

2 Peter 2

A Warning Against False Prophecy

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

Even though it is not immediately evident, there is a close connection between this chapter and the first one, as well as with the third chapter. There are exegetes who assert the opposite. One of them, for instance, has written, "In short, chapter 2 stands isolated here. It is neither prepared for in chapter 1, nor worked out in chapter 3". But anyone who studies the letter carefully must conclude that this is absolutely untenable.

The first chapter thoroughly prepares for the exhortations Peter writes in chapters 2 and 3. The apostle has firmly impressed on the believers the rich grace of which they partake and their holy calling as a consequence. Peter's main objective was to arm believers against the dangerous teachings of heretical teachers whose sole aim it was to destroy the congregations of the Lord by drawing them away from the firm foundation of Christ. The more they live in the communion of their Saviour, the faster they will be bound to the Word that is truth, and the stronger they will be in the fight against false prophecy. They will even more strongly abhor the ungodly sneering words and deeds of those seducers. For the prophetic Word was spoken and written down by men moved by the Holy Spirit. However, just as there were false prophets in the old dispensation who deceitfully claimed that they were inspired by the Spirit, so today, in the new dispensation, there are false teachers who call themselves prophets of God, but who in reality are erring spirits, bringing a gospel different from that which was proclaimed to them in the name of Christ.

It is against these ungodly people, whom John does not hesitate to call "antichrists" (cf. 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11) — see question 1, — that Peter warns the believers? In a moving argument, in a sharply penetrating way, he demonstrates to the believers the dangerous words and the repugnant, unabashed, and arrogant deeds of the false teachers. This portrayal is made concrete through three examples of God's judgment in history: the first in the world of angels; the second in the world before the Flood; the third Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the same God who looks upon and judges these actions and teachings, and he will strike them with the same burning judgment. It is even more necessary now to test the spirits, to fight for the faith as taught them by the true preachers of the Gospel, and to reject all false prophecy — see question 2.

MAIN THOUGHTS

Peter earnestly warns about false prophecy which distorts the pure Gospel of Christ. He demonstrates that such heretics will not escape the righteous and terrible judgment of God as has already been displayed in history. In the examples given of this, however, there is also a comforting element for all who remain faithful in the doctrine of Christ. God, who is the Protector of all those who fear him, shall save them from the temptation into which Satan, disguised as an angel of light, brings them.

This chapter can be divided into three parts: one, the appearance of false teachers is described (vv. 1-3); two, examples are given of the of severe judgments of God on false prophets (vv. 4-9); three, Peter portrays these false teachers who fall under that same judgment (vv. 10-17), their ungodly walk of life, their disastrous influence (vv. 18-19), and the justly deserved end of their lives (vv. 20-22).

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verse 1

The words "but there were also false prophets" indicate the contrast which can be expected in the context of the whole letter: to give heed to the true prophecy of Scripture means to reject the false. "False prophets" means "pseudo-prophets", that is prophets of lies; men who act as if they are prophets of God. The Greek word used for "among the people" refers to Israel as the holy nation — [see question 3](#). There are "false teachers among you"; this is to be expected. The covenant people of the old dispensation had the same experience (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:12-15). "False teachers" or "pseudo-teachers" are teachers of lies; people who pretend to be preachers of the truth, but in reality present a distorted version (cf. 3:16). To "secretly introduce" refers to introducing teachings through deceitful ways (cf. Galatians 2:4; Jude 4). The "destructive heresies" are actually "heresies of destruction"; they bring about destruction. The word for "heresy" in the original text is derived from a verb which means "to choose for oneself". It indicates: a) a deviant way of thinking (Acts 24:5,14; 26:5); and b) a party (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 28:22).

"Sovereign Lord" or "Master" [NASB] means "despot", "ruler". "Bought" indicates that these people belong to the Church of the Lord, that they have confessed him to be their Saviour, and thus the promise has been put in their name — [see question 4](#). They are "denying" the Master, not with their lips, but with their lives — [see question 5](#). "Swift" is the same word used in chapter 1:14.

Verse 2

"Many" points to the seductive power of these false spirits. The Greek verb for "follow" indicates "joining with eagerness". "Depraved conduct" or "sensuality" [NASB] is a way of life steeped in debauchery. "The way of truth" indicates that acceptance of the Gospel is not merely head knowledge, but practice as well (cf. Matthew 21:32; Luke 1:79; Acts 16:17; Psalm 119:30). The truth will be brought "into disrepute", "as if the Gospel indeed drove one, and gave one the liberty to live such a sinful life".

Verse 3

"In their greed" indicates the motive of false prophets:¹ The false church is always eager to make converts (cf. Matthew 23:15). They do so "with fabricated stories" and are outwardly pious (cf. Matthew 7:15).

To "exploit" is to "use others as merchandise". "Condemnation" refers to a judicial verdict. "Destruction" indicates the actual sentence.

Verses 4-9

Here are three examples of divine avenging condemnation. Note point 2 of "Main Thoughts". It is the apostle's aim to keep believers within the precious catholic faith which is being attacked by false teachers and their followers. For those who listen to the voice of the true Shepherd, it means to occupy not only a lonesome but also dangerous position (Noah, Lot). But Peter comforts them. When others were destroyed, God sovereignly helped those who persevered. This is still the promise for those who conquer the beast by keeping the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 13:11-14:5).

¹ The idea of monetary greed can also be applied here.

Verse 4

(The first example.) "For if" indicates not a supposition or condition, but the reality. "Angels" are the servants of God who are before his throne in heavenly glory. No more is said about their sin — [see question 6](#). This is an allusion to the defection in the world of the spirits before the throne. He "did not spare" any; God is the righteous One who does not let any creature who sins go unpunished. "Hell" means *tartarus*, the underworld. Scripture refers to the abode of judgment where the devils are kept till the Last Day (cf. Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3; 1 Peter 3:19).²

Verse 5

(The second example.) The "ancient world" is the world of the beginning. "Preacher" actually means "herald" (cf. note on 3:19). The word "righteousness" does not only refer to the coming judgment which Noah announced, but also the calling to repent and to fear God. It was a proclamation in word and deed (building the ark). "Flood" means "inundation". The Greek word for "ungodly" actually means "one who has no respect".

Verse 6

(The third example.) The verb for "burning" means to "make ashen", to "lay in ashes". "Destruction" [NASB] is the state of being turned upside down. "Condemned" means "doomed". These examples are given as a warning.

Verses 7 and 8

Just as in verse 5, Peter points out the bright side of these very dark examples. "Lot, a righteous man" means his walk was pious (cf. the description of "righteous" in Luke 1:6). "Distressed" is related to the word for "trouble", "heavy labour" (cf. Revelation 16:20,11, where it is translated as "pain"). Therefore, Lot was "exhausted on account of sore (spiritual) oppression". "Saw and heard" indicates the ungodliness which was revealed in word and deed — [see question 8](#).

Verse 9

This verse draws a conclusion. First God's preservation is pointed out, thereafter his punishment — and that is related to the objective of the letter. "Knows" means, he "is knowledgeable about". "Lord" is used here because it concerns his relationship with the God-fearing. The "temptation" [NASB] comes from Satan and is not a "trial" [NIV]; that is a work that comes from God. "Hold" means "under remand"; the unjust are held securely till the Day of Judgment. There is no escape. "Under judgment" indicates that the punishment is already being executed while they are "under remand".

In verses 10-22, Peter prophesies that the same judgment shall also come upon the false teachers.

Verses 10 and 11

First, Peter sketches the ungodly deeds of these deceivers with a few definitive examples taken from verses 4-8. It becomes apparent from these verses just how dangerous false teachers are since false doctrine and immoral practice often go hand in hand. In verse 10a the sensual ungodly life of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah is given as the distinguishing feature of these people. By "despise authority" Peter alludes to the complete absence of the fear of God as during the days of Noah. When he says that they "heap abuse on angelic beings" he refers to the sin of the angels, who did not tremble before authority. To whom does "such beings" in verse 11 refer? It refers to the sinners here on earth, whose image the apostles depicts in these

² cf. for discussion: question 5 of Outline 6

verses. Peter says that the holy angels do not bring such reviling judgment against the sinners as the sinners themselves do against all that are in authority over them.

Verse 12

"Brute beasts" is better translated as "unreasoning animals". They are "to be caught and destroyed"; since they bring others to destruction, they bring about their own destruction.

Verse 13

In the phrase "paid back with harm for the harm they have done", some manuscripts use another verb instead of "paid back", namely, "being defrauded". They think they will obtain a life full of pleasure and wealth through their ungodly life. What follows is a good description of knowing "Satan's so-called deep secrets" (Revelation 2:24). Not only at night, but also during the day, their only goal in life is carnal pleasure, living in fornication, carousing, and gluttony. Thus they are "blots and blemishes" in the church of the Lord. "With you" indicates that they have no scruples about bringing these evil practices into the life of the church.

Verse 14

Having "eyes full of adultery", or literally "full of an adulteress", points to the sinful passion of their inner being: merely seeing a woman's garment produces unchaste desires in their soul. This source of unholiness continuously springs up. "The unstable" are souls not grounded in the fear of God. "Greed" here does not only mean the pursuit of money, but the pursuit of all ungodly, carnal pleasures. "Accursed brood" is a Jewish expression, indicating "born of, belonging to, the curse of God" (cf. Deuteronomy 11:26; Psalm 109:18).

Verse 15

"The straight way" is the way of the fear of the Lord. It is the opposite of "gone astray", the wrong way. That is the way of Balaam who was driven by his greed for money, who despised the way of God — [see question 9](#). Some manuscripts have "Beor, but "Bezer" or "Bosor" most probably is the original, even though that name is difficult to explain. Balaam received "wages of wickedness"; his actions showed that he was driven by greed.

Verse 16

He "was rebuked... by a donkey". A prophet was put to shame by an animal that lacks the ability to speak! (cf. Numbers 22:21)

Verse 17

"Springs without water" and "mists driven by a storm" are images which indicate that those false teachers promise much, but give nothing.

Verses 18 and 19

These verses sketch the pernicious influence of these pseudo-teachers. They "mouth empty, boastful words" using hollow, arrogant words by which they cover up their ungodly desires and licentiousness. It is precisely for this reason that a terrible temptation issues from them to "people who are just escaping from those who live in error", to people with divided hearts, who look both ways: to sin and to the Gospel. But how can a slave of corruption promise freedom (cf. 1 Peter 2:16; Galatians 5:13)? Perhaps here is an allusion to the error of the Nicolaitans (see Revelation 2), who taught that those who were saved from sin could dare to know the deep things of Satan (compare v. 19b to John 8:34; Romans 6:16).

Verses 20-22

In these verses Peter depicts, in a nutshell, the end of these wicked people's lives. For "knowing" compare 1 Peter 1:2-3 and 8, and the notes on those verses. "The end", their last state, is depicted here. "The beginning" refers to their state before their (outward) conversion. Peter states "the true proverb"; he quotes the Scriptures from Proverbs 26:11. "True" indicates something which indeed happens in reality. The apostle describes the same thing by the image of the sow which, after having been washed, again wallows in the mire.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When we read in the Bible about the antichrist(s), should we take that to be persons or trends in the world or in the church?
2. How can we distinguish between the essence of true prophecy and false prophecy?
3. Can you give examples of false prophecy in Israel's days?
4. Do we have proof from Scriptures that the saints can fall from faith, as the Remonstrants taught?
5. Why can the "denying" mentioned in verse 1 not be a verbal denial?
6. Does Scripture give further indications about the essence of the angels' sin (cf. v. 4, 1 Timothy 3:6; Jude 6)?
- 8³. Do we find in verses 7 and 8 an approval of Lot's life in Sodom and Gomorrah? Why is he praised?
9. Can you say more about the "way of Balaam" mentioned in verse 15 (cf. Numbers 22; 23; 24; 31:16; Revelation 2:14)?

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³ Ed. Note: Due to differences in Dutch and English Bible translations, Question 7 was irrelevant and has been removed.