

How can I Identify False Prophets?

“But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be corrupted from a complete and pure devotion to Christ. For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly!” (2 Cor. 11:3-4 HCSB)

The words of the apostle Paul are clear: Those who are not grounded in the Word of God are subject to deceptive teachings about “another Jesus ... a different spirit ... a different gospel” – three distinctive markers that help us identify false prophets. Whether they are Muslim prophets like Muhammad, or self-proclaimed messiahs like the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, these false teachers invariably promote an unbiblical view of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel. We will use these three markers, along with a comparative chart, to examine the teachings of Islam, Mormonism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses in light of what God’s Word proclaims.

The Bible cautions us to beware of false messiahs, false prophets and false teachers who “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” and promote “doctrines of demons” (see Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). But before we go deeper, let’s define some key terms.

Defining our terms

False religion. From a New Testament perspective, a false religion is any system of belief that opposes the central teachings of the Christian faith. While all cults of Christianity are false religions, not all false religions are cults, because not all religions claim to be Christian. Islam, for example, is a false religion but not a cult, because Islam does not claim to be Christian.

Cult. A cult is a religious organization whose members claim to be Christians, and who use the Bible and Christian terms, yet who deny the central beliefs of historical Christianity. Simply put, a cult is a counterfeit form of Christianity.

Heresy. This may be defined as a teaching strongly opposed to the doctrines of historical Christianity, for example the denial of Christ’s deity, full humanity, virgin birth, or bodily resurrection.

Sect. A sect is an otherwise orthodox group having established its own identity and teachings distinct from the group to which it belongs. In Jesus’ day for example, the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes were sects of Judaism.

Another Jesus, a different spirit, a different gospel

Every Christian can identify false belief systems by asking three important questions: 1) Who is Jesus? 2) Who is the Holy Spirit? and 3) How am I saved? As we go to the comparative chart and place the teachings of God’s Word against the teachings of Islam, Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, let’s remind ourselves of some key biblical truths that address these crucial questions.

Key truths about the real Jesus

Jesus is:

- The eternal Son of God, without beginning or end
- God / deity
- Co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit
- Virgin born
- The God-Man / fully divine and fully human
- Sinless in His humanity
- Our substitute through His sacrificial death on the cross
- Alive, having been raised physically from the dead
- The only way of salvation
- Seated today in heaven as our Mediator and Intercessor
- Coming visibly and physically one day in power and great glory
- The One who will judge all people and to whom, one day, all creatures will bow

Key truths about the real Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is:

- The eternal Spirit, without beginning or end
- God / deity
- Personal (not an impersonal force)
- Co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son
- The Author of Scripture
- The One who convicts the lost of their need for Christ
- The One who regenerates believing sinners, causing them to be made spiritually alive
- The One who indwells, seals and sanctifies believers, and who places them positionally into the Body of Christ
- The Giver of spiritual gifts
- God's down payment / guarantee of our home in heaven

Key truths about the real Gospel

- All people are sinners
- Sin separates us from holy God, resulting in spiritual and physical death and, ultimately, eternity apart from God in hell
- People are incapable of saving themselves
- Christ died on the cross for our sins and, as our Substitute, paid our sin debt in full
- Christ was buried and rose physically from the dead
- His finished work at Calvary conquered sin and death for us
- As a result, salvation is by God's grace through faith – not by works
- Salvation is God's gift – and everlasting, unbreakable, covenant relationship with Him

An exhortation from John the apostle

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now. You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:1-4 HCSB)

The Bible not only warns believers about false prophets; it describes them graphically as:

- Ravaging wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15; see also Acts 20:29)
- Deceitful workers (2 Cor. 11:13)
- Springs without water, mists driven by a whirlwind (2 Peter 2:17)
- Dreamers who defile their flesh, despise authority, and blaspheme glorious beings (Jude 1:8)
- Liars (Rev. 2:2)
- Antichrists (1 John 2:18)

How do we define a false prophet? Simply put, *a false prophet is one who preaches, teaches, or foretells events contrary to the Word of God – sometimes claiming God as his or her source.* As believers, we can guard our hearts from the teachings of false prophets by obeying three commands of the apostle John:

1. **Do not believe every spirit.** Kenneth Wuest's translation of 1 John 4:1 puts it this way: "Stop believing every spirit." The term "spirit" refers to those who claim to have divine gifts for service, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*. We should beware. Jesus warns us of miracle-working false messiahs and false prophets (Matt. 24:24). Paul says Satan masquerades as an angel of light, and his followers disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-5). Paul further cautions against "deceitful spirits" and "the teachings of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). And he warns that the time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but turn aside to myths (2 Tim. 4:3-4). We should be like the Bereans who greeted Paul and Silas. Acts 17:11 says "they welcomed the message with eagerness and *examined the Scriptures* daily to see if these things were so" (emphasis mine).
2. **Test the spirits.** The Word of God is the yardstick by which all truth claims must be measured. Here are a few markers. True prophets:
 - Are 100 percent accurate when they speak in the Lord's name (Deut. 18:21-2).
 - Exalt God, not themselves or false gods (Deut. 13:1-4).
 - Tell the whole truth, not tickle the ears (Ezek. 13:22-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).
 - Proclaim salvation by grace through faith (Gal. 1:8-9).
 - Set lifestyle examples (2 Peter 2:1-3).

3. **Know the Spirit of God.** In his first epistle, John challenges the views of the “antichrists” about the identity of Jesus. The most important question Jesus ever asked – and the question upon which every person’s eternal destiny hangs – is, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). Peter answered correctly, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16). Believers need to know who the real Jesus is. Indeed, He is:
- The eternal Son of God, Creator and sovereign Lord (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-18; 2:9-10; Heb. 1:3).
 - Virgin born (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25).
 - Full deity and full humanity in His incarnation (John 1:14).
 - Sinless Savior whose death paid our sin debt (1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21).
 - Raised and ascended in the flesh; seated at the right hand of the Father as our Mediator and Intercessor; and returning Lord who will appear visibly and physically one day (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 4:15-16; Rev. 19-22).

John’s words are simple and effective. Christians are people of faith – not a blind, ignorant faith, but a reasonable faith based on the evidence God has given us in creation, Scripture, and in the Person of His Son. While there have always been false prophets, and while there will continue to be those who fleece the flock rather than feed it, we can guard our hearts – and protect our families and our churches – from false teachings if we follow John’s commands: Don’t believe every spirit (that is, every person claiming divine gifting); test the spirits (according to Scripture); and know the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit’s teaching about the real Jesus as revealed in the Bible).

Comparing the Teachings of Christianity, Islam, Mormonism
 And the Jehovah’s Witnesses with Respect to Jesus, the Spirit, and the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

What the Bible Says about Jesus	What Islam Says about Jesus	What Mormonism Says about Jesus	What Jehovah’s Witnesses Say about Jesus
<p>He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:35). He is eternal God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-3, 14; 10:30; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-13). Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), rose physically from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and is coming back physically and visibly one day (Matt. 24:29-31; John 14:3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 19:11-16).</p>	<p>He was one of God’s prophets but inferior to Muhammad, who brought Allah’s final revelation to man (the Koran). The Koran denies that Jesus is the Son of God, and any Muslim who believes in the deity of Jesus has committed the unforgivable sin called <i>shirk</i> – a sin that will send that person to hell. Muslims do believe Jesus is the Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and is coming back one day – to establish Islam throughout the earth. They do not believe He died on the cross, but was called to heaven by Allah before His death and perhaps replaced by Judas Iscariot.</p>	<p>Jesus preexisted in heaven as a spirit child of Heavenly Father (Ehohim) and one of his goddess wives (as did Lucifer and all human beings). He then took on a human body through sexual relations between Heavenly Father and the virgin Mary (early Mormon teaching). Through his death and resurrection, he paid for Adam’s sins and secured general salvation (resurrection) for all people. After rising from the dead, he came to America to preach to the Nephites, the ancestors of Native Americans. He was the bridegroom at the wedding in Cana and perhaps had three wives and numerous children, from whom Joseph Smith, Mormonism’s founder, is descended.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(more)</p>	<p>Jesus was “the first and direct creation of Jehovah God” (<i>The Truth Shall Make You Free</i>, p. 47). Jesus then created all “other” things (Col. 1:16 <i>New World Translation</i>).</p> <p>“Jehovah took the perfect life of his only-begotten Son and transferred it from heaven to ... the womb of the unmarried girl Mary ... Thus God’s Son was conceived or given a start as a human creature ... Jesus’ birth on earth was not an incarnation” (<i>From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained</i>, pp. 126-27; <i>What Has Religion Done for Mankind?</i> p. 231).</p> <p>“... the true Scriptures speak of God’s Son, the Word, as ‘a god.’ He is a ‘mighty god,’ but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah” (<i>The Truth Shall Make You Free</i>, p. 47).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(more)</p>

What the Bible Says about Jesus	What Islam Says about Jesus	What Mormonism Says about Jesus (cont)	What Jehovah's Witnesses Say about Jesus (cont)
		<p>Jesus is one of three gods in the Mormon godhead, although Mormonism recognizes the Trinity only as one in "purpose," arguing instead for a multitude of gods. Jesus and Heavenly Father have bodies of flesh and bone, making it "impossible for Him [Heavenly Father] to occupy at one time more than one space of such limits" (James E. Talmage, <i>Articles of Faith</i>, p. 43).</p>	<p>"This firstborn from the dead was raised from the grave, not a human creature, but a spirit." (<i>Let God Be True</i>, p. 276)</p> <p>"Jesus returned to earth in 1914, has expelled Satan from Heaven and is proceeding to overthrow Satan's organization, establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom, and vindicate the name of Jehovah God. He did not return in a physical form and is invisible as the Logos" (Walter Martin, summarizing the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in <i>Kingdom of the Cults</i>, p. 52).</p>

What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit	What Islam Says about the Holy Spirit	What Mormonism Says about the Holy Spirit	What Jehovah's Witnesses Say about the Holy Spirit
<p>The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19-20) and is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son (Acts 5:3-4).</p>	<p>Islam denies the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, as well as the Trinity. Rather, the Koran describes the Holy Spirit as "the angel which brought revelation" (Mualana Muhammad Ali, <i>The Holy Koran with English Translation and Commentary</i>, p. 43). The Koran also calls the Spirit "Gabriel" (2:97) and the "Faithful Spirit" (26:193).</p>	<p>Mormon.org offers this definition of the "Holy Ghost:" "Also called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and the Comforter. He witnesses, or testifies of the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and reveals and teaches truth."</p> <p>Sounds orthodox, but historically Mormon leaders have offered more disturbing views of the Holy Spirit. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Father, Son and Holy Spirit "constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, p. 370). • <i>Doctrine and Covenants 130:22</i> declares that the Father has a body of flesh and bones. So does the Son. But the Holy Ghost is "a personage of spirit." • "The Holy Ghost is yet a spiritual body and waiting to take to himself a body as the Saviour did or as the gods before them took bodies" (Joseph Smith, April 6, 1843; see <i>Discourses on the Holy Ghost</i> compiled by N.B. Lundwall, p. 73). 	<p>"... The holy spirit is the invisible active force of Almighty God that moves his servants to do his will" (<i>Let God Be True</i>, p. 108).</p> <p>"The Scriptures themselves unite to show that God's holy spirit is not a person but is God's active force by which he accomplishes his purpose and executes his will" (<i>Aid to Bible Understanding</i>, p. 1543).</p> <p>"As for the 'Holy Spirit,' the so-called 'third Person of the Trinity,' we have already seen that it is not a person, but God's active force" (<i>The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life</i>, p. 24).</p>

What the Bible Says about the Gospel	What Islam Says about the Gospel	What Mormonism Says about the Gospel	What Jehovah's Witnesses Say about the Gospel
<p>Through His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus conquered sin and death, paid our sin debt in full, and provided forgiveness of sins and everlasting life by God's grace through faith in Christ (John 3:16, 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).</p>	<p>The Koran teaches, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam" (3:19). This means salvation is achieved only through submission to the teachings of Islam. Forgiveness is based on good works and Allah's choice of mercy.</p> <p>The Muslim's chances for heaven are good if he or she: 1) accepts Allah and his prophet Mohammad; 2) does good works and all that is required of him or her by Allah; and 3) is predestined to Allah's favor.</p> <p>Islam teaches that Christ was neither crucified for our sins nor resurrected; therefore salvation cannot possibly be attained through faith in Christ. In fact, sin is not man's problem. Man is sinful by act only, not by nature. Original sin is viewed as a "lapse" by Adam. Man is not really "fallen" in his nature; he is merely weak and forgetful. Sin is thought of in terms of rejecting right guidance. It can be forgiven through repentance. No atonement is necessary.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(more)</p>	<p>Jesus' atonement secured "salvation" (meaning resurrection) for nearly all people, but "men will be punished for their own sins" (<i>Article of Faith #2</i> by Joseph Smith). People may earn "eternal life" (godhood) by "obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel," meaning works (<i>Article of Faith #3</i> by Joseph Smith).</p> <p>Godhood is the goal of Mormonism. According to fifth LDS President Lorenzo Snow, "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become" (<i>The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow</i>, p. 1).</p> <p>Joseph Smith taught that "you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves ... to inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of God" (<i>History of the Church</i>, vol. 6, p. 306).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(more)</p>	<p>"The atonement is a ransom paid to Jehovah God by Christ Jesus and is applicable to all who accept it in righteousness. In brief, the death of Jesus removed the effects of Adam's sin on his offspring and laid the foundation of the New World of righteousness including the Millennium of Christ's reign" (Walter Martin, <i>Kingdom of the Cults</i>, p. 52).</p> <p>"Those people of good will today who avail themselves of the provision and who steadfastly abide in this confidence will find Christ Jesus to be their 'everlasting Father'" (<i>Let God Be True</i>, p. 121).</p> <p>"We have learned that a person could fall away and be judged unfavorably either now or at Armageddon, or during the thousand years of Christ's reign, or at the end of the final test ... into everlasting destruction" (<i>From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained</i>, p. 241).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(more)</p>

What the Bible Says about the Gospel	What Islam Says about the Gospel	What Mormonism Says about the Gospel	What Jehovah's Witnesses Say about the Gospel
	<p>Muslims believe in heaven and hell. Allah predetermines the eternal destiny of each person, and the hope of salvation for the Muslim is based on works, although no Muslim has the absolute assurance of heaven. Islam teaches its followers to prepare for the Day of Judgment, in which each person's good and evil works will be measured, resulting in heaven or hell.</p>	<p>Mormonism teaches that a person is destined for one of six places after death:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer darkness – reserved for Satan and his demons and the extremely wicked, including apostate Mormons. • Telestial kingdom – the lowest of the three heavens; the wicked will spend eternity here. • Terrestrial kingdom – the second heaven; honorable people and “lukewarm” Mormons will live here. • Celestial kingdom – the highest of the three heavens consisting of three separate levels; the top level is where Mormons hope to be “exalted.” 	<p>“Who and how many are able to enter in (the Kingdom)? The Revelation limits to 144,000 the number that become a part of the Kingdom and stand on heavenly Mount Zion” (<i>Let God Be True</i>, p. 136). The rest of Jehovah's Witnesses, the “other sheep,” hope to be resurrected and live on Paradise Earth.</p>