

The Battle for Truth: 7 Unmistakable Traits of False Prophets

“And many false prophets will rise and will deceive many. Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:11-12, emphasis added).

Theologians debate the historical context of this verse, but one thing we do know is that it definitely applies today. Many people want to know about end-times signs, but first we need to discern end-times voices—voices of truth versus those of falsehood.

In these dire times, many of us can relate to the prophet Jeremiah’s words: “My heart within me is broken because of the [false] prophets; all my bones shake ... because of the Lord, and because of His holy words” (Jer. 23:9, NKJV). The lies of Israel’s leaders led to Jeremiah’s broken heart as well as a loss of balance and stability. God declared, “‘For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house I have found their wickedness,’ says the Lord” (Jer. 23:11). The land, not unlike ours today, was full of unrepentant sin and fake voices, and the people were paying the price—the pleasant places were dried up.

In short, a false prophet is one who proclaims, “This is what God says,” when it’s not what God is saying at all. They also embrace ungodly movements because they are filled with the world rather than God’s Spirit. Leaders who are not mightily filled with God’s Spirit may exhibit some of the same characteristics as false prophets, which I’ve outlined below. However, in these cases, they lack holy fire but aren’t necessarily false leaders.

A false prophet is unconverted, whereas those who are wishy-

washy may simply be quenching and grieving the Spirit by their choices. Be careful in labeling people too quickly. The false prophet will draw clear lines in the sand; those struggling just need biblical direction. If we don't cling to the cross and seek God daily, we could easily become lukewarm and not boldly stand for Him. We all must be vigilant. Listen to a short clip here about this very issue.

Although the main focus of this article is on those who say they believe in Jesus, there are also false prophets in cults who downright reject the deity of Christ. The apostle Peter warned, "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 Pet. 2:1). False prophets will say they believe in Jesus, but they've never repented of their sin and embraced him as Lord and Savior. This point is critical—just because someone says something does not mean they believe it. Look at the fruit.

With that said, here are seven surefire signs of a false prophet based on Jeremiah 23.

1. False prophets scatter God's flock rather than unite it.

"'Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!' says the Lord" (Jer. 23:1). As just one example of many, during the COVID-19 pandemonium, I saw a pastor (who I believe to be a false teacher) mock another church that had stepped out in faith to host a meeting. Sadly, some people from that church did come down with the virus. But instead of praying for the church and protecting them by not spreading gossip, the mocking pastor had the audacity to ridicule them on social media even further, thus dividing instead of uniting.

False prophets also divide the body of Christ by embracing liberal theology and supporting such things as gay marriage.

Spirit-filled believers are left baffled and confused because false teachers keep promoting sin rather than looking to what God says. Granted, some Christians do not fully understand what the Bible says about certain topics and may therefore appear vague on their stance. These people are not necessarily false prophets; they are biblically illiterate.

- 2. False prophets do not care for the spiritual needs of others.** They appear loving to the world, but mature Christians can spot their hypocrisy a mile away. They march with ungodly movements but say nothing about the murdering of children in the womb. They are arrogant and boldly shake their fists at God in the name of tolerance. In 2 Timothy, Paul warns about people who are rebellious yet have a form of godliness. The world loves them because they are not convicted by their messages.

It's a given that most of us struggle with selfishness, but the rebuke from God is focused on how they lead: "'You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,' says the Lord" (Jer. 23:2). To not attend to their flocks is to not care for their spiritual needs. People are dying spiritually, and false leaders counsel them to keep sinning. Instead of offering the cure, they encourage the disease. For instance, a pastor I debated with on Fox News actually said that he would encourage someone who struggles with same-sex attraction to embrace it (see my podcast where I cover many of these topics). This leads right to the next point.

- 3. False leaders encourage people to indulge the flesh rather than fight it.** They are more afraid of holiness than sinfulness. Jeremiah's words are dead on here: "They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness" (Jer. 23:14). They encourage sin and avoid words like repentance. They won't talk about judgment because it convicts their

unconverted soul. The very thing they need is the very thing they are running from. They promote freedom, but they are “slaves to depravity” (2 Pet. 2:19, NIV).

There is a huge difference between a Christian who says, “I’m not really clear on this issue, but I’m searching God’s Word for answers,” and a leader who says that God is fine with sin. False prophets often align with Hollywood more than with the Holy Spirit. They talk about peace but never repentance: “To everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you’” (Jer. 23:17, NKJV). Granted, it’s biblical to encourage and help people. We are to encourage them in the midst of their sin, but we should never encourage sin.

4. False prophets avoid the difficult truths in the Bible.

To truly help people, we must preach the difficult truths as well as the joyful ones; preach the cross and the new life; preach hell and heaven; preach damnation and salvation; preach sin and grace; preach wrath and love; preach judgment and mercy; preach obedience and forgiveness; preach that God is love but not forget that God is just. It is the love of God that compels us to share all His truth. But false teachers avoid unpleasant doctrines to tickle ears rather than challenge hearts. Christians should not be an echo chamber for the world but a powerful voice proclaiming God’s Word with a spirit of humility.

5. False prophets use the phrase “don’t judge” out of context (this point differs in the sermon above). To them, “judge not” apparently means “don’t offend.” When asked why they don’t talk about sin, their statements go something like this: “It’s not my job to judge, just to love.” Yes, we need to love people and avoid a judgmental attitude, but this isn’t the issue here. Leonard Ravenhill was famous for saying that we must “weep before we whip.” True, biblical love speaks the

truth, especially regarding moral issues that destroy lives and dishonor God. We are to judge, to call into question behaviors, choices and lifestyles that lead people in a dangerous direction. In 1 Corinthians 2:15, the apostle Paul said that those who are spiritual should judge and discern all things. Jesus's famous words "judge not" were meant to condemn a pride-filled judgmental heart, not to have us remain silent on sin. Simply read Matthew 7 in its full context.

6. False prophets question the inerrant nature and reliability of Scripture. As a result, they often say, "I think," rather than "I know" when it comes to biblical truth. This is where the trouble starts. When we minimize the authority of God's Word and maximize our opinion, we will always lead others astray. False teachers have no solid foundation for their lives or for their theology. But had "they stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings" (Jer. 23:23). God is crystal-clear here that only the undiluted preaching of His Word leads to radically changed lives. Ironically, because they question God's Word, they themselves don't like to be questioned. Truth invites scrutiny, but error runs from it.

7. False prophets lack boldness and have no urgency in their preaching. When God truly calls a person and fills them with His Spirit, boldness always follows. They speak with authority and urgency. They are more concerned about God's opinion than popular opinion. This is what the Lord says: "And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28).

Yes, love and grace have conquered many hard hearts, but God also uses bold preaching: "'Is not My word like a fire?' says the Lord, 'And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'" (Jer. 23:29). But false teachers "speak great swelling words

of emptiness and “they allure through the lusts of the flesh” (2 Pet. 2:18). Their words are not a burning fire but empty pleasantries.

True prophetic voices are often too radical for most people because they threaten their comfort zones and dismantle lukewarm Christianity. But isn’t that the whole point? A. W. Tozer said, “When we become so tolerant that we lead people into mental fog and spiritual darkness, we are not acting like Christians—we are acting like cowards.”

The most important question one can face is, “Do you truly know God?” We cannot minimize the destruction, danger, and damage of sin. Jesus didn’t die on the cross for a minor violation. He died because the wrath of God was abiding on every human who ever lived. If you’re a false teacher, or if you’ve drifted from God, please change that today, and embrace the wonderful gift of assurance through repentance and the confession of sin. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). God’s grace will flood your soul as He renews and rebuilds your life.

Make sure to watch the sermon by the same title here. {eo}

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