

## Prayer

O Lord our God; you have called us to a life which is full of unknowns. Grant us the courage to accept the challenges and tests of each day, knowing that You will not push us beyond what we can endure. May we grow in confidence daily and look forward to all that You have planned for us. Thank You Lord, AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The Church in the Community

Pray that your own church will grow in its witness to the community in which you are set. Pray for the people who work hard to enable that witness in its many different forms, and ask the Lord to expand your witness wherever possible. Also, pray against those things that prevent the church from being a light within the community to the love of God.

## Meditation

Glory be to God who rejoices to make all things new;  
Renew me through and through; body, soul and spirit.

Glory be to God whose love is greater than the sins of the world;  
Forgive me, and set me free from all that binds me.

Glory be to God who does everything in truth and justice;  
Empower me, and make me worthy of Your call.

Glory be to God who knows when His people need His help;  
Strengthen me, and give me victory over evil.

Glory be to God who will draw all things to an end, one day.  
Give patience to accept Your authority in all things.

Glory be to God who loves me, and everything in His Creation  
For one day, we will all be united again, in Him.

## Bible Study - 2 Peter 2:15-22

<sup>15</sup> They have left the straight road and wandered off, following the road of Balaam son of Beor, who loved dishonest gain, <sup>16</sup> but received a rebuke for his own offence; a dumb ass spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. <sup>17</sup> These people are like waterless springs or swirling fog. The deepest darkness has been reserved for them <sup>18</sup> for they speak pretentious nonsense, and by appealing to the shameless desires of human nature they entice people who have only just escaped from those living in error. <sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, but are slaves of corruption themselves; for people are slaves to whatever masters them. <sup>20</sup> For if they are again entangled and overpowered by this, after they have escaped the corruption of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then the end has become worse for them than the beginning. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment passed on to them. <sup>22</sup> What has happened to them is true to the proverb; 'The dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'The sow washed clean only wallows in the mud.'

### Bible Study

This is an extraordinary outburst from Peter, which follows on from his condemnation of the evil which continues to exist within the church in the previous section (2 Peter 2:10-14). As we read a passage such as this, one dreadful illustration follows another without break, and without a chance for us to draw breath and say; 'what did he mean by that? Although this is certainly a long lecture to all who read his letter, it does have logic and it does make important points about the life of the church, even if we must listen patiently to his long analysis of all that goes wrong!

To begin with, Peter uses as an illustration the Old Testament story of Balaam as an example of the idiocy of those who try to add their own teaching to the revealed truth of the Gospel. Having talked throughout the second chapter about the dangers of 'false prophets', this story about one of the first prophets in the Bible is most apt. Balaam was a prophet who offered his services for hire (Numbers 22) and because he made a living from prophecy, he was adept at obtaining the highest price for his services. Hired to curse Israel by some foreign kings, he had an altercation with his donkey during which the Lord spoke to him through the donkey's mouth to challenge his 'perversity' (Numbers 22:31) and oblige him to say only what the Lord would have him say about the people of Israel. At the time of Peter, the story must have been used as a cautionary tale about sticking close to what the Lord says, and this is what it means here, for false prophecy within the church comes from a human need to 'add' to the Gospel. But there is one other feature to Peter's accusation, which was the issue of 'dishonest gain' (2:15). We know from other documents relating to the life of the early church that teachers were travelling around the country offering their preaching to local churches for hire, and Peter was adamant that this was no way to propagate the Gospel, for God's truth has always been free. His denunciation of this practice was damning. He went on 'they speak pretentious nonsense ... enticing people who have only just escaped from those living in error.' (2:18)

This last sentence gives rise to all that follows up to the end of chapter 2. Peter's fear is that those who were skilled in oratory and preaching would sway people's hearts to follow teaching that had nothing to do with the Gospel. As far as he was concerned, this was literally 'a fate worse than death'. The preaching of such false prophets clearly promised good things, but as far as Peter was concerned there was only one truth to be found in Jesus, and the promises of such people were fake (2:19). In a long Greek sentence which covers both verses 20 and 21, Peter responded with horror to the idea that anyone should be entangled in the 'slavery' of false religion again, only just having been set free by the Gospel of Christ. His graphic illustrations about dogs and pigs (2:22) need little interpretation!

We would be unwise to dismiss Peter's fears about false prophets or regard his concerns as rooted in the past alone. For example, it is desperately sad to see the Christian faith paraded on satellite TV channels today by people who ask for money for miracles and mission, in many cases making themselves richer and richer at the expense of the poor who are needy of the Gospel and needy of love. This is only one example of the awful things that happen in the name of Christ in our world, to add to those I mention in the study on the previous verses. All false prophecy and dishonest gain must be exposed and denounced without excuse, as Peter does in this letter.

*Space for notes*

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## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read through Numbers 22 and check that you know the story of Balaam son of Beor. What else can you learn about false prophecy from this text?
2. Is it right to pay preachers for their preaching? How should we pay our full time preachers and leaders and still avoid Peter's criticisms of potentially 'dishonest gain'?
3. What false prophets exist in the world today, and where do they operate?

## Discipleship

It is fascinating to observe the detailed knowledge of the Old Testament that the writers of the New possessed. In order for anyone to keep close to the Gospel and the revealed truths of Jesus Christ, the Bible is essential reading; and yet its study and use amongst churchgoers is very limited today. Make sure that you maintain a good working knowledge of the Word of God if you want to be able to defend the Gospel and advocate it!

## Prayer

Protect us, O Lord, from bad teaching and false prophecy. Inspire in the hearts of Your people a desire to know Your Word and live in Your presence so that they stay close to You and are not tempted away to follow after erroneous teaching. Keep us all faithful to You, we pray; AMEN