

## **RAVENOUS WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING**

Matthew 7:13-27 presents FOUR warnings:

- Two ways (vv. 13-14).
- **Two trees (vv. 15-20).**
- Two professions (vv. 21-23).
- Two builders (vv. 24-27).

In Matthew 7:13-14, Christ says there are two gates, two ways, and two destinies. Building on this, we now come to Christ's second warning/challenge in Matthew 7:15-20.

### **Matthew 7:15 (NKJV)**

**15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**

Christ here warns of false prophets who come to deceive you with a harmful self-agenda!

The word “Beware” (Gk. prosechete) is a present imperative indicating it is an ongoing command. To beware means to be alert to this danger – to watch out for these people because they are dangerous. To beware means to constantly be on guard. You cannot let your guard down because of the danger involved.

Earlier in the chapter, Christ said not to judge, but we noted in context that the emphasis is not to judge hypocritically. Christ certainly did not mean we are not to be discerning. In fact, in that same context in Matthew 7:6 Jesus said not to give what is holy to dogs nor to cast our pearls before swine, which, as we noted, requires a form of “judgment” or “discernment.”

In like manner, now in verse 15, Christ says to watch out for false prophets. This too requires making a judgment call. False prophets and false teachers have consistently been a stumbling block for many people down through the ages. They are key instruments the devil uses in spiritual warfare. You don't have to go far or wait long for them to show up. The devil is very active and aggressive in using these agents of his.

We have been warned! Christ warned us! There are true prophets, and there are false prophets. Actually, there are only false prophets on the scene today, because the true prophets have fulfilled their purpose in giving us the revelation of God and then passed off the scene of history.

The true prophets were the contemporaries of the apostles, but when they finished giving us the NT Scriptures, their job was done. There are no more legitimate prophets today. However, there are many who still claim to be prophets – but in truth they are all FALSE PROPHETS.

Biblically, a prophet is one who speaks for God. They have new revelation from God. They come proclaiming, “Thus saith the Lord” with authority because God has given them this message. However, to claim to speak for God when in fact you do not is a really serious error!

The true New Testament prophets were contemporaries of the apostles, and they gave us the revelational foundation called the New Testament Scriptures. The ministry of the apostles and their associates, the prophets, was “revelatory” and “foundational”.

### **Ephesians 2:20 (NKJV)**

**20** [The Church] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

### **Ephesians 3:5 (NKJV)**

**5** which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

You only lay a foundation ONCE, and then you build the rest of the superstructure upon it. The apostles and prophets gave us the foundation of the NT Scriptures on which the Church is built. We have no more revelation being given. The foundation is complete. The Scriptures are complete. There are no more legitimate prophets – but there are plenty of false ones.

### **2 Peter 2:1 (NKJV)**

**1** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

It's like Peter doesn't even legitimize the role of future prophets, instead calling them “false teachers” who will come in the future. Back in the day of the apostles, there were legit true prophets and, on the scene, there were also false prophets. But now that revelation is complete, there are only teachers. Some are true teachers, and some are false teachers. This in effect, is what Peter anticipates saying, “there will be false teachers among you,” not even giving any credence whatsoever to the idea of future prophets.

True prophets truly spoke for God and represented God's interests and the good of the people. In contrast, false prophets claimed to be true but, in actuality, had a self-agenda that came at the expense of the people.

Jeremiah 22 and 23 at great length address the serious error of false prophets, and God says of them that they "prophecy lies in My name" and they are "prophets of the deceit of their own heart" (Jer. 23:25-26). Their message was not from God, but rather came from their own deceitful heart!

In view is a general principle that has wide application related to all "false prophets" who come with deceitful intent.

Notice how these "false prophets" come. They don't come with pitchforks in hand. They don't come off as "mean-spirited" or demeaning. No, not at all! Rather, they come off genuine as one of the sheep. That is, they come off as true Christians who are true followers of Christ. This is what makes them so dangerous!

And they come in contrast to being sent. These are self-made prophets who come on their own accord with their own agenda. God didn't send them.

"God takes His truth seriously, and in a confused generation that is totally convinced of any person's right to promote any opinion, the warning here is critical. ...The contemporary church has lost the sense of God's sending teachers, and – as any Christian bookstore demonstrates – many have taken to themselves the right to teach their own opinion of God's truth." – ***Ed Glasscock***

These people intentionally come to deceive. They come dressed to deceive. They are pretenders. They pretend to be "sheep," which is to say God's people. They claim to be followers of Christ. They know the Christian culture, they know the language, and they know how to play the part well. And it looks good. They initially look credible on the surface.

But here is the problem, while having on sheep's clothing (outward appearance), inwardly they are ravenous wolves. They have an inward problem – a heart problem.

Wolves are known for being ferocious and merciless when it comes to prey. Wolves care about one thing – getting what they want, and they don't care about the destruction they cause in the process. Wolves have a total SELF-AGENDA, and they exploit the flock to that end.

The Greek word (harpax) translated as “ravenous” is also translated other places as “swindler” or “extortioner” (cf. Lk. 18:11; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:10). Ravenous “wolves” take advantage of vulnerable people for self-serving reasons.

## **2 Peter 2:1–3 (NKJV)**

**1** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be **false teachers** among you, who will **secretly bring in** destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

**2** And **many will follow** their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

**3** By covetousness they **will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

The **Didache** is one of the earliest Christian writings after the days of the apostles. It presents a sort of a manual on Christian living. It warns of false prophets. It describes them as being “Christ merchants”. In other words, they are those who are trying to make a profit off of Christ. They are all about “marketing Christ”.

## ***The Didache – Marks of False Prophets***

- 1) Seek to remain as a house guest for more than two days.
- 2) Ask for money.
- 3) Lives contrary to the standards he preaches.
- 4) Not willing to work.

False prophets and false teachers descended on the Church early – essentially right from the beginning. The N.T. Scriptures are full of warning and exhortation about this problem, showing that the warning of Jesus is ever relevant (cf. Acts 20:29; 2 Cor. 11:11-15; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 17-22; 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:1-6).

## **Acts 20:29–31 (NKJV)**

**29** For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

**30** Also **from among yourselves** men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

**31** Therefore **watch**, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Paul was passionate about watching and warning concerning the onslaught of false teachers, both from the outside and from the inside. These people have a total self-agenda, but they come off so legit. They fool many people, which makes it really hard for those with discernment who try to warn the flock. Often, those warning and raising a RED flag are considered to be the bad guy by the undiscerning.

Exactly what these false prophets will teach is not stated, but the flow of the Sermon on the Mount and the immediate context suggests that they will not acknowledge nor teach the narrow gate nor the difficult way of persecution that goes with it. They want the EASY way that promises your best life now – that is all about self-fulfillment – that caters to their own desires (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4). This is what so much of popular Christianity is all about!

## **2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NKJV)**

**3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

**4** and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

“False prophets prevent others from entering the narrow gate because they beckon people to the broad gate.” – *The Moody Bible Commentary*

“Wherever the stern demands of true discipleship are taught, there are false prophets who advocate the wide gate and easy way.”

– *William MacDonald*

This is my issue with the “Lordless Gospel” or what is often dubbed “Easy Believism”. It caters to the flesh that says you can have Christ and live anyway you want to live. That is a false gospel. If the gospel doesn’t change you from the inside out, that is a false gospel. This is in keeping with the message of false prophets who promote the “broad, easy way”.

“BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS”. They come disguised. They come garnering acceptance, but they have hidden ravenous motives that seek to EXPLOIT people. They are in it for what they can get out of it for SELF!