

How Can I Know the Gospel is True?

2 Peter 1:12-21

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?" There are many people in the world today who would cast doubt on the truths of the gospel and undermine your faith.

But as Peter came to the end of his life, he wanted all those who had become disciples to remove all doubt and continue in their faith. He wanted them to live with the assurance that the gospel message was an authentic and accurate report of Jesus and that the promise of His coming is real! He wanted to help them overcome their doubts about the historical Jesus.

How Can I know the Gospel is True? What evidence do we have that the gospel is credible? (2 Pet. 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 MESSIANIC PROPHECY--v. 19-21

The OT prophets predicted the coming of the Messiah.

All of these prophecies were written from 400 to 1000 years before Jesus was born give us detailed portraits of the Christ to come. 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 inalterable 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. There are in the O.T. over 330 prophecies that relate directly to the life of Christ. They tell us about the lineage, his birth, his ministry, his death and his resurrection and His kingdom.

Those prophecies were from God, not man.

Not of private interpretation

(not the Catholic concept of the inability of the individual to interpret Scripture). Peter is not talking about explanation of prophesy but rather the origination of prophesy.

I.e. these prophecies did not originate from the private interpretations of the prophets who gave their own understanding of events as they thought they would unfold!

But from God

Not made by the will of man. No prophet said, "I think I will predict the future today! or Here is what I think will

happen." Prophets received their messages as God willed for them to receive them!

They were infallibly guided in their pronouncements. They were "moved" or "borne along" by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore they have an illuminating character to those who pay attention to them! v. 19

The metaphor seems to suggest that the Scriptures shine in the dark place of our heart to reveal sin 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. 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)

One cannot dismiss these many prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus' life as mere coincidence or accidental fulfillment. McDowell gives an impressive illustration on this point. In 1963 Peter Stoner published a work entitled "Science Speaks" in which he addressed the issue of whether the OT Biblical prophecies could be fulfilled by accident. He selected 8 prophecies and then applied the principles of probability to determine the probability that one man should fulfil them all by accident. The figure was astronomical: 1 in 10¹⁷. To give this number some concrete form he gave the following illustration: Suppose we covered the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep all over the state. Then marked one dollar with an "x" and then stirred the whole mass thoroughly. Then we blindfold a man and tell him he can walk as far as he wants, pick up one coin, and declare that this is the one that has the "x". What are the odds of succeeding? 1 in 10¹⁷. But this only gives the probability that 8 prophecies should be fulfilled accidentally. There are over 300 prophecies! Surely anyone could see the utter impossibility of these prophecies having a fulfillment merely by chance!

CREDIBLE EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY

"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 founded 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!"

God revealed to them through their experience with the Lord His "power and coming".

The reference may be to the past miraculous ministry of Jesus and his future return for His people. "Parousia" is commonly used for the second coming of Jesus.

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.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE 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?

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.

His desire to remind them of the same things indicates no desire to keep coming up with "revelations" to establish his authority as a prophet! v. 12

Now late in life Peter looks back with no regrets. He believes his message will continue to bless His hearers and those yet to live! v. 13-14

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

His enthusiasm--"I am ready..."

His ethics--"I consider it right..."

His energy--"I will be diligent..."

These simple affirmations of concern and sincerity could be multiplied by the rest of what we know about Peter. Peter like the rest of the apostles paid 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!

Are these features the conduct of charlatans or pretendors 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?

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. I have given you conclusive proof that the story is true. Do you have faith to act upon it—to

become a Christian. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God who died for your sins and who will come again as your judge. Are you ready to face Him?