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Text: Isaiah 56:7-12

Warning Against Corrupt Leaders and False Prophets

The last time we were examining Isaiah's prophecy, two Sunday's ago, we began to address the section of Isaiah's prophecy that follows what is commonly referred to as "The Book of Consolation", which is chapters 40 through 55. From Isaiah 56 to the end of the book, chapter 66, there is recorded prophecies that were directed primarily to those Jewish people who had returned to their land from the Babylonian Exile, who were waiting for the promised Messiah. We read in these chapters that these people were still characterized by sin. These chapters reveal that the people were still guilty of the sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, and indifference. Isaiah prophesies to them confronting their sin, and setting before them their responsibilities before God with view toward the coming promised Kingdom, the Kingdom that God had promised to the Descendant of King David.

We have already set before us an outline of the contents of Isaiah 56:

1. The Importance and Observance of the Law (vs. 1, 2)
2. Admission of Strangers and Eunuchs to the Congregation of Israel (vs. 3-8)
3. Israel's Degenerate Leaders (vs. 9-12)

We have already addressed the first two matters of this outline. But before we move on, let us look again at **verse 7**. Here we read that the people of God are brought to dwell as citizens in the kingdom of God. This anticipates the promised kingdom of the Messiah of which Israel had waited throughout its history.

***⁷Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."***

***⁸The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
"Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him."***

The expression, "My holy mountain" is a euphemism of "Jerusalem", which is a symbol of the Kingdom of God (Israel). Gentiles, too, will have a place in the kingdom and will be allowed entrance into the "temple" to worship there. And so, the prospect of Israel's return from Babylon held forth hope for all peoples, that is, Gentiles, not Jews only. The time would come when God's Kingdom would be comprised of citizens from all nations, who would worship the God of Israel.

The kingdom of God is commonly depicted as a "mountain." A city-state kingdom would often be centralized on a mountain. A large and strong kingdom would be situated on a large, tall mountain. The kingdom of God is depicted in this way. In Isaiah 2 we have a reference to the kingdom and the "mountain" on which it is situated:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That ***the mountain of the LORD'S house***
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And ***all nations*** shall flow to it.
³Many people shall come and say,

“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 To the house of the God of Jacob;
 He will teach us His ways,
 And we shall walk in His paths.”
 For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
 And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴He shall judge between *the nations*,
 And rebuke many people;
 They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
 Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 Neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isa. 2:2-4)

But the prophet also depicts the coming kingdom not only as a “mountain”, but as a “house”, that is, a “temple”, in which prayer to God is made. It will be a house of prayer for “all nations.” The Lord Jesus made reference to this idea when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem.

Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹⁶And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. ¹⁷Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” (Mark 11:15-17)

It is in the context of this promised coming kingdom of God that God will gather the “*outcasts of Israel*” along with “*others besides those who are gathered to him.*”

The last section of Isaiah 56 contains an indictment against Israel’s leaders.

III. Israel’s Degenerate Leaders (vs. 9-12)

⁹*All you beasts of the field, come to devour,
 All you beasts in the forest.*
¹⁰*His watchmen are blind,
 They are all ignorant;
 They are all dumb dogs,
 They cannot bark;
 Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.*
¹²*Yes, they are greedy dogs
 Which never have enough.
 And they are shepherds
 Who cannot understand;
 They all look to their own way,
 Every one for his own gain,
 From his own territory.*
¹²*“Come,” one says, “I will bring wine,
 And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;
 Tomorrow will be as today,
 And much more abundant.”*

The command is given to “beasts of the field” to come and devour these people. These beasts are an emblem for hostile nations that would attack and afflict His people. This was the common experience of Israel after its return from the Babylonian captivity. Israel was afflicted by the surrounding nations, nations

that were not that significant, but they were more powerful than weak and vulnerable Israel. And then the larger, more powerful nations also attacked and subjugated Israel in those centuries from their return from Babylon until the days of the Lord Jesus in the first century. Egypt afflicted Israel. Syria conquered and controlled Israel on several occasions. And after a brief period of independence, Rome became its conquer and rule from 63 BC onward.

God bids these nations, these “beasts”, to come and attack His people, for its leaders, the “watchman” who should have been protecting the city, were not fulfilling their duty. **Verse 2** reads, “

*¹⁰His watchmen are blind,
They are all ignorant;
They are all dumb dogs,
They cannot bark;
Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.*

The Lord denounced the leaders of His people, the nation of Israel. Rather than serving the Lord’s people, seeking their wellbeing, they are as unfaithful watchmen on the walls of the city who are blind and ignorant, unable to awaken those in danger from invading marauding enemies. They have no concern for their people. They are only seeking their own interests at the expense of the Lord’s people. Because they had failed to teach and lead the people rightly, the people went astray and incurred God’s judgment upon them through these “beasts” that ravaged them.

The leaders of Israel, who are likened to watchmen on the walls who were to warn the city of approaching invaders, had failed to warn the people of God’s coming judgment. They were as blind watchmen; they just do not see the true picture. They are blind, ignorant, mute, and sleeping. Can any worse description of a watchman be given? What good is a watchman who cannot see? What good is a leader who is ignorant of God and His ways? What good is a watchdog which cannot bark? What good is a guard who is sleeping? The leaders were absolute failures in the function they were to provide the people. Every one of them was corrupt and selfish, “*to the last one.*” This sets the stage for their replacement.

Now as we stated earlier, the words of this prophecy were directed to the leaders that would return from exile in Babylon along with the other Jews whom God would restore to their land. Upon their return, they were to rebuild the temple and re-establish their society as they waited for the promised Messiah who would inaugurate the long-awaited, promised Kingdom of God, that is, the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom over which the Messiah would reign.

Now Israel (Judah & Israel) had been plagued by false prophets and corrupt priests before the Exile. Sadly the exile and the return of the remnant of Jews to the land had not eradicated this problem of corrupt leaders.

We may read of these *pre-exilic* corrupt leaders in other places within the prophets. For example, Jeremiah had to withstand the leaders of His people because of their failure to properly lead and represent the people. We read in **Jeremiah 5:30f** these words: “An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land:

³¹The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule by their own power;
And My people love to have it so.
But what will you do in the end? “

He later described these corrupt leaders with view to the Babylonian exile that the people would soon experience:

¹⁸For thus says the LORD:

“Behold, I will throw out at this time
The inhabitants of the land,

And will distress them,
That they may find it so.”

¹⁹Woe is me for my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I say, “Truly this is an infirmity,
And I must bear it.”

²⁰My tent is plundered,
And all my cords are broken;
My children have gone from me,
And they are no more.
There is no one to pitch my tent anymore,
Or set up my curtains.

²¹For the shepherds have become dull-hearted,
And have not sought the LORD;
Therefore they shall not prosper,
And all their flocks shall be scattered.

²²Behold, the noise of the report has come,
And a great commotion out of the north country,
To make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals. (Jer. 10:18-22)

Later in Jeremiah’s prophecy God had pronounced His judgment upon His people and the leaders who had led them astray. He would judge them through bringing Babylon upon them to destroy their cities and take them captive. We read In **Jeremiah 25:33ff** these words:

³³And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground.

³⁴“Wail, shepherds, and cry!
Roll about in the ashes,
You leaders of the flock!
For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions are fulfilled;
You shall fall like a precious vessel.

³⁵And the shepherds will have no way to flee,
Nor the leaders of the flock to escape.

³⁶A voice of the cry of the shepherds,
And a wailing of the leaders to the flock will be heard.

For the LORD has plundered their pasture,

³⁷And the peaceful dwellings are cut down
Because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

³⁸He has left His lair like the lion;
For their land is desolate
Because of the fierceness of the Oppressor,
And because of His fierce anger.”

On another occasion, the Lord declared through Jeremiah that He would remove the false “shepherds” from ruling over His people. He would replace them with good shepherds who would lead them and teach them rightly. This would coincide with the reign of the Messiah, the Son of David, who would inaugurate His Kingdom, even the Kingdom of God. We read this in **Jeremiah 23**. This is a long passage, but it speaks to the matter quite clearly and extensively.

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD.
²Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “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. ³“But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. ⁴***I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,***” says the LORD.

⁵“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
⁶In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell safely;
Now this is His name by which He will be called:

⁷“Therefore, behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ ⁸but, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ And they shall dwell in their own land.”

⁹My heart within me is broken
Because of the prophets;
All my bones shake.
I am like a drunken man,
And like a man whom wine has overcome,
Because of the LORD,
And because of His holy words.
¹⁰For the land is full of adulterers;
For because of a curse the land mourns.
The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up.
Their course of life is evil,
And their might is not right.

¹¹“For both prophet and priest are profane;
Yes, in My house I have found their wickedness,” says the LORD.

¹²“Therefore their way shall be to them
Like slippery ways;
In the darkness they shall be driven on
And fall in them;
For I will bring disaster on them,
The year of their punishment,” says the LORD.

¹³“And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria:
They prophesied by Baal
And caused My people Israel to err.

¹⁴Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem:
They commit adultery and walk in lies;
They also strengthen the hands of evildoers,
So that no one turns back from his wickedness.
All of them are like Sodom to Me,
And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

¹⁵“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets:

‘Behold, I will feed them with wormwood,
And make them drink the water of gall;
For from the prophets of Jerusalem
Profaneness has gone out into all the land.’”

¹⁶Thus says the LORD of hosts:

“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you.
They make you worthless;
They speak a vision of their own heart,
Not from the mouth of the LORD.

¹⁷They continually say to those who despise Me,

‘The LORD has said, “You shall have peace”’;
And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say,
‘No evil shall come upon you.’”

¹⁸For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD,

And has perceived and heard His word?
Who has marked His word and heard it?

¹⁹Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury—
A violent whirlwind!

It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.

²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back

Until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart.
In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

²¹“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran.

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

²²But if they had 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.

²³“Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD,

“And not a God afar off?

²⁴Can anyone hide himself in secret places,

So I shall not see him?” says the LORD;
“Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the LORD.

²⁵“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ ²⁶How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, ²⁷who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

²⁸“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream;

And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully.

What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD.

²⁹“Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD,

“And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

³⁰“Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor. ³¹Behold, I am against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who use their tongues and say,

‘He says.’ ³²Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” says the LORD, “and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,” says the LORD.

And so, God promised that He would replace the false “shepherds” of Israel with faithful shepherds over His people. This would come after the return of His people from the Babylonian Exile, coinciding with the Kingdom of the Messiah.

Now it is clear that the prophecy that God gave through Jeremiah, that He would depose the false shepherds and replace them with faithful shepherds, was not fulfilled immediately after the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. This may be substantiated by the declaration of our passage of Isaiah 56:9-12, in which we read that after the exile false shepherds were still a plague to the people. Moreover, Jeremiah’s prophecy declared that the replacement shepherds would coincide with the onset of the reign of the Messiah. We would assert that this prophecy was fulfilled when our Lord Jesus deposed the leaders of Israel from their authority over the nation of Israel, entrusting that authority to His apostles whom He appointed as judges ruling over the Israel of God, true believers in Jesus Christ. We read of this in Matthew’s Gospel:

³³“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. ³⁴Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. ³⁵And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. ³⁷Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”

⁴¹They said to Him, ***“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”***

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD’s doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

⁴³“***Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*** ⁴⁴And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

⁴⁵***Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.*** ⁴⁶But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet. (Matt. 21:33-46)

The Lord Jesus deposed these leaders from their former place of leadership. He appointed new leaders over His people who were citizens of His kingdom, those being His twelve apostles. He appointed them to be His judges over the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Luke 22:30). By the word, “judges”, we mean that they were leaders or shepherds over the people of God. They ruled as did the ancient judges who governed God’s people in the days before the monarchy of Israel under its kings.

And yet we would not say that the people of God since that time have been untroubled by false shepherds. ***For we read in many places in the New Testament Scriptures of false teachers who would trouble the people of God.*** For example, the apostle Peter wrote of false teachers and how they were the New Testament counter part to the false prophets in Israel. We read in **2 Peter 2:1ff** these words:

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. ²And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

⁴For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; ⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—⁹then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

¹²But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, ¹³and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, ¹⁴having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. ¹⁵They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

¹⁷These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

¹⁸For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. ²⁰For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²²But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

False teachers have plagued the churches throughout history just as false prophets had plagued Old Testament Israel. The New Testament abounds in warnings. Let us consider one passage that addresses the problem that churches often encounter. In 2 Timothy 3 we read of Paul's effort to encourage and instruct Timothy so that he might face courageously the difficulties that were before him as he served the Savior and His people. Paul wrote of the spiritually dangerous times in which Timothy would be serving our Lord. Timothy could fully anticipate the times to grow worse, not better. But Paul set before Timothy the fact that he had no reason to be timid or fearful, for God had provided everything that Timothy was in need of to live godly in godless days. In this passage we may find encouragement and instruction for ourselves as we too face increasingly godless times and encounter godless men.

Let us read the passage before us, **2 Timothy 3:1-17:**

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And

from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as James and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as their also was.

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra -- what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul made mention of “perilous times.” 2 Timothy 3:1 reads, “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.*” The sphere of these “evil men” is in the churches. A casual reading may assume that he is speaking of *the world* going through perilous times. But Paul was speaking of perilous times in among *the churches* of Jesus Christ. And he was not speaking of the physical threat that these evil men would pose to the churches as much as he was alluding to the great spiritual danger their presence and teaching would pose. The perilous times of which he wrote has reference to the danger that evil men posed to Christians *within* the churches as they propagate their damnable doctrines. Specifically, Paul was warning Timothy that there would be times of peril for the churches, more serious at times, but that *the threat lie primarily in the influence of evil men to corrupt and lead professing Christians into heresy.* This is the substance of Paul’s warning in these verses. He was not speaking of a general wickedness of the world just before the Second Coming of Christ. He was warning Timothy that as long as we are in these last days—this age of the church—there will be evil men propagating their error among Christians. And so, Timothy would need to be aware of the peril. But at the same time Timothy also needed to be assured that God had fully equipped him for the task to overcome these evil men and their teachings and to be used of God to preserve His people to their eternal destiny.

The warning that this passage contains is therefore much like other warnings we read of in the New Testament. The **Lord Jesus** himself repeatedly warned His followers of evil men coming among them that would seduce them to embrace heresy.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening **wolves**. (Matt. 7:15)

Paul had warned the church elders from Ephesus that they would encounter this among and from their own group:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

Paul described the evil men with whom Timothy must be on guard. We read of their character in **2 Timothy 3:2-7**. What are these evil men like that will bring such peril to the churches? Paul lists **19 characteristics** of these evil corrupters of the faith. These are listed in verses 2 through 5a. We read, “For men will be...

1. Lovers of themselves – This evil characteristic leads the list. These men are concerned about themselves. They do not love God primarily. They do not love others as they do themselves. They love themselves first and foremost. At heart they are selfish, self-interested, self-promoting individuals, desiring the power, respect and recognition that they perceive comes with noted leaders in the church.

2. Lovers of money – Peter wrote of false teachers, *“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.”* (2 Peter 2:3).

3. Boasters --

4. Proud – There is a self-confidence about them. In some minds they exude competence and credibility. But to those who are in the Lord, they are seen as proud. They owe their advancement not to the mercy and grace of God, but to their own wit and invention, their own ability and achievement.

5. Blasphemers – Their words and their behavior dishonors God. With their lips they honor God, but in their works they deny Him. Because of the nature of their person and how they live, God’s name is blasphemed rather than glorified.

6. Disobedient to parents – They show no respect to convention or tradition. They do not follow the counsel of their parents, giving honor to whom honor is due. They are disobedient. They are their own boss, knowing no authority other than themselves, even overthrowing the most basic and needful of relationships, the parental guidance of a son or daughter.

7. Unthankful – Since they are self-made men, they need not be thankful to God or men. They see themselves as having acquired all that they have and all that they are. Are they humble? No. Are they grateful? No. They believe all that they have they earned; in fact, they probably see themselves as cheated from what they see as they are deserving of.

8. Unholy – Their values and thoughts are corrupt. Their speech is foul. Their hearts are impure.

9. Unloving – They are able to walk away from others, not having pity upon them but rather disgust for them. Oh yes, they speak of love a great deal. But they are the ones who walk away from their commitments, breaking alliances and severing friendships. They in turn accuse the ones they walked from with being unloving.

10. Unforgiving – They harbor resentment against those who have sought to withstand them and expose them. The ones who sought to have Jesus crucified, hated Him for exposing them. They would not forgive Him for that. They would destroy Him. These false teachers will do the same.

11. Slanderers – They seek to destroy the good name of others.

12. Without self-control – They cannot restrain themselves from their fleshly appetites and their godless behavior. Oh yes, they may seek to commit sin under the cloak of darkness, but sin they must. They have no self-control.

13. Brutal – These are not kind people. They are diabolical in their planning. They are truly insensitive to the convictions and consciences of others. They perpetrate their error and they assault the sensibilities of godly people through their manner and their beliefs. As Jesus described ones similar to these. When “pearls” are before them, things that are seen as precious and valuable by others, they turn and “trample them under their feet, and turn again and tear into you (Matt. 7:6).

14. Despisers of good -- They hate vehemently good people and good moral standards.

15. Traitors – They betray former comrades, setting aside previous commitments. They cannot be trusted to keep their word.

16. Headstrong – They are unrelenting in pursuing their agenda. They have a plan devised to lead the people of God in a certain direction that is contrary to the ways of Scripture.

17. Haughty – No humility exists. They are perhaps even flippant in their demeanor and attitude. They look down at others as uninformed or unenlightened.

18. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – They do not love God. They are driven by their own lusts for sensual satisfaction. They do nothing of true self-denial. They may put on an appearance of piety and humility, but they live for personal pleasure.

19. Having a form of godliness but denying its power – They perhaps present themselves in their clerical clothing with their clerical credentials, with their clerical positions and titles, but it is all form. It is

outward. It is as sheep's clothing. Their apparent manner and method suggests that they are holy men of God. But the truth is they are an evil scourge upon the true people of God, confusing, corrupting, and capturing them, so as to embrace themselves and their damnable doctrines.

And so, how may false teachers be identified? As our Lord taught, "You shall know them by their fruit"; that is, by the way they live and by the kind of character that their belief has brought to their own lives.

The English puritan pastor, **Thomas Brooks**, who ministered in London in the 1600's, addressed this matter in his book entitled, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, which is available today. He wrote:

"Now the best way to deliver poor souls from being deluded and destroyed by these messengers of Satan is to display them in their true colors, so that being known poor souls may shun them, and flee from them as from hell itself."

He then went on to identify *seven identifying marks of false teachers* that he had derived from the various passages of Scripture, which address them. These marks are as follows:

(1) The first distinguishing mark is that they are men-pleasers. They preach more to please the ear than to profit the heart.

(2) The second distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they are notable for casting dirt, scorn and reproach upon the person, names and credits of Christ's most faithful ambassadors. In order to build themselves a following, they destroy others. (This fits with Paul's characteristic that they tend to slander others.)

(3) The third distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they spew out the devices and visions of their own heads and hearts. "*The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart, not from the mouth of the Lord*" (Jer. 23:16).

(4) The fourth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they easily pass over the great and weighty things of both the law and the gospel, and dwell mostly upon those things that are of the least importance and concern to the souls of men.

(5) The fifth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they cleverly disguise their dangerous principles and soul-deceiving notions with very attractive speeches and golden expressions.

Although I suppose it has always been the same way, in these days the content of the message is of lesser concern to the person in the pew than is the style of his delivery. Several years ago I went through the process of searching for a church to pastor. I was in contact with dozens of evangelical churches throughout the United States. I was amazed and alarmed at the kind of man the vast majority of these churches were looking for. The doctrinal stand was scrutinized superficially. It became apparent to me they were looking for a personality which would wow their congregations through pulpit style and gather in crowds of the unsaved through his personal charisma. The larger the churches tend to draw the more "dynamic" preachers. Character seemed to matter little in the process. Personality is the key ingredient for being called to large and would-be large churches in these days. The churches are ripe for picking by fruitless false teachers.

(6) The sixth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they strive more earnestly to win men over to their opinions, than to improve their behavior.

(7) The seventh distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they exploit their followers through covetousness. "They eye your goods more than your good." Again, because they want the largest church,

the larger crowds, they have budgets to meet, they tend not to preach those things that confront sin directly. They may talk about the sin “out there” in the cults, or the new age, among unbelievers, that kind of preaching solidifies a group in seeing itself as unique, but sin within the congregation is dealt with in a subtle manner, quickly, indirectly.

Paul warned Timothy about his involvement with these men. Verse 5b reads, “And from such people turn away!” These men cannot be reasoned with. You cannot work alongside of them. You must separate yourself from them. Why? Because of their manner of deceiving people (3:6-9).

1. They go in among the most simple and vulnerable of the church and begin there. Verse 6, *“For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* They have home Bible studies, preying on the simple and vulnerable, the careless and the clueless. Today, through the means of TV, radio, and now, the internet, they enter many homes and sit down with their gullible silly prey, and lead them astray. These *“gullible women”* are studious—they are *“ever learning.”* Much of what is produced for the Christian book market is geared for these kind of women. They are readers, but they read silly, superficial material that gives them a kind of “knowledge” but not of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. A snappy title, some cleverly worded chapters, a glossy cover, and it sells. But if you pick the book up and examine its contents seriously and biblically, you see it for what it is—a cleverly crafted piece, purporting to be biblical with all the good endorsements, that promises to fill some emotional longing that is common to women. These women are easy prey and false teachers often begin with them.

2. They use deception, presenting themselves as having the power of God. Paul mentions two persons by name in verse 7. *“Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth...”* These two men listed were the leading sorcerers of Egypt who withstood Moses at the time of the Exodus. They sought to mimic Moses, reproducing the miracles that he did in order to set themselves up as equal to him in authority, and equally representatives of “god” or the “gods.” In this way they sought to prevent God from delivering His people from their bondage. So it is that these false teachers have a following. They will do all they can to retain them. They claim to be God’s representatives that God is working powerfully through them. The silly, sinful, and simple-minded are persuaded to follow them.

3. These men are corrupt in their thinking; their belief system is flawed. They do not hold “the mystery of the faith on a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9), which is a qualification for the gospel ministry; rather they are *“men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith”* (v. 8b). You see, if they were examined as to exactly what they believe or do not believe in the light of the Bible, they would be exposed and disapproved by the people of God. Here, therefore, Paul hints of a standard by which these false teachers may be identified, exposed, and repudiated before the people of God. It is as Isaiah once said of false prophets in his days,

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because there is no light in them. (Isa. 8:20)

If their belief does not conform to “the faith” that is taught in the Word of God, they are disapproved by God and should be so by men and women.

4. Paul assured Timothy that God would assist Timothy to expose them and overturn their error. The true people of God will not be deceived further by them. *“But they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs (Jannes and Jambres) also was.”*

But in spite of the presence and influence of these evil men in the churches, Paul could assure Timothy that he was equipped to withstand their influence and preserve himself and his people. God will see to it that

these evil men are exposed for who they are, and when that is done their influence among the true people of God will be thwarted. We see, therefore, that I as a pastor and we as a church are to be in the business of both expounding the truth but also exposing error and evil, errant men who promote error. This is the kind of spiritual warfare in which we are to be engaged. It is not popular to do so. It will bring hatred and difficulty upon you and us. But Paul assured that this is what happens in the lives of all those who would live godly, as he wrote in 3: “Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

May our Lord keep His churches safe and secure from those who would deceive and disrupt His people. May He enable us to be alert and discerning to identify and expose these false teachers.