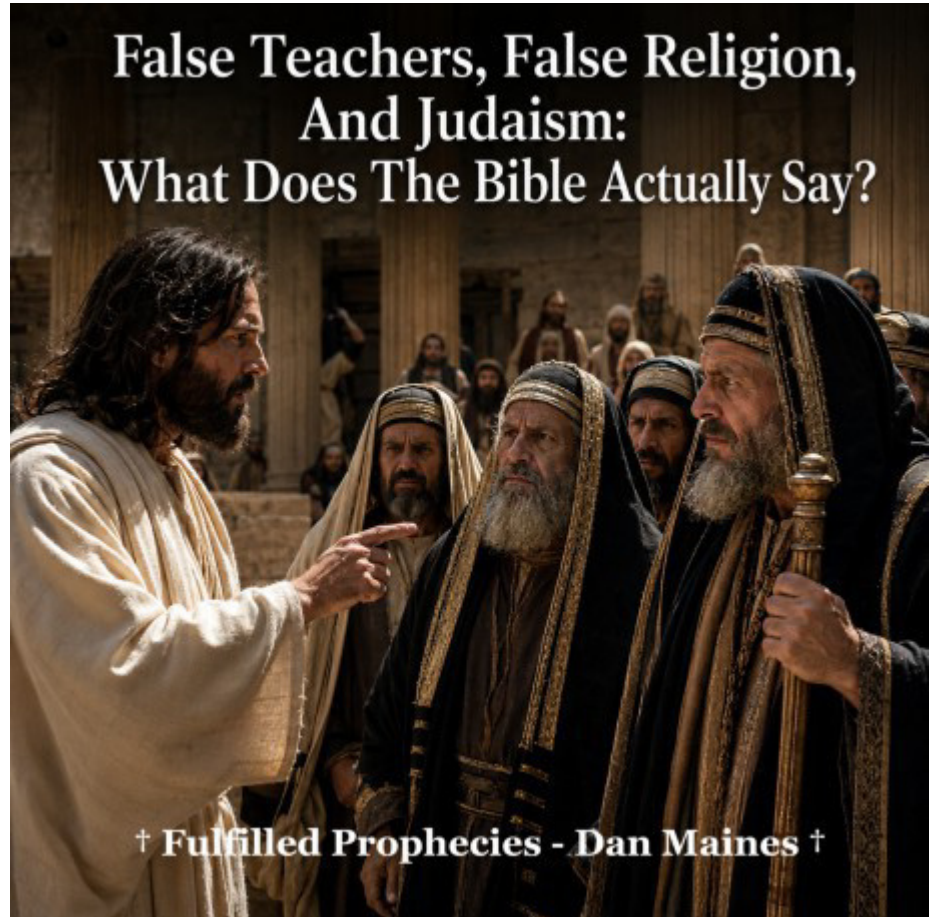


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**False Teachers,
False Religion,
And Judaism:
What Does The
Bible Actually
Say?**



By Dan Maines

False Teachers, False Religion, And Judaism: What Does The Bible Actually Say?

Introduction

† The words false teacher and false religion are used very freely today. Sometimes they're applied to anyone who disagrees with us on prophecy, baptism, spiritual gifts, church government, or another secondary doctrine. The Bible gives us a much more serious standard.

† A false teacher isn't simply someone who's mistaken about something. Scripture repeatedly connects false teaching with

denying Christ, corrupting the gospel, leading people away from God, exploiting believers, or claiming divine authority for something God didn't say (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3).

† This distinction matters because Christians can disagree and still belong to Christ. If every doctrinal disagreement makes someone a false teacher, then nearly every Christian would have to call nearly every other Christian a false teacher.

† The same care is necessary when discussing religion. We shouldn't condemn people merely because of their ethnicity, ancestry, nationality, or culture. Scripture judges beliefs and teachings by their relationship to God and Christ.

† Judaism requires particular care because biblical Judaism, first-century Judaism, and modern Rabbinic Judaism aren't identical things. The Old Covenant given through Moses came from God. It wasn't a false religion. The New Testament controversy concerned those who continued relying upon the Old Covenant system while rejecting its Messiah and fulfillment in Christ.

† This is why Christians sometimes reach different conclusions when asked whether Judaism should be called a false religion. Some focus upon its Old Testament origin and hesitate to use that label. Others focus upon modern Judaism's rejection of Jesus as Messiah and conclude that its present theological claims contradict the New Testament. We need to define exactly what we're talking about instead of using labels carelessly.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name, a word which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How will we recognize the word which the Lord has not spoken?' When the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, and the thing does not happen or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you are not to be afraid of him.

† False teachers aren't something Christianity invented. Israel itself was warned about people claiming to speak for God when God hadn't sent them.

† The test wasn't personality, popularity, education, or religious appearance. The question was whether the message actually came from God (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

† This principle remains important today. A person claiming God told me something doesn't make that claim true. Scripture gives us no reason to accept someone's supposed divine authority simply because that person claims it.

Matthew 7:15-20

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

† Jesus warned His own disciples that false prophets could look religious on the outside. The danger wasn't always obvious.

† Notice that Jesus didn't tell His disciples to label everyone who misunderstood something as a false prophet. He described people whose character and fruit exposed what they really were (Matthew 7:21-23).

† That's an important distinction today. Error should be corrected, but error alone doesn't automatically prove deliberate deception or make every mistaken Christian a wolf.

Matthew 23:13-15

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of

hell as yourselves.

† Jesus' strongest condemnations were often directed toward religious leaders within first-century Judaism, but we need to identify His target correctly. Jesus wasn't condemning Jewish ethnicity. Jesus Himself was Jewish according to the flesh, as were His apostles.

† He condemned scribes and Pharisees who claimed religious authority while preventing people from recognizing the kingdom standing before them in Christ (Matthew 23:23-28).

† Their problem wasn't that the Law of Moses had been false. Their problem was that they had corrupted God's truth and were rejecting the One to whom the Law and the Prophets pointed (John 5:39-40, 45-47).

† This is one reason we shouldn't say that Old Covenant Judaism was originally a false religion. God established that covenant. The problem came when men corrupted it, elevated their traditions, rejected Christ, and attempted to remain in an order that was reaching its appointed fulfillment.

Matthew 15:7-9

You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you, by saying: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. And in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

† Jesus identified one of the clearest marks of corrupted religion, human tradition being elevated into religious doctrine.

† The controversy wasn't Moses versus Jesus. Jesus was confronting traditions that religious authorities had placed alongside or above God's commandment (Matthew 15:3-6).

† This principle reaches far beyond Judaism. Christianity can do exactly the same thing. Whenever our denomination, creed, tradition, preacher, prophecy system, or theological school becomes untouchable, we need to ask whether we're defending Scripture or merely defending what we've inherited.

John 5:39-40

You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you

have eternal life; and it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me; and yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

† These words go directly to the heart of the New Testament controversy with Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus.

† They possessed the Scriptures, studied the Scriptures, and claimed the Scriptures, yet Jesus said those very Scriptures testified about Him.

† According to Jesus, possessing biblical writings isn't enough if those writings are interpreted in a way that refuses the Messiah to whom they point (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

† This is central to the Christian evaluation of modern Judaism. From the New Testament perspective, the Hebrew Scriptures reach their intended destination in Jesus Christ.

John 8:42-44

Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came forth from God and am here; for I have not even come on My own, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot listen to My word. 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 tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.

† Jesus said this to specific opponents who were rejecting Him and seeking His death. It must never be turned into an ethnic condemnation of Jewish people.

† Jesus challenged their claim that physical descent automatically proved their spiritual standing before God. Their actions contradicted their claim (John 8:37-41).

† This same principle appears throughout the New Testament. Physical ancestry doesn't determine someone's standing in God's kingdom (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:26-29).

† Using this passage as an excuse for hostility toward Jewish people would misuse Jesus' words. His argument concerned

spiritual allegiance, not race.

Revelation 2:9

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

† This is one of the strongest passages in the New Testament, and it's also one of the easiest to misuse.

† Jesus wasn't declaring every Jewish person throughout history a member of a synagogue of Satan. He was addressing a specific first-century situation affecting the church at Smyrna.

† The issue was covenant identity and opposition to Christ's people. They claimed the covenant name while opposing the Messiah and persecuting those who belonged to Him.

† In the fulfilled perspective, Revelation must first be heard by the seven churches that actually received it. Turning this first-century judgment into a permanent racial description of Jewish people goes beyond the text (Revelation 1:4, 11).

Revelation 3:9

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

† Again, the context is first-century conflict, this time involving the church at Philadelphia.

† The words say they are Jews, and they are not show that Revelation was dealing with something deeper than physical ancestry. The controversy concerned true covenant identity in the Messianic age.

† Paul taught the same basic principle when he distinguished outward identity from inward covenant reality (Romans 2:28-29).

† These passages can't responsibly be ripped from their historical setting and used as a blanket insult against Jewish people living two thousand years later.

Galatians 1:6-9

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, which is not just another account; but there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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! As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

† Here we find a much stronger biblical basis for identifying false religion and false teaching. Paul wasn't discussing minor disagreements. The gospel itself was being changed.

† The Galatian controversy involved people attempting to place believers under requirements associated with the Mosaic covenant, particularly circumcision (Galatians 5:1-6).

† Paul didn't treat this as a harmless theological difference because making covenant membership depend upon those requirements undermined the sufficiency of Christ.

† The standard remains valuable today. The closer an error gets to changing who Christ is, what Christ accomplished, and how people are reconciled to God, the more serious that error becomes.

2 Peter 2:1-3

But false prophets also appeared among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their indecent behavior, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

† Peter gives us another biblical description of false teachers. They brought destructive teachings, denied the Master, exploited people, and damaged the reputation of the truth.

† Notice how much stronger this description is than someone

simply interpreting a difficult passage differently.

† We should expose destructive teaching, but we shouldn't cheapen the biblical term false teacher by using it for everyone who disagrees with us.

† Christians can correct one another strongly while still recognizing the difference between misunderstanding Scripture and intentionally leading people away from Christ.

1 John 2:22-23

Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

† John makes the issue unmistakably Christ-centered. Denying Jesus as the Christ wasn't a secondary disagreement.

† This passage is especially important when discussing whether a religious system that rejects Jesus as Messiah can be considered true from a Christian perspective.

† According to John, someone can't separate acceptance of the Father from acceptance of the Son. That creates an unavoidable theological conflict between Christianity and any religious system that explicitly denies Jesus as the Christ.

† Christians therefore don't need hatred, insults, or ethnic hostility to say that Judaism's rejection of Jesus as Messiah contradicts the New Testament. We can disagree with a religious system while treating the people within it with dignity and love.

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and now it is already in the world.

† John didn't tell Christians to believe every religious claim

simply because it sounded spiritual. He told them to test what they heard.

† Again, Jesus Christ stands at the center of the test.

Christianity can't treat denial of Christ as merely another equally valid interpretation while remaining faithful to John's words.

† John also located this antichrist controversy in his own time. He said it was already in the world, which fits the first-century setting of his warning (1 John 2:18).

† We should preserve both truths. We don't need to pretend contradictory religious claims are equally true, and we don't have permission to mistreat people who believe differently from us.

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† This verse helps explain why calling biblical Old Covenant Judaism a false religion is historically and biblically inaccurate. God established that covenant, but Hebrews says it had become old and was near its disappearance.

† Something can be genuinely established by God for a particular covenant purpose and still reach the end God appointed for it.

† The fulfilled perspective sees the first-century transition culminating in AD 70 when Jerusalem and the temple system were destroyed, permanently removing the functioning center of the Old Covenant order (Hebrews 9:8-10; 10:9).

† Modern Rabbinic Judaism therefore shouldn't simply be treated as though the Mosaic covenant continued unchanged from Sinai to today. The destruction of the temple profoundly changed Jewish religious life.

Historical References

† Josephus described the first-century Jewish world, its priesthood, temple, sects, internal conflicts, and finally the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70.

His account demonstrates how completely the historical world surrounding the New Testament judgment texts was transformed (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7).

† Josephus recorded the burning and destruction of the temple under Titus, followed by Jerusalem's devastation. Whatever theological interpretation someone gives those events, the physical center of sacrificial Judaism was gone (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6.4-6; 7.1).

† Tacitus independently described the Roman siege of Jerusalem and the Jewish resistance during the first-century war, providing non-Christian historical testimony concerning the conflict that ended with Jerusalem's destruction (Tacitus, Histories 5.10-13).

† Eusebius later connected Jerusalem's catastrophe with Jesus' warnings and recorded the Christian tradition that believers left Jerusalem before the city's destruction (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5-7).

† The Mishnah, compiled around AD 200 from earlier traditions, demonstrates the development of Rabbinic Judaism after the temple period. Without the temple and functioning sacrificial system, Jewish religious practice increasingly centered upon Torah study, prayer, synagogue life, and rabbinic interpretation (Mishnah, especially Berakhot, Avot, and sections preserving temple traditions).

† Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, written in the second century, shows that Christians and Jews were already debating whether Jesus fulfilled Israel's Scriptures and whether the Mosaic covenant remained binding after Christ (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho).

† These historical sources help us distinguish ancient Israel under the Mosaic covenant, the competing forms of Judaism existing during Jesus' generation, and Rabbinic Judaism that developed after the destruction of the temple. Treating all three as though they're exactly the same creates unnecessary confusion.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We shouldn't call someone a false teacher merely because that person disagrees with our interpretation of prophecy, resurrection, baptism, spiritual gifts, church government, or another disputed subject.

† We should ask more serious questions. Does the teaching deny Christ? Does it replace or corrupt the gospel? Does it claim divine authority falsely? Does it exploit people? Does it knowingly lead people away from what Scripture teaches? Those are much closer to the biblical tests (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 2:22-23).

† We also need to distinguish between people and religious systems. A Jewish person isn't our enemy because that person is Jewish. An individual's ethnicity tells us nothing about that person's character.

† Christianity and modern Judaism do, however, make incompatible claims about Jesus. Christianity says Jesus is the promised Messiah, Son of God, and fulfillment of Israel's hope. Rabbinic Judaism doesn't accept those claims. Both positions can't be true in the same sense.

† From a New Testament Christian perspective, any religious system that denies Jesus as the Christ is wrong at its most important theological point (1 John 2:22-23). Saying that isn't hatred. It's simply acknowledging what the New Testament teaches.

† At the same time, phrases such as synagogue of Satan must remain anchored in their first-century contexts. They aren't permission to condemn an ethnicity or attach Satanic identity to every Jewish synagogue or Jewish person today (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

† We should apply the same standard to ourselves. Christianity written on a church sign doesn't guarantee that everything taught inside that building is true. Jesus condemned religious hypocrisy wherever religious authority was being used to hide corruption or obstruct truth (Matthew 7:15-20; 23:13-15).

† The question shouldn't be, What label can I put on these people? The better question is, Does this teaching agree with

Jesus Christ and the gospel revealed in Scripture?

† Truth doesn't require hatred. Love doesn't require pretending every belief is true. We can reject false doctrine without hating the person who believes it.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was Old Covenant Judaism a false religion?

A: No. God Himself established the Mosaic covenant with Israel. The New Testament teaches that it reached its intended fulfillment in Christ and became old as the New Covenant arrived (Hebrews 8:13; 10:9).

Q: Is modern Judaism identical to biblical Old Covenant Judaism?

A: No. There are historical continuities, but modern Rabbinic Judaism developed significantly after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. The biblical sacrificial system required a sanctuary, priesthood, altar, and sacrifices that no longer function as they did under the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews 9:1-10).

Q: Does modern Judaism accept Jesus as the Messiah?

A: Mainstream Judaism doesn't accept Jesus as the promised Messiah or divine Son of God. Christianity does, and the New Testament places confession of the Son at the center of knowing the Father (1 John 2:22-23).

Q: Does that mean Christians should call every Jewish person a false teacher?

A: No. A person isn't a false teacher merely because of Jewish ancestry or identity. False teacher describes someone teaching falsehood, particularly destructive teaching presented with religious authority (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Q: Does Revelation call all Jewish people the synagogue of Satan?

A: No. Revelation addressed specific first-century opponents of

the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia who claimed covenant status while opposing Christ's people (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

Q: Can Christians say another religion is false?

A: Yes, when its fundamental claims contradict what Scripture teaches about God, Christ, and the gospel. But Christians should identify the specific false teaching rather than using labels carelessly or treating people with contempt (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1-3).

Q: Is every Christian who teaches something incorrectly a false teacher?

A: No. Scripture distinguishes between error that needs correction and destructive teaching that denies foundational truth. Even sincere believers can misunderstand Scripture and need correction (Acts 18:24-26).

Q: What's the safest biblical standard?

A: Test the teaching by Scripture, examine what it says about Jesus Christ and the gospel, look at its fruit, and don't make accusations that go beyond the evidence (Matthew 7:15-20; 1 John 4:1-3).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Matthew 7:15-20; Matthew 23:13-15; Matthew 15:7-9; John 5:39-40; John 8:42-44; Revelation 2:9; Revelation 3:9; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 2:22-23; 1 John 4:1-3; Hebrews 8:13

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories 5.10-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5-7; Mishnah, Berakhot and Avot; Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho

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