

Profiting from Criticism

LIFE FAITH FUSION DEVOTIONAL DAY TWO

SCRIPTURE STUDY

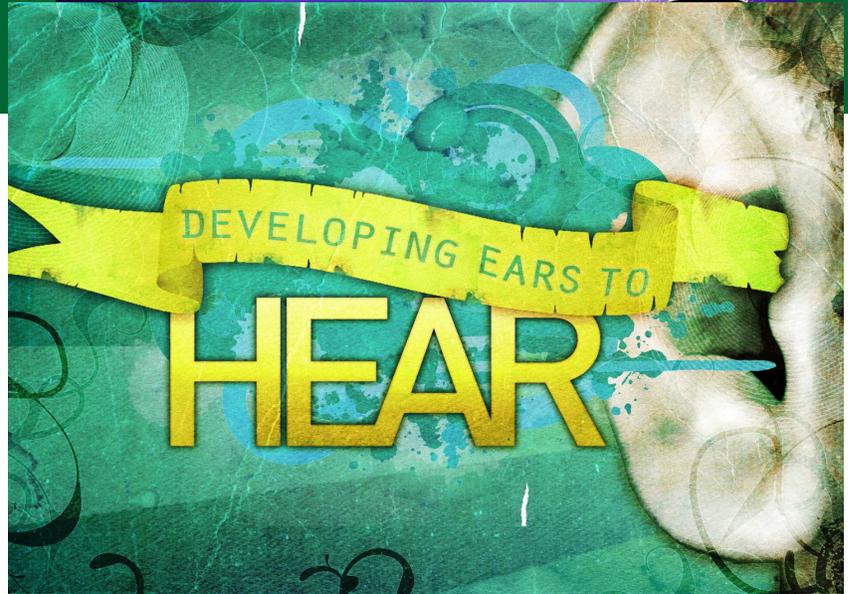
Hebrews 4:12
Jonah 3:5-6
Psalm 51:4
Proverbs 26:28
2 Samuel 12:13
Jeremiah 23:28-32
Psalm 32

DIGGING DEEPER

Hebrews 4:12 is a revealing glimpse of the awesome power of the Word of God. It is both a two-edged machete, and a sharp surgical knife. God knows how to clearly see the impurities in our lives and surgically remove them to restore life and health..

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
Help me to learn from your prophets to be a person of faith and obedience. Thank you for loving me enough to tell me the truth.
Amen



OLD TESTAMENT CRITICS

Old Testament prophets had two ministries: to speak God's words, and to foretell the future. Most of us focus on prophecies that predict future events such as the endtimes, but the bulk of prophetic literature deals with godly warnings to His people to bring them to repentance. Over and over Old Testament history recounts the story of God's people entering into a place of blessing. Then they forget God and turned to idolatry. God subsequently sent a prophet to warn the Jews of His impending judgment. In their foolishness, His chosen people disregarded the warnings and were overrun by their enemies. Finally, in their misery, they repented and God delivered them. But the Jews had a short attention span. Like a petulant child, they would wander away and follow the false gods of their neighbors. Famines, disease, and oppression would soon follow. We wonder how they could forget God's Word so quickly and so often! And what about the brave men and women who delivered the prophetic warnings? Were they honored for their courage and integrity? Never. They were drawn and quartered, imprisoned, scorned and mocked. A prophet had a lousy job. And yet, when the warning was heeded, lives were saved and blessed.

Let's take a look at just a few of these prophets and see what they said to admonish God's people. Every prophet had a different style of delivering God's message. Ezekiel and Isaiah acted out God's message in a dramatic fashion. Isaiah walked around Israel buck naked for three years to emphasize God's warning to Egypt of His impending judgment (Isaiah 20:3-4). Ezekiel ate food cooked from a dung campfire to predict famine (Ezekiel 4:12-15), and drew a

picture of a battle to predict Israel's invasion and defeat. (Ezekiel 4:1-3). Can you imagine that Jewish onlookers presumed that these men of God were crazy? Yet God was creative in getting His people's attention. They ignored sermons, so He resorted to "show and tell."

The prophets came from many walks of life. Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa (Amos 1:1). Deborah helped to lead Israel into battle (Judges 4:8). Samuel (1 Samuel 2:18) and Zechariah (Luke 1:5) were priests. Daniel was a high court official in the powerful pagan kingdoms of Babylon and Persia:

"Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men." Daniel 2:48 (NIV).

The critical messages the prophets delivered were direct and pointed. These men of God did not mince words. Conversely, false prophets were promoted to places of power and made lots of money for telling Israelite kings what they wanted to hear. In Jeremiah 23:28-32, God decries the preaching of false prophets and delineates between the words of true and false messengers:

"Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. **"Is not my word like fire,"** declares the LORD, **"and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"** "Therefore," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The LORD declares.' Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least," declares the LORD." (NIV)

King Solomon affirmed the value of truth-telling and warned against the dangers of listening to lying flatterers:

"A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin." Proverbs 26:28 (NKJV)

- Have you ever flattered someone? What were your motives—to please them, to gain power or position, etc.?
- Have you ever had to warn someone? What were the circumstances? How did they receive your warning?
- Read the verses listed beside the names of the prophets in the previous section. What are some of the qualities of these brave men and women? What did they have in common?

RESPONDING TO THE TRUTH

Occasionally, some people actually heeded prophetic warnings and were saved from disaster. King Solomon had watched his father David repent when the prophet Nathan confronted him over his adultery with Bathsheba (Solomon's mother) and his subsequent murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. In 2 Samuel 12:13, David repented and cried "I have sinned against the Lord." In Psalm 32, the king wrote of the misery of an unrepentant heart, and the disaster that would ensue. In Psalm 51 the king gave us a beautiful model of confession and repentance before God. David assumed full responsibility for his actions and recognized that he not only hurt others, he grieved God Himself:

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge." Psalm 51:4 (NIV)

Surprisingly, an example of a repentant response to God’s prophet occurs in the book of Jonah when an entire pagan nation repented in sackcloth and ashes when Jonah warned the Ninevites of God’s judgment for their sin. Jonah, the reluctant prophet, ran away from God when asked to prophesy to the “heathen Assyrians.” He feared for his life, and took the next boat out of town in the opposite direction of Ninevah. God did not let Jonah get away. He used a nearby whale (big fish, actually) to vomit the prophet upon Ninevite soil. To Jonah’s surprise, his words brought revival to the nation. They listened and repented:

“The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.” Jonah 3:5-6 (NIV)

- “Repent” means to change directions. Godly sorrow brings such repentance in our lives. Have you “changed directions” when the Holy Spirit convicted you of some sin? What were the benefits of this repentance?
- How would you describe your relationship with God? Would you view Him as a Father, a Judge, or a stranger? Spend some time praying and asking Him in His love to draw you closer to Himself.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S WORD

As New Testament believers, we also have prophetic warnings to follow. God asks us to hear His word and obey it. The Bible is not just a history book to be studied, it is the living Word of God to be heeded and followed:

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

This passage is perhaps the clearest passage in all the Bible about how the living Word of God operates. The Word is more powerful than a *machaira*, or two-edged machete, and cuts to the quick with a single stroke, according to the picture painted in Greek. The Greek word for “powerful” means *effective in its work*. God’s living word pierces or penetrates through the walls of our pretension and self-deception to reveal the difference between our fleshy, soulish reasoning and the intuitive revelation of the Holy Spirit to our human spirit (*pneuma*). The verse further teaches that the Word is like a scalpel in surgery that divides tissue and sinew to reveal our motives, feelings, and thoughts. When we remain in God’s Word, when we meditate on it, memorize it and obey it, we will clearly know the heart and will of God. We will be wise.

- Think of some situation where the “scalpel” of God’s Word gave you discernment and wisdom in a specific situation. What did you learn? What were the results of this information?
- Think of some benefits you have experienced from studying God’s Word. List them on the back of this sheet.

APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Scriptures below and write your observations

Hebrews 4:12, Jonah 3:5-6, Psalm 51:4, Proverbs 26:28, 2 Samuel 12:13, Jeremiah 23:28-32, Psalm 32