

Warning of False Prophets 2 Peter 2:1-22

Slide 1

Last week, in Chapter 1 of 2 Peter, we learned that Peter wrote it to remind the scattered believers of the tools they needed to walk with the Lord in turbulent times.

And he knew about turbulent times! The Roman emperor, Nero, blamed the Christians for the fire that burned much of Rome.

If you've ever seen any movies about the time when Rome ruled the known world, it probably had a coliseum scene which was filled with people watching Christians being thrown to the lions.

That sums up this particular time in which Peter ministered because it was under Nero that not only was Peter executed, but Paul was beheaded.

Two leadership giants of the early church snuffed out during this persecution period.

But now in Chapter 2, Peter's warning them to be careful of false prophets.

Before Jesus was arrested and crucified, Peter had pulled Him aside and asked Him to explain some things. James, John and Andrew were also there for that private conversation.

This discussion with Jesus is recorded in what we call the Olivet Discourse. What Jesus said has some similarities in what Peter was saying before his execution 30 years later.

Mark 13:22-23, *“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”*

It's in this context that Peter's writing these warnings to these scattered believers. He wanted to keep them walking with Christ so they would avoid the pitfalls that could shipwreck their faith.

Chronologically, the first book written in the New Testament is Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, the heart of the area where Peter's writing to now.

In that letter to the Galatians Paul warned them to watch out for Judaizers and legalism in the church.

Here in chapter 2, Peter's not only warning these scattered believers but us today.

We need to make sure that we don't become deceived by false prophets/teachers that are out there claiming to represent God.

Peter's warning that it's possible for a person, who has known the truth, to become deceived by the evil one and return to the mind set of deception.

This whole second chapter is a warning for us to be aware of false prophets/teachers posing as godly Christian people yet have no relationship with the Lord.

False prophets promote lies about God's truth, saying it's from God when it's actually from the devil.

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It's unthinkable that, while Christians were being thrown to the lions, false teachers were lying to believers in order to make a profit from distorting the truth of the gospel.

Peter describes them here in 2 Peter 2:1-3, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”*

False prophets and false teachers have always been around, and they always will be.

This is a war where we aren't fighting an enemy whose wearing a different uniform but these false prophets are wearing the same uniform.

They, and their teachings, are slipping into congregations around the world. Most members don't even notice it's happening because they're so cunning.

It might just be a small doctrinal error they introduce at first or they may use a “proof text” that's taken out of context.

It might come from the way they interpret a certain Scripture, but almost always, false gospels add something to grace, when in reality it's a free gift of God.

These fake soldiers are those who want to see the enemy win so they can make a profit. These traitors are out for themselves.

False prophets cause division pitting Christians against each other. There are enough mixed-up Christians to keep these liars going strong.

They're not only giving the Truth a bad name, but they're opposing God, but they won't get by with it. They're going to meet a bad end.

In fact, Peter has examples of what will happen to these false prophets. He starts with the fallen angels. What are fallen angels?

The Bible tells of a rebellion in heaven led by Satan against God, after which God tossed him and his followers out of heaven. These followers are the fallen angels.

Now, Satan had many angels who followed him. These sinful angels are called demons today. In fact, some of them are even allowed to roam the earth.

But many are locked up in hell where, in the future, God will release them on the earth as part of judgment on sinful man.

2 Peter 2:4, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment."

Like these rebellious angels, the Lord will hold false teachers accountable and for judgement.

Peter then gives two examples of God's judgement to underscore the fate of these false teachers that prey on Christians.

First, at the time of Noah God destroyed the wicked people and delivered righteous Noah and his family.

2 Peter 2:5, *“If he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.”*

The second example of judgment, and what will happen to the ungodly, was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

2 Peter 2:6-8, *“If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard).”*

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a warning to anyone who’s living an ungodly life.

Peter chose examples that showed a contrast between the ungodly, who face destruction, and the righteous, who’re delivered from that destruction.

Then in verse 9, Peter gets to the point of his examples: God’s judgement is coming! These false teachers are facing God’s coming judgement.

2 Peter 2:9, *“If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.”*

This judgement Peter’s talking about is for those who lead believers astray. The righteous will be rescued, but they should be on the alert not to be deceived by false teachers.

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What we must understand is that false prophets often come from within the congregation, rather than from without.

They work secretly, subtly and behind the scenes while following the way of corruption, despising authority. They don't want anyone to notice their activity.

They attempt to make their teachings look like true teachings so no one will notice the subtle difference. That's why they often target new Christians who don't know any better.

But beyond misrepresentations of Jesus, they misrepresent grace and discipleship, teaching that there is no need for repentance or that certain behaviors are not sinful. They promise freedom but deliver slavery.

2 Peter 2:11-14, "Yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!"

These false teachers are enslaved by their own corruption and sin, bringing the judgement of God on themselves.

When Peter used the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was using the harshest example possible.

But Peter has another lesson about false prophets. It's the example of Balaam. His story is found in Numbers 22-24.

Balaam was paid by Israel's enemies to curse God's people so they could be defeated.

On the way to administer the curse, Balaam's donkey warned him not to do such a terrible sin of selling out the Lord's people for money.

2 Peter 2:15-16, "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness."

There were false prophets among the scattered Christians who had taken the same path as Balaam. It was a sellout of their own righteousness to gain money. They were enslaved by their corruption.

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It's a frightening fact that many people, who're now zealous members of cults, were at one time attending Bible believing churches.

They participated in the Communion service, seeing the death of Jesus portrayed in the bread and the cup, many even recited the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's' Prayer.

Yet today, these same people will tell you that they "feel free" now that they've been "liberated" from the Christian faith.

Nobody's completely free in the sense of having the ability and the opportunity to do whatever they want.

Yet, even if you could do whatever you wanted, that wouldn't lead to freedom, but to the worst kind of bondage.

This is why false prophets are so dangerous. Think about it. When you're thirsty you need a water fountain that provides refreshing clean water.

False prophets give nothing that will quench the thirst of the soul. They only cause a life of bondage after promising a life of freedom. Everything they do is to justify and promote self-pleasure.

They delight in deception and brag about their ability to lure people into sin and twisted sensual desires. They promise freedom but are actually promoting slavery to the flesh.

Everything they teach sounds great, but Peter says they're springs without water.

2 Peter 2:17-19, "These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."

Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. A pagan may have great faith in his idol, but the idol can do nothing for him.

How can false prophets deliver the freedom they promise when they themselves are slaves to sin? They are like clouds which you see coming your way, but they have no life-giving substance.

These false prophets may seem to offer spiritual refreshment, but their words are full of vain, empty claims which extract hope for sustaining spiritual life.

They have turned their backs on following God. Their lust and greed is their own addiction.

2 Peter 20-22, "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."

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Conclusion

Peter is quoting Proverbs 26:11, here at the end of verse 22. Dogs in that culture were not friendly pets but seen as wild filthy beasts, and pigs would literally bring feelings of disgust.

Understand, Peter's not writing to a new church planting, he's writing this letter to a well-established church. This is why we need to take it and apply it to ourselves, as well.

What are you a slave to? Do you desire to be a slave to Christ, or to your own desires? Do you seek to find alternative meanings of Scripture to justify and condone ungodly behavior?

Do you ignore Scripture so you don't have to feel convicted? Are your desires more important to you than the One who bought you?

When a sermon seems to speak directly at you and maybe convicts you, do you get mad at the pastor, or are you thankful that he preaches the truth. Does it create a desire in you to change?

If a pastor or teacher seems to spout their own opinions, do they get offended when you ask them to back up their views with Scripture?

The idea here for us to believe and be committed to the true Word of God, and not man's personal interpretations that don't fit with the whole of Scripture.

Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want. We are not free if we follow our sinful nature, we're just a slave to that instead of God, and who do you trust more?

These false teachers and their followers are like people who know they're sinking in quicksand but refuse to grab the rope thrown to save themselves.

They know about salvation and Christ, but they reject this truth so they can continue freely in their sin.

What a condition the first century church was in. But we need to heed these warnings of Peter today, these same warning he heard from Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

There's judgment for false prophets and a way of escape for the righteous.

The only way we'll have the moral compass needed in our times to avoid these false prophets is to trust Jesus Christ as our savior.

Let Peter's example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah be enough to make you stand up and listen.

The truth you seek, the living water you thirst for is found only in Jesus Christ. Jesus died for you, the just for the unjust to bring you back to God.

This chapter speaks of judgement for false prophets, but it's also a chapter of grace for the righteous, those who put their faith in God, by seeking forgiveness in Jesus.