

FALSE PROPHETS – THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS

DEFINITIONS

1. “Destructive heresies” are self-designed religious lies which lead to division and faction (cf. 1 Cor. 11:19). The Greek word, in v. 1, for “destructive” basically means “shameful” or “deliberately immoral”.
2. Misrepresentation of the truth and its consequent deception is destructive. False teachers claim to speak for God and for the salvation of people when in reality they speak and lead people astray (cf. Deut. 13:1-18; 18:18-22; Jer. 23; Ezek. 13; Mt. 7:15-23; 23:1-36; 24:4, 5; Rom. 16:17, 18; 2 Cor. 11:3-15).
3. Peter uses the title *false teachers* in v. 1 – showing that the heretics in Peter’s reference are false teachers, not prophets. (cf. Matt. 24:4, 5). They were distorting the truth.

INTRODUCTORY

1. Satan has always infiltrated believers with the deceptions of false teachers. Since Eve, he has been in the deceit business (2 Cor. 11:3, 4)
2. False teachers come in sheep’s clothing – as Christian pastors, teachers, and evangelists (cf. Jude 4).
3. Heresies may include denial of major doctrines like *The Virgin Birth*, *Deity of Christ*, *The Bodily Resurrection of Christ*, and *The Second Coming of Christ*.
4. It is disastrous when a church makes a virtue out of the toleration of unscriptural teachings and ideas in the name of love and unity (see 2 Thess. 3:14, 15; Tit. 3:9-11).

\* \* \* \* \*

FALSE TEACHERS *are described in 2 Pet. 2*

➤ **SUMMARY OF THEIR DEED & DESTRUCTION:** v. 1

This first verse is a summary of everything Peter will be teaching in this chapter about such false teachers. Three things are clear about them:

1. **They will secretly bring in destructive heresies.**
2. **They will deny the Lord Jesus Christ – His supreme authority.**
3. **They will bring judgement upon themselves.**

➤ **SENSUALITY & GREED – Their Fundamental Fault:** vs. 2-3

1. truth is blasphemed
2. (The lusts of the flesh, the world, and the devil)
3. **Their greed/covetousness** (uncontrolled love of money): exploit you with false words. It is uncontrolled greed. The underlying motive of the false teachers was not love of the truth, but love of money (cf. v. 14 – trained ...). They exploited people.

\* \* \* \* \*

➤ **THEIR END:** vs. 3b

Just as God planned salvation for the elect from eternity past so also has He planned to damn false teachers. It will come to pass. God will act. God will judge all liars and deceivers. The Judgment, for condemnation, of false teachers is certain (Mt. 7:23; cf. Jude 5-7, 14-15).

In this passage, two particular groups are singled out for judgment:

1. Those who live in unclean **lust** and
2. Those who hold **authority** in contempt.

The passage teaches that the wicked are kept like prisoners awaiting sentencing that will send them to their eternal prison (cf. v. 4). The *Final Judgment* on the wicked is called *The Great White Throne Judgment* (Rev 20:11-15) where all the those not in Christ in all human history, will be raised and judged for final condemnation. They will be cast into the lake of fire.

➤ **3 POWERFUL ILLUSTRATIONS OF PAST DIVINE JUDGMENT ON THE WICKED:** vs. 4-8

i. **Angels when they sinned: v. 4**

Cf. Jude 6 “did not keep their own domain,” i.e. they entered human society as men who had immoral relationships with women.

1. Before the flood (v. 5; Gen. 6:1-3).
  2. Before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6; Gen. 19)
- God cast them into hell (Greek mythology: *Tartarus*). The demons feared going there and begged Jesus during His life on earth not to send them there (cf. Mt. 8:28-33; Lk. 8:27-34).
  - God committed these demons in chains of gloomy darkness. However, not all demons are bound. Many were thrown down from heaven and work, with Satan to deceive humans on earth (cf. Rev 12:7-9).
  - God keeps the bound demons in chains until the judgment. These incarcerated demons are like prisoners awaiting final condemnation.
  - *Tartarus* is temporary. On the Day of Judgment, these wicked angels will be ultimately cast into the lake of fire together with Satan (Rev 20:7-10).
- ii. **The ancient world: v. 5**
- God destroyed the whole world through the world-wide flood (cf. Gen. 6:5-8:22). Only 8 people remained to populate the earth after that judgment (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20).
- iii. **Sodom and Gomorrah: vs. 6-8**
- God totally destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah together with the other lesser surrounding cities (cf. Gen. 18:16-33; 19:1-38; Dt. 29:23-28).

\* \* \* \* \*

**A. GOD’S KEEPING POWER: v. 9a**

God is Sovereign over all events. He delivers the godly out of, but **not away from**, their trials. The Greek word for “temptation” can mean “an attack with intent to destroy” and refers to severe divine judgment. God will rescue the godly before His judgment falls on the wicked.

**B. THE MOTIVATIONS/CHARACTERISTICS AND GOD’S JUDGEMENT OF THE FALSE TEACHERS: v. 9b-22**

1. **They indulge in the lust of defiling passion: v. 10**  
False teachers are slaves to sinful desires of the flesh.
2. **They despise authority: v. 10**  
“Authority” logically flows from the same Greek word as “lord” (1:2). The false teachers claim to know and love Christ, but they would not live under His Lordship.
3. **They are bold and wilful: v. 10**  
(Or lust and arrogance). “Daring” is to be brazen, audacious, and defiant. “Self-willed” is to be obstinate, determined in one’s own way.
4. **They do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones: v. 10-11**  
Cf. Jude 8b. To blaspheme is the same as to revile, or speak evil of, or ridicule. “Angelic majesties” refers probably to wicked angels. Wicked angels have a level of existence in the supernatural world that has a dignity and a transcendent quality about it that is beyond human existence (Eph. 6:12). We must not be flippant regarding Satan and his angels.

False teachers may have tried to excuse their wicked lusts by pointing to the angels in Gen. 6.

The blasphemy of the bad angels by the false teachers demonstrated their arrogance. Even the archangel, Michael, recognized the great power and position of Satan and refused to speak evil of him (Jude 8, 9). Believers should not be boldly foolish and mock or command the power of supernatural demons, especially Satan.

- a. **They are like irrational animals: v. 12**  
Cf. Jude 10. The false teachers behave like wild animals and are insubordinate, insolent, and arrogant.
- b. **They are creatures of instinct: v. 12**  
Like animals, they also react only to present circumstances, without giving thought to the consequences of their actions. They pour abuse on things which they do not understand; like an angered dog attacks someone whom it thinks is threatening him.

- c. **They are born to be caught and destroyed:** v. 12  
Since they act like animals, they will end up like animals; their inner corruption will be the cause of their destruction, as a mad dog is sometimes shot to death to keep him from harming others. False teachers cannot get beyond their own instincts and thus will be destroyed by the folly of those passions. That is the irony of sinful living: its very pleasures in the end become distasteful. Sensuality is self-destructive.
- d. **They blaspheme about matters of which they are ignorant:** v. 12-13a  
They charge into the supernatural realm, cursing away at persons and matters they don't understand. They act in ignorance.
5. **They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime:** v. 13b  
False teachers take great pleasure in making a show of their evil – even displaying it as good. False teachers have no qualms about practicing their erroneous concept of Christian liberty in clear daylight. Indulging in sinful pleasures during the day was the downfall of Roman society (cf. 1 Thess. 5:7).
6. **They are blots and blemishes:** v. 13  
Cf. Jude 10. That is, dirt spots and scabs.
7. **They revel in their deceptions while they feast with you:** v. 13  
The **feast** mentioned here could be the *agape* feast. The term may even refer to the normal social interactions people had with the heretical teachers. The heretics were so self-deceived that they celebrated their freedom in Christ in drunken revelry at the Lord's Table..
8. **They have eyes full of adultery:** v. 14  
They looked lustfully at women. The false teachers had so totally lost moral control that they could not look at any woman without seeing her as a potential target for their sexual pleasures.
9. **They were insatiable for sin:** v. 14  
They were never satisfied and needed more and more fulfillment in sinful indulgences.
10. **They entice unsteady souls:** v. 14  
They convinced unstable people in churches that adultery is acceptable Christian behavior and so led them into sexual immorality.  
**Entice** means “to catch with bait.” The metaphor is from fishing and appears also in v. 18. Unstable believers are easily deceived into an immoral lifestyle. False teachers do not capture those strong in the Word but prey on the weak, unstable, and the young in the faith (see 3:16).
11. **They have hearts trained in greed:** v. 14  
This is a serious accusation. The false teachers have deliberately trained their **hearts** in greedy practices. Covetousness (*pleonexia*) is used both to refer to greed for money and greed for bodies (i.e., illicit or unnatural sex). Here it is primarily greed for money or comforts. The word “trained” was often used for training in athletics. The false teachers have trained, prepared, and equipped their minds to concentrate on nothing but things for which they lust. They are well schooled in the craft of self-fulfillment. Balaam is an example of the covetous ways of the heretics.
- a. **They are called accursed children!** v. 14  
This is a Hebraism for the curse of sin being the dominant thing in their lives. They are therefore damned to hell from eternity past. Cf. Eph. 2:3.
- b. **Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray:** v. 15  
The “right way” is an OT metaphor for obedience to God.
- c. **They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing:** vs. 15-16  
He was an OT prophet who compromised his gift to whoever paid him, who preferred wealth and popularity over faithfulness and obedience to God. See Num. 22 to 24 and Jude 11 and Rev. 2:14. Though Balaam's subsequent sin of introducing immorality into the camp of Israel is not mentioned here, it is significant that both avarice and lust were the major motivations of the false teachers described here. These two sins are seldom far apart!

12. **They are like waterless springs and mists driven by a storm:** v. 17  
False teachers give false expectations. A spring or well without water would be a major disappointment in a hot and dry land. False teachers have a pretense of spiritual water to quench the thirsty soul, but they actually have nothing to give. The false teachers promise spiritual refreshment, but were all show with no substance (cf. Jude 12).
- a. **For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved:** v. 17  
That is, hell (cf. Jude 13).
13. **They speak loud boasts of folly:** v. 18  
**Allure**, like *enticing* in v. 14, means “to catch with bait.” The bait is **great swelling words of emptiness or** high-sounding promises that have no real content. The false teachers deceive the weak with high sounding words pretending to be great scholars with great spiritual depth. They claim to have direct revelation from God. They contradict the teachings of Scripture which they may not be able to explain properly because they lack adequate training and divine wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14).
14. **They entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error:** v. 18  
They entice by the **lusts of the flesh**. These teachers teach similar to Hindu philosophy – that once the soul is saved what is done in the body is not important. Seduction rather than the truth is what they use. They offer people religion which allows holding on to a sinful life-style. False teachers particularly attract women. Such people are not saved and therefore vulnerable because of guilt and anxieties — people with broken marriages, the lonely, those tired of the consequences of sin and looking for a new start. False teachers exploit these people.
- a. **They promise freedom:** v. 19  
b. **are slaves of corruption:** v. 19
15. **They were nominally aware of the Lord Jesus Christ:** vs. 20-22  
The false teachers are called “slaves of corruption” in v. 19. They had formerly turned from the pollution of the world through a knowledge of Christ. Now, however, they have fallen back into immorality, even becoming teachers of sinful lifestyles. As a result, **the latter end is worse for them than the beginning** (cf. Matt. 12:43-45).
- “Defilements” has the idea of putrid or poisonous vapors. Morally, the world gives off a deadly influence. These false teachers and their followers may have wanted to escape the moral contamination of the world system and sought religion, even Jesus Christ (on their terms, not His).
- Knowledge without obedience is dangerous (cf. Judas: Matt. 26:24). They knew what was right and holy, but they deliberately chose or, not being careful in their obedience, gradually slipped to do what was wrong and corrupt.
- Knowing the true gospel and then rejecting the Christ is apostasy (cf. Heb 10:26, 27).
- For examples of apostasy see 1 Cor. 10:1-12; Heb. 3:12-19; 6:6; 10:26, 38ff; 1 Jn. 2:19; Jude 4-6).
- Jews considered dogs and pigs among the lowest of animals, so Peter chooses these animals to describe people who have known the truth but have turned away from it. The first proverb is found in Prov. 26:11; the second is from the Syrian story of Ahikar.

#### CONCLUSION

False teachers as Peter describes them were not made outside Christianity. They are always bred in the church; they reject the truth and try to seduce others in their attempt to fulfill their won selfish ambitions and sinful pleasures.