

Lesson Eleven -- 1 & 2 Peter  
2 Peter 2:2-11

1. Beware of false teachers. 2:1-3.

1. This chapter is closely linked with the preceding verses; indeed, some suggest that 1:16-2:3 has a chiasmic order.

I. A. Apostles. 1:16-18.

B. Old Testament prophets. 1:19-21.

B'. Old Testament false prophets. 2:1a.

A'. False teachers. 2:1b-3

*Comment: Chiasmic - mark with two lines crossing like an "X" (chi, the 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet). "Chiasmic" is the adjective form of "chiasmus. In general, chiasmus refers to an inverted parallelism or sequence of words or ideas in a phrase or clause, sentence, paragraph, chapter, or an entire literary work.*

2. This careful construction makes possible both comparisons and contrasts between the apostles and the false teachers.

1. Moreover, it enables Peter to move from defense against the charges of the opposition to the attack.

2. This dominates the whole of chapter 2.

2. Peter's mind still lingers in the Old Testament prophecies.

1. In Israel there were false prophets among the people as well as true, and now history was repeating itself.

1. There always has been and there always will be false prophets and false teachers even among the people of God.

2. Justin Martyr (d. 165 AD) wrote to the Jew Trypho: And just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with your holy prophets, so now there are many false teachers amongst us, of whom our Lord forewarned us to beware. Many have taught godless, blasphemous and unholy doctrines, forging them in his name; have taught, too, and still are teaching, those things which proceed from the unclean spirit of the devil.

2. Peter calls them "false teachers," not "false prophets," so it may be that they did not purport to prophesy.

3. Nevertheless, three prominent characteristics of false prophets in the Old Testament could apply to them.

1. Unlike true prophets, they did not speak with divine authority; their message was one of spurious peace; they were condemned to be punished by God.

2. Their teaching was flattery; their ambitions were financial; their lives were dissolute; their conscience was dulled; their aim was deception.

3. These false teachers were the type of men whom you will always find secretly or surreptitiously bringing in heretical views.

4. The word translated "bring in privily" or "introduce" has two overtones: 1) to bring in alongside, and 2) to introduce secretly.
5. "Destructive heresies" means opinions destructive of the true faith.
4. The effect of their teaching was that they were even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.
  1. Note in passing that this is an adequate answer to Calvin's limited atonement
    1. The Sovereign Christ bought with his blood not only the elect but also those who go to perdition.
    2. Calvin did not accept this epistle as canonical.
      1. It is not treated in his extensive commentary on the New Testament.
      2. Could this perhaps have been a cause of its omission?
  2. This phrase shows us something of what the cross meant to Peter; bought emphasizes both the seriousness of man's plight and the costliness of Christ's rescue.
  3. God redeems man in order that his changed way of life would be a credit to his Savior.
  4. The false teachers were familiar with the liberty afforded by the Cross; liberty was one of their war cries.
  5. However, instead of accepting the obligation of holy living, their lives denied the Lord who bought them.
5. Peter is at one with the rest of the New Testament authors when he asserts plainly that a man cannot run with both the fox and the hounds. Matt. 6:24.
  1. The man who attempts to serve God and self is on the road to swift destruction.
  2. These men who taught freedom from destruction (2:19), scoffed at the second coming, and gave themselves to immorality would be judged for that immoral way of life at the very second coming that they denied.
3. The denial of the sovereign Lord is primarily ethical, not intellectual.
  1. It has two effects.
    1. It spreads to other people, which is why Peter is so vehement in his condemnation.
      1. These self-styled prophets were insidiously persuading men to believe the things that they wished to be true rather than the things that God had revealed to be true.

2. They did not set themselves up as enemies of Christianity.
3. Far from it, they set themselves up as the finest fruits of Christian thinking; and so it was gradually and subtly that people were being lured away from God's truth to other men's private opinions.
2. It brings discredit on the cause of Christ.
  1. In the early days, just as now, every Christian was a good or bad advertisement for Christianity.
  2. See Rom. 2:24; Titus 2:5.
2. "Shameful ways" is a strong word for reckless and hardened immorality, the very antithesis of the way of truth.
  1. There is only one way of truth, and that is Jesus Christ himself. John 14:6.
  2. That is why denial of him is the same thing as departure from the truth.
4. Verse 2 speaks of the immorality of the false teachers; verse three is concerned with their greed and their doom.
  1. It is instructive to compare v. 3 with 1 Thess. 2:5 where Paul denies that he is a teacher of this type, like the wandering sophists of the Graeco-Roman world, whose main concern was not truth, but success in argument.
    1. This accounts for the reference to "feigned words" or "stories they have made up" (NIV) which were designed not for helping the hearers but for fleecing them.
    2. Peter is turning the false teachers' charge of "cleverly devised stories" back on themselves.
    3. The word rendered "exploit" has a commercial background, "to make money out of"; like the false teachers of 1 Tim. 6:5 these men thought Christianity could be a source of financial gain to themselves.
    4. They have no concern for the sheep, but only for the shearing of their wool.
  2. The stringent condemnations that Peter pronounces upon these false teachers and by which he describes their doom appear to 20th century readers as old-fashioned and inappropriate because we have largely lost any sense of the diabolical danger of false teaching, and have become as dulled to the distinction between truth and falsehood in ideas as we have to the distinction between right and wrong in behavior.
    1. Note in v. 1 that God did not bring this destruction on them -- they brought it upon themselves.
    2. But it was impossible to be alive, as Peter was, to the ethical and

intellectual importance of the way of truth without being incensed when that was flouted, particularly in the church.

3. Peter reiterates that the condemnation pronounced against false teachers long ago in the Old Testament is impending (it has not been idle).
  4. He concludes by saying that their destruction has not been sleeping - "perdition waits for them with unsleeping eyes." (NEB).
2. The fate of the wicked and the rescue of the righteous. 2:4-10a.
1. Peter now proceeds to give examples of the impartial judgment of God, and the certainty that it will come even though it lingers (cf. 3:8-10).
  2. The white heat of its intensity glows through it to this day; but it moves in allusions that would be terrifyingly effective to those who heard it for the first time, but which have become unfamiliar to us today.
  3. It cites three notorious examples of sin and its destruction; and in two of the cases it shows how, when sin was obliterated, righteousness was rescued and preserved by the mercy and grace of God.
    1. Peter begins with the fallen angels (v. 4), but does not specify their sin. (See Jude 6 and Revelation 12:7 for additional information.)
      1. Peter says that God condemned the sinning angels to the lowest depths of hell.
        1. Literally the Greek says that God condemned the angels to *Tartarus*.
        2. Tartarus was not a Hebrew conception, but Greek.
        3. In Greek mythology Tartarus was the lowest hell; it was as far beneath Hades the heaven is high above the earth.
        4. In particular it was the place into which the Titans were cast when they rebelled against Zeus, the father of gods and men.
        5. Just as Paul could quote an apt verse from the Greek poet Aratus (Acts 17:28), Peter made use of this Homeric imagery.
        6. Josephus does the same and speaks of heathen gods chained in Tartarus.
      2. The next term is "pits of darkness" (Gk. *seirois* or *sirois*) or "chains" (Gk. *seirais*) depending on the Greek manuscripts that are followed.
        1. "Pits of darkness" is the most probable word used by Peter.
        2. The words originally mean a great earthenware jar for storing grain.
        3. Then it came to mean the underground pits in which grain was stored.

4. *Siros* has come into English in the form of *silo*, the towers in which grain is stored.
  5. Still later the word when on to mean a pit in which a wolf or other wild animal was trapped.
  6. Thus, the angels were cast into great subterranean pits and kept there in darkness and in punishment.
  7. This well suits the idea of a Tartarus beneath the lowest depths of Hades.
3. The evil angels are in the place of torment awaiting judgment.
  4. Peter's eschatology is characteristic of the entire New Testament which sees God's future judgment as finalizing the choices men are making in their lives.
2. Peter's second example, the flood (v. 4), seems to be a favorite of his, used also in 1 Peter 3 and 2 Peter 3.
    1. Here, against the background of a rebellious and wicked world (*asebon, ungodly*, suggests that they had no time whatever for God), we find God's salvation depicted.
    2. Peter insists that it was available for all but effective for only a few, Noah and his family.
    3. The Old Testament does not say that Noah was a preacher of righteousness; it does say that he was a righteous man, a perfect man in his generations, who walked with God. Gen. 6:9.
    4. This being the case, we know that he was a preacher in word and in deed.
      1. His very life would have been so different from the wicked men around him that it would and did speak volumes, for by it "he condemned the world." Heb. 11:7.
      2. How could any good man keep quiet when he saw others going to ruin?
      3. Any man of God is at least as concerned for the rescue of others as he is in preserving his own relationship with God.
    5. We, as well as Peter's readers, must choose between apostolic orthodoxy and contemporary heresy.
    6. The consequences of that choice will follow as certainly as those illustrated in the fate of Noah and the ancient world.
  3. Peter's third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot (vv. 5-10a).
    1. The words in this verse are very striking.

1. *Tephrosas*, the word used for "burning to ashes" or "covering with ashes," is unique in the Bible.
  2. It is used by Dio Cassius in his account of the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 when Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried in lava.
  3. Sodom was as famed for its affluence and softness as for its immorality and, of course, like any men come of age, they thought they had outgrown the idea of God; they found out their mistake too late.
  4. This total destruction was allowed by God in order to bring home to successive generations that unrighteousness will end in ruin.
  5. False teaching and false behavior always produce suffering and disaster, whether in Lot's day, Peter's day, or our own day.
2. As in Noah, we see Lot as characteristic of the righteous.
    1. Lot lived in the midst of evil and the very sight of it was a constant distress to him.
      1. Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it.
      2. It often happens that when evil emerges people are shocked; but as time goes on they cease to be shocked and accept it as a matter of course.
      3. There are many things at which we ought to be shocked -- prostitution, promiscuity, drunkenness and drugs, gambling fever that is increasing, breakdown of the home, violence, vandalism, and many others.
      4. In many cases the tragedy is that these things have ceased to shock and are accepted in a matter-of-fact manner as part of the normal order of things.
      5. For the good of the world and our own souls we must keep alive the sensitivity that is shocked by sin.
    2. When worse came to worst, Lot was willing to make a break with his environment.
      1. As much as he did not want to do so, he was prepared to leave it forever.
      2. Even as he lingered, God's messengers took him by the hand and led him out. Gen. 19:16.
        1. There are times when the influence of heaven tries to force us out of some evil situation.
        2. Some may involve a choice between security and a new start.
        3. There are times when a man can save his soul only by

breaking clean away from his present situation and beginning all over again.

4. It was in doing this that Lot found his salvation; it was in failing to do this that Lot's wife lost hers.
4. Verse 9 concludes the sentence begun in v. 4 and summarizes their contents -- the Lord knows how to rescue the righteous from the test (trial, temptation) and reserve the unjust unto judgment to be punished.
  1. Noah and Lot were delivered from the test; they stood alone among mockers and unbelievers and emerged victorious.
  2. No temptation from within or test from without is too great to be endured, for God not only regulates it, but gives to his people strength to face it. 1 Cor. 10:13.
  3. Note that God delivers a man "out of" and not "away from" trials.
    1. Christianity is no insurance policy against the trials of life.
    2. God allows them to befall the Christian; he meets us in them and delivers us out of them.
  4. The examples of Noah and Lot are instructive as to the manner that God delivers us "out of" our tests.
    1. Neither Noah nor Lot had an immediate deliverance.
      1. Noah had to help himself by building an ark in obedience to God's instruction -- despite the mirth and ridicule of his neighbors.
      2. Lot had to endure long years of self-recrimination for his foolish decision to go and live in Sodom.
    2. Yet at the time of God's choosing, God delivered them both.
      1. God may permit us to endure long years of waiting before he intervenes.
      2. He may use us to help ourselves out of the difficulty.
      3. But he well knows how to deliver the godly; he can be relied on.
  5. The faithful to whom Peter wrote may well have wondered how long God would let them be plagued with such venomous heresy and how long God would wait before judging the wicked.
  6. Peter has answered the first of these questions and now briefly addresses the second.
    1. Just as God knows how to deliver, he knows how to punish.
    2. Further, he knows how to reserve the unjust to judgment for that very purpose.

1. The Greek may mean either that they are now being punished until judgment with more punishment to follow, or it may mean that the unjust are held now until judgment with punishment to follow.
2. There is no comfort to be found if the debate is about when punishment is to begin.
5. Peter concludes this topic for the time being by assuring his readers that the false teachers are still in God's hand.
  1. They have not escaped his control despite their overt immorality.
    1. Some commentators assert that the phrase Peter uses to describe these men (*them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness*) suggests sodomy.
    2. Whatever it is, they participated in their foul lusts and longed for the sordid.
  2. There are three ways of explaining the *authority* or *government* that they despise.
    1. It may be an angelic hierarchy (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16).
    2. Peter may be returning to v. 1 and indicating that the false teachers despised the Lordship of Christ.
    3. It may be a reference to church leadership, that is to say, the authority of Peter and the eldership in their locality.
  3. The second is the most likely.
    1. There is little to no evidence that these false teachers were interested in different ranks of angels; to the contrary, they seemed to be very materialistic in their outlook on life.
    2. Peter has already said that their lives are a denial of the Lord who bought them.
4. Peter faced a very modern predicament.
  1. There were people in the church who lived sensual lives and justified it; the infection was spreading.
  2. They did not believe in the notion of judgment and they laughed at the second coming.
  3. People cannot do that and get away with it in God's world.
  4. Alongside this dark thread of sin and its doom runs a silver thread of God's rescue of any who, like Noah and Lot, turn to him and call for his rescue.
  5. The God of justice cannot be flouted; the God of grace can be relied on.

3. The insolence of the false teachers. 2:10b-11.

1. At this point Peter pauses to give a further description of the false teachers.

1. They are presumptuous and self-willed (some translations say "bold and arrogant).

1. The first word smacks of reckless daring that defies God and man.

2. The latter word is used for an obstinate fellow who is determined to please himself at all costs; no logic, common sense, appeal, or sense of decency will keep him from doing what he wants to do.

2. The second phrase may mean that they slander celestial beings or that they speak disrespectfully of church leaders.

3. The reference to angels in v. 11 may make the former more likely.

1. He insists on living in one world; the spiritual world does not exist and he never hears voices from beyond.

2. He is of the earth, earthy; he has forgotten that there is a heaven and is blind and deaf when the sights and sounds of heaven attempt to break through to him.

2. In contrast to these headstrong fellows, the angels, though stronger and more powerful, do not use insults when pronouncing judgment on them from the Lord.

1. The false teachers do not hesitate to bring vituperative accusations against their superiors; whereas the angels do not even dare to impugn their inferiors in such terms in the Lord's presence.

2. Unlike the false teachers who are careless of the lordship of Christ and are free with their insults, the angels so revere their Lord as they live all their lives in his presence, that no insulting language is allowed to pass their lips, even though it would be richly deserved.

3. Consciousness of his presence tames the tongue.