesson—*The Quicksand of False Prophecy*--explores the Bible teaching on false prophets and their false prophecies. The teaching of Jesus warned of these false prophets and their deceitful teaching. At the close of his sermon from the mountain in Matt 7:24-27, the Lord separates those who hear his words and put them into action from those who hear his words and do not put them into practice:

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

These words of the Lord followed his detailed teaching on how we may know false prophets in Matt 7:15-20. Since false prophets aim to deceive humankind, they and their prophecies become the quicksand that swallows those who are deceived by their work.

Recognizing False Prophets

Since false prophets destroy the hope of those whom they deceive, the recognition of false prophets and their prophecies becomes critical. Early in the Old Testament, the followers of God learned how to recognize false prophets. In Deut 18:21-22, Moses recorded a rule for discerning false prophets:

21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" 22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

How many times since this have false prophets and teachers forecast events that never happen. For example, Jehovah Witnesses are notorious for recasting the date that they forecast for the coming of the Lord. Watchtower has given Jehovah's Witnesses 1874 and 1914 as the dates for the Second Coming. At the start of World War I, they gave their followers that time as the beginning of 1,000 years of peace and prosperity that was to accompany their so-called Millennium. It did not happen; it was not true; and they were false prophets. The 1990's ushered in the Gulf War and along with it, the false prophecies predicting it was the Biblical Armageddon. It did not happen; it was not true; they were false prophets.

Jesus, at the close of the Sermon on the Mount gave us the rules that tell us how we may know

false prophets. In Matt 7:15-20, he taught us:

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

The Lord's conclusion is that by the false prophets' fruit, you will recognize them. Just as in the natural world, we know that grapes come from the grapevine, so we know in the spiritual world, spiritual truth comes from Christ and from those that he appointed—his apostles and prophets. After all, Christ had announced in John 15:1-2:

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

We are to watch out for false prophets, who appear as sheep but are ferocious wolves. Is their teaching in the New Testament of Christ? John repeated Christ's critical warning about false teachers and prophets in 2 John 8-11:

8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

False prophets and false teachers run ahead and do not continue in the teaching of Christ. In order to recognize them, we must ask, "Is this teaching the teaching of Christ?" If anyone comes to us and does not bring the teaching of Christ, we should not ask him in or welcome him; for if we do, we share in his wicked work.

Does the teaching of prophets and teachers adhere to the teaching of Christ, the true vine, in the New Testament? If not, they are false.

To recognize false prophets, one must understand that the Bible teaches that divine prophecy would end. When the written word of the New Testament was complete, the spoken word of prophecy stopped. Paul wrote in specific terms that prophecies would cease in 1 Cor 13:8-11:

8 Love never fails. But where there are **prophecies**, they **will cease**; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and **we prophesy in part**, 10 but **when perfection comes**, the imperfect **disappears**. [Emphasis added].

James tells us what that perfection is in James 1:25, "5 But the man who looks intently into the **perfect law that gives freedom**, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does." Jude also spoke of this law as the faith that was once for all entrusted (delivered ASV) in Jude 3: " I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was **once for all** entrusted to the saints." [Emphasis added.] Jude made this statement to condemn those who are false teachers and false prophets, as he said in Jude 4:

4 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a

license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

The days of prophecy ended when the faith *once for all was delivered* to the saints. Any prophecy after the time of the writing of the New Testament is not true. The pioneer preachers made a statement that bears repeating here: If anything is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new!

Some false teachers and false prophets will try to refute Paul's teaching: When that which is perfect (the perfect law) is come, that which is in part (prophecy) will be done away. They will say that that which is perfect is heaven. That which is perfect in this context cannot be heaven because 1 Cor 13:13 teaches: "13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." There will be no faith in heaven; for faith will become knowledge. There will be no hope in heaven, for hope will have become realization. Of faith and knowledge, Paul said 1 Cor 13:12 in this very context: "2 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then **we shall see face to face**. Now I know in part; then **I shall know fully**, even as I am fully known." Of hope and realization, Paul wrote in Rom 8:24-25: "24 For in this hope we were saved. But **hope that is seen is no hope at all**. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

When the apostles and prophets finished writing the inspired word of God, as we have it today in the New Testament, the work of prophecy ended. All prophecy since then is false prophecy, and we must recognize it as such.

False Prophets Foretold

Christ had warned of false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount, as discussed above. At the end of his time, he also warned of false prophets coming after his death in Matt 24:9-12:

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

In the same context, he spoke of the deceptive powers of the false prophets, even the power to perform great signs and miracles, especially as regards his coming back to receive his saints. In Matt 24:23-25, Jesus taught:

23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible.

History is replete with people forecasting the coming of Christ—the *second coming* they call it. The term, *second coming*, does not refer to Christ anywhere in the New Testament. The Lord's teaching is clear: false prophets will come; they will say he has come here or there; but do not believe it. Though they take the name of Christ, and though they perform great signs and miracles, do not believe it. The entire purpose of these false Christ and false prophets is to deceive the elect. This sounds so much like the 21st century, yet the scene has repeated itself for every generation for 2,000 years. [A later lesson will present a detailed study of Matt 24.]

As the apostles were writing the New Testament, they continued to carry the banner of Christ against the advent of the false prophets and false teachers. Peter warned in 2 Peter 2:2:

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.

Just as the Lord had said, these false teachers work secretly with their destructive heresies among the Christians. They will go so far as to deny the sovereign Lord.

Paul made it clear that these false prophets and teachers would rise up from within the church itself, even from among the elders (bishops). Echoing the warning of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, Paul spoke of the distortion and deceit that would come from among the leaders of the church. In Acts 20:29-31, he said:

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard!

Indeed, the greatest purveyors of false prophecy and false teaching have been those claiming to be preachers, clergy, and high up ecclesiastics who claim to speak for God. Many of these falsely interpret the scriptures and many claim latter day powers of inspiration.

False Prophets of the Devil

True Christians must realize that false prophets and false teachers are doing the work of their father the devil. Jesus illustrated that you cannot have it both ways—your father is either God or the devil. Understanding this dichotomy is central to defending the church against false prophets and teachers. We must never give these evil doers the benefit of any doubt. If they have any other teaching than the teaching of Christ, they are more than false prophets and false teachers; they are sons of the devil. Jesus spoke to Jews who had believed him in John 8:31: "31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

Jesus severely castigated these believing Jews, labeling them as children of the devil in John 8:41b, 43-44:

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

False prophets and teachers of today are unable or unwilling to hear what Jesus says. Instead, they want to carry out the will and desires of their father, the devil. The devil does not hold to the truth; neither do his children.

Teachers and students often narrowly interpreted the antichrist as spoken of by John in his letters as those false prophets and teachers afoot in John's day, denying that Jesus came in the flesh. In the passage below, John speaks separately of the *spirit of the antichrist* the motivating force behind the many false prophets. The countervailing force to the antichrist in the passage is the Spirit of God. Thus, the Spirit for Christ prevails against the spirit the antichrist. John wrote in 1 John 4:1-3:

4 Dear friends, 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. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

False prophets and teachers are not merely cherubic and cheery clergymen or dignified and divinely acting ecclesiastics and theologians. Anyone without the teaching of Christ, inspired by the Spirit of God in the New Testament, is speaking according to the spirit of the antichrist, by the power and will of the devil.

Paul advanced this same truth about the source of false prophets and false teachers in 2 Thess 2:3-4:

3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and **the man of lawlessness** is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

The man of lawlessness combines in one entity the personification of false prophecy (prophets) and false teaching (teachers), and he does the work of opposing and exalting himself over everything that is called God. Down with Christ; down with the word of Christ; down with the Spirit of God; down with the New Testament of Christ; down with the church of God and Christ; down with God's children, the Christians—all of these and more are opposed by the false apostles and false teachers, summarized here by the term *man of lawlessness*. But up with teaching not found in the Bible; up with speaking *ex cathedra*; up with pronouncements of synod and conventions; up with the terms *reverend* and *holy father*, reserved for God alone in the sacred scriptures; up with the revelry of religious holidays and gambling to raise money; up with rejecting huge passages of scripture on moral living, sexual promiscuity, and homosexuality—all of these and so much more are advanced above the teaching of the scriptures in order for the man of lawlessness to exalt himself.

John identified the *spirit of the antichrist* and Paul identified the *man of lawlessness*, both of which the devil motivates and directs to do his evil work. Paul called this the *work of Satan* in 2 Thess 2:7-12:

7 For the **secret power of lawlessness** is already at work; but **the one** who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then **the lawless one** will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with **the work of Satan** displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that **deceives those who are perishing**. They perish because they refused **to love the truth** and so **be saved**. [Emphasis added.]

Three actors of evil dominate this passage: the secret power of lawlessness, the lawless one, and Satan. Their counterfeit signs and their unrestricted evil aims to deceive the perishing, who are those who refuse to love the truth and so be saved. This same three, who embody evil, stage the world's great deceit. They act through their legions of false prophets and teachers gone abroad in the world, disguised in religious garb and pious demeanor. These false prophets and teachers are themselves disguise as apostles of Christ, according to 2 Cor 11:13-15:

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

John in the Revelation also identified this triad of evil—Satan, the power of lawlessness, and the lawless one. The language of the metaphors varies but the meaning is clear. In Rev 16:13-14, John, through his vision, named the three:

13 Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Paul's *Satan* and John's *dragon* are the same, as John defines the dragon in Rev 12:9: "9 The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." Paul's *spirit of lawlessness* is John's *beast*, one of unrestricted authority and power over evil in Rev 13:2-3: "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." Paul's *lawless one* is John's *false prophet*, the last entity in this triad of evil, according to Rev 16:13-14:

. . . they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world . . .

False prophecy and false teaching is the work of the false prophet in the world. John, while describing the false prophet's capture, stated his job description in Rev 19:20:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs, **he had deluded those** who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

Paul gave this same job description to the lawless one. Certainly false prophets and teachers are of the devil.

The End of False Teachers and False Prophets

The triad of evil and their minions upon the earth throughout the generations of man will share an equal and just fate. Of the false prophets and teachers, Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2:12:

12 But these men [false prophets and false teachers] blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

Of the beast and the false prophet, John wrote in Rev 19:20:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Of the devil, John recorded in Rev 20:10:

10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Of those souls, deceived and deluded, by the working of evil in world, 2 Thess 2:10-12 teaches:

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

The devil's followers perish, just as he, will perish, according to "Rev 20:12-15:

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matt 7:24-27: Who is the wise man? Who is the foolish man? To what are they compared?
2. Deut 18:21-22: What rule did Moses give for identifying false prophets?
3. Matt 7:15-20: Christians are warned to watch out for whom? What will happen to those who bear bad fruit? How will you recognize false prophets?
4. John 15:1-2: Who is the true vine?
5. 2 John 8-11: Who does not have God? If you continue in the teaching of Christ, whom do you have? What will you share if you welcome a false teacher?
6. 1 Cor 13:8-11: What will cease? When? What will happen to that which is in part?
7. Jude 3: For what are Christians to contend? What was delivered once for all?
8. Jude 4: Who secretly come into the church? What do godless men change?
9. Cor 13:12: What will happen to our faith in heaven?
10. Rom 8:24-25: What will happen to our hope in heaven?
11. 1 Cor 13:13: What three things remain now? Which of these is greatest?
12. Matt 24:9-12: What did the Lord tell the apostles to expect after he left them? How would those who turned away from the faith act? Who would appear?
13. Matt 24:23-25: What would some people say about where Jesus was?
14. 2 Peter 2:1-2: What will false prophets and teachers do secretly?
15. Acts 20:29-31: What did Paul call false teachers? From where would they come? What would they do? What should the church do?
16. John 8:41b, 43-44: Who was the father of these Jews who believed on Christ? Why was Christ's language not clear to them? What was the devil's native language?
17. 1 John 4:1-3: How can you we recognize the Spirit of God? The spirit of the antichrist?
18. 2 Thess 2:3-4: Who will be revealed? What will his fate be? How will he act toward God? What will he do in the temple of God?
19. 2 Thess 2:7-12: What secret power was working in the church? To whom did Paul accord this work? What will happen when the lawless one comes? Why will they perish?
20. 2 Cor 11:13-15: As whom do Satan's workers masquerade? As whom does Satan masquerade? What will their end be?
21. Rev 12:9: What are the different names of the devil?
22. Rev 13:2-3: What three things did the dragon give the beast?
23. Rev 16:13-14: From what three entities do evil spirits come? Against whom do they war?
24. Rev 19:20: How did the false prophet use these miraculous signs?
25. 2 Peter 2:12: What are false prophets like?
26. Rev 19:20-21: What will happen to the beast and the false prophet?
27. Rev 20:10: What will happen to the devil?
28. 2 Thess 2:10-12: What will happen to those who refuse to love the truth? What will happen to those who believe a lie?
29. Rev 20:12-15: What will happen to those whose names are not found in the book of life?