

CHAPTER 4

FALSE TEACHERS

Introduction

False teachers or false prophets, as they are more familiarly known in the Old Testament, are a special class of unbelievers. While all unbelievers might be considered this since their testimony is false, there is established a group of people who are actually advocates (promoters) of false doctrine. They are very specifically the followers of the serpent (“seed of the serpent”) of Genesis 3:15 and as such they deceive about the coming of the Christ. And then if they fail to convince, they, like Satan, move to persecute and kill (associated with the striking of Messiah). In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies the Scribes and Pharisees as such.

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is because you cannot hear My word.* ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:41-44)

False Prophets in the Old Testament

As the Old Testament began to unfold, Cain started as the first false teacher (who “told his brother”¹⁰), followed by his protégés who advocated fame and the things of this world as the way to God.¹¹ But as things moved along these antagonists, who followed the deceit of the serpent of old, particularly during the time of the kings in the pre-exilic period, were separated out from among the people. God’s prophet Jeremiah was competing with those who prophesied prosperity to the king even while Jeremiah was prophesying of the approaching Babylonian army and the final devastation of Israel as a result of the curse of God for disobedience.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. ¹⁵ "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are

¹⁰ See the Genesis commentary for the contextual basis for Cain advocating his belief to Abel.

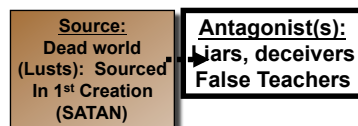
¹¹ See the Tower of Babel in the Genesis commentary as well as the designation of the line of Cain by their vain emphasis on fame in this perishing world.

prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them-- yet they keep saying, 'There will be no sword or famine in this land '-- by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! ¹⁶ "The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them-- *neither* them, *nor* their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters-- for I will pour out their *own* wickedness on them. (Jeremiah 14:14-16)

False Prophets in the New Testament

Matthew records Jesus and John the Baptist as identifying these Scribes and Pharisees as “seeds of serpents,” or followers of their rebellious fathers who followed the serpent (Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33). Jesus then named these Scribes and Pharisees when He stated that the believers should “beware of the false prophets” (Matthew 7:15), who looked and sounded righteous (“wolves in sheep’s clothing,” see 6:1-18), yet were betrayed by their speech (“fruits,” or confession, see 12:33-37). Their speech was a testimony of self-righteousness and a rejection of imputed righteousness from God, testified and lived by Jesus.

The False Teachers have their Source from the Devil



In a sharp contrast to the apostles (“we are from God . . .,” 4:6), John declares that they are from the world (“they are from the world . . .,” 4:5). “The world,” John declares, is sourced from Satan (“the whole world lies in the evil one,” 5:19). Thus their doctrine is from Satan passed through the first Adam to his children, and thus they are in the family of Satan.

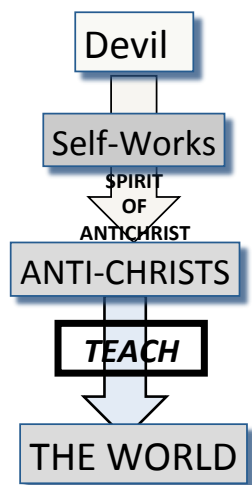
The “antichrists” are defined as those who are “seed of the serpent” from

Genesis 3:15, and who are followers of Satan, the serpent of old. They were prophesied to oppose the “Seed of the Woman” who was coming, and when He came they would kill Him (“strike Him on the heel”). Following that they would continue to hate and kill the followers of the Christ.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. (1 John 4:5)

¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not do righteousness¹² is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:10-12)



FALSE TEACHERS

Paul identifies them as getting their doctrines from demons, which results directly in a depraved conscience.

¹² This will be defined later as “belief in Messiah,” as can be seen in 3:12 where Abel’s deeds were “righteous.” That was his sacrifice, which was his demonstration of belief in Messiah to come.

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron . . . “ (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

Jude identifies their source as “lusts.”

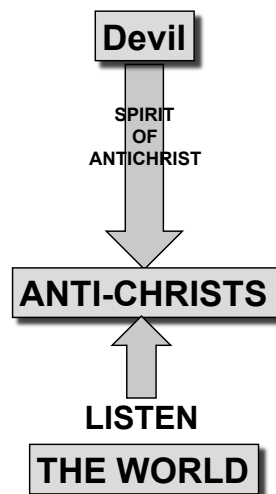
¹⁶ These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their *own* lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage. (Jude 1:16)

It is immensely clear that these false teachers operate out of the depraved mind, the coveting of Satan, which was passed on to Adam and then passed on to all his children through inheritance.

False Teachers Teach the World of Unbelievers

John identifies them clearly in 1 John as he states,

⁵ They (“*false prophets*,” see 4:1) are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. (1 John 4:5)



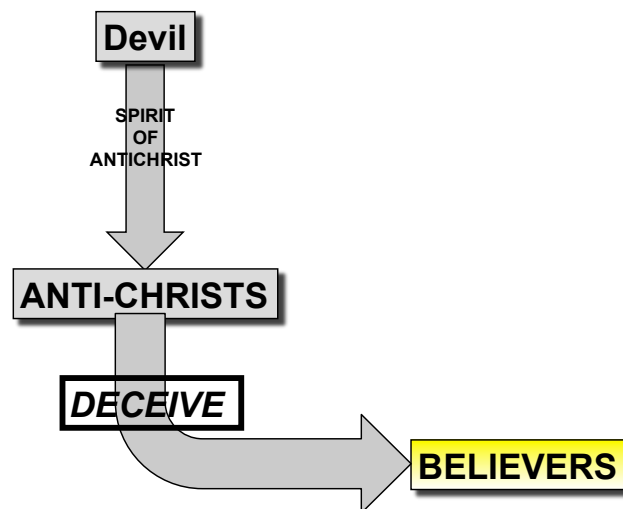
False Teachers Try to Deceive the Believers

Matthew 18 then warned that these false teachers would teach their false doctrines in the church and gave an imperative to the apostles to apply discipline (church judgment) to them due to their destructive abilities in their teaching on naïve believers.

⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! (Matthew 18:6-7)

John continues about the false teachers and their deceptive desires toward the believers in the church.

²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (1 John 2:26)



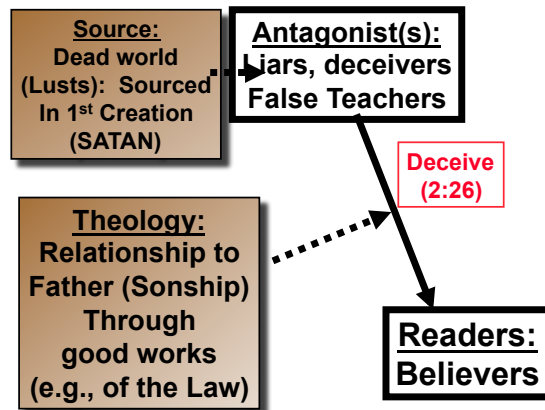
Thus, it is predicted from Genesis 3:15 that this “seed of the serpent” would show up in the epistles and preach self-righteousness and oppose the apostolic doctrine of Jesus’ death for sins and bodily resurrection to life.

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (1 Corinthians 15:12)

Paul gathered the elders from Ephesus to warn them of the arrival of these very men.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).



The False Teachers Oppose the Apostles and the Apostolic Doctrine

Thus, the interpreter must be aware that this unique group of people within the unbelievers, “false teachers,” “false prophets,” or “antichrists” (“seed of the serpent”) will be the direct antagonists to the apostles. They will typically try to infect the believing church and turn them against the apostles.

But Paul, Peter, and John will also directly oppose the false teachers by warning the readers about their past, present, or future deception. In doing so they will, of necessity, defend themselves. Thus, the apostolic epistles are frequently “apostolic defenses.”

⁹ I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. ¹⁰ For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, **unjustly accusing us with wicked words**; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church. (3 John 1:9-10)

While Paul frequently mentions the charges against him, it usually occurs in his statements of defense (and thus the reader knows he is being accused.) In Romans 1:16,

Paul states he is “not ashamed of the gospel,” thus defending himself against that attack. In Romans 9:1, he states he is “not lying” when he says he loves Israel, thus staking a defense against the accusation that he hates Israel (and is a liar when he says he loves them). In fact, the whole book of Romans is an answer to why Paul did not come and defend himself against the accusation that he had wrongly removed the Law from the believers’ life (and thus removed Israel from its means of salvation).

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) (Romans 1:13)

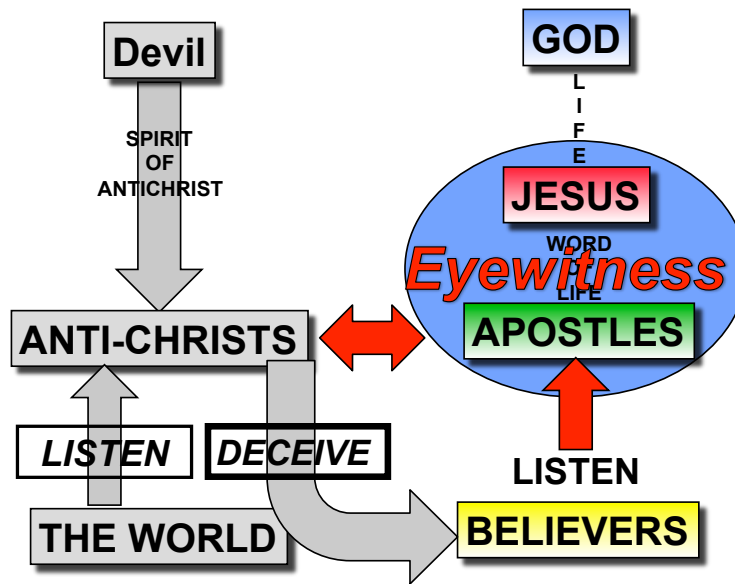
¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, (Romans 1:16)

²² For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; (Romans 15:22)

Second Corinthians is full of Paul’s defense of their attacks throughout the book.

In the epistles, the False Teachers are a special class of unbelievers. They are those who teach the world (i.e., rejecters of God’s revelation), and the world listens to them. They are the opposite of the apostles. They are unbelievers and are referenced by John as “antichrists” (i.e., “seed of the serpent,” Genesis 3:15). They are identified clearly in 1 John 2:19-22 and 4:1-6. Peter refers to them in 2 Peter 2:1 as they “deny the Master who bought them.” Paul refers to them as being parallel to the serpent in 2 Corinthians 11.

³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)



1 John precisely identifies these false prophets. If these are not identified clearly in 1 John the interpretation will suffer due to a loss in the distinction of pronouns. The first person plural “we” is apostles. The third person plural “they” is the false teachers. The “you” is the readership. The “He” is always God or Jesus depending on the context.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. . . . (1 John 2:18)

. . . because many false prophets have gone out into the world . . . They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

¹⁷ Now Likewise they show up in the Pauline Epistles, such as Romans 16:17-18, Galatians 1:7-9, Titus 1:10-11.

I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (Romans 16:17-18)

⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is

preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!¹³
(Galatians 1:7-9)

But in the non-apostolic epistles the antagonist is not confronting the author through the readers. In other words, there is no direct attack on the author cited in Hebrews, James or Jude. And there is no defense of the author's position as a source of the theological truth. His source is the Old Testament, or the apostles, or Jesus, but never himself.

Summary

In the analysis of an epistle, it is very important to separate the individual characters so as to keep the message as focused as possible. If one assigns traits to one character that belong to another, or assign traits of a larger class of people to a group within the class, then ambiguity results.

In this case, false teachers occupy almost every book. They are a specific class within the world of unbelievers and are those who advocate, teach, and promote Satan's doctrines. They come from Genesis 3:15 as "seed of the serpent" and their doctrine is the same. They deceive and kill the believer in Christ and imputed righteousness, convincing them of self-righteousness, either through the keeping of the Law or keeping of their Gentile moralities. These false teachers oppose the apostles directly and try to discredit them because the apostolic doctrine is almost inherent with them. Thus many apostolic epistles are "apostolic defenses." In non-apostolic epistles, this does not occur, since the non-apostle justifies his case from Jesus, the apostles, and the Old Testament. Thus these false teachers these foundations in lieu of the non-apostolic author.

¹³ This is likely aligning them with Deuteronomy 13:1-6 where false prophets are identified by their changing the revelation to that of other gods, gods of their imagination, or as in this case, other revelations other than that of the apostles. Paul is saying they are teaching another god, another Jesus.