

A “Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing”

A Word Study—Because the English Translation is Inadequate

Overview

The “Wolf in sheep’s clothing” contains a hidden test. The Greek word for clothing means “to sink into”—an assumed identity. The word for ravenous is the same term Paul uses for extortioners. False prophets wear an identity, not a costume. This article walks through Matthew 7:15-20, word by word, in the original Greek. Three words rebuild the passage. The first is ἔνδυμα (endyma), translated as clothing, which comes from ἐνδύω (endyo, to sink into). The second word is ἐπιγινώσκω (epiginosko), translated as “know,” denoting forensic recognition based on evidence. The third is ἄρπαξ (harpax), translated ravenous, which appears five times, and four of them describe a human predator who seizes by force. After this, the passage stops sounding like a vague warning and starts sounding like a complete discernment system.

Summary

Προσέχω (Prosecho), translated as “beware,” comes from pros (toward) plus echo (to hold), originally a nautical term for bringing a ship to port. The form is a continuous imperative, signifying ongoing navigation. Endyma derives from endyo, en (in) plus dyo (to sink), meaning that which one sinks into rather than throws on. Matthew uses endyma three other times: Matthew 3:4 for John the Baptist's prophetic garment signaling identity, and Matthew 22:11-12 for the wedding garment whose absence reveals someone who entered without the identity the room required. Paul uses the same root verb in Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27. Καρπός (karpos) appears seven times in five verses, a diagnostic protocol. Verse 17 contains two different Greek words for good: ἀγαθός (agathos) for the tree, intrinsically good, and καλός (kalos) for the fruit, excellent in its kind. English flattens both. Epiginosko prefixes ginosko with epi, indicating mental direction toward what is known. Thayer defines it as to become thoroughly acquainted with, to recognize by certain signs. 1 Corinthians 13:12 contrasts γινώσκω (ginosko, “now I know in part”) with epiginosko (“then I shall know fully”). Harpax appears five times. 1 Corinthians 5:10-11 and 6:10 list it among extortioners. The root ἁρπάζω (harpazo) is the same verb in Matthew 13:19, where the wicked one snatches what was sown. The word [Sapros] (Sapros) in verse 17 means rotten, putrid, not moral evil. The five-word system (prosecho, endyma, karpos, epiginosko, harpax) works as a precision instrument for any voice in the inner landscape.

An Examination of the Text

Three times, Paul mentions ἄρπαξ (harpax) as one of the worst types of people. Once, Jesus used it in a parable, and only once does it appear in Matthew 7:15. Your English Bible translates it as "ravenous." The traditional interpretation of this passage isn't wrong, but it is incomplete. The underlying Greek contains a system that English can't fully capture. Additionally, the word translated as "clothing" in "sheep's clothing" does not mean "disguise." The Greek root word refers to something you physically enter into, something you become.

The real challenge in this passage lies in a word in verse 16 that is rarely examined closely. It's not the word "fruit" but three Greek words that describe the disguise's nature, the violence beneath it, and a forensic tool for identifying both. By the end of this article, you will have a practical method based on the word καρπος (karpos, meaning fruit): a single question you can ask about any voice in your life to understand what it truly produces.

Matthew 7:15 says, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." You recognize this phrase. You have probably used it yourself, perhaps about a pastor who used his spiritual authority to manipulate, a teacher whose words sounded wise but whose influence left you worse off, a leader who appeared righteous but acted predatory, or a friend who wore trust like a uniform, only to be revealed as something entirely different underneath. That experience is real; that wound is real. This passage confirms it. The Greek word for false prophet is ψευδοπροφήτης (*pseudoprophētās*), meaning a deceptive claimant to divine authority and a religious impostor. The wolves are real. The disguise is real. And many of you are deceived precisely because of this—trusting someone who used the right words while hiding something else underneath.

Let's begin with the first word: "Beware." The Greek term is Προσέχω (Prosechō), which means "to hold the mind toward." Its root comes from προς (pros), meaning "toward," and ἔχω (echo), meaning "to hold." Originally, it was used in a nautical context—referring to steering a ship toward port or guiding a vessel toward danger so you can navigate around it. Notice that Jesus does not say to run away. He tells you to focus your full attention on the threat. The verb is in the continuous form, meaning you keep doing this—not just once or when suspicion arises, but as an ongoing process, not a quick glance. You were taught that "beware" means "avoid." However, Greek instructs you to focus entirely on the threat to protect yourself. From now on, prosechō should remind you, with every warning, to look closer before deciding what to do next.

But attention is only the beginning. Jesus says they come in sheep's clothing. And the Greek word translated as "clothing" doesn't mean what you were taught. This is just the first layer of the test this passage is hiding. Your English says "sheep's clothing," so you picture a costume: a wolf throwing a fleece over its back. Something superficial. Something you could spot if you looked hard enough. That is the assumption everyone carries. The disguise is shallow and removable.



But the Greek word doesn't refer to a costume at all. The word is ἔνδυμα (endyma), defined as "a garment, a piece of clothing, specifically a cloak or an outer garment." However, its meaning is broader than a single piece of clothing. Look at the root word. Endyma comes from the verb ἐνδύω (endyō). That verb is formed from ἐν (en), meaning "in," and δύω (dyō), meaning "to sink into." Not to drape over. To sink into. That which one enters into. Not that which is thrown on. The false prophet has not dressed as a sheep. He has entered into sheep identity. The disguise is not a costume but an assumed self.

Now look at how Matthew uses this word. Every time Endyma appears in his Gospel, it signals identity. In Matthew 3:4, John the Baptist wears an endyma of camel's hair. That garment shows who he is. It is the recognized uniform of a prophet, echoing Elijah's hairy mantle. The prophetic garment was so widely recognized as an identity marker that a false prophet wearing one was not merely playing dress-up; he was claiming **the office and the authority it carried**. When the false prophet in Matthew 7 wears the endyma of sheep, he is doing the same thing. He is adopting the identity of a harmless member of the flock.

Matthew 22:11–12 tells the parable of the wedding feast. A man is found without a wedding garment. The king asks, "How did you get in here without it?" The garment signifies belonging. Its absence indicates that someone entered the room without proper identification. The result is immediate: the man is bound and thrown out. A garment isn't just decoration; it's proof of belonging. Its absence signals intrusion. In both cases, the garment in Matthew answers the same question: "Who are you?" And in both cases, the answer has consequences.

Paul uses the same root verb endyo when he writes "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" because endyo means becoming, not dressing up. The person who hurt you did not wear a mask. They adopted the identity of someone safe. That is why the disguise worked and fooled everyone around you. And that is why it cut so deeply when the truth finally surfaced. You were not naïve! You were deceived by someone who sank into the role so completely that the identity became indistinguishable from the person.

So, the next time someone appears safe, you won't be looking for a costume. Instead, you'll be testing their identity. Endyma is the word behind that question. It was in the text all along, not because someone pointed it out, but because the passage revealed it to anyone examining the original Greek. However, knowing that a disguise is an identity doesn't help unless you can see through it. And Jesus provides you with the tool in the next verse. It's a word your English Bible made invisible. Matthew 7:16 says, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?" You mistakenly took that as just general awareness. Eventually, you'll understand. Just give it some time and trust your instincts.

However, Jesus did not use γινώσκω (*ginōskō*), the common Greek word for knowing. He chose a different, much stronger word. This choice is the hidden test that this title promises. The word He used is ἐπιγινώσκω (*epiginōskō*). Ginosko means to know; epiginosko adds the prefix epi, which shifts the meaning to "a mental direction toward, an application to, and that which is known." Thayer defines the full term as "to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know accurately, to recognize by sight, hearing, or certain signs." The *fruits* are not clearly specified,

but the message is clear: the profession must be tested through practice. This is not intuition. This is guided recognition and true identification based on evidence.

Paul illustrates the difference in First Corinthians 13:12. He uses *ginosko* for "now I know in part" and *epiginosko* for "then I shall know fully." This shows partial knowledge versus complete understanding. Jesus does not promise that you will eventually feel about the wolves. Instead, he promises that the fruit test will clearly identify them.

The church reading has helped many people, but the meaning behind "know" goes beyond what a sermon ever mentions. *Epiginosko* does not mean you will eventually figure them out. It means the evidence will identify them for you. You were told to trust leaders; however, the Greek text says to test what they produce. So the next time you hear "just trust me," also listen for "*epiginosko*" beneath it. You'll realize that Jesus gave a different instruction: not to trust first, but to test first. Not because you're cynical, but because the text has given you the tool, and no one needs permission to use it. The word is now yours. The test is yours to conduct.

Now examine the structure of the test itself. The word *καρπός* (*karpos*), meaning fruit, appears seven times in five verses, 16 through 20. That is not just a metaphor mentioned once; it reads like a repeated diagnostic tool you can't miss. And here is a detail that English completely misses: in verse 17, the "good tree" is *ἀγαθός* (*agathos*), which is defined as "good in its nature, intrinsically good."

Notice that the phrase "good fruit" uses a different Greek word: *καλός* (*kalos*), which means "beautiful, good in quality, excellent in its kind." There are two words for "good." Unfortunately, both are translated the same way in English. You need to understand what these verses actually say: a tree that is healthy inside (*agathos*) produces fruit that is excellent in appearance (*kalos*). The inner condition determines what is produced. The disguise cannot hide what the tree naturally bears. That is how the test works. It's not about how the voice sounds or how it presents itself, but about what it produces over time. You now have the disguise and the test, but there's one word left.

Your Bible translates it as "ravenous." However, the Greek word has nothing to do with hunger. When you see what it actually says, everything you've just learned about *endyma* and *epiginosko* fits together perfectly. Back to Matthew 7:15, "But inwardly they are ravening wolves." Your English says "ravening," which suggests a hungry animal driven by appetite—a mindless, consuming craving that devours. However, the Greek word is not about appetite at all. The word is *ἄρπαξ* (*harpax*). Thayer defines it as "rapacious, ravenous. As a substantive, a robber, an extortioner." The root is *ἄρπαζω* (*harpazo*), meaning "to seize by force, to snatch, to carry off." This word appears five times in the entire New Testament. Three times, Paul lists it alongside extortioners and robbers. Once, Jesus uses it in the mouth of a Pharisee (Luke 18). Each time, it describes a human predator who takes by force (i.e., a kidnapper). Matthew 7:15 is the only place in the New Testament where this word modifies an animal. Jesus applies the extortioner's word to the wolf.

The root word is *harpazo*, meaning to seize, and it appears in Matthew 13:19 in the parable of the Sower. The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown. That is *harpazo*. It shares the

same root as harpax, with the same agent and purpose. The wolves are not feeding; they are stealing. They take your trust, your devotion, your years, and your resources. These things are seized from you.

And one more detail: Verse 17 calls the bad tree σαπρός (*sapros*). Your translation says "corrupt," which sounds like a moral judgment or a character flaw. It implies a choice. However, *sapros* does not mean "morally bad." Thayer defines it as "rotten, putrid, corrupted by age and no longer fit for use." It was used in classical Greek to refer to spoiled fish. The tree is not called evil; it is called rotten. The decay comes first. The harmful output, which the verse calls πονηρός (*ponāros*) fruit, follows from internal deterioration.

Also in verse 19, every fruitless tree is cut down and thrown into the fire. The word for "cut down" is ἐκκόπτω (*ekkoptō*). It's the same verb and nearly the same sentence, word for word, that John the Baptist used in Matthew 3:10: "*The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (NASB). Jesus is quoting the Baptist. He links the end of the Sermon on the Mount to the start of his public ministry. The warning was consistent from the beginning. The person wearing sheep's clothing didn't just deceive you; the Greek says they seized from you. Harpax reframes what happened to you—not "I was fooled," but "I was robbed." Being robbed isn't your failure; it's proof of a predator. The next time you feel ashamed for being deceived, you'll have harpax. It will remind you that the issue was never your trust but their violence. You didn't fail a test; you were targeted by someone referred to in Greek as an extortioner.

Three powerful words. The disguise is an adopted identity. The test is forensic recognition based on evidence. And beneath it is not hunger but a seizure. Jesus did not give you three separate tools. He provided one integrated system—a complete discernment methodology. And it has been sitting in the Sermon on the Mount all along. Five words in six verses.

1. Prosecho. Concentrate on the danger.
2. Endyma. Understand that the disguise is at the level of identity.
3. Karpos. Used seven times. Review what has been generated.
4. Epiginosko. Achieve forensic identification through evidence.
5. Harpax. Name what is really happening beneath the surface.

Now listen to Paul. Acts 20:29–30, "For I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Two directions. One from outside, and one from within. Paul says the wolves come from both. The external wolves may be behind you, but you still carry inner voices that wear sheep's clothing. Guilt that presents as conviction, fear that presents as wisdom, old programming that appears as discernment, shame that shows as humility, and anger that manifests as boundaries.

Some of these voices have become so much a part of your identity, Endyma, that you stop questioning them. They feel like your own thoughts. They sound like safety. They have been running for so long that they seem like who you are. But they are not who you are. They are what you put on over time.

The test Jesus created doesn't care how long you've been wearing them. Use the same test.

- What does this voice actually produce? That is karpos.
- What does the evidence show when you give your full attention to the results? That is epiginosko.
- Is this voice nourishing you or taking from you? That is harpax.

Using the fruit test doesn't require a Seminary degree. It doesn't need permission from a leader. It only requires one thing: honesty about what has been produced. The passage has equipped you. The rest is between you and the evidence. This passage points to something more than a warning about others. It functions as a precision tool for your inner landscape. The test is the same whether it's spoken from a pulpit or in your own mind. Not because you created it, but because the text is provided for anyone willing to explore the Greek text's true meaning. The source of understanding is the passage itself. How you use it is your choice.

Verse 16:20 concludes with the same test: "By their fruits ye shall know them." The passage begins and ends with the same instruction. That's not repetition; it's a frame. The test lies in the first and last words. Start there. Finish there. You have the system—three words, one test, and it applies everywhere.

The text provided the instrument. The evidence provided the answer. Recognition is yours. The passage begins with "direct your attention" and ends with "by their fruits you shall recognize them." The practice follows the same sequence: attention, then evidence, then recognition. The passage gave you the order. The Greek provided the precision. The rest is yours. Not because you created this on your own, but because the text gave you a test, and the test is yours to run. Matthew 7:20 tells us, "By their fruits you will know them." **The test has always been there; the Greek simply made it clear.**