

The Second Letter of Peter

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 - A. The fact of false teachers, v. 1a
 - B. The conduct of false teachers, vv. 1b-3a
 - C. The fate of false teachers, vv. 3b- 3:10a
 - D. The profile of false teachers, vv.10d-22
 1. They are lustful, bold, and arrogant, vv. 10b-11
These false teachers insult the angels (“angelic majesties”). Since the angels brought the Law (Heb. 2:2), this is likely a reference to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. While Michael, the archangel (Jude 9), was reluctant to accuse or possibly slander other angels accusing them of error, these people have no conscience when it comes to explaining their opinions (they are bold, but baseless). Angels cannot twist God’s Word without consequences and that is what false teachers do (it seems to be an argument from the greater to the lesser. If angels are judged, how much more sure humans who rebel?)
 2. Ignorant, v. 12
Though these teachers are spell-binders, impressing unstable believers with their rhetoric, they traffic in error rather than thoughtful reflection; they are like the beasts of the field, being subhuman in action, and so is their judgment sure.
 3. Immoral, vv. 13-14a
The lifestyle of these people is loose. The attraction of these teachers is that they advocate freedom from the law; they claim, as “Christians” we have freedom to live as we please according to the dictates of our desires. They seem to imply that Christ has set us free from moral restrictions; that for the believer there are no moral standards.
 4. Greedy, vv. 14b-16
The illustration of the materialistic motivation of the false teachers is Balaam (Num. 22-24), the connecting link being the reference to “cursed children.” Balaam knew that he could not curse God’s people yet his quest for money led him to seek their corruption through immorality and idolatry. By this means, he sought to change the

Israelites view of God. As Balaam was rebuked, so will be every false teacher.

5. Fruitless and unsaved, v. 17

These men make promises, but they are empty and will prove disappointing to those who believe their message. This Peter illustrates with two examples from nature: a well that is waterless to the thirsty and mists suggestive of a downpour but passing clouds with no rain for the parched.

Like the angels who overstepped divine authority, judgment is inevitable.

6. Enslaved and enslavers, vv. 18-19

The false teacher misapplied the freedom that we have in Christ to proclaim that the Christian is not under the law of God; in doing so they promoted libertinism (that is, sinful behavior for the Christian is non-existent; we have been set free!). However, we are not free to sin; we are free not to sin!

The freedom that we have as Christians is not from restraint, but from debauchery and wastefulness. To be truly free is to be enslaved to the dictates of a benevolent and loving master! All people are slaves of their likes and dislikes. We are slaves to a new master, not ourselves.

7. Perpetrators of destruction, vv. 20-22

These verses have perplexed commentators upon the Scriptures. The problem arises from the pronouns because the references are unclear. The “them (v. 18)” and “those (v. 19)” are young Christians bedeviled by the false teachers.

a. The fact established, vv. 20-21

The “they (v. 20)” is the same as the “themselves” of the previous verse, false teachers. Peter is not saying that these people are saved (v. 17), but that they have come into a sphere of greater light by being in the Christian community. Greater light will only enhance the severity of their judgment. These may have washed as the pig, but like the pig its nature did not change, and they will return to the mud dragging others with them. They are mere professors whose natures have not been changed!

That the “they” are not duped saints seems apparent for the following reasons: (1) the content of the passage is exclusively about the character and actions of false teachers and (2) the nature of these people has not changed (v. 22) What they returned to doing and being (v. 22) revealed the true nature of these people.

These are people that momentarily appeared to be sons of light but inwardly are ravenous wolves (pigs and dogs).

b. The fact sustained, v. 22

The first quotation is a general citing from Prov. 26:11; the second seems to be from an unknown secular source. The point is that the improvement of outward circumstances does not change basic human nature permanently; it can do so temporarily.

E. The Reassurance of Peter in Christ's Coming, 3:1-18a

The connection between the warning of Peter relative to the presence of false teachers (Ch. 2), who are destructive of spiritual progress, the plea of the letter (Ch. 1), and this chapter is that the false teachers must have ridiculed the idea of the Lord's return and a future judgment (3:1-14) leading to their libertine lifestyle and teaching. The term translated "unprincipled men (3:17)" is the same word translated "debauched lifestyle" in 2:7 indicating the connection between the two chapters (false teachers and heretics)."

1. The denial of Christ's coming, vv. 1-7

a) The presence of mockers, vv. 1-3

1a) A call to remembrance, vv. 1-2

Peter indicated that the authority sources for the church were two: the OT prophets and the apostles of the Lord (1:16-18, 19-21 respectively). Peter understood, as we should, that the prophets and the apostles speak with divine sanction. Here he points to specific prophecies to validate his point. The point of reference to these two authorities have to do with the coming of the Lord to consummation time, that God begin the story of mankind by creating the earth and its inhabitants, dwelling in it, and He will end time with its judgment and the creation of the new earth dwelling once more in an unsullied environment among His people and forever. Time will end in the vindication of God through His judgment and with Satan's defeat complete.

b) A fact to remember, v. 3

In this case, "last days" refers, not to the end of the current age, but the entire period. The presence of false teachers will characterize the age.

2. The accusation of mockers, v. 4

It seems that one of the most questioned truths in the New Testament era was the second coming of Christ. The context of this was a misinterpretation of Jesus' comments to Peter about John (John 21:20-23). For those that perpetuate this falsehood the issue seems to have been the denial of future judgment, a teaching unbelievers shutter to consider; However, for those who know the Lord, it is our great hope.

The argument of the false teachers is that the stability of the created world precludes its cessation in destruction. Constancy of effect suggests continuance, not termination. Constancy of effect does suggest constancy of cause, but not continuation of cause. Because something lasts a long time does not mean that it will not end.

“Fathers” or “ancestors” is likely a reference to the patriarchs though it could be simply a general observation of history. God has not come in judgment leading to the assumption that He will not. When an assumption is wrong, the conclusion will likely be errant also! It is interesting that these mockers appeal to the Scriptures, but in a twisted sense

3. The willful ignorance of mockers, vv. 5-7

Claiming to be biblically literate, these teachers are not. They have neglected their own sacred book.

a. Of a past divine intervention, vv. 5-6

Creation had a beginning and it will have an end. The reason it will have an end is the intrusion of the perverting effect of sin. The end of this creation in judgment is made clear by the fact that God brought the earth to judgment after its creation in the time of Noah (Gen. 6-8). That which was created perfect, and later damaged, was judged but renewed with the same inherent damage that will necessitate another judgment, putting it to an end in a new earth or dwelling place without the blighting damage that sin causes. Not to be missed in Peter’s account of creation is the power of God; God can create and destroy!

b. Of a coming divine intervention, v. 7

As God brought judgment once, destroying the wicked of the earth, he will do so once more. The earth is a coffin for the lost; it is not paradise! Once God brought forth creation by His word and out of water; in the future He will bring it to an end through fire, destruction, and judgment.

Thoughts

1. This world is quite a temporal place. People spend their energies, time, resources, and hopes believing that this earth is “heaven.” Our neighbors believe that the meaning of life is found in this life questing its joys and pleasures only to find that it is like a hungry beast that requires endless feedings and is only temporally satisfied. We believe that this is a temporal place, but there is a greater world ahead and that God’s purpose in this

world is to create the inhabitants of the next. We respect this world because God has given it to us as a shadow, a figure, of the wonder of the next. We are to see God's glory in this world, embrace it, and enjoy it being filled with hope that a far more enduring one will be given to us. In that world the God we long to see will forever be with us. Does this not help you to see that we are to be caretakers of this temporal world to show people that there is another one yet to come? Does this not fill you with hope for the future and purpose in the mundane now?

2. Unfilled promises are no evidence that they will not be fulfilled. You and I may languish in fear and tears that God has not answered our prayers, that God has made us promises that have not come true, but God's delays are not indication that He has forgotten them or that He is inept to execute them. God's purposes are very complex and multitudinous with one final one, His own glorification, but they will all converge in fulfillment someday. You and I should not focus on the "delay" in keeping some promise, but realize that God's timing is not ours, that ours are imperfect and often selfishly motivated and that in the end He will prove faithful and true! How does this insight help you to grapple with the pain and frustration of unanswered prayer, the pain of criticism for your faith in the Savior, or the years of grave disappointments?
3. Unbelievers, and even some believers, doubt the return of Christ because of what it entails, judgment. Judgment or accountability is the antidote to unwise living. To justify lascivious freedom, moderns adopt adages: "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die;" "Life is full of sound and fury signifying nothing;" "Have it your way;" "You deserve a break today so get out and get away." Mankind wants to avoid divine judgment for their actions. In what sense are you a modern? Are there things in your behavior that practically denies accountability?
4. One of the reasons for the "delay" in God's return is that the body of Christ is not complete, the "garden" not full; all the redeemed have not been gathered. The Lord has a divine purpose for the elongation of time and that is to gather myriads and myriads of people to himself. Remember that God created a "garden" to dwell among His people and He will not be defeated in His determination to create "a greater garden," defeat His enemies, and dwell among us receiving glory and praise from us forever. What does this tell us about the God we love and serve? Do you praise Him regularly for allowing us to be included in His "garden?" Do you have insight into God's purposes for the world and His church?