

Study 9: 2nd Peter Chapter 2

Introduction

The second chapter describes in graphic terms those false teachers who were trying to lure away the Christians. The situation is not too different today, as we look around the religious world at some who claim to be serving God, but in reality they want to be a self-focused empire that has the facade of Christianity, and deceives many who want to serve the Lord.

Body of the Study

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study.

What characteristics should alert us that we have encountered a false teacher?

How can the knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures and the events described in them, help us to oppose false teachers when we encounter them?

Why are false teachers dangerous?

Notes for study 9: 2nd Peter Chapter 2

The second chapter describes in graphic terms those false teachers who were trying to lure away the Christians. The situation is not too different today, as we look around the religious world at some who claim to be serving God, but in reality they want to be a self-focused empire that has the facade of Christianity, and deceives many who want to serve the Lord.

False Teachers

The chapter begins with the ending of the previous chapter – prophecy and scripture are the domain of God, and not of men. Peter reminds the brethren that the situation with them is just as it was with the prophets of old “...*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false prophets among you...*” (2:2:1 NKJV). False teachers were predicted in many places (such as Acts 20:29-30), and much of the New Testament writings carry warnings against and rebuttal of the false teachers. Peter does not give us an idea of which group of false teachers were the problem, and the two most prevalent groups in the first century were the Judaisers and the Gnostics. The Judaisers accepted Christianity as another Jewish sect, but insisted that the Christians needed to become Jews; whilst the Gnostics believed that enlightenment came from some special knowledge.

These false teachers would “...*secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them...*” (2:2:1 NKJV). The message is clear, that these people were Christians, since they had been *bought* by the Lord – which is another way of describing Christ’s sacrifice. However, they were not pure in their motives or their actions, and they would be deceptive in leading others away. Their actions would be *secretive*, and not clear and above board.

As a result of their actions they would “...*bring on themselves swift destruction...*” (2:2:1 NKJV). The outcome is clear – it will be destruction – which clearly has reference to their eternal destiny, and it will be something that they have *brought on themselves*. They had been bought with the blood of Jesus, but as a result of their own actions, they had given up their rightful place and reward in eternity.

Unfortunately, they would not only deceive themselves, but “...*many will follow their destructive ways...*” (2:2:2 NKJV). It is unfortunate that very often many people are swept up in false doctrine and false teaching. It can often sound so plausible and rational, however the problem occurs when it is not in accordance with scripture! And people go along with the false ideas because they do not *know* what the scripture says! In the end, by embracing the false teaching, they “...*bring the way of truth into disrepute...*” (2:2:2 NIV).

Peter describes the methods of the false teachers “...*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up...*” (2:2:3 NIV). Their motivation was greed, not truth, and they were only exploiting those who heard and believed what they were saying. Further, the things that they were teaching were stories that had been *made up*. However, God sees right through all of it, and will bring justice. “...*Their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping...*” (2:2:3 NIV).

For false teachers, however, religion will be commercialized; they will "exploit" people. With fabricated stories they will fleece the sheep. In the light of the commercialism of religious cults today, Peter's warning is clear enough. But the popularity and prosperity of the errorists will certainly come to an end. Their judgment and doom have been announced long ago... (NIVBC).

God’s Judgement Against the False Teachers

Peter gives an assurance that God will bring righteous judgement against the false teachers, by giving three examples from the Old Testament:

1. The Angels who Sinned were removed from their position, and will be dealt with accordingly. “...For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment...” (2:2:4 NIV). The clear message from the verse is that if God would not tolerate sin in the angels, then neither will He tolerate it in human beings.

However, the passages that support what Peter says are less clear: Just who were these fallen angels, and what do we know about them? The only other information that we from scripture have is found in Jude:6 “...And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day...” (NIV). Many writers cite the apocryphal writings and Jewish traditions to say that Peter and Jude were both referring to the events described in Gen 6:1-4. In this place, *the sons of God* are taken to be the angels, and they saw how beautiful the human women were. They came and had sexual relations with them, and (it is supposed that) this act caused their fall. We can recognise that this was a Jewish tradition, and that both Peter and Jude wrote in recognition of that tradition amongst the readers. We can also note what they said – that the act of disobedience amongst the angels (whatever it was) caused God to remove them and put them in a place of punishment.

Peter describes the place where they have been sent as “hell”, which is translated from the Greek word *tartarus* and is used only here in scripture. So, we can conclude that it is a place that is reserved for fallen angels. The usual word for “hell” is *hades*, which just means *the unseen place of the dead*, and is the place where the dead go to await judgement. The third word translated “hell” in the New Testament is *gehenna*, which is a place of eternal torment. We can see from this verse that *tartarus* is not a place of permanent punishment, but a place where they are awaiting judgement, and we can conclude that it is a place that is separated from humans who die (and go to *hades* awaiting judgement).

2. The Ancient World was brought under God’s judgement. “...if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others...” (2:2:5 NIV). Peter also used this example in the first letter (1:3:18-22). God saw that the world had become wicked, and had turned against Him. He brought about retribution against those who had turned against Him, and the only family to escape was Noah’s who were judged to be righteous.

3. The Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were brought under God’s judgement. “...and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)...” (2:2:6-8 NKJV).

According to Ge 19:24-28, "the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the LORD out of heaven." Peter says God "condemned" them "by burning them to ashes" (GK G5491). This rare word means either "reduce to ashes" or "cover with ashes"; it was used at the time of Vesuvius's volcanic eruption and Lycophron's "being overwhelmed with ashes." Thus God may have used a volcano to destroy the wicked cities. This total destruction is an "example" (GK G5682) to the ungodly of the things that are going to happen to them ... The contemporary application is plain. To what extent are Christians who are living today in a godless society "tormented" by what they see? (NIVBC).

Peter culminates the point “...if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment...” (2:2:9 NIV). This is a statement of God’s uncompromising faithfulness – He will rescue the just and, will not allow the ungodly to go unpunished. The present tense – continuance – of the statement *while continuing their punishment*, shows some form of punishment before the final judgement. Many writers suggest that this is punishment in *hades*, and support that argument with

the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). However, the point of the parable is to illustrate the permanency of the situation, and to be prepared whilst we have the time.

An alternate view is that God will bring retribution (punishment) in this life for the evil that they have done, and that punishment will continue at the judgement. The flaw in this argument is that many who commit crimes against God's people do not suffer in this life, at least not as much as the people they persecute. Whatever way the punishment is to come and continue on the unrighteous, we can be sure that it will be to "...especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority..." (2:2:10 NKJV). These people were deceitful greedy, and not interested in truth (2:2:3). They were involved in sexual sin, and refused to recognise authority. Most likely this was the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18), and the elders who ruled over the congregation and would have been trying to correct their faulty lives and faulty teachings (Heb 13:17).

Characteristics of the False Teachers

Peter describes them in even stronger terms "...They are presumptuous, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries..." (2:2:10 NKJV). These people have respect for no-one, and show their arrogance by their behaviour. In contrast to these people, even the angels do not behave in such a way "...yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord..." (2:2:11 NIV).

These people are compared to wild animals. In our area, one of the worst feral animals are the feral pigs which destroy the environment, grow to huge sizes, and will easily kill any man who gets in their way. "...But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption..." (2:2:12 NKJV).

Peter's thought is that such libertines are steeped in a sensuality that is self-destructive. Those who follow fleshly appetites and passions are on a road that will lead to destruction. Like animals which are caught in snares, their destruction is brought about by their appetites¹.

They "...will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you..." (2:2:13 NIV).

"They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done" preserves a word play in Greek that is quite characteristic of Peter's style in this letter. The errorists suffer harm as a wage of injury. Normally one thinks of carousing as a nighttime activity (1Th 5:7), perhaps because of the shame involved. But these people carouse in broad daylight. Peter sees them as "feasting together" with the recipients of his letter ... They also revel in their deceptions. (NIVBC).

The *feasts* that Peter describes may be a reference to the church partaking of the Lord's Supper, or it could be a reference to meals that the congregation share together.

It only gets worse as Peter describes more of their behaviour "...having eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children..." (2:2:14 NKJV). Their practices are clearly sexually oriented, and they have no shame about what they are doing. With no respect for authority (2:2:10) they openly have gone out – *trained themselves* – to indulge in such practices because of covetousness.

¹ Kelcy, p.145

The Way of Balaam

Peter refers back to Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved money and went out to pursue it rather than obeying God (Num 22:5 – 24:25). God stopped him, with an angel appearing in the pathway to stop him. The donkey saw the angel and would not proceed. Balaam beat the donkey because he was so intent on what he was doing he did not see the angel. The angel confronted the donkey again in a narrow pathway, and Balaam beat her again. God allowed the animal to speak to him, and then the angel spoke and Balaam repented of his actions and did what God said.

These false teachers are like Balaam “...*They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey--a beast without speech--who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness...*” (2:2:15-16 NIV).

Further Characteristics of the False Teachers

As a further description of these false teachers, Peter describes them in terms that we can well understand after a long running drought “...*These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever...*” (2:2:17 NKJV). They are all promise, but deliver nothing. It’s like coming across an oasis in the desert with a well, but when you get there it’s all dried up, and the clouds that come in promising rain, but the wind just blows them away and no rain ever comes. Their end is described as *forever*, which is a metaphor for their everlasting punishment.

Even their speech is empty and delivers nothing “...*For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him...*” (2:2:18-19 NIV). Their deceptive and deceitful actions are to lure away again those who are trying to escape the corruption.

These heretics use sensual propaganda to "ensnare [or entice; GK G1284; cf. v. 14] people who are just escaping from those who live in error." In other words, they take for their targets new converts to Christianity from paganism (NIVBC).

Whilst promising “freedom” and “liberty”, what they are actually selling is slavery to sin, and the results of sin is (spiritual) death (Rom 6:23). Those who entered into the delusion (both the false teachers and those who they entice away) were christians (2:2:1) who fall – or have fallen – away. “...*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning...*” (2:2:20 NKJV). This verse clearly shows that it is possible for a person who has been saved – *escaped the pollutions of the world* – to turn away from God so as to be lost again. However, he can repent of his sin and confess it, and then come back into a relationship with God again. The implication from the verse is that these people are so deluded that they deny the authority of the Lord (2:2:10) and are not willing to repent, and will therefore remain in a lost condition. “...*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them...*” (2:2:21 NIV). Peter is contemplating those who have **known** the right way (2:2:15), which they obtained through **knowledge** (2:1:2,3), but have then rejected it. Whilst at first reading, this verse suggests some degrees of punishment, the reality is that in their latter state they are less amenable to responding to the gospel than they were at the beginning.

“...*Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."*...” (2:2:22 NIV). Both of these descriptions are vivid and sickening, with the first quoted from Pr 26:11. The second is a truism that is not from scripture.