

PREPARING FOR THE MESSIAH

Part II

Text: Matthew 24:1-51

Key Word: Deception

Key Thought: We must Be Aware of False Christ's and False Prophets

The disciples were curious as well about some very important questions dealing with future events. They asked three questions.

1. When will this happen?
2. What will be the sign of Your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

What Were These Disciples Told about the Signs Proceeding the Return of Christ?

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8)

II. THE INCREASE OF PERSECUTION (Matthew 24:9-10)

III. THE ABUNDANCE OF OPPORTUNITY (Matthew 24:12-14)

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8) (Contd.)

3. Four Characteristics of False Prophets

False ministers exhibit a number of peculiar characteristics.

The Love of Preeminence: They like to be important and to have others believe and follow them. Diotrefes is a case in point. He loved to have the preeminence, but his heart was wholly evil (III John 9). If someone has an inordinate desire to be a leader, if he thrusts himself forward to gain ascendancy, ask yourself a very important question: Is that person a false prophet?

The Love of Money: We know from Scripture that the love of money is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6:10). The early Christians wrote that if a man asked for money, he was surely a false prophet. If someone is always pressing for money and seems likely to benefit personally from that gift or offering - beware!

The Love of Immorality: Adultery and fornication are never too far removed from the doors of most false prophets (Jude 4; Revelation 2:20). Some may appear to be holy, even sanctimonious, but their apparent "purity" does not negate the rule (II Corinthians 11:15). If you have doubts about someone, watch that person's interpersonal behavior.

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8) (Contd.)

B. Deception of False Prophets (24:11; 24) (Contd.)

3. Four Characteristics of False Prophets (Contd.)

The Love of Miracles and Spectacles: The God of the Bible is certainly a God of miracles. Faithful preaching of the Word of God even today will be followed by miracles and deliverance (Hebrews 13:8). At the same time, Jesus clearly warned that the presence of miracles and the casting out of demons is not necessarily authentication of a true prophet. Rather, some who do those things, according to Scripture, may be the ones who will hear Christ's words: *"I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME"* (Matthew 7:23).

As the return of Jesus Christ nears, we may expect an abundance of false prophets and ultimately they will usher in the appearance of the Antichrist. He will be a man of lying signs and wonders (II Thessalonians 2:9).

4. The Fourfold Message of the False Prophet

False prophets never speak all lies. Rather, they speak mostly truth, but woven in and through the many true statements is a lie - probably a major lie. Paul was amazed that the Corinthian church had been taken in by pseudo-apostles (II Corinthians 11:1-15). The message of the false apostle may demonstrate and/or be characterized by a number of things.

He has his own gospel: If the prophet is false, and inspired by the devil, he will have a special message. It will make sense. It will have its own reasons and rationale. It is also likely to be accompanied by its own miracles, and providence. This was exactly the case among the Corinthians. But do not be deceived - it is a different gospel, a different message. Even though the Corinthians knew the Apostle Paul and had been taught by him, they loved the new gospel, and it went down smoothly (II Corinthians 11:4; see also Galatians 1:6).

He has his own Jesus: There are many being called Jesus in the world, just as there are many antichrists (I John 2:18) and many false Christs (Matthew 24:24). Is He the Jesus of the New Testament, of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Is He the Jesus Christ described by the Apostle Paul? Did He come in the flesh (I John 4:1-3), and is He Lord of all (1 Corinthians 12:3)? Is He the Jesus we confess in the Apostles' Creed?

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8) (Contd.)

B. Deception of False Prophets (24:11; 24) (Contd.)

4. The Fourfold Message of the False Prophet (Contd.)

He has his own spirit (II Corinthians 11:4): There is a reason why Christians must never invite false prophets into their homes (II John 10). Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses have another gospel, true. And they preach an alternate Jesus, true. But they are most dangerous because they have another spirit, an evil spirit which can do great damage in the life of a Christian.

"There is an urgent need for discernment among Christians. We are often too gullible, and exhibit a naive readiness to credit messages and teachings which purport to come from the spirit-world. There is such a thing, however, as a misguided charity and tolerance toward false doctrine. Unbelief (believe not every spirit) can be as much a mark of spiritual maturity as belief."

John R.W. Stott
"The Epistles of John"
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960, 153

If Christians are discerning, they will have learned the habit of disbelieving all spirits. That, in fact, is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he said, "*Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, KJV).

He has his own anointing: False prophets are sometimes very exciting and colourful. They speak with power. They may be interesting and dramatic. There is a reason for that; being false does not mean being without an anointing. He just has another kind of anointing, an alternate anointing (I John 2:18-27). The true prophet is supposed to have an anointing from the Holy Spirit of Almighty God. The false prophet has another kind of unction.

5. Four Favorite Doctrines of False Prophets

The Denial of the Deity of Jesus Christ: For false prophets, Jesus Christ may be "a" god but not the Creator, God incarnate, God Almighty (John 1:1). Without exception, they find ways to diminish the integrity and deity of Jesus Christ. These false prophets are inspired and empowered by Satan, and he has been a liar from the beginning (John 8:44).

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8) (Contd.)

B. Deception of False Prophets (24:11; 24) (Contd.)

5. Four Favorite Doctrines of False Prophets (Contd.)

The Denial of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ: Every spirit that does not continually confess that Jesus Christ is come "*in the flesh*" is not of God (I John 4:1-3). Why is the incarnation so essential? If Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, who died on the cross? And what was torn if not His flesh? And what was shed if not His blood? The Apostle Paul preached Jesus Christ crucified. He preached the cross. Beware when there is no mention of the blood of Jesus Christ. Beware when there is no preaching about the cross of Jesus Christ. "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18, KJV).

The Denial of the Lostness of Man: The Scriptures are very clear that all men and women who have not believed in Jesus Christ are eternally lost (John 3:16,36). To question that there is a place called hell, and to suggest that eternity is not forever is a favorite message of false prophets. Jesus Christ was the most emphatic teacher of eternal punishment and the lostness of man in all of the Bible (Matthew 25:46; John 3:16, etc.). False prophets, moved and controlled by evil spirits, do not want to confess their own future since the lake of fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

The Denial of the Inspiration and Integrity of Scripture: The Bible teaches that God's Word has been inspired as holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write (II Timothy 3:16). Every single word of the original texts has been given by God. Not even a tiny jot or tittle will pass away (Matthew 5:18). It is the practice of Satan to say, "*Did God really say . . . ?*" (Genesis 3:1).

False prophets also like to have their own revelations and attack the adequacy and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures in order to introduce their own scriptures. If the prophet is adding new revelation to the Bible accepted by the Church for most of these 2,000 years, you can be sure that prophet is false.

I. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (Matthew 24:4-8) (Contd.)

B. Deception of False Prophets (24:11; 24) (Contd.)

6. Four Main Weapons against False Prophets:

Fortunately, there are a number of powerful spiritual weapons that can and must be used in the Christian's struggle against the deception of false prophets (II Corinthians 10:4-6).

God's Word: The more one reads and studies the Bible, the more likely he is to recognize false prophets. Conversely, the less one knows about the Word of God, the more easily he will be deceived and led astray. Like Timothy of old, we should give attendance to reading (I Timothy 4:13), and we should study to show ourselves approved unto God, not ashamed, but able to rightly divide the Word of Truth (II Timothy 2:15).

If the literal sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. Another helpful rule of interpretation to remember is that the Bible is by far the best interpreter of itself.

A Multitude of Counselors: In a multitude of spiritual counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14). God's servants are part of a body - the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16). If pastors or elders or older brothers and sisters in the church warn you, listen! They are probably correct. Their wisdom is exceptionally valuable. Having seen various false prophets over the years, they have learned not to be taken in by them.

Tough Truth (II Timothy 4:2-3): False prophets tickle the ears of the people (II Timothy 4:3). They often pronounce that they have deeper truths to share (Revelation 2:24). Paul observed that those who wish to turn away from the Lord Jesus Christ will not "endure sound doctrine" (II Timothy 4:3). The message that is very smooth and attractive probably has something wrong with it. Real truth has an edge; it has bite to it. It makes demands. It sometimes hurts when we hear it.

Pursuit of Love (I Corinthians 14:1): Love is preeminent. Miracles and martyrdom cannot compare with it (I Corinthians 13:3). It is greater than faith and hope (I Corinthians 13:13). Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35). The great commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength (Mark 12:29-30). *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples," Jesus said (John 13:35).*

*** In conclusion, I must recount the story of a false prophetess who lived in a Latin American city. The beginning of a movement that was called a revival was underway in that city. It featured a lot of falling under the power, being "slain in the Spirit." Eventually, the woman, along with her brother who was the pastor, withdrew from her home church with perhaps 200 others. Because the church leadership was wrong, and because they were not following the Holy Spirit, she said, it would soon become clear that she was to be a prophetess and would lead a great movement for God. To validate her calling and future status, she also announced that on a certain day her invalid husband would die. His death would demonstrate the rightness of her prophecies and launch her out into a wide prophetic ministry.

The predicted day arrived. The sick husband, a believer, dressed himself in his best finery. Many people gathered to witness the passing of this saint of God into the presence of the Lord. They waited the whole day and even partly into the next, but nothing happened. The husband did not die on the day appointed. The woman obviously was a false prophetess. To his credit, her brother who was pastor of the new group publicly rebuked her. The original church that had lost hundreds of people returned to evangelism and soul-winning. The congregation grew until once more the sanctuary was filled. But, in the meantime, the false prophetess had caused a great deal of trauma and pain. ***

One might assume after listening to this that discerning false prophets is a simple matter. If that impression has been conveyed, it is most assuredly wrong. Even the most studious and sensitive can be deceived. The struggle to be discerning is a challenge even to the elect (Matthew 24:24). If you have a great concern about false prophets, my advice is ultimately twofold:

- 1) immerse yourself in the Scriptures (II Timothy 2:15), and
- 2) pursue the love of God, so that it may abound on every side and it will bring you discernment in the end (Philippians 1:9)

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Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: Above All - A

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This message will continue completing the 2 remaining points.

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Key Thought: We must Be Aware of False Christ's and False Prophets

What Were These Disciples Told about the Signs Proceeding the Return of Christ?

3. Four Characteristics of False Prophets

The Love of Pre-eminence: *III John 9*

The Love of Money: *I Timothy 6:10*

The Love of Immorality: *Jude 4; Revelation 2:20; II Corinthians 11:15*

The Love of Miracles and Spectacles: *Hebrews 13:8; Matthew 7:23*
II Thessalonians 2:9

4. The Fourfold Message of the False Prophet - II Corinthians 11:1-15

He has his own gospel: *II Corinthians 11:4; see also Galatians 1:6*

He has his own Jesus: *I John 2:18; Matthew 24:24; I John 4:1-3;*
I Corinthians 12:3

He has his own spirit: *II Corinthians 11:4; II John 10; I Thessalonians*
5:20-21, KJV

He has his own anointing: *I John 2:18-27*

5. Four Favorite Doctrines of False Prophets

The Denial of the Deity of Jesus Christ: *John 1:1; John 8:44*

The Denial of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ: *I John 4:1-3*
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The Denial of the Lostness of Man: *John 3:16,36; Matthew 25:46;*
John 3:16, etc.; Matthew 25:41

The Denial of the Inspiration and Integrity of Scripture:
II Timothy 3:16; Matthew 5:18; Genesis 3:1

6. Four Main Weapons against False Prophets: II Corinthians 10:4-6

God's Word: *I Timothy 4:13; II Timothy 2:15*

A Multitude of Counselors: *Proverbs 11:14; Ephesians 4:15-16*

Tough Truth: *II Timothy 4:2-3; Revelation 2:24; II Timothy 4:3*

Pursuit of Love: *I Corinthians 14:1; John 13:34-35; Mark 12:29-30;*
John 13:35

The struggle to be discerning is a challenge even to the elect (Matthew 24:24).

1) immerse yourself in the Scriptures (II Timothy 2:15), and

2) pursue the love of God (Philippians 1:9)