

Peter's Farewell Testament How Can We Know that the Gospel is True?

Intro: Do you ever have times of doubt about your faith? Does the thought ever come to mind, "Is this real? Did the things I've believed about Jesus really happen?" Satan works busily to promote such thoughts. There are many people in the world today who would cast doubt on the truths of the gospel and undermine our faith.

But as Peter came to the end of his life, he wanted all those who had believed in Jesus to remove all doubt and continue in their faith. He wanted them to live with the assurance that the apostle's message was an authentic and accurate report of Jesus and that the promise of His second coming is real! Peter records his answer in what we are calling "Peter's Farewell Testament."

In the first paragraph he answers the question, "How Can we know that we will enter the eternal kingdom?"

Let's hear how Peter answered the question, "How Can We know that the Gospel is True?"

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:12-21)

Peter gives two powerful evidences that the gospel is true. Let's consider them in the reverse order that Peter presents them.

UNALTERABLE WRITTEN PROPHECY

Peter assures his readers by pointing first to what he calls the "prophetic word." He refers of course to the OT prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah.

All of these prophecies, written from 400 to 1000 years before Jesus was born, give us a detailed portrait of the Christ to come.

It has been said that there are in the OT over 330 prophecies that relate to the Messiah and His kingdom. I'm pretty sure that list includes many prophecies in the form of shadows or types of Jesus. But there are many direct prophecies of the Messiah that tell us about his lineage, his birth, his ministry, his death and his resurrection and His kingdom.

These prophecies had been collected and translated into Greek at least 200 years before the time of Christ.

Most scholars affirm that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) was begun in the third century before Christ and was completed by the beginning of the first century BC.

So that there was an unalterable body of Jewish literature predicting a coming Messiah given at least 400 years before Jesus' birth and translated into other versions at least a hundred years before His birth. Those Scriptures were scattered all over the Roman world by the time of Jesus.

Those prophecies, though spoken and written by men, came from God.

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Peter says that those prophecies were "not a matter of one's own interpretation" or "private interpretation" (KJV).

That expression is often misunderstood. It is not suggesting the Roman Catholic concept of the inability of the individual to interpret Scripture today and the need for an official church interpretation. In fact, Peter is not talking about the explanation of prophesy at all, but rather the origination of prophesy.

The prophecies of the OT did not originate from the private interpretations of the prophets who gave their own understanding of events as they thought they would unfold. They were not even the result of an act of human will. No prophet said, "I think I will make a revelation today or here is what I think will happen."

But "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

Peter's concept of "inspiration" as we call it was that prophets received their messages as God willed for them to receive them!

They were infallibly guided in their pronouncements, since they originated from God.

They were "moved" or "borne along" by the Holy Spirit.

We need not read into the concept of inspiration certain mechanisms like robotic dictation. My sense in

studying the OT is that the prophets were quite active in the process of revelation, using their faith as the Spirit guided them to a vision of NT realities.

What we can be sure of is that what they spoke and wrote was made possible by the Spirit's help and guidance so that they made known what God wanted said.

Therefore they have an illuminating character to those who pay attention to them!

And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19)

The metaphor seems to suggest that the Scriptures shine in the dark place of our heart/mind to reveal what we cannot know except by divine revelation, and to bring us to the informed knowledge of God's nature expressed in Jesus Christ.

Thus, in keeping with the figure of the transition from the darkness of night to the light of day, Peter speaks of how the "day dawns" and "the morning star arises" in the heart of the reader of OT Scripture. Peter is describing spiritual illumination. It's another way of saying as did Paul that they can "make us wise to the salvation that is in Christ" (2 Tim. 3)

EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)

"We did not follow cunningly devised tales (the Greek word from which we get our word "myths"). The NEB translates "artfully spun".

The apostles' testimony was based not upon hearsay but upon their own experience!

We were "eye-witnesses". The word Peter uses is unique to Him in the NT, occurring also in his first epistle as well (a linguistic link suggesting common authorship). It means an "onlooker or spectator". Peter affirms "we were there!"

He refers to one of the most stirring events in the Lord's ministry, the transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36). We heard God's voice and what a testimony God gave!: *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"*

Of all the events that Peter might have referred to this one is especially important.

God revealed to them through their experience with the Lord His “power and coming.” The word “coming” translates “parousia” (a term often used in the NT for the second coming). It means the return of a king.

The apostolic testimony of Jesus' return is grounded in God's affirmation of His divine sonship and authority at the Transfiguration. What Peter and the apostles affirmed about Jesus was that He possessed divine majesty! (a word used for divine greatness). The transfiguration was itself a theophany revealing the great glory of Jesus which would be revealed in His “parousia” (Cf. Mt. 25:34).

Peter affirms then that the prophetic word is made more sure by the fact that its confirmation rests not on hearsay or fabrication but on eye-witness fact! Hence we have in the apostolic testimony confirmation of the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's words given through the prophets.

Thus, the prophetic word which is “sure” because it originates from God might be said to be made “more sure” through its confirmation in the apostles who saw its fulfillment.

We may add a third “leg” to Peter's proofs:

CREDIBLE WITNESSES

It is clear that we are dependent upon the testimony of the apostles themselves for the correspondence between OT prophecy and Jesus' life.

Can we trust them?

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. (2 Peter 1:12-15)

When we look at the life of the witnesses we see nothing to cause us to doubt their credibility in the revealing of the gospel of Jesus. Take this paragraph as an example of the kind of concerned sincerity that Peter had for those he had taught.

Notice first his desire to remind them of the same things indicates no desire to keep coming up with new “revelations” to establish his authority as an apostle! He is content to simply repeat what He has already taught them.

Note that Peter, now close to death, looks back with no regrets. He believes his message will continue to bless His hearers and those yet to live!

In this paragraph we see three traits of Peter as an evangelist:

He was enthusiastic--“I am ready...”

He was ethical--“I consider it right...”

He was energetic--“I will be diligent...”

Are these features the conduct of charlatans or pretenders or baldfaced liars? Why would a prankster be concerned about continuing faith in his message when there was nothing for him to gain by it?

These simple affirmations of concern and sincerity could be multiplied by the rest of what we know about Peter. He would pay a great price for the testimony he gave.

Jesus had predicted a violent death for Peter (Jn. 21:18).

And so Eusebius confirms that Peter paid for his testimony with his life!

Conclusion: And so, today we have to decide whether the story of Jesus is true; and whether to stake our lives on a message 2000 years old. Peter offers us the proof we need.

One day the King will return for His people? Will you be ready to go out and meet him? Have you believed the proofs the gospel gives us? Have you acted up to that faith by obeying the gospel?