SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 PETER 2:1-11
To understand the reality of false teachers in the church today.

History Repeats Itself

You've likely heard the phrase before, "history repeats itself," or, "anyone who forgets history is doomed to repeat it." The general idea is that by understanding repeating patterns in history, we can anticipate potential downfalls before they happen and protect ourselves from the fallout. Mark Twain once said, "A favorite theory of mine is that no occurrence is sole and solitary, but is merely a repetition of a thing which has happened before, and perhaps often." One such repeating event is the uprising of false teachers from within the people of God.

In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter warns us: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you." As there were false prophets in the Old Testament that led the people of God astray, Peter predicts because of history's repeating patterns that false teachers will again arise in the midst of the New Testament people of God in the same way. There is a little bit of chiasm in Peter's statements from the end of chapter 1 to the beginning of chapter 2. In 2 Peter 1:16, "we" is a reference to the New Testament apostles, and then in verses 19 through 21, we have references to the, "prophetic word," and Old Testament, "prophecy." Then, in verse 1 of chapter 2 we find, "false prophets," followed by, "false teachers." There is a chiastic structure. See the table below.

Chiastic Structure in 2 Peter 1:16-2:1

1a. [Positive] NT (1:16)
    2a. [Positive] OT (1:19-21)
    2b. [Negative] OT (2:1)
1b. [Negative] NT (2:1)

Peter's intentional word ordering shows how the apostles' authority and power are equivalent to the revered Old Testament prophets, and how similarly, the threat of Old Testament false prophets sets the stage for the coming threat of New Testament false teachers. This week, we will look at the reality of these false teachers, how God has proven through history that He is capable of rightly dealing with them, and then next week we will examine the characteristics of these false teachers so that we might be able to more easily recognize them.

The Reality of False Teachers

The potential problem of false teachers leading people astray is not a matter of if, but when. Peter says, "Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." False teachers will lead people astray by coercing them to follow sensuality and greed, and in doing so, the truth of God will be maligned. That word, "maligned," is the Greek word βλασφημέω (blasphēmeō), the word from which we get our English word *blasphemous*. And understand the toll that these false teachers will take; "*Many will follow,*" not just a few. However, their end is certain. For, "their judgement from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (2 Pet. 2:3). False teachers should not conclude from a lack of sudden judgment that they are safe. God is actively (not idly) planning their judgment. It is only a matter of time before He destroys all who oppose Him.

God Knows the Difference

A large chunk of chapter 2 is committed to several examples that demonstrate God's ability to, "know how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under judgment for the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 2:9). Below is a brief outline of the different examples Peter gives. Peter gives two negative illustrations and two positive illustrations in back and forth order.

THE FALLEN ANGELS AND FALLEN WORLD

The first example given comes from Genesis 6, "when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them; the Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward" (Gen. 6:4). This clear break in God's creative order resulted in their punishment (1 Pet. 3:19-20). Peter writes that, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Beyond that, Genesis 6 indicates that, "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Therefore, "God did not spare the ancient world," but instead destroyed it with a flood. This first example indicates that God knows how to handle transgression from individuals who are unrepentant.

NOAH AND HIS FAMILY

The positive part of this first illustration is found in Noah, "a preacher of righteousness, with seven others" (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah was the only person living in obedience during this time, and as a result of his righteous living, God prevented him from judgment. His wife, three sons, and three daughter-in-laws were all safely brought

through the flood in the ark. This part of the example demonstrates that while God will punish the unrighteous for their ungodly behavior, He also knows how to keep the righteous from harm.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The second illustration comes from Genesis 19, when God judges the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God judges them because of their sexual immorality, which is exemplified in two different ways. First, the men of the city are weaponizing sex to the level of rape. They demand that the two traveling visitors with Lot (who are actually angels according to Genesis 19:1), be given over to them that they may, "know them" (Gen. 19:5). Beyond that, given that they are all men, it is revealed that homosexuality has become not only acceptable but highly practiced, which is a clear violation of God's moral law (Lev. 18:22). As a result, "He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes" (2 Pet. 2:6).

RIGHTEOUS LOT

On the other hand, He did not condemn Lot who was being, "oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men" (2 Pet. 2:7). Again, when it comes to blessing and judgment, God knows how to distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous.

A Case for Genesis

It should also be mentioned that both of these examples validate the importance of at least Genesis 6 and 19 in the ministry of the apostles. Peter's usage of these stories indicates not only that they were familiar with them, but these were popular enough stories for his time to use them as illustrations without having to really explain them. The examples assume the reader is familiar with the stories.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 2 Peter 2:1. Who arose among the people? What people is this a reference to? Who else will rise up among the people? What will they do?

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2. Read 2 Peter 2:2-3. What will many people follow? How are these false teachers described in these two verses?

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Day Two

1. Read 2 Peter 2:4-5. What negative example is given here, and from what book and chapter in the Old Testament? What positive example is given as well?

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2. Read 2 Peter 2:6-7. What negative example is given here, and from what book and chapter in the Old Testament? What positive example is given as well?

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Day Three

1. Read 2 Peter 2:8. What did Lot feel inwardly as a result of the sinful people living around him?

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2. Read 2 Peter 2:9. What does the Lord know how to do for the righteous? What does He do for the unrighteous? What is the point of this verse?

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Day Four

1. Read 2 Peter 2:10. How are the unrighteous described in this verse?

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2. Read 2 Peter 2:11. Describe verse 11 in your own words. What is the argument that Peter is making?

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Week 5 Discussion: False Teachers

In 2 Peter 2, Peter discusses the reality of false teachers. He tells us that the Old Testament people of God were at risk to be led astray by false prophets, and in the same way, the New Testament people of God must watch out for false teachers who will lead many into error. Talk as a group about what kind of healthy practices you can engage in to avoid being led astray by false teaching.

1. Icebreaker: How at risk are Christians of being led astray by false teachers today?
2. How does Bible study prevent Christians from being led astray?
3. How does community help prevent Christians from being led astray?
4. Why do you think people are so willing to listen to unbiblical teaching?
5. Should false teachers be called out? Why or why not?
6. Should false teachers be called out by just anyone, or by someone with clear command of Scripture? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. False teachers will lead many people astray.
2. They are identifiable by their ungodly, unrighteous characteristics and actions.

PRAYER REQUESTS: