

The sermon on the mount

Part 7 – detecting the lies of our world (matthew chapter 7: 13-20)

Based on john stott: 12 studies for individuals and groups

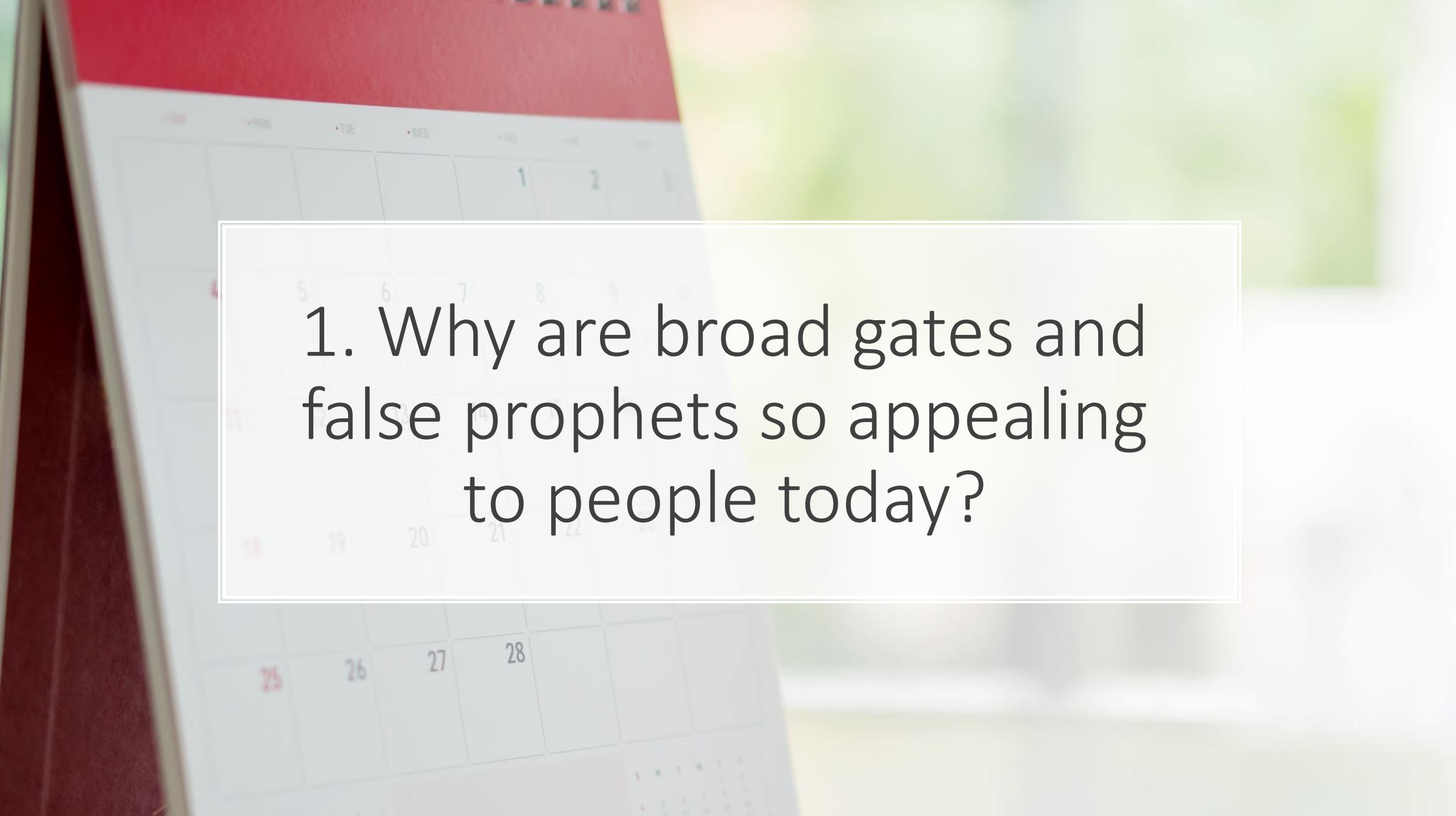
Introduction from John Stott

- In our consumer-oriented society, people would like the opportunity to combine elements of several religions or even to design one of their own, but Jesus will not allow us this comfortable option.
- He insists that ultimately there is only one choice.
- GROUP – if God hired a consultant to help him improve his image amongst 21st century Brits, what characters would the consultant want to emphasize and what changes might he/she suggest to make God more popular with the masses?
- In the Sermon on the Mount, the contrast between the two kinds of righteousness and devotion, the two treasures, the two masters and the two ambitions have been faithfully portrayed.
- Now it's decision-time: is it to be the Kingdom of Satan or the Kingdom of God – the prevailing culture of the time, or the Christian counter-culture?



Matthew 7: 13-20

- “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.
- “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits.



1. Why are broad gates and false prophets so appealing to people today?

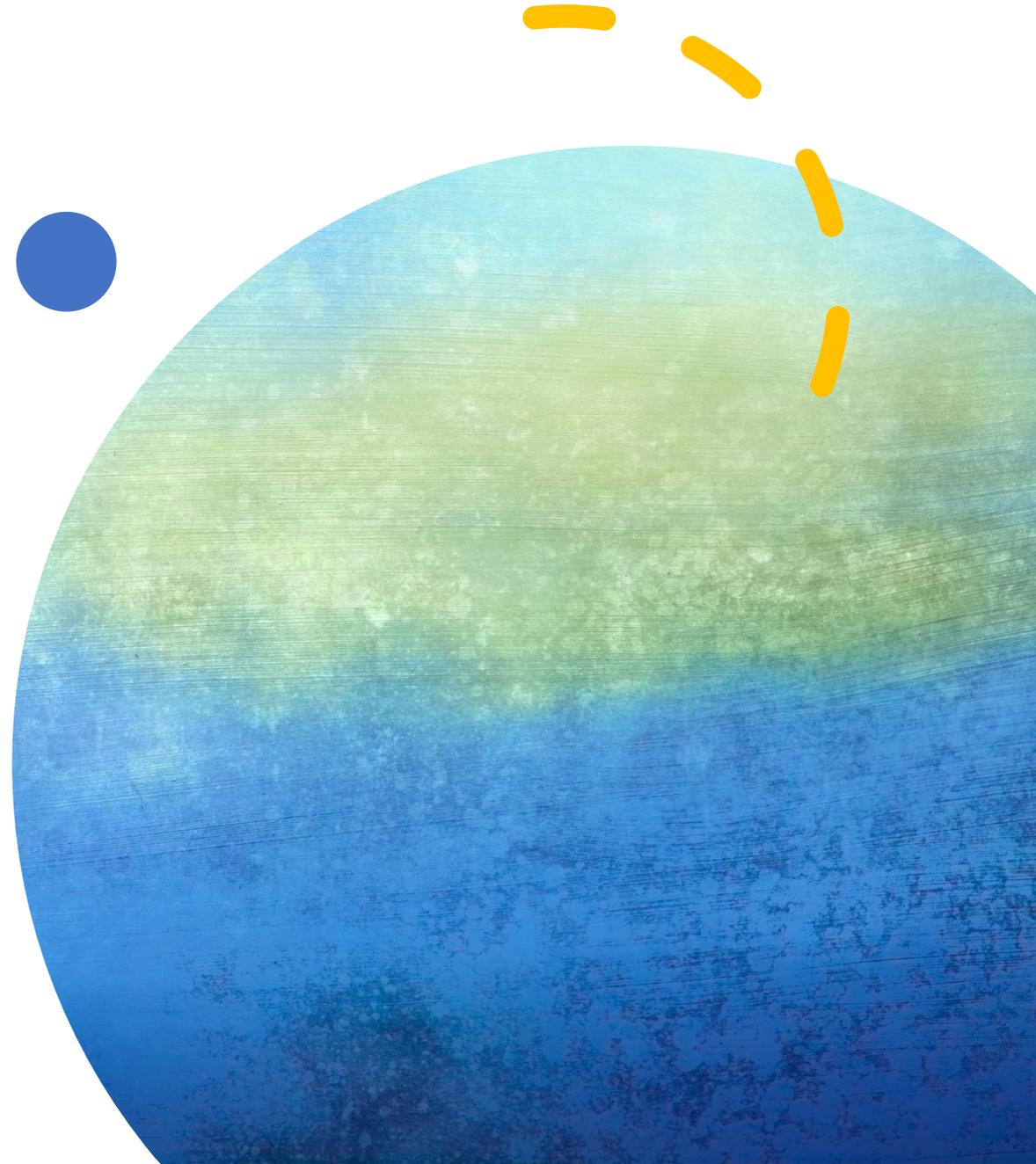
2. How are the two gates described in verses 13 and 14?

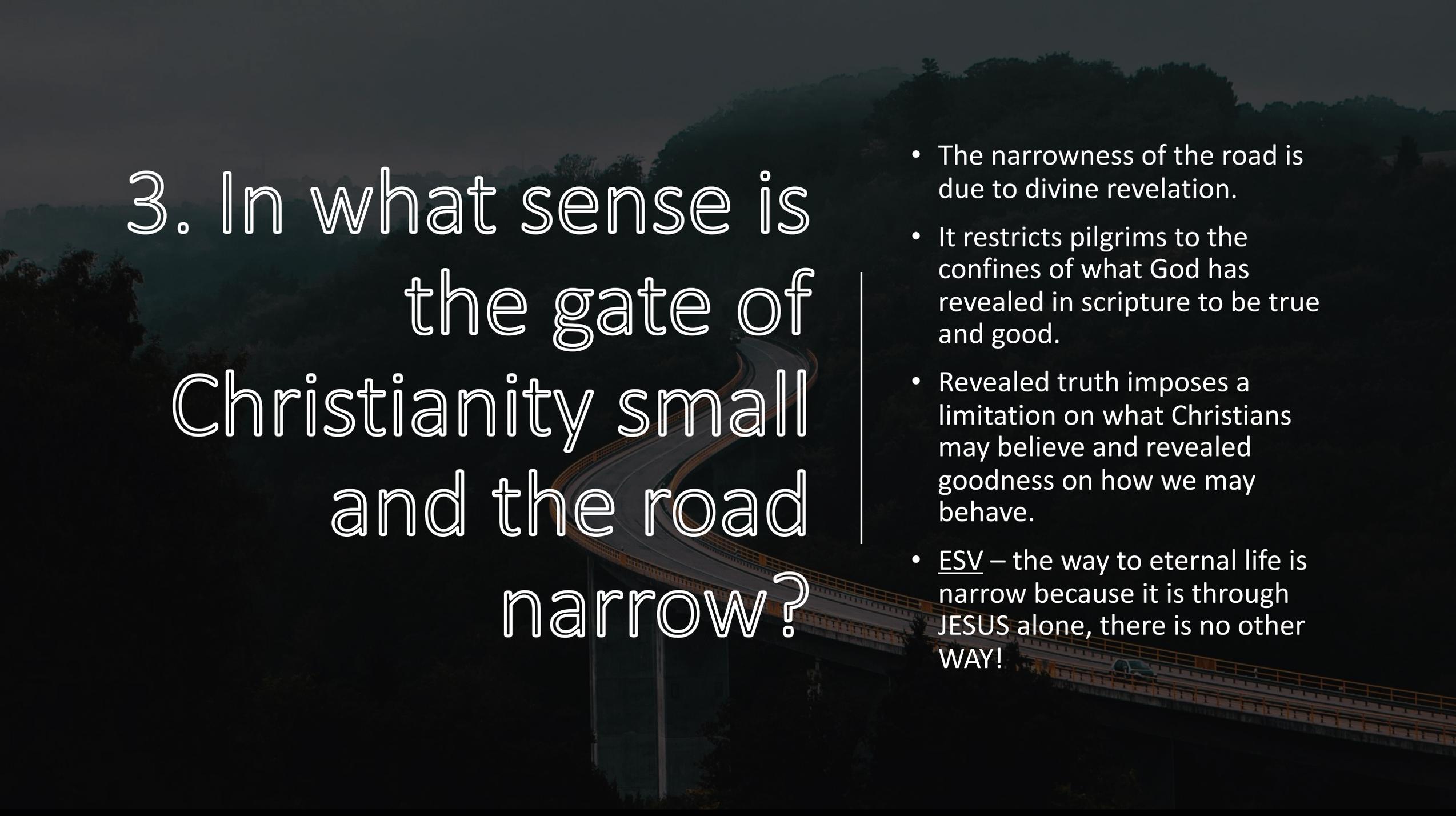
What is immediately striking about these verses is the absolute nature of the choice before us.

There are **ONLY** two gates, two roads, two destinations and two groups.

We **MUST** choose one or the other.

We **CANNOT** be neutral.





3. In what sense is
the gate of
Christianity small
and the road
narrow?

- The narrowness of the road is due to divine revelation.
- It restricts pilgrims to the confines of what God has revealed in scripture to be true and good.
- Revealed truth imposes a limitation on what Christians may believe and revealed goodness on how we may behave.
- ESV – the way to eternal life is narrow because it is through JESUS alone, there is no other WAY!

4. In what sense is The World's gate wide and its road broad?

- On the broad road there is plenty of room for diversity of opinions and laxity of morals.
- It is the road of tolerance and permissiveness.
- It has no curbs and no boundaries of either thought or conduct.
- Travelers on this road follow their own inclinations, that is the desires of the human heart and its fallenness.
- Superficiality, self-love, hypocrisy, mechanical religion, false ambition etc. i.e., things that don't have to be learned or cultivated.
- Effort is required to resist them. No effort is required to practice them. That is why the broad road is easy.
- ESV – though The Way is hard, those who choose the easy way by seeking the approval of man and not of God will find that it leads only to destruction.

6. Why is it significant that Jesus warning about false prophets (verses 15-20) comes immediately after his discussion about the gates?

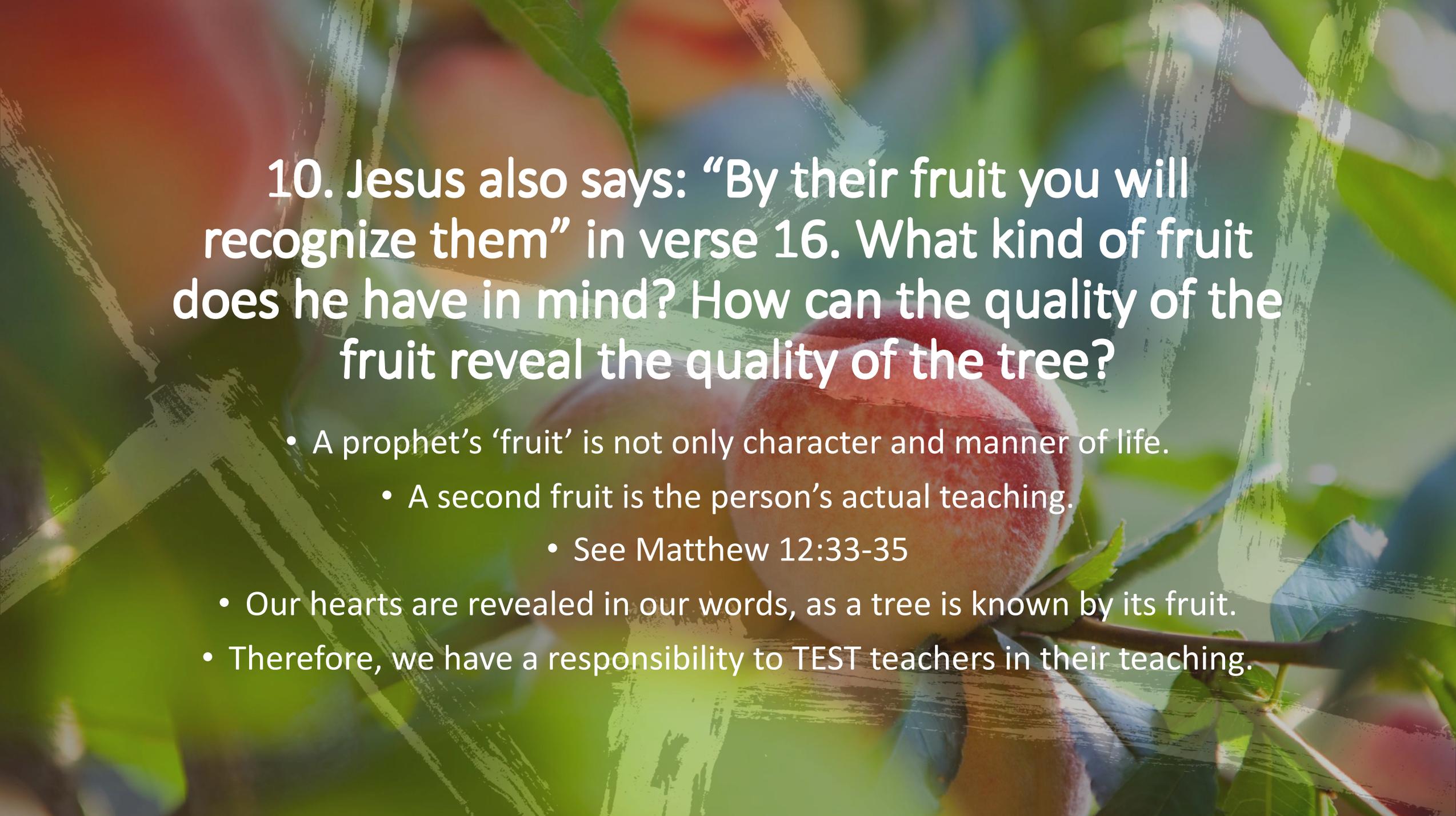
- One of the major characteristics of false prophets in the OT was their amoral optimism which insisted that God's way was really the broad way!
- They denied that God was the God of judgement as well as steadfast love and mercy.
- False prophets give a false sense of security.
- They lull people to sleep in their sins.
- They fail to warn people of the impending judgement of God OR tell them how they might escape it!
- ESV – though we must not judge, we must not be naïve either, but rather wisely discerning of 'professed prophets!'



7. Jesus says that false prophets “come to you in sheep’s clothing”. What disguises might they wear today?

- False prophets are adept at blurring the issue of salvation.
- Some so muddle or distort the gospel that they make it hard for seekers to find the narrow gate.
- Others try to make out that the narrow way is in fact much broader than Jesus implied and to walk it requires little, if any, restriction on one’s beliefs or behaviour.
- Yet others dare to contradict Jesus and claim that all roads lead to God.
- No wonder Jesus likened such false teachers to “ferocious wolves”, for they are responsible for leading people to destruction.

8. What false messages or prophecies have you heard recently. How did you know they were false?



10. Jesus also says: “By their fruit you will recognize them” in verse 16. What kind of fruit does he have in mind? How can the quality of the fruit reveal the quality of the tree?

- A prophet’s ‘fruit’ is not only character and manner of life.
 - A second fruit is the person’s actual teaching.
 - See Matthew 12:33-35
- Our hearts are revealed in our words, as a tree is known by its fruit.
- Therefore, we have a responsibility to TEST teachers in their teaching.

11. How can we keep from becoming “witch hunters” as we seek to recognize false prophets?



The application of the “fruit test” is not altogether simple or straightforward for fruit takes time to grow and ripen!



We also need an opportunity to examine it closely, for it is not always possible to recognize a tree and its fruit from a distance.



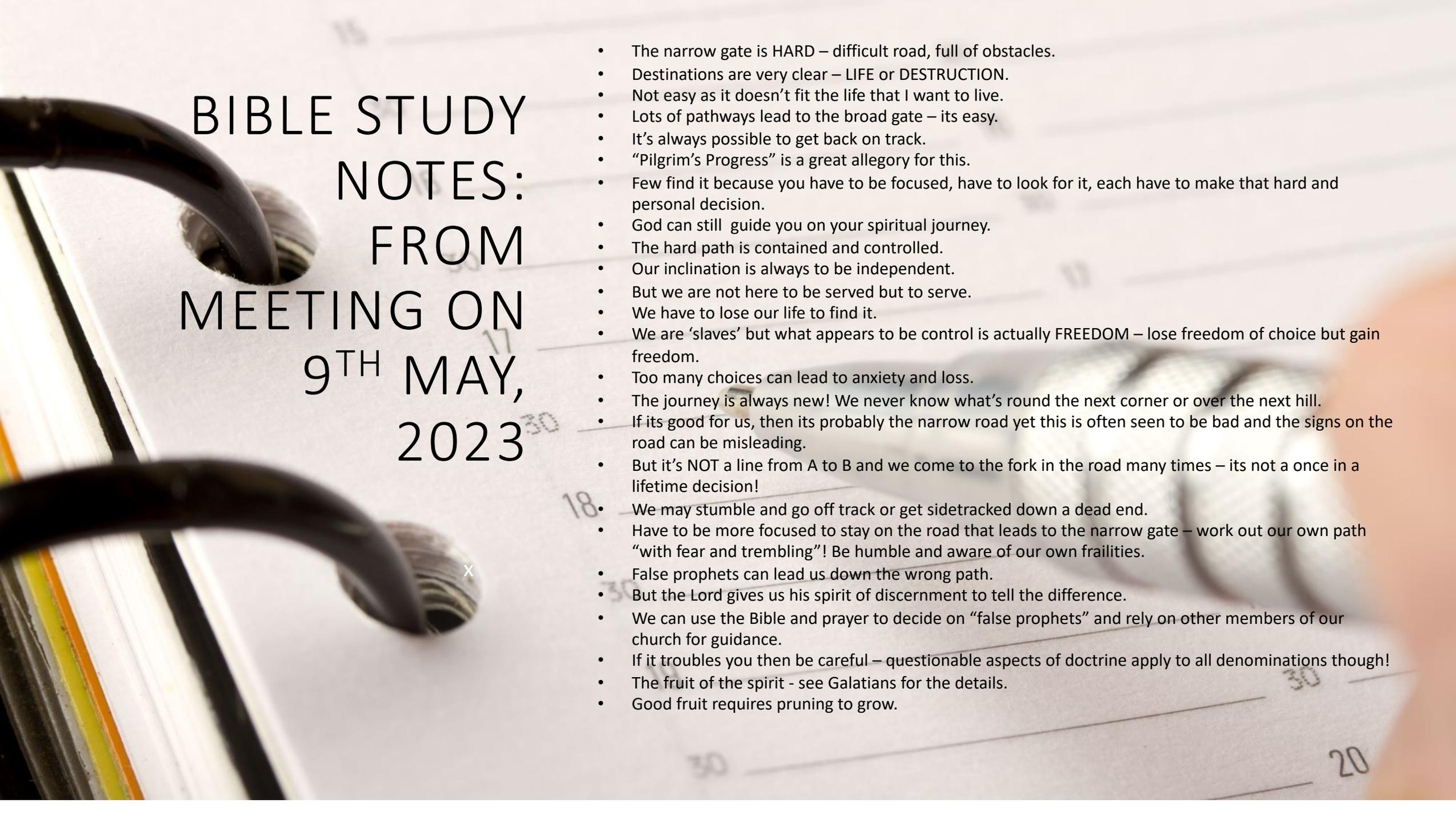
Even at close quarters we may at first miss the symptoms of disease in the tree or the presence of a maggot in the fruit.



To apply this to a teacher what is needed is not a superficial estimate of his standing in the church, but a close and critical scrutiny of his character, conduct, message, motives and influence.



12. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” – verse 19. How can this warning keep us from being complacent?



BIBLE STUDY NOTES: FROM MEETING ON 9TH MAY, 2023

- The narrow gate is HARD – difficult road, full of obstacles.
- Destinations are very clear – LIFE or DESTRUCTION.
- Not easy as it doesn't fit the life that I want to live.
- Lots of pathways lead to the broad gate – its easy.
- It's always possible to get back on track.
- "Pilgrim's Progress" is a great allegory for this.
- Few find it because you have to be focused, have to look for it, each have to make that hard and personal decision.
- God can still guide you on your spiritual journey.
- The hard path is contained and controlled.
- Our inclination is always to be independent.
- But we are not here to be served but to serve.
- We have to lose our life to find it.
- We are 'slaves' but what appears to be control is actually FREEDOM – lose freedom of choice but gain freedom.
- Too many choices can lead to anxiety and loss.
- The journey is always new! We never know what's round the next corner or over the next hill.
- If its good for us, then its probably the narrow road yet this is often seen to be bad and the signs on the road can be misleading.
- But it's NOT a line from A to B and we come to the fork in the road many times – its not a once in a lifetime decision!
- We may stumble and go off track or get sidetracked down a dead end.
- Have to be more focused to stay on the road that leads to the narrow gate – work out our own path "with fear and trembling"! Be humble and aware of our own frailities.
- False prophets can lead us down the wrong path.
- But the Lord gives us his spirit of discernment to tell the difference.
- We can use the Bible and prayer to decide on "false prophets" and rely on other members of our church for guidance.
- If it troubles you then be careful – questionable aspects of doctrine apply to all denominations though!
- The fruit of the spirit - see Galatians for the details.
- Good fruit requires pruning to grow.