

# Watch Out For False Prophets

## Matthew 7:15-23 and Luke 6:43-45

**DIG:** How does the **tree** and its **fruit** help you recognize a **false teacher**? What are the three ways you can identify a **false teacher**? Yeshua said that **not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of Heaven**. Will it matter if they **prophesied, drove out demons and performed many miracles in His name**? Why does **Messiah call them evildoers**? What will the Lord say to **them**? Is that cruel or just? Are **those** pictured here believers who have lost **their** salvation? Why or why not? Who will be the ones who will be able to **enter the kingdom of Heaven**?

**REFLECT:** Although this passage specifically warns against **false teachers**, the concept also applies throughout the Bible to those who bear unacceptable **fruit in their** spiritual lives. It is always timely to ask ourselves, "What kind of **fruit** am I bearing today in my own life?" So what quality of **fruit** would your family or co-workers say you are producing? How can we tell the real **Anointed One** from the counterfeit?

In the final book of C. S. Lewis' book *Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Last Battle*, a devious ape named Shift finds an old lion's skin and persuades a simpleminded donkey to put it on. Shift then claims that the disguised donkey is Aslan (the Lion who is the rightful king of Narnia) and forms an alliance with Narnia's enemies. Together they set out to control and enslave the subjects of Narnia. Young King, Tirian, however, can't believe that Aslan would actually be involved with such brutal practices. So, with the help of the real Aslan, he defeats Shift and his counterfeit lion. **In Christ's fifteenth example contrasting the true righteousness of the Torah with pharisaic Judaism, He teaches us to discern what is false and warns against false teachers.**

The Bible tells us that the devil is in the business of imitating **God**. His goal is to be like the **Most High** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Dp - How You Have Fallen From Heaven, O Morning Star**). Through deception, the Adversary tries to replace **Christ** with a substitute. **Jesus Himself** warned us of **false prophets** and **counterfeit christs** when **He** said: **Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in My name, claiming, "I am He," or "I am the Messiah," and, "The time is near." They will deceive many, but do not follow them** (Matthew 24:4-5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8).

**Watch out for false prophets.** Unfortunately, **they** have always harassed Isra'el (Numbers 31:15-16; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Jeremiah 28:1-17). Where the truth of ADONAI is revealed, **the enemies** of that truth will most certainly try to stir up confusion or deception (see my commentary on **Jude Ah - Godless People Have Secretly Slipped In Among You**). **They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves** (Matthew 7:15). **They** are called **false apostles** and **false believers** (Second Corinthians 11:13 and 26), **false teachers** (Second Peter 2:1), **hypocritical liars** (First Timothy 4:1-2), **false witnesses** (Matthew 26:60), and **false messiahs** (Matthew 24:24). Paul's last words to the Ephesian elders when he said good-bye to them on the beach near Miletus, included a sober warning about the inevitable **false teachers** that would be coming. **I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard (Acts 20:29-31a)!**

After warning about **false teachers**, Yeshua tells us what to **watch** for in identifying them. We should be able to discern between the true shepherds of **God's Word** and **false teachers** by the spiritual **fruit** in **their** lives. Is there **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control** (Galatians 5:22-23a)? Or is there negativity, oppression and spiritual death (see my commentary on **Jude As - They are Autumn Trees without Fruit, Wild Waves of the Sea Foaming Up Their Shame, Wandering Stars**)? **False prophets** or **false teachers**, used here in the broadest sense of one who speaks for **God**, are judged by **their** life, not merely by **their** appearance or **their** words. **Jesus** said: **By their fruit you will recognize them** (Matthew 7:16a; Luke 6:44a). The Pharisees were to be judged **by their fruits**. They were not righteous. If they had been righteous, they would have showed **the fruit** of righteousness. The fact that they were producing **bad fruit** showed that neither they nor pharisaic Judaism was righteous.<sup>597</sup>

There is no need to be deceived if we look closely. Some **false teachers** are noticeably phony and they would only take in the most gullible person. Others disguise their true nature with incredible skill, and only careful observation will expose them for what they are. These are the ones **Jesus** describes here. **Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles** (Matthew 7:16b; Luke 6:44b)? The Greek construction here expects a negative answer. From a distance it might appear that **the grapes** and **figs** were growing on real **fruit trees**. **The fruit** appears to be real, so naïve people might also conclude that **the tree** itself has to be genuine. But even though **the fruit** appears colorful and attractive, in reality, it is bitter, distasteful and even poisonous. Judging **the fruit** of **false teachers**, of course, is not nearly so easy as judging **fruit** from an orchard. But the Bible teaches us **three ways** to identify those who are **wolves in sheep's clothing**.<sup>598</sup>

**The first way to identify false teachers is by their character.** A person's basic character - his or her inner motives, standards, loyalties, attitudes and ambitions - will eventually reveal itself in actions. **A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (Luke 6:45).** The expression **heart** is commonly used by **Luke** to refer to the inner being of an individual out of which attitudes (**Luke 2:35, 16:15**) and values come (**Luke 12:34**). **An evil heart** produces critical and judgmental attitudes (**Luke 5:22, 9:47**), doubts (**Luke 24:38**), and wickedness (**Acts 8:22**); but **a good heart** produces **good fruit** (see **Et - The Parable of the Soils**). As a result, we should guard our **hearts** (**Luke 21:34**).<sup>599</sup>

**The second way to identify false teachers is by their creed.** At first glance **they** may seem biblical and orthodox, but careful examination always reveals concepts that are unbiblical and the absence of strong, clear theology. False ideas will be taught and important truths will be omitted. In the last analysis, **the fruit** will show **a tree** for what it is, because **every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit (Matthew 7:17).** Any farmer in Galilee can tell you that **a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit (Matthew 7:18; Luke 6:43).** All false teachers will have an incomplete, distorted, or perverted view of **the Meshiach**. If the Adversary can confuse and mislead people about **the Savior of Sinners**, he has confused and misled them at the very heart of the Good News. **Their** message is full of gaps, the greatest gap of which is the truth that saves. Therefore, the second evidence that **the many** who travel **the broad way** (see **Dw - The Narrow and Wide Gates**) will not enter the messianic Kingdom is that **their** lives are not built on the foundation of **Christ** and **His Word**.<sup>600</sup>

**The third way to identify false teachers is by their converts.** Their followers will be like **them, people** who have the same superficial, proud, self-centered, self-willed, and unscriptural beliefs as **they** do. **Counterfeit teachers** and **their counterfeit followers** refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason **God** sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (**Second Thessalonians 2:10b-12**). In the final analysis, **ADONAI** makes sure that **every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:19).**

**The fire** would surely remind the crowd of the common belief in the afterlife and the place of judgment as **Ben-Hinnom** that represent hell in the Scriptures. **Jeremiah** records: **They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech (Jeremiah 32:35).** During the time of **Christ**, the Valley of Hinnom became the common receptacle for all the refuse of the city. Here the dead bodies of

animals and of criminals, and all kinds of filth, were cast and consumed by fire kept always burning. It thus in process of time became the image of the place of everlasting destruction, and used by our Lord in this sense (Matthew 5:22, 5:29-30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5). **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:20).**

Spiritual deception is not only about **false** outward appearances, but also has much to do with **false** words. Anyone can say, "Lord, Lord" with their mouth. **Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven.** Notice that it is not the one who says she knows Jesus or who believes certain facts about Him; rather, it is the one who **does the Father's will** that is saved. The issue is obedience to the Word of God. Yeshua said: **If you hold to My teaching you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31 also see Matthew 24:13; Colossians 1:22-23).** You cannot separate salvation and obedience from **the will** of ADONAI, as the writer to the Hebrews makes clear: **He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).**

Notice that the **many** who will be turned away are not pagans. **They** are religious people who have chosen the **wide gate and the broad way that leads to destruction (Mattityahu 7:13 DBT).** Their plea will be the religious deeds they have done. **Many will say to me on that day of judgment (see my commentary on Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment), "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles" (Matthew 7:21-22)?** Rabbi Sha'ul said people like this have **a form of godliness but deny its power (Second Timothy 3:5).** They are much like the Pharisees, obsessed with religious activity, not necessarily apostates, heretics, anti-God, atheists, or agnostics - merely people trying to earn God's favor through external works rather than living out the righteousness based on faith.<sup>601</sup>

But the one who practices lawlessness will be excluded. **Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers" (Matthew 7:23)!** This doesn't mean that the Lord didn't know who **they** are. He knows **their** identify perfectly well. But the Hebrew idiom *to know* represents intimate relations. It was used frequently of marital intimacy (Genesis 4:1 and 17). It was also used of Ha'Shem's special intimacy with His **chosen people** Isra'el and with all **those who** have faith in Him. In a distinctive and beautiful way ADONAI knows those who take refuge in Him (Nahum 1:7 NASB). The Good Shepherd knows His sheep intimately (John 10:1-14). The lesson here is that if a person lives an unrighteous life of disobedience, it doesn't really matter what she says or what good things she has done. She is an unbeliever and in danger of eternal damnation. In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua was warning the people, in very strong terms, against following the Pharisees, who were **false teachers.**

**God's** name has been defamed throughout history because of imposters masquerading as believers. In these passages we are commanded to be **fruit** inspectors. This doesn't mean we are to judge others. But if someone is purporting to be a believer we should remember that **every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit**. But the apostle **John** has given us a couple of other ways to discern **bad fruit**.

Some believe that what is pictured here are **those** who have "lost their salvation." But, that can't be true because the Bible teaches that believers are eternally secure in **Christ** (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). They didn't "lose their salvation," because they were never saved to begin with. **John** teaches that **they went out from us; but they did not really belong to us**. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (First John 2:19).

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. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges the Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 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 (First John 4:1-3).

So how can we tell the real **Messiah** from the counterfeit? The only authentic **Christ** is the one described in the Scriptures. Anyone or anything that portrays a different **Yeshua** than the One presented in the Bible is promoting "a donkey in lion's clothing."<sup>602</sup>

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

Now it came to pass as I journeyed, that I came upon a Great Church, which the Builders were making Greater. And they pulled down a certain portion of the Wall, and builded it Westward, and the removed the Organ, and builded one Greater. Now, the Organ that had been within the church had been sweet of tone, but it was deemed Too Small, and, moreover, it had grown Rickety, so that it Creaked, and Squawked, and did those things which it Ought Not to have done, and left undone the Things which it Ought to have done. Wherefore they removed it. But the Pipes therein were still good, and they Saved them with Care, to be builded into another and a Greater Organ.

Now, the old Organ had never been so great as it seemed, but had been Built into a Larger Space than it could Occupy. And one-half of the Pipes in the Front Row were Real Pipes and the other Half were Dummies. And the organ had stood for forty years, and no one sitting in front of it could have told that Half the Pipes were Dummies, nor could one tell which were the Real Pipes, and which were the Dummies.

But when the Organ was removed, the Real Pipes were Packed with Care, and sent away to a Great Factory, where to be Rebuilt into some other Organ. But the Dummy Pipes, some larger and some smaller, were cast into the junk to be hauled away into the Valley of Hinnom, which same is a valley outside the city gates, like unto that which is near Jerusalem, where the worm dieth not, because it feedeth ever upon refuse, and the fire is not quenched, because ever they haul to it more junk.

Now as the Dummy Pipes waited for the coming of the Trash Man, to haul them to the Valley of Hinnom, one of the workmen took the largest of the pipes, which was Twelve Cubits long, and was like unto a Real Pipe which might have given forth the tone of Middle C but had never given forth a tone, for it was a Dummy. And the Workman took it, and placed it at the end of a Sewer Pipe, for the same had been broken apart in the building; yet the Sewer was still in use in the older part of the Sanctuary, but there was need for certain days that a Temporary Pipe should be place there, lest the Filth should Run out in the place where the workmen wrought; and Plumbers could make the Sewer Connection. So I came and beheld, and Lo, the Beautiful Pipe, that was Twelve Cubits in Length, and Half a Cubit broad, was in use as a drain for the Drainage of Filth.

And I was displeased, and I sought out the Master of the Workman, and I said, What do ye, defiling a Pipe that hath had its place in the Organ? Surely, ye have done an Unholy thing!

And he said, That pipe is doing good service, and it had been thrown away, and it was good for nothing else. Wherefore should we spend money and have the work delayed, to buy a Pipe when here is one at our Hand that is Big Enough, and Long enough for our needs?

Nay, said I, but not this Pipe. For this hath had its part in the Worship of the House of God; and even though it be cast aside I would have it treated Reverently.

But the Master of the Workman spake to me sternly, and he said, Business is Business. Take heed to they Preaching and I will attend to my Building. We must use what Material we can from the Old Building to save us Money on the New. For what with the High Cost of Living, and the peril of Strikers, it is hard enough to pay Expenses as it is.

Then said I, Lo, I am a poor man, yet will I pay for Sheet Iron Pipe for that place, that a Thing be not Defiled with Filth that hath had a place in the worship of God.

But the Master Builder said to me, Keep thy Money, and be not too free with it. As for the Pipe, trouble not thyself. Forty years it stood in the House of God, falsely proclaiming itself to give forth sweet Music, and it gave none. This is the first time since it was made that it hath ever been of Any Use under Heaven. Let it be used for the One Thing it is good for, and then let it go with the Junk.

Then I went my way, and I meditated, and I said, Lo, this is the portion of the Hypocrite; for though he stand in his place in the House of God for Forty years, yet at the end shall appear a Hallow Mockery, and God shall find for him whatever Place he still can be of use, but it may not be a Pleasant Occupation.

And many times thereafter I thought about the Dummy Organ Pipe, and the Dummy Believer. And I said, Lo, if it must be that anyone whose life was a Sham shall go to the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, the ways of the Lord are just and righteous altogether.

But I remembered that the Dummy Pipe was Decorated with Gold Leaf, and it was good to look upon. And I sorrowed at the base to which it was put. But I could not deny that It was useful at the end. And I considered these things.<sup>603</sup>