

Bible Study

Week commencing 11th October 2020

Study Five – 1 and 2 Peter A warning about false prophets 2 Peter 2: 1-22

John Birch

Opening prayer: -

Thank you, Gracious God, that in freedom we can meet and enjoy fellowship together around the reading and understanding of Scripture, entering in some small way into the world of Peter and the churches to which he wrote, and from it look at our own lives, faith and experience, and how we might grow as a loving community. Amen

Comment: -

Chapter two brings quite an eye-opening condemnation of those who Peter calls false prophets, and a promise of divine punishment on those who lead believers away from the faith handed down to them by the apostles.

False prophets have been a part of religious life throughout the ages, and no more so than within the bigger story of God and his people. Their motives have broadly remained the same up to our own generation; gaining popularity by telling people what they want to hear; gaining wealth at the expense of those who follow their words; leading lives that often do not seem to fit comfortably with the values they preach, and leading people away from rather than closer to God.

Jeremiah 6:14 says of the false prophets of his day that they saw, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace', and Ezekiel 13:16 adds that they were sharing visions of peace when God was saying there was no peace. We all prefer to hear good news rather than bad, but Scripture goes on to show that these false prophets led the people into, rather than away from trouble. Micah 3:11 says 'priests teach for a price, and prophets tell fortunes for money' and Isaiah notes that 'priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions'.

So, Peter's words though harsh are following a line of God's messengers telling the people to be wary of what they hear and not fall into the same trap that their

ancestors did, assuming that the most favourable visions are those which are true and from God.

Along with this very vitriolic attack on the false prophets, there are some lovely poetic phrases, at least in translation, which say something about the writer. In verse 17 he says these people are 'springs without water and mists driven by a storm'!

It is not an easy chapter, but no doubt we can all think of individuals, personally or in the media spotlight, who come to mind as we read these words.

Question: -

What would you say was currently the gospel of the world?

Key Verse: -

'But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you' (part of 2 Peter 2:1)

Some questions: -

1. One of the familiar tactics of the false prophets that Peter talk about was to couch their message in words that were exactly what people wanted to hear, a very populist 'good news'. Is this a familiar theme in today's world, and how successful can it be?

2. How easy is it, if the truth is hard to accept, to side with those who seem to offer a more comfortable alternative - and should that influence how Christians talk about touchy subjects such as sin?

3. Is there an alternative word or phrase you can think of that could be used instead of 'sin' which, to some, is an antiquated concept that they cannot connect with?

4. Within the culture that Peter is writing into, the population had a wide range of philosophies and teachings to follow, rather like we might find along a bookshop shelf labelled 'Religion and Spirituality'. Jesus came as 'The way, the truth, and the life' and that made for a difficult decision.

Is the situation similar or different today?

5. What particularly irked Peter was that some of these false prophets were calling themselves believers, and yet their teaching seemed to be a complete denial of Christ. How can we protect ourselves from this kind of heresy?

6. Peter's words in vv. 4-11 shout out from the page, packed with Old Testament references to sin, destruction and the rescue of the righteous. The language may a little obscure, but can we find some comfort from these words?

7. 2 Peter 2:12-16 seem to speak of a hedonistic lifestyle which is not dissimilar to those of the rich and famous whose photographs appear on the front pages of newspapers now and again (Hedonism being a school of thought that argues that pleasure and happiness are the primary or most important intrinsic goods and the proper aim of human life). What are the dangers in pursuing such a lifestyle?

8. Is the Church at times guilty of not standing up and condemning such behaviour, or is it perhaps afraid of appearing to be a bit of a killjoy? At what point might 'enjoyment' become 'excess'?

9. Are the proverbs that Peter quotes in v. 22 as true as he believes them to be?

10. This is not the most comfortable or easy passage in the Bible to read. If you were to sum it up, what are the main points that you can take away and think about?

Something to think about: -

Peter gets angry in this chapter, so think about those things that really cause your hackles to rise this coming week, even if you don't commit your thoughts to paper or social media. Are they things that really matter, to you and society in general?

Prayer: -

Pray for those who would seek, through their words, to twist the truth to their own advantage and to the detriment of others.

Some quotes: -

'It is surely harmful to souls to make it a heresy to believe what is proved' (Galileo Galilei)

'The word of God is complete, and those who don't preach the word in its fullness are false teachers.' (Monica Johnson)

'Some people think that the truth can be hidden with a little cover-up and decoration. But as time goes by, what is true is revealed, and what is fake fades away.' (Ismail Haniyeh)

'The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next.' (Helen Keller)

'The Bible is full of warnings about false prophets and false messiahs. These satanically inspired people have appeared in almost every generation of history.' (Billy Graham)

'It is possible to lead astray an entire generation, to strike it blind, to drive it insane, to direct it towards a false goal. Napoleon proved this.' (Alexander Herzen)