SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 PETER 3:1-7
To understand the similarities between Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles.

Where True Authority is Found

Over the last two weeks, we have discussed the reality and characteristics of false teachers in the church during both Peter's and our time. Again, in 2 Peter 3:1-7, Peter warns us of them, but this time with a different purpose. He says in verse 3 that they are, "mockers," and they will say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'" In other words, they are not convinced that Jesus will come again. The word that is usually translated, "His coming," is the Greek word παρουσία (parousia), and it is the focal point of Christian *hope*. Christians, regardless of the suffering they might face, can know for certain that Christ will come again to put an end to evil, sin, and death. It is also the focal point of *judgment*. What we do in this life matters, because one day Christ will return. But these false teachers were not convinced there would be a reckoning for their lustful behavior (2 Pet. 3:3), namely because they rejected the power and authority of not only, "the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets," but also, "the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles" (2 Pet. 3:2). What is problem with that? *The prophets and the apostles are the ones who communicate true authority from God Himself*.

This week, we will take a closer look at the similarities of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament. What we will find is that if they really are who Peter says they are, then the Scripture, and only the Scripture, is where true authority is found.

The Old Testament Prophet

The importance of the function of the Old Testament prophet cannot be overstated. They were the means by which God communicated a great number of important messages to His people. Sometimes the prophets would reveal certain characteristics about God. For example, Isaiah reveals to us something about the sovereignty of God: “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Is. 46:10). Sometimes, the prophet would communicate where God's people were to go. For example, God told Moses to tell the people of Israel to continue moving forward (Ex. 14:15). Often times, however, the prophet would call people to repentance. The *Torah* (the first five books of the Old Testament) was written by and centers around the ministry of the *greatest prophet in all of the Old Testament*, Moses (Deut. 34:10-12). Beyond that, one whole section of the Old Testament, the Nevi'im (prophets), is committed to the prophetic writings of the so-called major and minor prophets. Even in the historical narratives, prophets show up to give warning to the many different kings of Israel and Judah.

THE STANDARD OF THE PROPHET

The prophets are held to a standard of absolute perfection in the Old Testament. If a prophet gives a prophecy that does not fully come to pass, they are to be put to death (Deut. 18:20-22). Additionally, if a prophet speaks and the prophecy *does* come true, but they attempt to sway the people into idolatry, they are to be put to death as well (Deut. 13:1-3, 5). God does not take lightly the prophet speaking of his own accord. This is one of the reasons why false prophets are condemned so heavily, is that they are hijacking a God-ordained office that is of the utmost importance to the people of God in the Old Testament (and to the Old Testament itself, since it contains their words). Why does God take this so seriously? Because prophets speak on behalf of God Himself.

THE SOURCE OF THE PROPHET

God tells us multiple times that this is the case. In Deuteronomy 18:18, God says, “I will raise up a prophet like you from among their brothers, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I commanded him.” In Numbers 22:38, Balaam told Balak that he must speak, “the words that God put in my mouth.” When the prophet Jeremiah was commissioned, the LORD said, “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9). Ezekiel was told, “You shall speak my words to them” (Ez. 2:7). Over and over again we find the words of God are heard through the mouth of the prophet. Prophets of the Old Testament are the mouthpiece for God to communicate divine revelation to His people. That brings up an important theological distinction that we must not take lightly: *To disobey a prophet is to disobey God Himself*. This is, in part, what Peter is getting at when he says, “You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets” (2 Pet. 3:2). Why? Because the words they speak didn’t come from them, they came from God Himself, and thus they are authoritative and binding for eternity.

The New Testament Apostle

We don’t have time in this session to dive into the differences between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament prophet, but they are definitely different roles. The more accurate connection to the Old Testament prophet is the New Testament apostle. Peter hints at this in 2 Peter 3:2: “You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.” The apostolic authority is given the same force as the prophets.

This is consistent with Paul’s tendencies in his writing as well. Anytime the apostle Paul appeals to his God given authority, he does so not by appealing to his knowledge or prophetic gift, but by appealing to his

apostleship. Romans 1:1 says, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” In 1 Corinthians 9:1, while arguing for the validity of his ministry, he says, “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” One of the qualifications for apostleship was to have seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:21-22). When Paul talks about the danger of some false teachers posing a threat to the church in Corinth, he says: “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13).

It is also the apostles, not the prophets, who have the authority to write God's words that form the New Testament Scripture, which Peter will also argue hold equal authority to the Old Testament (2 Pet. 3:16). To disobey an apostle is to disobey God Himself. They are also endowed with miraculous signs and wonders in the same way that the Old Testament prophets were, to establish their authority as they warn the people to turn from their sin and back to their Creator. This is why Paul argues that the household of God is built on, “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20).

True Authority

Understanding the apostles and prophets are the mouthpiece by which God chooses to reveal Himself and His plan means that Scripture also holds that authority, since it was both formed in part and also defended by the apostles. For believers today, in order to avoid the danger of falling prey to false teachers, it is imperative that we stir one another up to remember the Word of God, as Peter sought to do (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 2 Peter 3:1-2. What is Peter seeking to do in this second letter? What is significant about the mention of prophets and apostles?

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2. Read 2 Peter 3:3. How are false teachers referred to in this verse? What two things will they do?

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Day Two

1. Read 2 Peter 3:4. In your own words, what do the false teachers proclaim? What is their reasoning?

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2. Read 2 Peter 3:5-6. When did the heavens exist? What was the earth formed out of? What is Peter referring to when he talks about the earth flooding with water? What Old Testament book is this from?

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Day Three

1. Read 2 Peter 3:7. In the same way the world was judged in the days of Noah, how will the world again be judged in the future according to this verse?

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2. Read Romans 1:1 and 2 Cor. 11:13. What does Paul appeal to prove his authority? What does he say the false teachers in Corinth were doing that was so dangerous?

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Day Four

1. Read Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:1-2. What are the two things that prophets in the Old Testament should be put to death for? Why is this such a severe sin?

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2. Read Ephesians 2:19-20. What does Paul say the foundation of the household of God is built upon? Why is this significant in light of 2 Peter 3:1-7?

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Week 7 Discussion: Old Testament

In 2 Peter 3, there is a strong appeal to the Old Testament. Peter mentions, “the holy prophets,” but also recalls both the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2, and the flood narrative in Genesis 7-9. Peter, as well as Paul and even Jesus Himself, all make significant references to the Old Testament Scripture to either formulate their arguments or give imagery to their words. And yet, in the modern church, the Old Testament is often woefully ignored. Talk as a group about the importance of the Old Testament, and why you think it is avoided more than it should be.

1. Icebreaker: On a scale from 1-10, how often do you engage the Old Testament? Why?
2. What is the most confusing thing about reading the Old Testament?
3. What is the most exciting thing about reading the Old Testament?
4. Do you think knowing the Old Testament brings out details in the New Testament that you wouldn't have understood without it?
5. How high of a value do you place on learning more about the Old Testament?
6. How can the church teach and lead with a balance of both the Old and New Testaments?

Takeaways:

1. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles share the same level of authority.
2. The Scriptures that reflect the words and teachings of the apostles and prophets are equally authoritative.

PRAYER REQUESTS: