

Examination of False Teachers in 2 Peter 2: Their Identity, Nature of their Teachings, and their Destiny

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Abstract

The question of false teachers and teachings has been a significant concern since the apostolic times. Several books in the New Testament address this theme in diverse contexts. Potentially, heretical teachings can be disastrous because it influences one's belief system and conduct. In a church context, heretical teachings can cause division and instability. This study identifies the identity, teachings, and destiny of false teachers in 2 Peter 2. Habitually, false teachers are sensual, rebellious, obsessed with popularity, and are slaves to the sins they preach against. They give false hope despite knowing that they cannot deliver what they promise. The study also recognizes the presence of similar heretical movements in the contemporary scene. It highlights the reality, dangers, and tricks of modern false teachers. Believers in Christ have a responsibility to know the truth, discern the false teachers by their doctrine and lifestyle, thereby minimizing their influence. Finally, the study suggests that expository preaching and discipleship programs can help ground believers in biblical teachings to counter the spread of heretical movements.

Key Words: False Teachers, False Teachings, 2 Peter, Heretics, Christians, Church.

Introduction

The whole idea of false teachers and false teachings is not a theoretical subject but a practical concern to the body of Christ today. What has come to be known as the prosperity gospel has now become a threat to orthodoxy. The media is awash with false teachings and preaching that are inconsistent with biblical truth. These heretical movements prey on many unsuspecting

adherents who attend and participate in worship meetings. These heretics exploit the masses in the name of God and can change the course of the congregation midway. A case is cited in Nigeria where “a certain professor started teaching that Christ is not the only way to reach God. As this man gained disciples and became the head of his denomination, liberal theology took over a denomination that had once had a strong evangelical heritage.”¹ The apostolic church had similar challenges when false teachers from within and without threatened the biblical and apostolic foundations of the church. The present study focuses on the nature, identity, and destiny of false teachers in 2 Peter 2. The study highlights the importance of believers being able to carefully discern false teachings and teachers who come in the name of the Lord, yet they are enemies of the Gospel.

Who is a False Teacher/ Prophet/ Preacher?

A false prophet misrepresents the biblical message and falsely claims to have a (new) revelation from God (Deut 18:20-22). Michael Green defines false prophets as “those who speak on their own and do not speak for God.”² According to Elwell and Beitzel, “A false prophet is a spokesman, herald, or messenger falsely speaking for, or on behalf of someone else. He/ she is not motivated by the love and loyalty of God but a desire for popularity.”³ False prophets claim to be sent by God, yet they are deceitful people propagating their selfish agenda.

False Teachers and Teachings in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses warned of prophets who use signs and wonders to seduce people to serve other gods (Deut 13:1-5). Balaam led the people of Israel to err (Numbers 22-23). In 1 Kings 22, a group of 400 prophets lied to the Israelites into attacking Ramoth Gilead. The results were disastrous. False teachers have a lying spirit (1 Kings 22). During the days of Jeremiah, there was a false prophet named Hananiah who lied to the people of Israel that in two years, the Lord will break the captivity of Nebuchadnezzar. Through prophet Jeremiah, the Lord promised to wipe him from the face of the earth because he had preached rebellion against the Lord (Jeremiah 28). Ryken Phillip observes that “Hananiah was wrong about God’s plans. God did not intent to bring the king back to Jerusalem. Plus, he was wrong about God’s timetable. Way wrong- he was off sixty-eight years. Hananiah thought the exile would be a short

¹ Tokunboh Adeyemo ed, *Africa Bible Commentary*. (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers; 2006), 1527.

² Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*. (Inter-Varsity, 1984), 102.

³ Walter A. Elwell and Beitzel J. Barry eds, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1988), 1780.

term, but Jeremiah knew Israel was in Babylon for the long haul.”⁴ The captivity lasted for seventy years as opposed to two years, as predicted by Hananiah. Many other Old Testament scriptures texts attest their presence (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 1 Kings 22; Isaiah 9:15; 28:7-13; 29:9-12; 44:20 Jeremiah 2:8, 12, 26-28; 5:31; 6:13; 14:13-15; 18:18-23; 23:9-40; 27:9-18; 28; Ezekiel 13:1-23; 22:28, Micah 3:5-12 and Zephaniah 3:4).

False Teachers in the New Testament

Jesus warned of heretics in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (NIV Bible version here and thereafter). He predicted their coming, “And many prophets will rise and lead many astray” (Matthew 24:11). False prophets also emerged during the apostolic church (Acts 13:6-12). In his farewell message to the elders of the Church in Ephesus, Paul speaks of deceptive men who will pervert the truth (Acts 20:28-30). Apostle Paul reveals that they will disguise themselves as the angels of light, yet they are agents of Satan (2 Cor 11:13-15).

In Galatians 1:8, Paul warns the Galatians against false teachers who contradict the message of the Gospel “But, even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached, let him be accursed.” False teachers misrepresent the truth of the Gospel as taught by Jesus and His disciples. In Galatia, they distorted the true Gospel of grace and sought to replace it with observance of the Law. Sadly, as McConnell rightly puts it, “Galatians were in danger of being severed from Christ and falling from grace as a result of listening to these false teachers.”⁵

Introduction to 2 Peter

The internal evidence indicates the author of 2 Peter as the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:1; 3:1). He was among the inner-circle disciples of Jesus and actively participated in Jesus’ earthly ministry (Matthew 16: 13-19; Mark 9:2). He was the lead apostle after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2:12-47). He wrote to a general audience, “To those who have through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours (2 Peter 1:1b). It is also possible that Peter wrote to the same audience as addressed in his first letter (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). In

⁴ Ryken G. Phillip, *Jeremiah and Lamentations from Sorrow to Hope*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 1278.

⁵ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 13.

the letter, he mainly addressed false teachings and teachers who had arisen amongst the church (2 Peter 2:1). According to F. John, “2 Peter may be conservatively placed sometime after the writing of 1 Peter and before Peter’s death, between AD 64 and 68.”⁶

Notably, 2 Peter 2:1 correlates with what Peter wrote in 1:16-21 especially in 1:19-21, where he indicates that “prophecy of Scripture” originates not in the mind, imagination, or will of man but the revelation and guidance of the Holy Spirit. God commissioned his true prophets and apostles as his mouthpieces to speak His truths under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Conversely, false teachers present cleverly invented stories that originate from personal interpretations and imaginations. Constable noted that “There were not only holy men of God among the Jews, who prophesied by divine inspiration, but there were also false prophets, whose prophecies were from their own imagination, and perverted many.”⁷

In 2 Peter 2, the author expounds on false teachings, their identity, and destiny. Then, he issues a warning against them and announces the judgment that awaits them just like their counterparts in biblical history. Apostle Peter, in his epistle, also interprets the emergence of false teachers as signs of the eschatological times. Still, he exudes confidence that believers will eventually be delivered from this existential danger.

Textual Examination of 2 Peter 2

Warning against False Teachers 2:1–3

The Certainty of False Teachers (v. 1a)

The contrastive conjunction δὲ (but) in verse 1 makes a distinction between prophets under the influence of the Holy Spirit in chapter 1 and the false prophets, the subject of chapter 2. There were both true and false prophets in the Old Testament, just as there were in Peter’s day. In verse 1, Peter switches from using “false prophets” to “false teachers.” The false prophets of the Old Testament were similar to the false teachers of Peter’s day since their message and behavior were the same, contradicting the truth. There is no much significance with the change from prophet to a teacher, “The change may mean that the Old Testament false prophets focused on predicting the future while the New Testament prophets focused not on predicting the future but

⁶ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary eds, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1983), 862.

⁷ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 2 Peter*. 2021. <https://planbiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/2peter.pdf>. Accessed August 8, 2020.

focused on teaching what contradicts the truth. These false teachers were not recognized by the apostles as true and they taught falsehood.”⁸ This is supported by Richard Bauckham, “The false teachers in 2 Peter do not appear to have claimed prophetic inspiration, and so it is probable that the author here deliberately avoids calling them false prophets.”⁹ They taught messages that contradicted the truth of the Scriptures. Constable adds that “By comparing false teachers in the church with false prophets in Israel, Peter was saying that, just as there were those who misrepresented God in Israel, so there would be those who misrepresent Him in the church.”¹⁰ Most importantly, Peter’s emphasis is on their teachings, lives, and destiny.

Characterization of False Teachers (vv. 1b–3

Apostle Peter points out the characteristics of false teachers. First, they teach heresy, thus misleading many. According to William MacDonald, “A heresy is a deliberate deceptive mixture of the false and true doctrine.”¹¹ These heresies are wrapped in the true doctrine to obscure it. Heresy is a teaching that does not originate from God or the teachings of the Bible. In their book *Courage in Leadership*, Kelvin Perrotta and John Blattnner state, “There are two main types of error, the doctrinal error, and the moral error. Bad doctrine will contribute to bad morals.”¹² Doctrinal error is a teaching that is not in line with the fundamental beliefs of the Bible, and a failure in doctrine leads to flawed character. A moral error is a lifestyle or a practice contrary to the teachings of the Word of God. Heresy is a doctrinal error that leads people to moral error. They will not discreetly slip into congregations and introduce destructive heresies; instead, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies. The disastrous impact of their warped teachings is tremendous since it misleads both those who listen to it and propagate it.¹³

Second, they deny Christ, who bought them at a price (1 Cor 6:20). They do not openly deny Jesus, but they craftily ensure that Jesus is not the center and focus of their message. Many of them appear to be genuine Christians, yet they have no saving knowledge of Christ. Third, embracing heresy leads to apostasy, which leads them to deny the Master who bought them (v.

⁸ “Grace in Focus.” <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y2007/2nov07.html>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

⁹ Richard Bauckham, Bauckham, David A Richard, Glenn W Hubbard Barker, and Bruce Manning Metzger, [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 50. *Word Biblical Commentary*. (Waco, Tex: Word Books, Publ, 2005), 238.

¹⁰ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 2 Peter*, 42.

¹¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 2294.

¹² Kelvin Perrotta and John Blattner, *Courage in Leadership*. (Ann Arbor, Mich: Servant Books, 1988), 102.

¹³ De Haan, W. Richard and Lugt Vander, *How to Tell the Truth*. (Wheaton, IL. Victor Books, 1978.), 66.

2:1). Those who teach and believe in the heresies consequently invite God's judgment upon themselves. Their heretical teachings that seek to destroy believers' faith will not go unpunished. God will pay them back for the great harm they cause to the body of Christ. Swift destruction awaits them. The denial of the Master will lead them to shameful sensuality.

Sensual Behavior (vv. 2:2:10;13;14;18)

The second nature of false teachers in this passage is that they are sensual. Their unregenerate lives are dominated by sexual overtones associated with impurity, immorality, and sexual promiscuity.¹⁴ Sensuality is desires of the flesh associated with sexual impurities of the carnal person. In addition to living in sensuality, they encourage their followers to do the same. These are men devoid of the Holy Spirit and possess no power to restrain their sinful inclinations.

Popular in their Teachings (v. 2:2)

The third nature of false teachers, according to 2 Peter 2, is that they are popular, not necessarily faithful. The apostle Peter predicts that the number of those who follow the false teachings will be considerable. Many believers will fall out from the pure doctrine to follow their shameful immorality. This is because of their appeal to sensuality as opposed to the biblical standards of holiness. They follow a gospel that does not demand obedience to God's commands. Instead, they introduce other rules that are not biblical, all in the name of God. Indeed, a gospel that calls for no constraints appeals to many. Joe Kapolyo emphatically writes that "Such people proclaimed popular messages that were tailored to suit the taste of the hearers, but were not the word of God."¹⁵ It is a well-crafted message to entertain the hearers. McConnell writes that "The so-called faith-Gospel is that, without question, the most attractive message that has promised so much and demanded so little."¹⁶ Most of the false teachers will preach health and wealth without and demands of holy living, hence making them popular.

Greed is their Driving Force (v. 3,14)

The fourth nature of false teachers in this chapter is that they are greedy. Greed or avarice is "the excessive and insatiable desire to obtain more wealth and in this pursuit to be willing to use the

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, Vos, and Rea, *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 1550.

¹⁵ Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1125.

¹⁶ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 19.

other and what belongs to the other to satisfy one's own wants.”¹⁷ The false teachers will in their πλεονεξία (greed or insatiable desire) ἐμπορεύσονται (exploit) believers with fabricated words. False teachers desire to have more and more at the expense of their members and even when they have more than they need. False teachers will deceive the unsuspecting Christians to make money out of them. Their preaching of the Gospel will not be motivated by God's love and to see people transformed to the image and likeness of God. Instead, their covetous attitude leads them to accumulate more of the world's comforts. Jesus warned His disciples to take heed and be on guard against all greed because a person's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15). Likewise, Paul warns believers in Ephesus that covetousness should not be named among them (Eph 5:3).

The Judgment of False Teachers and the Deliverance of the Godly (vv. 4–8)

This passage gives examples of God's divine punishment upon those who practiced iniquity in the Old Testament and the deliverance of God's remnants. False teachers will inevitably face God's wrath. Rebecca Skaggs points out that, “The proof of their judgment is affirmed by the historical examples of the fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah and the ancient world of Noah.”¹⁸ God will not have mercy on them; He will not spare them for the evil they caused to His people. Wickedness will not go unpunished, as the justice of God demands that He punishes the wicked and spare the righteous.

The first example given is that of the fallen angels (v. 4). God did not refrain Himself from punishing the angels who rebelled against Him (Gen 6:1–4; Jude 6, Rev 12:7–9). Instead, he rightly gave what they deserved. The angels were committed to chains, And they were handed over to the necessary authority for punishment. God will not let them loose until He has punished them. Hell, possibly here is a temporal place of judgment as they wait for their final judgment in the lake of fire which is hell. Thomas Schreiner commends that “the language of confinement could be interpreted literally as if the angels are restricted to a physical locality, limited in the sphere of operation.”¹⁹ It may also refer to a temporary place of punishment as they wait for eternal punishment.

¹⁷ Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008), 1036.

¹⁸ Rebecca Skaggs, *The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude*. (London: Clark, 2004), 116.

¹⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 337.

The second example of judgment and deliverance is given from the times of Noah (2 Peter 2:5- a reference to Genesis 6:5- 9:17). In this verse, the apostle Peter cites Noah, a righteous person amid a crooked generation. Peter refers to the flood three times in this epistle (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5 and 2 Peter 3:6). God did not spare the ancient world when they rebelled against Him. Instead, he punished all the wicked people by sending the flood. The expressed point is, “if God did not spare the angels and the ungodly people who were judged by the floods, what about the teachers who are ungodly?”²⁰ The wicked people perished, but Noah and his family were spared from the flood. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, is one of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:7. Norman Hillyer suggests that “Noah’s godly lifestyle would be in itself a powerful and continuous sermon to the godless world around him. Words are not essential for one to be a preacher of righteousness.”²¹ Daryl Charles inspires us that “This passage “encourages readers to remain faithful amid their seemingly overwhelming social challenges.”²² Noah and his family were God’s remnant in their crooked generation, while the wicked perished in the floods.

The third example of judgment is with the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:6–8; a reference to Genesis 18:16- 19:29). Unlike the use of floods during the time of Noah, these two cities were destroyed with fire as a condemnation of their wickedness. These two ancient cities were “a common pairing” that represent sin and rebellion throughout the Old Testament.²³ According to Genesis 19, the cities were full of immorality and practiced sexual perversions. The same is attested by Jude 7, “just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” Ezekiel adds that “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49). Apart from prophet Ezekiel, other prophets have written about the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9-10; Jeremiah 23:14; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9). Jesus used the two cities to warn about the coming judgment upon the wicked in Matthew 10:15; 11:23-24, and in Luke 10:12; 17:26- 29.

²⁰ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 226. (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 226

²¹ Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 188.

²² Daryl J Charles, “On Angels and Asses: The Moral Paradigm in 2 Peter 2.” *Proceedings* 21 (2001): 1–12.

²³ R.C Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 98.

Although Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned, Lot was divinely delivered. As the angels set the city of Sodom and Gomorrah on fire, Lot and his family were rescued (Gen 19:16) due to Abraham's intercession (Gen 19:29). God used fire to bring His judgment upon the two cities (Gen 19:24), leaving behind absolute destruction of people, property, and creation. Retrospectively, the Apostle Peter argues that what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah is a historical example of what will happen to the ungodly in the future. The ungodly are not safe; their punishment is preserved for them in the future.

God's Deliverance of the Righteous (v. 9)

The preceding verses dealt with God's certain punishment of the fallen angels. He also judged the unrighteous people during the time of Noah, and the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but preserved Noah and Lot, respectively. This demonstrates that God has a way of punishing the wicked and delivering the righteous. Douglas Moo observes, "God does not only condemn the ungodly but also delivers the godly. This does not mean that He will prevent them from getting into trials, difficulties, and afflictions. The promise is that He will not bring any trial that we are not capable of handling. He does not promise that we will not be affected, but He will deliver us out of the trial."²⁴ God knows the godly and has the power and authority to deliver them from trials and during trials. Green echoes this, "Christianity is not an insurance against trials of life. God allows them to befall the Christians, He meets us in them and delivers us out of them. He knows well how to deliver the godly, He can be relied on."²⁵ The godly are those who fear Him and walk in His ways. He saves them from the distress they undergo as they live, hear and see what the wicked are doing as Lot was disturbed by the wickedness of his neighbors. God shows His wrath by preserving the wicked for punishment, but he also demonstrates His mercy by delivering the godly. The final judgment of the ungodly will occur during the second coming of Christ.

Heretics Rebel against Authority (vv. 10–12)

Having expounded on the destiny of both the godly and ungodly, the writer now embarks on the characteristics of false teachers. The fifth nature of false teachers is that they rebel against

²⁴ Gouglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, and Jude*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

²⁵ Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*. 102.

authority, slander, and blaspheme. Interpretation of this verses 10–12 brings a range of possibilities, “Despising authority can imply the Lordship of Christ (2:1) or the apostolic leadership of Peter and John (3: 9-11), or some angelic hierarchy (3:11).”²⁶ It is more likely that the main idea is the rebellion against the authority of Christ, the Creator of all who has also appointed the apostles to represent him. The verses also emphasize the inevitable destruction of these false teachers.

They Follow the Way of Unrighteousness (vv. 15–16).

Sixth, false teachers deviate from orthodoxy to follow ways that lead to death. The apostle Peter uses the analogy of Balaam, who led the Israelites to err. These heretics abandon the way of truth and righteousness (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14) to pursue their selfish desires. Osborne mentions that “The straight path comprises both doctrinal and moral matters and is often used for those who have walked through life faithful to God.”²⁷ The false teachers and prophets have forsaken and departed from the path of obedience to God.

Promise what they Cannot Deliver (vv.17–22)

The seventh nature of false teachers is that they promise what they could not deliver. In verse 17, Peter uses two metaphors to condemn the false teachers who claim to be religious teachers while they were not. They are springs without water or waterless clouds, according to Jude 12. Spring is a source of water that nourishes a thirsty person, so it must have flowing water. They give bold and great promises but cannot deliver. Like a spring without water, they arouse people’s expectations but fail to fulfill the promise. In addition, they are slaves to corruption, yet they promise freedom. Keener notes that “They are like people defeated in war and taken captive, yet they promise deliverance. They speak about freedom from passions while they mean freedom to indulge in passions.”²⁸ It is ironic for the false teachers to promise freedom, yet they are slaves of the same corruption.

²⁶ Adeyemo eds, *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1527.

²⁷ Grant R Osborne, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude*. (Carol Streams, Illinois: Tyndale House Foundation, 2015), 632.

²⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 730.

Application

Just as in the days of Peter, heresies are still present today. False prophets and teachers would like to advance opinions and doctrines contrary to the established tenets of the Christian faith. Some false teachers use the Bible but deny Jesus as the Savior of the world. Certainly, they do not present themselves as false teachers as Green points out, “These people will not have big signs around their necks saying, I am a false teacher, so please do not listen to me. They will be highly plausible and they will secretly smuggle in their new ideas.”²⁹ Most of them use stories of how God is using them, how God is teaching them new truths and new revelations but with ulterior motives. Unfortunately, they create false impressions, twist the truth, and mislead many.

To guard against heresy, first, Christians must understand the fundamental beliefs of their faith in Christ to reject and shun the anti-biblical teachings of the false teachers. For Christians to understand the biblical truth and be grounded in it, there is a need for sound preaching. Specifically, expository preaching is necessary to understand the biblical message and lay bare the ways of false teachers. Timothy Keller explains expository preaching as “the contemporizing of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior towards godliness.”³⁰ This kind of preaching helps the preacher to be faithful to the biblical text. It focuses on the exegesis of the biblical text rather than preaching what appeals to one’s temperament. The advantage of expository preaching is that it uses the Bible text as the foundation for the sermon points and ideas; it also relates the text to other revealed truths in the Bible.”³¹ In addition, a strong discipleship foundation can go a long way in confronting the danger of heretical teachings. Preaching should be out of the flow of one’s walk with God as Kinlaw argues, “The person who preaches for commitment must be a man of the Word, that his ministry should come out of his walk with God, and that he should work with God rather than simply work for God.”³²

Second, false teachers and prophets are live immoral lives. They are not interested in the message of holiness but are out there gratifying the lusts and cravings of the flesh. In South Africa, the issue of fake pastors has previously caught the national attention,

²⁹ Lucas and Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*, 1995, 87.

³⁰ Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 17.

³¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching- Communicating Faith in the Age of Skeptism*. (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 21.

³² Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit*, 65.

There have been some high-profile cases in recent months involving disgraced pastors. President Cyril Ramaphosa has even got involved, urging South Africans to come together to curb bogus pastors. Victims of alleged sexual abuse have detailed their experiences to the BBC, and criticized the invulnerability of so-called men of God who use their position of authority as a cover for abuse.³³

The situation in South Africa of the growing influence of false teachers remains a great concern to the body of Christ.

Third, false teachers and prophets are popular because of their accommodating messages. They use whichever way to make themselves famous and trending. They create an impression among people that they are true men and women of God. Yet, as Kenneth Mbugua notes, “huge congregation, big names, and titles, celebrity status, and expansive influence have never been the test of what is true.”³⁴ It is opposed to Jesus when He fed 5000 men, and people wanted to make Him a king because of His popularity. He departed to the mountain alone by Himself (John 6:15). Such people sacrifice the truth at the altar of popularity. They are ready to do anything that will make them famous. They preach the easy stuff that does not offend their congregation and shun unpopular sermons that deal with sin, repentance, and judgment. Kapolyo observes, “They are concerned for their own welfare, not the congregation, they preach an easy and attractive gospel which neglects some of the more difficult demands that the true gospel makes upon Jesus followers.”³⁵ To preach the holistic Gospel, one must be willing to go beyond pleasing people by giving them what they want to hear.

Fourth, the chief motivation of false teachers and prophets is the insatiable desire to make more wealth by any means, even when one has more than enough. This is where the false teachers make more wealth at the expense of their members. Adeyemo observes that “Many of those who preach a prosperity gospel in our day easily fall into Balaam’s error and make a travesty of the Gospel. They live as enemies of the cross of Christ, their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is their shame.”³⁶ Many false teachers target the money of their adherents rather than their souls. They confuse their members with strange teachings. They promise them that they will be richly blessed with material things (big cars, homes, and financial assets), that they will not get sick, and such similar promises. These

³³ Mbulelo Mtshilibe, “False Prophets Shake South African Faith.” *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-47541131>. 2019. Accessed August 27, 2020.

³⁴ Michael Otieno Maura, *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel*. (Nairobi, Kenya: African Christian Textbooks, 2015), 2.

³⁵ Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1125.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 1527.

teachings lack a balanced interpretation of the Bible. Alcorn writes that “Like many of God’s servants in the early church, Paul was neither wealthy nor healthy. It is clear that God didn’t intend for him to be healthy or wealthy, but today he is enjoying perfect health for all eternity”³⁷ This does not mean that God was displeased with Paul when he was sick, in lack, and chains. The apostle Paul understood the nature of true riches.

Fifth, false teachers and prophets rebel against the authority of Christ. Today, some false teachers do not serve the authority of Christ. Sanders observes that “Personality cults have often developed around great spiritual leaders. Followers are awestruck at a leader’s virtues and show such fawning deference that the leader seems no longer merely human.”³⁸ Some go to the extent of calling themselves the Messiah. Others are being elevated to the position of being worshipped by their congregants. Such people do not operate under the authority of Christ; they also would not operate under any other form of power.

Lastly, false teachers and prophets promise what they cannot deliver. The situation has not changed today, as in the days of the apostle Peter. Randy Alcorn observes that “When these people operate today, then, we would expect great claims for what God has done and will do through them, and for remarkable spiritual benefits and freedom that have come from following their simple program. Nevertheless, we are disappointed.”³⁹ They build people’s expectations but fail to deliver. They make much noise with no transforming power of the Gospel. The false teachers of today are like springs without water. They use strategies to convince people that they are worthy of being listened to and followed but fail to deliver. The Scriptures already announced their destiny as destruction.

Conclusion

The question of false teachers is a timeless problem that the church needs constantly check on. Jesus warned about their coming, the distorted teachings, and the destiny of false teachers and prophets. The apostolic church battled false teachings movements and provided a paradigm and an example of identifying and countering heretical movements. According to 2 Peter 2, false teachers are sensual, greedy, hypocritical, deceiving, and rebel against any form of authority. Citing historical dealings of God with wicked people, the Bible demonstrates that their

³⁷ Randy C. Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, 81.

³⁸ Oshwal J. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 155.

³⁹ Lucas and Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*, 1995, 116.

destruction is inevitable. The wicked will perish, but the righteous will be delivered. The Body of Christ today needs to be armed with the truth of the Gospel to counter the prevalent false teachings. One of the paper's proposals highlights the need for expository preaching and intentional discipleship to ground believers on truth.

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