

## Chapter 19: Beware of False Prophets

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Book of Books, God’s Holy Scripture reveals to all its readers two great truths. The first truth is the hopelessness of humankind who lives in opposition to God. The second truth is the great salvation which God conceived in eternity for any person who with sincere faith believes in His Son Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. About this second theme that should evoke our reaction of amazement, we have already examined in a previous chapter of this book.

In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate to my Serbian people the spiritual reality of our ancestors – and that under which we live today. The fact is well known that the Serbs in the late eighties and early nineties of the previous century, after the fall of communism, began to return to traditional religion and sought in all kinds of ways to adopt and adhere to religious customs and rituals. Visiting churches and monasteries exploded. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals became religious events that required the presence of Orthodox priests. The curriculums of primary and secondary education incorporated classes on religious education at the insistence of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Wide dissemination and acceptance of the idea emerged that every true Serb had to be Orthodox – otherwise, such a person is called a “sectarian” and considered as a traitor to the faith of his ancestors and to his nation. Almost no one dared to dispute the assumption that Orthodoxy was the truest “religion” in the world.

However, Dositej Obradovic, the great Serbian educator, urged his readers to consider the objective spiritual reality of his times and to reject prejudice and subjectivity (such “exaggeration” is a well-known characteristic of our culture):

“Oh, how sloppy we are with regard to the search for truth! When someone puts gold in our hand, just because they say it is gold does not suffice for us. Rather, we examine it ourselves for signs that it is authentic gold: can one bend real gold? Yet for truth, which itself is gold for the mind, does not concern us that much. **Whatever we were told from the beginning continues to stick with us** – we do not give ourselves any effort toward exploring and identifying the true signs of pure truth. What is worse, we cannot even think, **and we are afraid to take a look**. The old fable is well and good, but truth is bare and demands that others strip themselves bare and reveal themselves as they really are. Thus, people do not volunteer to suffer with truth, but rather to hate truth. Thus, truth runs away and hides in a well. So if someone desires to arrive at truth, that person must strip himself of all his preconceived notions and speculations, otherwise he cannot accept truth.”<sup>2</sup>

Truly it would be right in the instance that in the true sense the majority of Serbs would have the right idea about themselves and their relationship to God. Serbs call themselves “the people of Heaven” and their ancestral homeland “Heavenly Serbia” (such a term we have heard too often

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:15.

<sup>2</sup> Dositej Obradovic, *Collected Works*, 77-8. Author’s emphasis.

from individual priests, opposition politicians, and academics in the last decade of the twentieth century) which would undoubtedly imply that the whole nation has always been faithful and loyal to God. This would be a most wonderful idea on which to meditate.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, on the basis of Scripture, the truth is different from the fantasy of most Serbs. I am afraid that the greatest enemy to the human soul has deceived almost our entire nation and led them astray spiritually just like other nations, including the people of Israel in biblical times.

Bojan Jovanovic in his book *The Spirit of Pagan Inheritance* contrasts Serbian religious fervor with the true Christian confession of faith:

“In contrast with individuals who become Christians confirm their new faith through spiritual transformation, the Serbian people after accepting Christianity remained loyal to their former natural religious beliefs. A continuity of ancient mythical rituals and magical-religious practices in folk tradition are incorporated into their Christianized forms through the observance of holidays and special life cycles in their annual calendar. Supplementing folk traditions with Christianized rituals and holidays indicates the vitality of the ancient cultural order of folk religion from time predating Christianity.”<sup>4</sup>

Concerned that the state of spirituality of the Serbian people is not where it should be, the famous writer and psychiatrist Vladeta Jerotic asks questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Nikolai of Dabrobosan in a meeting with all of his clergymen (*Orthodoxy*, Issue 957, February 1, 2007, 10-11) asserted that “All Serbs serve the Lord” (this is the headline of the article).

This belief was also shared by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic. In his book *The Nationalism of Saint Sava: The Serbian People as Theodoulos* [translator’s note: “servant of God”] there is a chapter called “Ministry unto Christ: the Essence of Serbian History”, Father Nikolai wrote the following:

“The fundamental and unbroken current of Serbian history over the last 800 years can be summarized in these words: **Ministry unto Christ**. During this time of 8 centuries, the Serbian people represents the true Theodoulos, or God’s servant, and Christodoulos, or Christ’s servant, which is of one and the same essence.”

But, these words of the soon-to-be canonized Serbian saint about the “Representation as Theodoulos of the Serbian people” should not be taken too seriously. The proof comes in the fact that in the very same book, the Bishop speaks very praiseworthy words about probably the greatest criminal to ever oppress humankind: Adolf Hitler. Bishop Nikolai wrote these words about Hitler prior to the outbreak of the Second World War:

“Luther’s conception of creating a national church in Germany has been realized in our day under the current leader of the German nation. With great difficulty and continuing struggle, he has over the last two years achieved partial success in organizing amongst the Protestant German people something like a national church... **Still, we owe veneration to the present German leader**, who as primary architect and a man of the people recognized that nationalism without faith is an anomaly, a cold and unstable apparatus. And now, in the twentieth century, **he implemented the vision held by St. Sava. As a layman, Hitler has given his people a most important achievement worthy only of a saint**, genius, and hero. **And St. Sava carried out the same work for us** as the first among saints and first among geniuses amongst the early heroes of our history.” See *Ikhtus Christian Book*, (Belgrade 2002) 19-21, 28. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> Bojan Jovanovic, *The Spirit of Pagan Inheritance in Traditional Serbian Culture*, (Svetovi: Novi Sad 2000) 33. Author’s emphasis.

“So we need to ask ourselves: where are we today, we as people living in the twentieth century, we as Serbs in the Balkans, in regards to polytheism versus monotheism? To narrow the issue from the general to the specific: if the Serbs are an Orthodox nation, in comparison with European nations who are Roman Catholic and Protestant, **do we really turn out to be more of a polytheistic culture, rather than a monotheistic, Christian people?**”<sup>5</sup>

The reality is that Serbs neither care about God all that much nor do they participate much in church life (even including their own church). This fact is confirmed before the Second World War by a friend of the Serbian people, Dr. Rudolf Archibald Reiss. He wrote a book *Serbs, Beware of Yourselves* when compulsory religious education existed in the schools and when the priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church could not complain about the harmful influence of atheism by the Communists (who came to power only after the War). Dr. Reiss vividly described some of the virtues and vices that characterized the Serbian people only a century ago. Dr. Reiss describes the religious feeling of our people:

“To foment patriotism, you add yet another national cult hero, almost as an effective advertisement. You have turned aside religion in favor of your national church, which really is based on folk tradition... **However, you are not religious. You are unable to accept God or the Bible.** You have turned aside the eternal and omnipotent Ruler of your people. If I could use one trivial expression in this area, I would say that your ‘god’ bears the armor and the beard of Prince Marko Kraljevic, wearing a military Chetnik hat with Cera and Jadra, Kajmakcalan and the Good soil. **Among you there exist neither priests nor church people,** but rather diehard patriots with all the virtues and vices of your people... **Your men do not participate much in church.** So many times during the liturgy have I walked into your temples and found only a few attendees, almost exclusively women!”<sup>6</sup>

For reason of the correctness of Dr. Reiss’s view that the Serbs do not honor God in a truly biblical way, it is necessary to seek the truth in this time of God’s patience and mercy that He would open the eyes and hearts of people for spiritual enlightenment.

Thus, we must conclude that Serbs in general do not belong to God (which is also true of every other nation on earth). Salvation belongs only to individuals of all nations, never of entire nations. Jerotic affirms this biblical principle:

“Christ’s victory over death and evil is valid only for the individual (**never for whole nations, even if they were to call themselves ‘Christian’**) who believes with all his being in Christ as the hope and love of God.”<sup>7</sup>

Earlier chapters of this book have explained in detail how the religious leaders of the Orthodox peoples, including the Serbs, have led them spiritually astray away from Christ’s way of salvation. Let us now examine the devilish religious deception of the people of Israel which

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<sup>5</sup> Vladeta Jerotic, *The Old and the New in Christianity*, (Belgrade 2000) 7. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolph Archibald Reiss, *Beware Serbia! Beware of Yourselves*, 17. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Jerotic, 38. Author’s emphasis.

occurred in the Old Testament. This examination will reveal that satanic tactics have not really changed at all in the last two thousand. Indeed, the Devil continues to wage his campaign of religious deception up to our day in many nations, including our own.

## **Satanic Deception of the People of Israel**

*“I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘**Abraham is our father.**’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.’ Then they said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; **we have one Father—God.**’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. **You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.**”<sup>8</sup>*

John chapter 8 presents one of the harshest verbal condemnations of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of Truth, upon the members of his people who, unaware of their danger, were on the road to eternal destruction.

The greatest and most serious problem of Jesus’ countrymen was their blind confidence in the folk teaching of their religious leaders, who assured their people that everything in the spiritual sense was all right. The religious leaders and scholars, the Sadducees, scribes and Pharisees, were the interpreters of Scripture. They had greater access to the sacred Book than the common people, who mostly heard it through their messages (only) once a week on Sabbath worship in the synagogues.

Thanks to their superficial knowledge of God’s Word along with their unreserved confidence in the teachings of their rabbis (their version of the “holy fathers”), which they accepted without any critical examination, the people of Israel were easily misled away from the path of the true knowledge of God.

Jesus Christ, who described Himself as “the light of the world”, also revealed himself as “the light of men” (John 1:4). The Jews of His time and many generations earlier were very distant from serving the Lord. Indeed, they served the desires of the devil. On the other hand, the tragedy which cannot be overemphasized was that Jesus’ contemporaries were convinced of exactly the opposite. They believed their lives were pleasing to the Creator and that they belonged to His people.

*On What Basis Did the People of Israel Form Their Conviction?*

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<sup>8</sup> John 8:38-44. Author’s emphasis.

The proud people of Israel believed in the unshakeable truth of their bond to the Almighty for three reasons: (1) they were descendants of Abraham, the servant of the Lord, (2) they obeyed the “ancient teachings” (“sacred traditions”), and (3) they venerated their religious teachers and priests. The Lord Christ in his speeches recorded in the gospels shattered their illusion in disproving all three of the main reasons for his compatriots in considering themselves as “the heavenly people”. John’s text shows us the major battle of divine truth against devilish deception. The Jews were held utterly captive by the power of sin and Satan in their confidence about their own religious infallibility.

### *The Refutation of the First False Pretense*

Before Jesus appeared in public and began His Messianic ministry, John the Baptist called the people and their elders to repent and change their lives. A small number of people who felt sincere regret for the sins they had committed repented and were baptized in the waters of the Jordan River:

*“John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”<sup>9</sup>*

However, most ordinary laity and clergy strongly believed that repentance was not necessary. They desired to be baptized partly as a means toward their salvation but also to draw them closer to God. John the Baptist rebuked them with strong words:

*“But when he saw many of the **Pharisees and Sadducees** coming to his baptism, he said to them, **‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.’**”<sup>10</sup>*

*“Then he said to **the multitudes** that came out to be baptized by him, **‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’**”<sup>11</sup>*

Their primary need was repentance. Godly works would have followed it. Any person who sincerely regrets transgressing the Lord’s will can have total assurance that the Lord would answer his prayer for God’s help to help him live his life according to the Holy Scriptures on a daily basis.

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 1:4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 3:7-9. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 3:7-9. Author’s emphasis.

Unfortunately, such was not the case with many Jewish individuals. They continued to live in sin and reject God's way of salvation. Regarding people who practice sin and do not truly repent of it before the Lord, the Apostle John wrote "*He who sins is of the devil.*" (1 John 3:8)

However, Jesus' contemporaries were blinded by Satan. They firmly believed that their salvation was secured through their physical blood ties to the God-pleasing Abraham, who lived nearly two thousand years earlier.

Jesus' message was identical to that preached by John the Baptist. Christ's herald called the unrepentant Jews "a brood of vipers (that is, of the devil)". Christ Himself tells them that God can turn ordinary rocks into children of Abraham – that is, if his physical descendants did not belong to God. The Lord Jesus informed his listeners that their deeds did not conform to those of the God-fearing Abraham. He told them their father was the devil. Clearly, they did not like this. Since Jesus did not tell the Jews what they wanted to hear – a confirmation that they belonged to God's people – the Jews accused Jesus of being possessed by a demon:

*"Then the Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and **have a demon?**' Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that **You have a demon!** Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.'"<sup>12</sup>*

The national religious leaders held the same opinion about Jesus of Nazareth:

*"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, '**This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.**'"<sup>13</sup>*

*"And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebub,' and, '**By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.**'"<sup>14</sup>*

These passages from the Bible clearly illustrate satanic deception. Unregenerate people, unaware of being influenced by the devil, deceive themselves into believing that they are "orthodox" and being totally dedicated to God. At the same time, they accuse Jesus and His true disciples as "heretics" and servants of Satan. The Lord warned His disciples that they would be the subjects of unfounded ridicule, lies, and slander:

*"It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the **master** of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call **those of his household!**"<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> John 8:48-52. Author's emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 12:22-4. Author's emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 3:22. Author's emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 10:25. Author's emphasis.

As a Bible scholar, I am convinced that Satan has no greater deception than to trick unregenerate people into considering themselves to be religious. This is a truly frightening situation.

### *The Refutation of the Second False Pretense*

In addition to boasting of their sacred lineage, another foundation upon which the Jews built their conviction that they truly belonged to God stemmed from their veneration for religious traditions and teachings of religious authorities from the recent and distant past. Though such religious fervor alleges to lead to spirituality, which proves one's loyalty to his religious roots and traditions lived out by countless generations of their ancestors, even if they were never commanded by God, a person pursuing such a path cannot please God. On the contrary, the religious fervor of the Jews was a great abomination before God, and He protested against it over many centuries.

Responding to the worship of Israel during the seventh century before Christ, the prophet Isaiah recorded these words from God:

*“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths  
And honor Me with their lips,  
But have removed their hearts far from Me,  
And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.”*<sup>16</sup>

This spiritual condition had not changed even over several hundred years. Christ addressed His contemporaries in the same manner:

*“Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:*

*These people draw near to Me with their mouth,  
And honor Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.  
And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*<sup>17</sup>

The Savior Himself through history has warned us that we cannot worship God in any manner. God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, is the exclusive source that reveals the will of the Almighty for how man should worship God. Only obedience of God's revelation can result in a person's truly knowing God. On the other hand, people who invent their own interpretations of the Bible along with religious rites and customs that are not mandated by the Lord are subject to the Lord's judgment. Christ calls such worship “in vain”, regardless of how much fanatical religiosity or zeal is manifested by those who perform it.

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<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 29:13. Author's emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 15:6-9. Author's emphasis. See also Mark 7:1-13.

### *The Refutation of the Third False Pretense*

We have just seen that Jesus refuted two of the false pretenses of many Jews for believing their false identification with the people of God. Physical descent from Abraham and adherence to religious tradition not taught in God's Word failed to justify them before God. However, a third deceptive pretense also blinded the Jews: their blind confidence in submitting to the national religious leaders.

These religious leaders and teachers of the people were the main culprits for leading the whole nation astray from the Lord. During the times of the Old Testament prophets in Israel, God warned the shepherds in Israel and condemned them for their indifference to the spiritual condition of the people:

*“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD.”*<sup>18</sup>

Instead of being true spiritual teachers and examples of devotion to God, the priests exploited the people with religious traditions. Such exploitation included a financial dimension in that the priests enriched themselves at the people's expense without leaving them any tangible return of spiritual enrichment:

*“And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: **Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!** Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. **The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them’** ‘Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, **but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock.**’”*<sup>19</sup>

Precisely because of this very sad spiritual state of people in the Old Testament, God raised up His servants the prophets to preach against the many false shepherds and to show people the true path to God's righteousness.

Yet one should not assume that the prophets would be received with delight by the priests and people. One might assume this were the case. However, the majority of people rejected God's truth. They were in a very perilous spiritual condition and submitted themselves to the various “burdens” of their priests. One might have expected the people to accept the Lord's provision with great joy.

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 23:1.

<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel 34:1-8. Author's emphasis.

Yet the attitude of the priests ought to be clear. The priests' agenda was well served by the very ignorance of the people, who were afraid of changing their religious thinking, even if it were based upon the severe ignorance of God in daily living. After all, the priests portrayed themselves as the guardians of national and state interests, even if from God's point of view they would eventually cause the downfall of the nation.

The priests also had at their use a large group of false prophets. These false prophets also claimed to speak in the name of God. They served the priests in keeping their subjects in spiritual blindness and utter ignorance of the Lord's will. After many centuries of calling His people back to Himself, and their constant rejection of Him, the Lord sent their enemies the Babylonians to take them into captivity for seventy years:

*“And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, ‘Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you. **Yet you have not listened to Me,**’ says the LORD, ‘that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: **‘Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’** says the LORD, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.’”<sup>20</sup>*

What is quite interesting about this time is that God's prophet Jeremiah urged the people not to resist the king of Babylon if they wanted to remain in their country and preserve the holy place (God's temple in Jerusalem). The king of Judah with all his subjects refused to accept the defeat and occupation of their country without a fight. Jeremiah also warned his people not to believe the false prophets who claimed to speak in the name of the Lord, but instead were transmitting messages of demons:

*“Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, ‘You shall not serve the king of Babylon.’ **For they prophesy a lie to you,** to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out, and you will perish. But the nations that bring their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let them remain in their own land,’ says the LORD, ‘and they shall till it and dwell in it.’ **I also spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, ‘Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live! Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Therefore do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, ‘You shall not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they prophesy a lie to you; for I have not sent them,**’ says the LORD, ‘yet they prophesy a lie in*

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<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 25:4-9. Author's emphasis. This prophecy refers to the conquest of the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C. by Babylon. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. After the death of King Solomon, both parts of the Jewish kingdom were punished by the Lord with the killing and enslavement of tens of thousands of the descendants of Israel for their godlessness.

*My name, that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you.’ Also I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you... **for they prophesy a lie to you.**’”<sup>21</sup>*

However, the majority of people considered Jeremiah as a “traitor to his people and nation” and that he spoke on behalf of the enemy. The people were ready to lynch the proclaimer of the divine message of salvation:

*“So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, **that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, ‘You will surely die!... And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, ‘This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.’”**”<sup>22</sup>*

Jeremiah 28 tells us that the message of the false prophets, in contrast to that of Jeremiah, appealed to the people of Israel as a patriotic call to “national dignity” in the form of a war of national defense regardless of the casualties. After two years of war, the Babylonian king weakened and eventually vanquished Judah. Such a message naturally appealed to the national pride of the Israelites, who considered themselves the heavenly nation. Any other idea that suggested voluntary surrender to a superior enemy was considered a serious insult. Those proclaiming such a message would be publicly attacked.

The message of Judah’s true enemies, the false prophets (who were also Jews), influenced Zedekiah the king to consider Jeremiah as a traitor and in “cooperation with foreign aggressors”. He had Jeremiah arrested and interred in a dungeon.<sup>23</sup> In the meantime, the leaders of Israel requested the death penalty for Jeremiah and accused him of weakening the morale of the army and preaching against his own people:

*“Therefore the princes said to the king, ‘Please, **let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm.**’”<sup>24</sup>*

The final result of the rejection of God’s message was the death of many Jews and the removal of the rest of the people to exile in Babylon.<sup>25</sup> The main reason for this tragedy was the belief of the people in their religious leaders who were spiritually blind and did not know God.

There exist many other examples when the people of Israel rejected God’s message through His prophets, only because they accepted the false religious teaching of the majority. Here we will mention only two examples.

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<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 27:9-16. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah 26:7-8, 11. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> See Jeremiah 37.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah 38:4. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> See 2 Kings 25:1-12.

The first example is that of the prophet Elijah, the lone remaining brave servant of the Almighty, in his confrontation with the mass of prophets of Baal and Ashtar who led nearly the whole nation of Israel to serve pagan idols.<sup>26</sup>

The second example is the prophet Micaiah who stood off against hundreds of false prophets who through a satanic spirit also believed that they were serving the true God and yet worked against the true servants of God. Their demonic prophetic inspiration would be revealed.<sup>27</sup>

These examples demonstrate that false prophets in Old Testament Israel (who spoke in the name of Jehovah and considered themselves as the only God-pleasing ones of Israel) always enjoyed greater popularity than the true messengers of God, whose message was largely dismissed and even brought the messengers themselves persecution.

### *The Popularity of False Prophets and Rejection of True Preachers in the New Testament Church*

This very situation existed in Jesus' time. Jesus said:

*“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*<sup>28</sup>

The Lord's quote makes it clear that in every society (consistent with the earlier reference from Dr. Vladeta Jerotic) most of the world takes the “broad way” of unbiblical religion or godlessness that leads to eternal destruction and alienation from God. Only a few people accept Christ and surrender their lives to His leadership and thus inherit eternal life.

Jesus Christ told His disciples to be alert to the attitude most (non-religious) people would have toward them:

***“Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,  
For the Son of Man's sake.  
Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!  
For indeed your reward is great in heaven,  
For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets ...  
Woe to you when all men speak well of you,  
For so did their fathers to the false prophets.”***<sup>29</sup>

The entire history of the New Testament Christian Church has fulfilled the prophecy of the Lord's words. This fulfillment has extended to the exaltation and veneration of religious

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<sup>26</sup> See 1 Kings 17-19.

<sup>27</sup> See 1 Kings 22.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 7:13-4,

<sup>29</sup> Luke 6:22-3, 6. Author's emphasis.

teachers advocating religious principles not based on Scripture. It also has included the rejection of the message of God's true servants. The apostles attested to these phenomena:

*“Yes, **and all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer persecution.**”*<sup>30</sup>

*“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”*<sup>31</sup>

During the time of the persecution of the Church of God on the part of unbelievers, the biblical writers foretold the progress of all kinds of false doctrines and their religious propagandists:

*“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*<sup>32</sup>

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; **because many false prophets have gone out into the world...** and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. **They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.** We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”*<sup>33</sup>

*Who Are the False Prophets Hiding in the Midst of New Testament Christianity?*

*“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.”*<sup>34</sup>

*“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. **They went out from us, but they were not of us;** for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, **and that no lie is of the truth.**”*<sup>35</sup>

The verse above spoken in the words of the inspired apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit inform us about false teachers in the Church. First of all, false teachers will appear from the ranks of church leaders (overseers) whom the apostles themselves had appointed and ordained.

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12. Author's emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Peter 4:16.

<sup>32</sup> 2 Timothy 3:13.

<sup>33</sup> 1 John 4:1, 3-6. Author's emphasis.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 20:28-30. Author's emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> 1 John 2:18-21. Author's emphasis.

It is very important to note the references of Paul to “*perverse things*” and John to “*no lie is of the truth.*” Such people, whom Satan uses to mislead others away from the way of gospel truth, Paul labels “savage wolves”. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself used these strong words to refer to false teachers:

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are **ravenous wolves.**”*<sup>36</sup>

### *Traits and Manners of False Teachers*

*“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, **even the elect.** See, I have told you beforehand.”*<sup>37</sup>

Jesus teaches us that the goal of these false prophets is to deceive His true disciples and turn them to the path of destruction, even as they have already misled the majority of other formally religious people. Secondly, we observe that such people are difficult to discern from genuine servants of God (at least in terms of their external appearance). They are trained to wear “sheep’s clothing” by adorning themselves with various “virtues” that religious people appreciate, such as smooth speech, asceticism, long prayers, special modes of dressing, et al. For this reason, such false prophets are considered to be holy men and women worthy of special reverence. Such false prophets are escorted to be seated in the front row, receive gifts from the people they hypnotize, are called “spiritual fathers”...

About such religious leaders Jesus Christ says this:

*“But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love **the best places** at feasts, **the best seats** in the synagogues, **greetings** in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. **Do not call anyone on earth your father;** for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.”*<sup>38</sup>

Thus, false prophets appear to the people whom they deceive as righteous followers and representatives of the one true Christian faith and its interpretation. However, there are two facts that anyone who is impartial can discern in order to figure out their true identity. These facts include:

- False teaching that departs from the Bible, and
- Unchristian living (lack of living guided by Christ’s gospel and the Holy Spirit)

I suppose that the 18 previous chapters have said more than enough about the “truthfulness” that exalts itself as the traditional Christianity of the East. What is certain is that such a deceptive system results neither in faith nor in deed that pleases God.

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew 7:15. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 24:24-5. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 23:5-10. Author’s emphasis.

Thus, I consider that every reader of this book has a relatively simple task before him or her. In order to attain the knowledge of godly biblical faith and its clear distinction from a religious system that has no foundation on Holy Scripture, one needs God's mercy and leadership of the Holy Spirit Who indwells the person who is spiritually born again.

The Lord Christ said:

*"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."*<sup>39</sup>

People roaming aimlessly in anxiety and helplessness in the dark labyrinths of false religion as they follow false leaders have the opportunity to be transferred onto the true path of divine light. Christ has promised deliverance from the darkness of the ignorance of God. What a person needs to do is believe His word and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. When a person chooses to follow Jesus Christ in strong faith, the Holy Spirit becomes that person's constant companion and guide. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor in preserving *"the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints."*

In contrast with unregenerate people who from birth dwell in spiritual darkness and thus represent easy game for false prophets, Christ's warning to "beware" applies to His true believers. By the grace of God, Christ ushers into His flock the elect who follow their Shepherd. True followers of the Lord, who always seek Him and find their comfort in Him alone, doubtlessly have not the least desire to follow false teachers who deceive the masses.

Christ Himself said:

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. **I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.** As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John 12:46.

<sup>40</sup> John 10:11-16. Author's emphasis.