

# INTRODUCTION AND 2 PETER

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## Introduction

### *I. Authorship*

A. The author is identified in 1:1 as Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

1. Peter's given name at birth was the Aramaic name *Shim'on*, which is transliterated into Greek both as *Simōn* (Σίμων) and *Sumeōn* (Συμεών), which are transliterated into English as Simon and Simeon, respectively. *Sumeōn* seems to be the preferred form of transliteration in certain Jewish circles.

2. He was given the nickname "Rock" by the Lord Jesus to symbolize his new role as an apostle (Jn. 1:42; see also Mat. 16:18). That nickname probably was given in Aramaic. The Aramaic word for rock is *kēpā*, which is transliterated into Greek as *Kēphas* (Κηφᾶς), which in turn is transliterated into English as Cephas.

3. The Greek word for rock is *petra*. Since *petra* is grammatically feminine in form, when applied to a man it becomes *petros*, which is transliterated into English as Peter. So Peter is the English *transliteration* of the Greek *translation* (*Petros*) of the Aramaic nickname (*kēpā*) and Cephas is the English *transliteration* of the Greek *transliteration* (*Kēphas*) of the Aramaic nickname.

4. Peter is most often referred to in the NT simply as Peter, but sometimes in the Gospels and in 2 Pet. 1:1 his given name and his nickname are combined, yielding Simon (or Simeon - 2 Pet. 1:1) Peter. It is not clear why Peter identified himself in the opening of 1 Peter simply as Peter and in 2 Peter as Simeon Peter. Since he was known by both Peter and Simon/Simeon Peter, I suspect this was merely a stylistic variation, as I might sign one letter to a congregation as "Ashby" and a later letter to the same or a different group as "Ashby Camp" without intending any significance in the difference.

B. Further identification of the author as the apostle Peter is made by the personal reminiscences. In 1:13-14 the author refers to the Lord's prediction, later recorded in Jn. 21:18-19, that he would be put to death. Peter apparently found himself in a situation of persecution under Nero in which he could see that he would soon be executed; the handwriting was on the wall that the Lord's earlier prophecy was soon to be realized. In 1:16-18 he refers to having been an eyewitness to the Lord's transfiguration.

C. Despite this internal evidence, there were doubts in some quarters of the early church about the authenticity of 2 Peter based on differences in style and vocabulary between it and 1 Peter. But as Gene Green states:

The evidence from the early centuries of the church in favor of the authenticity of 2 Peter is not robust, but neither is it sufficiently weak to

preclude the possibility of Petrine authorship. The book was used early and widely and, although doubts did exist, the letter was never classified as spurious and eventually found its way into the major canons.<sup>1</sup>

D. The fact many unorthodox writings that had been forged in Peter's name were circulating in the second and third centuries (the Apocalypse of Peter, the Gospel of Peter, the Acts of Peter, the Teaching of Peter, the Letter of Peter to Philip, the Letter of Peter to James, the Preaching of Peter, the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter), combined with the differences between 2 Peter and the more widely known and accepted 1 Peter, probably slowed development of the church consensus regarding 2 Peter's authenticity.

E. Though 2 Peter's authenticity came to be recognized church-wide, most modern scholars deny that Peter wrote it. Their reasons for doing so, however, seem insufficient. Current scholars who defend Peter's authorship include such notable recent commentators as Edwin Blum, Michael Green, Douglas Moo, Gene Green, Robert Harvey and Philip Towner, Curtis Giese, and Thomas Schreiner,<sup>2</sup> as well as the following authors of recent New Testament introductions: Donald Guthrie; D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo; and Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. Carson and Moo conclude:

The very fact that 2 Peter was accepted as a canonical book, then, presumes that the early Christians who made this decision were sure that Peter wrote it. . . .

We are therefore left with the choice of accepting the letter's *prima facie* claim to have been written by the apostle Peter or viewing it as a forgery hardly deserving of canonical status. Since the usual arguments against Petrine authorship are not finally conclusive, we prefer the former option.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. As Gene Green summarizes the matter:

The contemporary objections to Petrine authorship are not without their weaknesses, and we must not allow the volume of opinion to decide the case . . . The verdict of the early church was ambiguous at first, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 144.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin A. Blum, "2 Peter" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:257-261; Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 13-38; Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21-24; Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter & Jude*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 9-15; Curtis P. Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 6-11; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, CSC, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Holman, 2020), 298-323.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 811-842; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 659-663; Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 749-754.

<sup>4</sup> Carson and Moo, 663.

problem of literary style in comparison to 1 Peter accounts for the early doubts. The book was used early and, according to early witnesses, used widely. The book is decidedly dissimilar to later literature that went under the name of Peter, such as the Acts of Peter, the Preaching of Peter, the gnostic [Coptic] Apocalypse of Peter, and even the early-second-century Apocalypse of Peter. The concerns raised within the letter fit well within the struggles of the church of the first century, and we may reasonably affirm that Simeon Peter, the apostle, authored the book.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Relationship to Jude

A. There are quite a few parallels between 2 Peter and Jude. They occur almost without exception in the same order in the letters, and many of them involve words or expressions found nowhere else in the Bible. These include:<sup>6</sup>

| <u>Jude</u>  | <u>2 Peter</u> |
|--|----------------|
| 4 the false teachers' "condemnation" from the past   | 2:3            |
| 4 [they] "deny" the "Sovereign [and] Lord"   | 2:1            |
| 6 angels confined for judgment (note the rare word ζόφος [ <i>zophos</i> , "darkness"])                                    | 2:4            |
| 7 Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of judgment of gross evil   | 2:6            |
| 8 [they] "reject [Jude]/despise [2 Pet.] authority"  | 2:10           |
| 9 "the archangel Michael . . . did not . . . condemn him for slander" [Jude]/<br>"angels . . . do not heap abuse" [2 Pet.] | 2:11           |
| 12 [the false teachers are] "blemishes"  | 2:13           |
| 12 "clouds without rain, blown along by the wind" [Jude]/<br>"springs without water and mists driven by a storm" [2 Pet.]  | 2:17           |
| 18 ungodly [Jude] desires/"scoffers" following their own evil [2 Pet.]   | 3:3            |

B. This similarity in order and rarity of language elsewhere in the Bible suggests that Jude borrowed from 2 Peter in composing Jude, or that Peter borrowed from Jude in composing 2 Peter, or that both Jude and Peter both borrowed from some other source in composing Jude and 2 Peter, respectively. This poses no threat to inspiration, as God is able to produce precisely what he wanted written through inspired authors using sources. Luke, for example, specifies in Lk. 1:1-3 that he researched matters in writing his Gospel. The process of inspiration is often more complex than an author taking dictation from God, but the end product is no less from God; he superintends the entire process.

1. The early Christians generally held that Jude borrowed from 2 Peter, whereas most modern scholars think that Peter borrowed from Jude. The matter cannot be decided with any confidence, but with Moo, I think a comparison of 2 Pet. 3:3 and Jude 17-18 offers some support for the idea that Jude borrowed from Peter.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Green, 150.

<sup>6</sup> Carson and Moo, 655-656.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, 18.

2 Pet. 3:3 (ESV) – knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

Jude 17-18 (ESV) – <sup>17</sup> But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

2. If Jude borrowed from 2 Peter, he was extracting points that were relevant to a similar false teaching with which he was dealing. If Peter borrowed from Jude, he was expanding on Jude in a way suitable to the situation his readers were facing.

### *III. Date and Place of Writing*

Reliable early tradition records that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome between A.D. 64-66 during Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians.<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter was written shortly before Peter's execution (1:13-14), so it was almost certainly written from Rome around A.D. 64-66.

### *IV. Destination and Audience*

A. It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that 2 Peter was sent to the same audience as 1 Peter. That is certainly the case if the allusion in 3:1 to a first letter is a reference to 1 Peter. That would mean it was addressed mainly to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor.

B. It is possible, however, that Peter in 3:1 is referring to a letter we no longer have, like Paul's letter to the Corinthians noted in 1 Cor. 5:9. In that event, we are left with little to go on in determining the destination.

1. Despite having been classified historically as a "catholic" (in the sense of universal) or "general" epistle, meaning a letter to the church at large, it clearly was written to a specific group of Christians who were being threatened by certain false teachers and who had received at least one of Paul's letters (3:15).

2. Given the uncertainty of the reference in 3:1, Moo states: "The most we can say, then, is that the Christians Peter writes to probably lived in Asia Minor, Macedonia, or Greece, since these are the regions in which Paul ministered and to which he addressed his letters. For this same reason, we can also surmise that at least most of

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Penguin Classics, trans. by G. A. Williamson (New York: Viking Penguin, 1965), 107-108; Bryan Litfin, *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 148-160, 175-182.

the Christians Peter addresses in the letter were Gentiles."<sup>9</sup> A couple of statements in the letter also may hint that the audience was mainly Gentile, but they are subject to differing interpretations.

## V. Occasion

A. Peter's main reason for writing was to combat certain false teachers who had arisen from within the church and were threatening the community to which he was writing.

1. Though they are spoken of in the future tense in 2:1-3 and 3:3, it is clear they already are present. They are already feasting with the church (2:13) and are seeking converts from among its members (2:14, 19). They are ignoring fundamental Christian truth (3:5-7) and have perverted Paul's teaching (3:15-16).

2. Peter probably refers to the false teachers in the future tense in 2:1-3 to remind his readers that the false teachers' presence is fulfillment of earlier prophetic warnings about the rise of such teachers (e.g., Mat. 7:15, 24:11; see also, Acts 20:29-30; Deut. 13:2-6).<sup>10</sup> Schreiner states, "He reminds his hearers that the advent of the false teachers was foreknown beforehand and thus God reigns even in such perilous times."<sup>11</sup>

3. Another possibility raised by Gene Green is that the shifting tenses are rooted in the already-and-not-yet aspect of eschatology. He writes:

Another approach is to recognize that, at times, grammatical form and meaning come apart, and this is true for the future indicative as other tenses [citing Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, With Reference to Tense & Mood* (1989), 403-39]. While Peter does use the future to refer to coming events, as those that will occur after his own death (1:12, 15) or eschatological events (1:11; 2:12; 3:10, 12), he may elsewhere use a present (2:3b). The oscillation between the present and the future in the letter in reference to the heretics appears to be rooted in the author's eschatology. The heretics will come in the last days (3:3-4), and their presence in the church is evidence that the last times have come (3:5-7). Peter's thought differs little from the oscillation between present and future in 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 3:1-9, 13; and 4:3-4.<sup>12</sup>

B. The false teachers were doctrinally and morally corrupt. They denied a future coming of Christ in judgment (3:3-4 with 1:16-21) and engaged in all manner of sins of the flesh (2:1-3, 10-16, 18-20). Christianity had become for them a license to sin. Schreiner remarks:

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<sup>9</sup> Moo, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Moo, 91-92; Schreiner, 391-392; M. Green, 104.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiner, 392.

<sup>12</sup> G. Green, 238-239.

Instead of identifying the opponents precisely, we must be content, historically, with the limited information available to us regarding the false teachers. We know that they denied the parousia and that they were antinomians. Perhaps they drew upon Paul's letters to justify their libertinism. Their denial of the future coming of Christ probably was linked with the rejection of a future judgment.<sup>13</sup>

## Text

### *I. The Letter Opening (1:1-15)*

#### A. Salutation and greeting (1:1-4)

**Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to the ones who have received a faith of equal privilege to us through [the] righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup>may grace and peace be multiplied to you in [the] knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, <sup>3</sup>seeing that his divine power has given to us everything for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and manifestation of divine might, <sup>4</sup>through which things he has given to us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you might become sharers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption in the world [caused] by lust.**

1. Peter identifies himself as "a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ." He had been specially chosen by the Lord to serve as one of his authoritative representatives and is writing to them in that capacity.

2. He addresses them as those "who have *received* a faith."<sup>14</sup> Their faith was not something they generated on their own. Rather, it was given to them by God in the sense it was produced by his enabling of their faculties and his revelation of his nature and work, including the revelation given to them in the gospel. It is like we might say that near the end of WWII prisoners in Hitler's concentration camps received or were given a faith that they would be liberated by the Allies.

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<sup>13</sup> Schreiner, 329.

<sup>14</sup> With the NAS, NRS, NAB, NASU, NJB, and NIV (see also, ESV), I opt for "received" rather than "obtained." NET note states: "The verb λαγχάνω (*lanchanō*) means 'obtain by lot,' 'receive.' A literal translation would put it in the active, but some of the richness of the term would thereby be lost. It is used in collocation with κλήρος (*klēros*, "lot") frequently enough in the LXX to suggest the connotation of reception of a gift, or in the least reception of something that one does not deserve."

a. As Paul says in Rom. 10:17, "faith [comes] from hearing, and hearing [comes] through the word of Christ." He says in 2 Thess. 2:14 that one is called to salvation through the gospel. Whenever a person hears the gospel, the message that God the Son became a human, that he was crucified for humanity's sins, and that he was raised to life and exalted to the highest place, God is offering that person faith, calling him to believe. Those who do so will have been given faith by God. That is what Peter's audience had done.

b. Peter does not state that their faith was given to them through the preaching of the gospel, but I think that idea is lurking in his statement that they received their faith *through the "righteousness" of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

(1) When righteousness is attributed to God in the OT, it frequently has reference to his saving activity. That is the form that his righteousness takes. For example, in Isa. 46:13 God promises through the prophet (ESV): "I bring near my *righteousness*; it is not far off, and my *salvation* will not delay." Ps. 98:2 says (ESV), "The Lord has made known his *salvation*; he has revealed his *righteousness* in the sight of the nations." See also, Ps. 35:26-28, 40:10, 51:14, 71:15-16, 71:24, 88:12, 119:123; Isa. 51:5-6, 51:8.

(2) In Rom. 1:16-17 Paul applies this concept of God's righteousness, righteousness as his saving action, to the preaching of the gospel. He says the gospel is "the power of God for salvation" for in it the "righteousness of God" is being revealed. In the preaching of the gospel, God's saving action, his bringing people into a right relationship with himself, is taking place (being "revealed" in history).

(3) Similarly, I think Peter is saying that they received their faith through the "righteousness," the saving activity of God, which took place in the exercise of his power for salvation through the preaching of the gospel. As Moo says, "'Righteousness' (*dikaioσύνη*) has a broad range of meaning in the Bible. One of its meanings is 'justice' or 'fairness,' and some commentators think that this meaning fits very well here . . . But 'righteousness' normally refers to the act by which God puts sinners in a right relationship with him. And this seems to be the more likely meaning here."<sup>15</sup>

3. Notice that the title "God and Savior" is applied to Jesus Christ. This is acknowledged by the vast majority of modern commentators and Greek grammarians (see also, Jn. 1:1, 1:18, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8-9; 1 Jn. 5:20[?]). Here and elsewhere, Jesus is expressly acknowledged to be divine – he is God the Son – though normally God refers to God the Father (as in 1:2).

4. The faith they received is of equal privilege (or equal standing, NRSV) to "us." It is not clear to whom "us" refers. It could refer to the apostles or to Jewish Christians or to all other Christians generally. But whatever the scope of "us," the point seems to be that the recipients are not second-class citizens in the kingdom. Their faith

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<sup>15</sup> Moo, 35.



receives all the blessings that attach to the faith of any others; no one is any more a child of God than they are.

5. Peter in v. 2 invokes blessings on those who have come to know God and Christ in their conversion to the Christian faith. It is only as Christians, as those who have come to and not renounced the knowledge of God and Jesus, that people will experience the blessings of God's grace and peace.

6. His prayer for grace and peace to be multiplied to them is made in light of how richly Christ (or God the Father) has already blessed Christians ("us"), which includes them.<sup>16</sup>

a. Those blessings include his providing by divine power everything needed for "a godly life" (the phrase "life and godliness" is probably a hendiadys).<sup>17</sup> As Christians, we have all we need for living a moral life, a life that respects God's will, which resources include the Holy Spirit empowering our lives (see, Rom. 8:12-13; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 3:16).

b. We received this divine assistance for godly living in our conversion to Christ, who called us to conversion by the glory and power manifested in his incarnation, ministry, and resurrection. Though ἀρετή commonly is translated here as "virtue," "goodness," or "excellence," Richard Bauckham states, "In this context, ἀρετή is virtually synonymous with δόξα [glory], and denotes the manifestation of divine power."<sup>18</sup> BDAG puts 2 Pet. 1:3 under the meaning "manifestation of divine power."<sup>19</sup>

c. Through Christ's saving work, through the glory and power manifested in his incarnation, ministry, and resurrection, he also gave to us the "precious and very great promises."

(1) Peter does not here specify the promises he has in mind, but he probably is referring to the magnificent promise of Christ's return to consummate the kingdom of God and the promise of resurrection life in the perfect reality, the new heavens and new earth, that is associated with that return (e.g., Mat. 19:28, 25:31-46; Jn. 5:28-29).

(a) The word "promises" points to the promises of chapter 3. Specifically, it points to Peter's statement in 3:4 about the false teachers denying the "promise" of Christ's coming, his assurance in 3:9 that the Lord is not slow to

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<sup>16</sup> I take ὡς at the beginning of v. 3 as a connection with v. 2 and thus translate it "seeing that" (see Schreiner, 342, and the proponents noted there).

<sup>17</sup> A hendiadys is the expression of a single idea by two nouns linked by a conjunction instead of a noun and its qualifier (e.g., "He came despite the rain and weather" rather than "He came despite the rainy weather"). It is a stylistic way of adding force to the statement.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 179.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 130.

fulfill that "promise" when viewed from God's perspective, and his reference in 3:13 to the "promise" of a new heavens and new earth. Indeed, the word translated "promises" in 1:4 (plural form of ἐπαγγελμα) is used only one other time in the entire Bible – in 2 Pet. 3:13.

(b) That the promises Peter has in mind relate to the eschaton, the eternal state, fits nicely with the statement that it is through these promises, meaning through their fulfillment, that they might become sharers of the divine nature. (The switch from "us" to "you" "is probably because [Peter] is already thinking of his intention to exhort his readers to moral effort [v 5] so that they may be sure of inheriting the promises.")<sup>20</sup>

[1] They (and we) will become sharers of the divine nature in the sense that in the resurrection they will resemble God in additional aspects of his being. When this reality is "heavenized," when it is given the ultimate makeover in conjunction with Christ's return, the God who is *inherently* immortal and incorruptible will bestow immortality and incorruptibility on them.

[a] As Paul makes clear (1 Cor. 15:42-54), this perishable and mortal body will at that time, by God's grace, be made imperishable and immortal. And at that time our sanctification, our transformation toward the likeness of Christ, will be completed. As John says in 1 Jn. 3:2, when Christ appears we shall be like him; our transformation will include our being morally perfected.

[b] Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 1:3 that God had given them a new birth into a living hope, and then in 1 Pet. 1:4-5 he spelled out the substance of that hope. It is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and it is the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[2] As Paul indicates in Rom. 8:20-23, the present material world is under a curse of corruption as the divine judgment on sin. Peter says that in their participating in the divine nature through the bestowal of resurrection life, they will, in the fullest and most complete sense, have escaped from the corruption in the world caused by lust. In other words, they will finally and fully have escaped the decay, transitoriness, and mortality that characterize the world as a result of sin that flowed from unbridled desire.

(c) That Peter's focus is on the eschaton, the eternal state, is further suggested by 1:5-11. Verse 5 is tied to the preceding by the opening "for this very reason," and the goal of the exhortation is said in v. 11 to be "entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

(d) The denial of Christ's consummating return by the false teachers is central to the letter, so it makes sense that Peter would focus on that.

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<sup>20</sup> Bauckham, 179.

(2) Christ gave the promise of his return, and the promise of the new heavens and new earth that are associated with that return, through his saving work – through the glory and power manifested in his incarnation, ministry, and resurrection – in the sense his saving work provided for the *fulfillment* or *realization* of those promises.

(a) Moo writes, "Peter's language here is elliptical: In saying, 'through these he has given us his very great and precious promises,' he really means that through these attributes, Christ has provided for the *fulfillment* of these promises."<sup>21</sup>

(b) As Paul indicates in Eph. 1:7-10, God's will for the management of the end of history is that heaven and earth will be united *in Christ*. Christ's redemptive work is the basis on which creation will be transformed, "heavenized," at his return.

## B. Strive to grow in Christian character (1:5-11)

**<sup>5</sup>And also for this very reason, making every effort, supplement your faith with virtue; and virtue with knowledge; <sup>6</sup>and knowledge with self-control; and self-control with perseverance; and perseverance with godliness; <sup>7</sup>and godliness with brotherly affection; and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup>For if these things are existing in you and increasing, they make [you] neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>9</sup>for the man in whom these things are not present is blind by being near-sighted, having forgotten the cleansing of his former sins. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, brothers, be more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for by doing these things you will never stumble. <sup>11</sup>For in this way entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided to you.**

1. Peter prays in v. 3 for grace and peace to be multiplied to them, seeing how God has blessed them so richly already as expressed in vv. 3-4. Verses 5-7 are then based on the description of those blessings.

a. Because Christ has given us everything necessary for godly living and has given us the precious and very great promises, we must work to be the people God wants us to be, to be morally and ethically pure. We cannot continue live like the world from which we have been saved.

b. Note that this requires effort on our part. The Spirit transforms us; he produces various qualities in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23), but he does not do so apart

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<sup>21</sup> Moo, 43.

from our laboring to develop them. Through applying ourselves we yield to the Spirit's molding; we make ourselves a hospitable environment for the growth of his fruit.

2. In this list of virtues, it is unlikely that Peter is indicating a particular order of development, as though each virtue builds on the preceding one.

a. He is probably employing a conventional literary form called a sorites (suh-RYE-tees) (A . . . B, B . . . C, C . . . D, and so on) to provide a memorable summary of the kind of qualities that should characterize a Christian's life. Moo states:

Some commentators, and especially popular writers and speakers, make much of the sequence of the steps here – as if we must make sure to add these virtues exactly in the order that Peter sets them forth. But this reading of the passage, while superficially convincing, fails to take account of the literary form Peter is using. Once we see that Peter is using a popular device of his day, we will recognize also that the order in which he puts these virtues may be somewhat haphazard. All of them are important; but we doubt that Peter intends to say that we must pursue them in the precise order he gives them.<sup>22</sup>

b. The only two fixed items in the Christian adaptation of this literary form were the first (faith) and the last (love).<sup>23</sup> The entire Christian life is based on faith, and love summarizes our responsibilities to God and to man.

3. So as Christians, people of faith, we are to labor to have lives of:

a. virtue (or goodness) – This is the very general quality of "moral excellence." We might express it as doing the right thing, as acting in our particular circumstances and situations as Christ would act. This kind of character shines in our society. We need to be working to be a Christlike boss, a Christlike employee, a Christlike customer, a Christlike friend, a Christlike neighbor, a Christlike student, a Christlike parent, a Christlike child, a Christlike spouse, etc.

b. knowledge – This refers, in Bauckham's words, to "the wisdom and discernment which a Christian needs for a virtuous life and which is progressively acquired."<sup>24</sup> The virtuous person must have his eyes open for traps, for situations in which the chance of compromise is heightened. We gain this knowledge through absorbing God's perspective, which we do through hearing and studying his word. We need to be spending time doing this.

c. self-control – We must work to be masters of our own desires. This term was often, but not exclusively, associated with sexual restraint, something woefully lacking in the false teachers. We are to exercise self-discipline and restraint, not

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<sup>22</sup> Moo, 44-45; see also, Bauckham, 174-176; Schreiner, 352-353.

<sup>23</sup> See Bauckham, 174-176.

<sup>24</sup> Bauckham, 186; see also, Moo, 45.

excuse our lack of it in the name of a disease, poverty, genetic inclinations, or childhood mistreatment

d. perseverance (endurance or steadfastness) – This "refers to courageous and steadfast endurance in the face of suffering or evil."<sup>25</sup> We are called to nobly cope with the difficulties and injustices of this life, to refuse to be spiritually or emotionally defeated by them, because we trust in God and hope for the fulfillment of his promises. Christian faith is to be a power for living in the "real world."

e. godliness – This general term denotes respect for God's will and moral living which are an inseparable part of a proper attitude toward God. Peter said in 1:3 that God had given them everything necessary for godly living and here he commands them to exert themselves in making use of those resources. Pursuing godliness, moral living, is not optional. As Moo states, "While God gives us the ability to become godly, it is our responsibility to use the power he has made available to us and actually work at becoming people who please God in every phase of life."<sup>26</sup>

f. brotherly love (or brotherly kindness) – This refers to the love, the bond, that naturally exists among siblings. In the early church it was applied to "spiritual siblings," brothers and sisters in Christ. We are commanded to have toward fellow believers the kind of commitment that one ideally has toward one's physical brother or sister.

g. love – With the last virtue we are called to love beyond the circle of fellow believers, to have a sacrificial commitment to the welfare of all others. Moo writes:

The first word he uses is *philadelphia*, "love of the brother," or, as NIV renders it, "brotherly kindness." In distinction from the second word, the familiar *agape*, *philadelphia* probably refers to love expressed among fellow Christians. *Agape*, then, is not a completely different love, but embraces "love of the brethren" as one sphere of Christian love in its fullest scope – the Spirit-given act of the will by which we treat other people with active benevolence. Surely it is not by chance that love, the crown of Christian virtues (see 1 Cor. 13), comes at the climax of Peter's staircase of Christian qualities.<sup>27</sup>

4. Growing in these things is what it means to be a productive and fruitful Christian. That is how they "keep you" from being useless and unfruitful. Verse 8 literally says: "For if these things are existing in you and increasing, they make [you] neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, 186.

<sup>26</sup> Moo, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Moo, 46-47.

5. The unfruitful Christian, the man without these ethical manifestations of faith, is blind in that he cannot see the implications of his salvation; he has forgotten the significance of his prior cleansing from sin. He is living as though his forgiveness means nothing to him, ignoring the desire of the one who showed him such great mercy.

6. We must exert effort to grow spiritually, and in doing so we are assured that we will never stumble from the path we are on, a path that leads to glory, to entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is danger in stagnating in our faith. If we are not growing, we become more vulnerable to the enemy.

### C. Importance of such growth demands reminders (1:12-15)

**<sup>12</sup>Therefore, I will always be poised to remind you of these things though you know [them] and are firmly established in the truth that is present [with you]. <sup>13</sup>And I think it right, as long as I am in this tent, to arouse you by a reminder, <sup>14</sup>knowing that the putting off of my tent is imminent, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. <sup>15</sup>And I will also be diligent to cause you always to have, after my departure, the memory of these things.**

1. Verse 12 begins with *Therefore* or *So*. Because spiritual growth is a safeguard against falling away from the faith and thus has relevance to entering the consummated kingdom, it is a matter of top priority. As I said, if we are not actively tending our faith, consciously seeking to be more like Jesus, we are in danger of our faith eroding. We must be growth conscious. We cannot settle into the comfort zone and decide we will put no more effort into becoming more Christlike.

2. This is so important, Peter says that as long as he is alive (in this tent) he is always going to remind them of these things and that he will do all he can to ensure that they remember them even after his impending death. We need to remind one another of the importance of spiritual growth, and we need to expose ourselves to the reminder by regularly assembling, by developing ties with other Christians, and by studying the word.

3. Peter knows from his situation that he is about to be executed, which is in keeping with the Lord's prophecy to him in Jn. 21:18-19 that when he was old he would be put to death for his faith. Notice his attitude toward death, even knowing that it would be a violent one. According to Eusebius, the ancient church historian (late-third/early-fourth centuries), Peter was crucified in Rome.<sup>28</sup>

## II. *The Body of the Letter (1:16 – 3:13)*

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<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Penguin Classics, trans. by G. A. Williamson (New York: Viking Penguin, 1965), 107-108.

A. Christ will certainly return, as promised (1:16-21)

### 1. Peter had a preview of Christ's final glory (1:16-18)

**<sup>16</sup>For not after following cleverly devised myths did we make known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but after becoming eyewitnesses of that one's majesty. <sup>17</sup>For he received honor and glory from God [the] Father when such a voice [as this] was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." <sup>18</sup>And we ourselves heard this voice that was conveyed from heaven when being with him on the holy mountain.**

a. "For" (*gar*) at the beginning of v. 16 expresses a connection with the preceding. Growth is crucial because it is a key to staying on the path to entering the consummated kingdom, the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1:11), and staying on that path is so important because the kingdom is definitely going to be consummated. Jesus is for sure coming back to finalize the kingdom he inaugurated at his first coming.

b. The phrase "power and coming" is probably another hendiadys meaning "coming in power" or "powerful coming." The "vast majority" of scholars understand that phrase as a reference to the second coming of Christ.<sup>29</sup> They do so because:

(1) The word Peter uses for coming, *parousia*, was in Christian circles in the first century almost a technical term for the second coming. Indeed, Peter uses it in 3:4 and 3:12 unambiguously in reference to Christ's return. Moo states, "[T]he word 'coming' is used throughout the New Testament as almost a technical term for Christ's return in glory – so much so that the underlying Greek word, *parousia*, has passed into our theological vocabulary."<sup>30</sup> Schreiner concurs (p. 312), "[I]n the New Testament *parousia* becomes virtually a technical term for the arrival or future coming of Jesus Christ (Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; Jas 5:7-8; 2 Pet 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28)."<sup>31</sup>

(2) Christ's return is associated with "power" in Mat. 24:30, Mk. 13:26, and Lk. 21:27 (see also, Mk. 9:1), so the combination of power and coming reinforces the conclusion that Peter is referring to Christ's return.

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<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, 215.

<sup>30</sup> Moo, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, 372.

(3) The denial of the second coming by the false teachers (3:3-4) is central to the letter, so it makes perfect sense that Peter is here defending that doctrine.

c. In assuring his readers of the certainty of the apostolic claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to return in great power, which return will be an eschatological climax marked by the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and new earth, Peter confronts directly the claims of the false teachers. They denied that Christ was returning (3:3-4), and apparently taught that the claim to the contrary was nothing more than a fable or myth, perhaps even alleging that it had been concocted as a tool for restraining behavior by the threat of a final judgment. Moo comments:

We do not know precisely why, or on what basis, the false teachers were denying Christ's return. In 3:4-13, Peter puts particular stress on the radical change in the created world that will accompany Christ's return. Probably, then, the false teachers thought that the world would continue on as it now was and denied that there would be any kind of eschatological climax in which good would be rewarded and evil punished. That this was the case seems to be confirmed by Peter's emphasis on the certainty of judgment (see, e.g., 2:3b). And the false teachers' eschatological skepticism was undoubtedly tied to their immoral lifestyle: With no prospect of future judgment, one did not have to worry much about living a righteous life.

We can only speculate about the sources of these false teachers' denial of future eschatology. Certainly many Greek thinkers of Peter's day scorned any notion of divine providential control of history and of life after death. And these errorists may also have been influenced by a "spiritualized" eschatology of a type that Paul also had to deal with: Christians who thought that the final form of the kingdom had already arrived (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8) and that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:18).<sup>32</sup>

d. Peter denies that the message of Christ's glorious return was a cleverly concocted fairy tale. He does so by asserting that he and some others (meaning James and John) were eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty when they were with him on the mountain of transfiguration. So he clearly is saying that what they personally experienced in the transfiguration event somehow disproves the false teachers' claim that the doctrine of the second coming is hogwash. But *how* that experience disproves their denial of Christ's consummating return is less clear.

e. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all suggest that the transfiguration was a fulfillment of Christ's prediction that some of the apostles would not die until they saw a specific manifestation of the coming kingdom of God (Mk. 9:1 – "the kingdom of God come with power"; Mat. 16:28 – "the Son of man coming in his kingdom"; Lk. 9:28 – "the kingdom of God").

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<sup>32</sup> Moo, 70.



(1) They each preface the transfiguration account with Christ's prediction and then link the transfiguration to it by noting in the very next verse the length of time between the two (Matthew and Mark – six days; Luke – about eight days).

(2) So it is not surprising that, as Jerome Neyrey says, "In the early church there was a widespread interpretation of the transfiguration as the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Jesus that 'those standing here would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come in power' (Mark 9:1)."<sup>33</sup>

f. Peter seems to be saying that in seeing in the transfiguration Christ's glorious and majestic nature, in seeing his divinity, they saw the full coming of his kingdom in the sense they saw one who was too great to leave unfinished business, too great to leave creation in a continuing state of corruption. Therefore, they saw one who necessarily would return powerfully to consummate the kingdom of God, return to fully "cash out" his victory by ushering in the eternal state in which there was no sin, suffering, death, mourning, crying, or pain.

g. That Peter is saying that the second coming was foreshadowed in the transfiguration is recognized by the vast majority of commentators. For example:

(1) Davids states: "2 Peter . . . says that the Transfiguration was a view into the future of the coming exaltation of Jesus, a view of his second coming with power and glory."<sup>34</sup>

(2) Schreiner states: "The truth of the coming of Christ is defended in a surprising manner. Peter appeals to his eyewitness testimony of what occurred at the transfiguration. Apparently the transfiguration is a proleptic and prophetic indication of the glory and power of Christ that would be displayed at his future coming."<sup>35</sup>

(3) Moo states: "Peter, James, and John *saw* – not in a vision or a dream, but at a specific time and place in history – Jesus' Parousia glory. And Peter wants us to believe that Christ will come again in glory because he did see this."<sup>36</sup>

(4) Gene Green states: "The particular tenet of the heretics' teaching that Peter counters has to do with the eschatological parousia of Christ (v. 16; 3:3-4). He presents the transfiguration, with its revelation of Christ's kingship, as the guarantee of that final event."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 173.

<sup>34</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 202.

<sup>35</sup> Schreiner, 371.

<sup>36</sup> Moo, 84.

<sup>37</sup> G. Green, 216.

(5) Lewis Donelson states, "Thus it appears that 2 Peter interprets the story of transfiguration not just as an epiphany, which it certainly is, but also as a promise of Jesus' return."<sup>38</sup>

(6) Terrance Callan states, "The author implies that what Peter and the others experienced when Jesus was transfigured was a foretaste of Jesus's future power and coming."<sup>39</sup>

## 2. The prophecies are absolutely reliable (1:19-21)

**<sup>19</sup>And we have the wholly reliable prophetic word, to which you do well in paying attention as to a light shining in a dark place, until [the] day dawns and [the] morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>knowing this first [of all] that no prophecy of scripture is [a matter] of one's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For no prophecy ever was brought by [the] will of man; rather, men being moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

a. In vv. 16-18 Peter tells them that staying on the path to entering the kingdom that Jesus will consummate at his return is so important *because* ("for") the kingdom definitely is going to be consummated. Jesus is for sure coming back to finish what he began (contrary to what the false teachers were suggesting). And they can know he is coming because Peter, James, and John had an eyewitness preview of that coming in the Transfiguration.

b. And in addition to this eyewitness testimony, they can be certain Christ is returning because they have the wholly reliable prophetic word which testifies to that return.

(1) With the NAB, NIV, NET, and "the majority of commentators,"<sup>40</sup> I think the comparative adjective βεβαιότερον is best taken here as a superlative or elative (very certain, altogether certain) rather than as a true comparative (more certain).

(2) The term "prophetic word" refers either to the entire Old Testament scriptures, in accordance with a common Jewish view that all inspired scripture is prophetic (note "prophetic scriptures" in Rom. 16:26), or to specific prophecies that are part of the Old Testament. The reference to "prophecy of *Scripture*" in v. 20 makes clear that *writings* are in view.

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 232.

<sup>39</sup> Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 174.

<sup>40</sup> Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 115. See, e.g., Bauckham, 223; G. Green, 226; Norman Hillyer, *I and 2 Peter, Jude*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 179.

(3) Peter does not identify any specific texts, but there are a number of passages that early Christians recognized as testifying to the Messiah's coming in judgment and thus as referring to Christ's return (e.g., Ps. 2:9; Dan. 7:13-14; Num. 24:17; see also, Isa. 63:1-6).

c. Peter tells them that they will do well to pay attention to this wholly reliable prophetic word as to a light shining in a dark place. Being wholly reliable, scripture reveals the truth, penetrates the darkness of ignorance and the lies of the devil, and thus provides guidance for one's life. Those who ignore God's word, who do not take advantage of the light of that revelation, will not be prepared for the Lord's return, for the day of judgment.

d. They (and we) are to heed the witness of Scripture until the day dawns and the morning star rises in their hearts.

(1) The "day" of which Peter is speaking is the day of Christ's return; that is the subject of discussion. It is what Peter in 1 Pet. 2:12 calls the "day of visitation," what he in 2 Pet. 2:9 and 3:7 calls the "day of judgment," what he in 2 Pet. 3:10 calls the "day of the Lord," what he in 2 Pet. 3:12 calls the "day of God," and what he in 2 Pet. 3:18 calls the "day of eternity." It is the day when the kingdom of God will be consummated, when this reality will be "heavenized" into the new heavens and new earth.

(2) At that time, the "morning star," who is Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:16), will rise in our hearts in that our gratitude for and appreciation of him will become even greater as our faith becomes sight. We will, in the vernacular, "be busting."

(3) We heed the witness of Scripture *until* that time because in the brightness of that revelation the prophetic message will be superfluous. As Davids states:

This is what Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:8-10, "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." Now the prophetic word (in Paul the reference is to the prophecies of contemporary prophets, while in 2 Peter it is to the OT) is a light in the darkness, but when the darkness disappears with the coming of the dawn, we will no longer need the Scriptures. One treasures a love letter while the beloved is absent, but once he or she is present, the letter is laid aside and exchanged for the personal contact.<sup>41</sup>

e. The wholly reliable prophetic word to which they (and we) are to pay attention until Christ returns is wholly reliable because it is from God and not man.

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<sup>41</sup> Davids, 210.

It is not the thoughts, opinions, philosophies, or imaginings of the various prophets. Not at all. They were God's instruments who wrote what they wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(1) We are not told the specifics of how the Spirit supernaturally guided the sacred writers in their choice of words, but we know that he did so in the normal language of their day and consistently with their differing personalities and styles of writing. So the process often was more complicated and subtler than a writer recording the dictated words of God.

(2) As I noted earlier, Luke investigated things before he wrote his Gospel; he didn't sit in a trance and write. The point is that God superintended the entire process so that the end product was precisely what he wanted written.

## B. The false teachers (2:1-22)

### 1. The presence and impact of false teachers (2:1-3)

**But there were also false prophets among the people, as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their licentious acts, because of whom the way of truth will be slandered. <sup>3</sup>And in greed they will exploit you with false words, for whom the condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.**

a. As there were false prophets among the people of Israel in the days of the true prophets to whom Peter he has just referred, so it was foretold that there also would be false teachers among them, as has now occurred; that prediction is now playing out in their community.

(1) As I stated in the introduction, it is clear that the heretics were already on the scene. They were already feasting with the church (2:13) and were seeking converts from among its members (2:14, 19). They were ignoring fundamental Christian truth (3:5-7) and had perverted Paul's teaching (3:15-16). I am with those who think Peter probably refers to the false teachers in the future tense here to remind his readers that the false teachers' presence is fulfillment of earlier Christian prophecies warning about their rise (e.g., Mat. 7:15, 24:11; see also, Acts 20:29-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Deut. 13:2-6). Schreiner states, "He reminded his hearers that the advent of the false teachers was foreknown beforehand and hence that God reigns even in such perilous times."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Schreiner, 392.

(2) Peter refers to these heretics as false teachers rather than false prophets. Since prophets do indeed teach, perhaps this is just a stylistic variation, another way of referring to false prophets. It is also possible that Peter used the word "teachers" because, though these heretics were within the scope of the earlier prophecy, they did not claim prophetic authority (perhaps because they rejected the very notion of inspiration).

(3) Even if these heretics did not claim prophetic authority, they shared characteristics of the false prophets of old. As Richard Bauckham summarizes the characteristics of false prophets, they lack divine authority, they promise people peace when God threatens judgment, and they will certainly be judged by God.<sup>43</sup>

b. Peter says the false teachers secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.

(1) They are devious in their method. Since they are called "arrogant men" in 2:10b, they probably did not hide what they taught but instead they covered up the degree to which their teaching differed from the accepted apostolic teaching.<sup>44</sup>

(2) The errors they push are so serious that they lead to destruction, meaning eschatological punishment. Moo remarks, "Any who buy into them find themselves on the road to eternal condemnation."<sup>45</sup> One is reminded of Paul's words to the Galatians in Gal. 1:8-9 (ESV): "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." Moo says regarding the word "destructive" (lit. "of destruction"):

This word refers to eschatological condemnation. As a metaphor for judgment, the word does not carry the literal meaning of "annihilate" or "cease to exist," but, with "salvation" as its opposite (2 Cor. 2:15), denotes the eternal loss of fellowship with God (see also John 12:25; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18; 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10). . . . Those who follow the theology of the false teachers will be led not to final salvation but to condemnation.<sup>46</sup>

(3) They denied Christ, who bought them as his slaves through his atoning death on the cross. They are Christians who have now turned from the Lord. In denying his second coming and living immoral lives, these heretics were denying Jesus' lordship. And as Jesus said in Mat. 10:33, "Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."

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<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, 238.

<sup>44</sup> Moo, 92.

<sup>45</sup> Moo, 99.

<sup>46</sup> Moo, 93.

c. In bringing in these destructive heresies, the false teachers bring on themselves the eschatological judgment that will fall suddenly on them in the end.

d. Peter says that many will follow the false teachers by adopting their licentious ways.

(1) Moo remarks, "Sadly, there are always those within the church who are attracted to new and different teaching, especially if, like the ideas peddled by these false teachers, it removes the bounds of moral constraint and accountability to a holy judge."<sup>47</sup>

(2) The problem of false teaching becomes even more acute as popular culture increasingly swallows the notion that there is no objective truth. In that environment, Christians easily become more comfortable witnessing for their faith not in terms of its truth but in terms of its utility – e.g., it helped my family, helped my self-image, etc. – which makes us less concerned about the truth. Moo states, "Such a situation provides a golden opportunity for false teachers to enter our ranks and prey on those who simply do not know much about what they believe or why."<sup>48</sup>

e. Those who follow the false teachers in their sinful ways will cause the way of truth, Christianity, to be slandered or blasphemed. When people see those who wear the name Christ living in sin and rationalizing it, the Christian faith is discredited.

f. The false teachers are motivated by greed. They are exploiting the believers' vulnerability by feeding them lies they are willing, if not eager, to lap up and apparently are receiving some economic benefit in the process.

g. The judgment planned for these false teachers from long ago is not idle, meaning it was not suspended but is still advancing despite their claim that the length of Christ's absence means it will not happen (3:4). Their destruction is not asleep, and thus will not sleep through its hour, but will come in God's time.

h. Moo's comments on the contemporary significance of this text are worth quoting at length:

The challenge [of false teaching] is especially great because, as Peter reminds us, false teachers are often deceptive, mixing enough truth with their error so that well-meaning but uninformed Christians will be taken in by them. I think at this point of some of the more radical "health-and-wealth" gospel advocates on TV and radio. . . .

Perhaps, then, the most significant point of application to emerge from this paragraph in our own day is the assumption that Peter makes about the utterly disastrous consequences of false teaching. . . .

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<sup>47</sup> Moo, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Moo, 98.

The specific false teaching Peter is addressing seems to have had its basis in a doctrinal error – denial of the return of Christ in judgment (see 1:16-21; 3:3-10) – and to have led to serious moral failings (see the "shameful ways" of 2:2, 10-22). But application of Peter's warnings should not be confined to this one particular "heresy." . . . Any denial of clearly revealed biblical truth falls under the strictures that Peter gives here. Thus, as much as we may respect the moral seriousness of Mormons, for instance, their denial of the deity of Christ puts their doctrine into the category that Peter discusses here. Examples can be multiplied endlessly; and false teaching, while taking many similar forms throughout history, is always emerging with new nuances and permutations of errors. But it is the broad principle that we must latch hold of here: What we *believe* matters – and matters eternally.

What we are advocating is not a "heresy hunt" – becoming so ultrasensitive to every fine nuance of expression that we read people out of the kingdom on the basis of the most subtle theological differences. . . . Yet as much as we may deplore the way some Christians have been too eager to brand those who disagree with them as heretics, we should at least recognize that they have a sense of the importance of truth.<sup>49</sup>

## 2. Contrasting fates of the rebellious and the godly (2:4-10a)

**<sup>4</sup>For if God did not spare angels who sinned but delivered into chains of gloomy darkness those being held for judgment, casting them into Tartarus; <sup>5</sup>and [if] he did not spare the ancient world but, having brought a flood [on] a world of ungodly people, protected Noah, [as the] eighth, a preacher of righteousness; <sup>6</sup>and [if] he condemned [the] cities of Sodom and Gomorrah [to destruction], reducing [them] to ashes and making [them] an example of what is coming to [the] ungodly; <sup>7</sup>and [if] he rescued righteous Lot who was distressed by the conduct of the lawless in [their] licentiousness <sup>8</sup>(for while living among them, that righteous man was tormenting [his] righteous soul day after day in seeing and hearing their lawless deeds); <sup>9</sup>[then the] Lord knows [how] to rescue godly people from a trial and [how] to keep [the] unrighteous for punishment in [the] day of judgment – <sup>10</sup>especially those who go after [the] flesh in [the] lust of defilement and who despise authority.**

a. The notion that God will allow rebellion and sin to go unpunished is shown to be false by his prior judgments of sin. He did not spare certain rebellious angels from judgment, did not spare the ungodly world of Noah's day from judgment, and did not spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from judgment. So why should anyone think the false teachers and their followers will be spared from judgment? On the other

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<sup>49</sup> Moo, 98-99.

hand, God did protect Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and his family from the flood and rescued righteous Lot from the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah.

b. Peter makes his points through an extended "if . . . then" formula. According to v. 9, if, as is true, God cast certain sinful angels into Tartarus to be held for judgment, flooded the world of ungodly people but protected Noah, incinerated Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of what is coming to the ungodly, and rescued Lot (vv. 4-8), then at least two things can be concluded: God is quite capable of rescuing godly people from a trial and is likewise capable of holding the unrighteous for punishment in the day of judgment.

(1) The fact God knows how to rescue the godly person from the trial or test of judgment, how to bring the faithful through that sifting event without destruction, is an encouragement to the faithful, those who believe in the coming judgment. There is no chance that the coming judgment will be indiscriminate, that it will take the righteous with the wicked, so there is every reason for them to continue to resist the false teachers' encouragement to immoral living.

(a) The flood from which Noah was protected and the incineration of cities from which Lot was rescued were acts of divine judgment, and Peter ties the word "trial" to the judgment from which Lot was spared by repeating the word "rescue" (ῥύομαι): God "*rescued* righteous Lot" [from the incineration of the cities] and thus "knows how to *rescue* godly people from *a trial*." So it seems that the trial from which the godly will be rescued is an act of divine judgment, and the act of divine judgment of which he is speaking, the judgment that will punish the false teachers and their followers, is the final judgment at Christ's return, which the false teachers denied.

(b) 1 Pet. 4:17 Peter indicates that in the persecution of Christians God is beginning his judgment of humanity starting from the church. Whereas the purpose of that judgment in terms of the church is to test it, to allow the genuineness and purity of its faith to shine through (see 1 Pet. 4:12, 1:6-7), the purpose of that judgment when it later falls on unbelievers at the return of Christ will be to condemn and punish them. Here I think Peter applies to the *final* judgment the notion of testing as that phase of the judgment relates to the church. As the faithful, the righteous, are rescued from condemnation, their faith is exhibited as genuine and pure.

(c) Lot was not without fault, but his righteousness is implied in the Genesis account by Abraham's declaration in 18:25 that the Lord does not destroy the righteous with the wicked and Lot's subsequent rescue from Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 19. It also is implied by Lot's being the only one in the city who offered hospitality to the visiting angels and his defending them (whatever one thinks of his offering his daughters in that cause) when the entire town insisted that he turn them over for sexual relations. His righteousness was recognized in one stream of post-biblical Jewish tradition (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 10:6, 19:17) and in the early church (e.g., 1 Clement 11:1).



[1] Notice how Peter emphasizes Lot's distress and torment over the sin around him as a reflection of his righteousness.

[2] In America, no-fault divorce, abortion, homosexual conduct, gender rebellion, and sexual immorality of all kinds have come to be accepted in the brief span of five or six decades. Rather than being distressed and tormented by this decadence, too many Christians have become insensitive to it and even accepted it as a valid personal choice. As Moo states:

This muted reaction to ever more rampant sin is fraught with danger not only for society but for the church. As Cardinal Newman, the nineteenth-century Roman Catholic theologian, put it, "Our great security against sin lies in being shocked by it." When we are shocked at something, we avoid it at all costs. . . . But when sin loses its "shock value," it can too easily become something we tolerate and then fall prey to ourselves.<sup>50</sup>

Moo adds that we do not find more Christians distressed by the sin that rages around us because "we do not sufficiently share God's own horror at it" and "[w]e care too little about this world we live in."

(2) The fact God knows how to hold the unrighteous for punishment until his chosen time, until in the day of judgment, means that no ungodly people will avoid judgment, even if they die before the Lord returns. None of them will slip through the judgment net, however long it takes for that day to come. He adds that this is especially true of those who indulge the flesh in lust and despise authority, referring to the false teachers. So again, there is every reason for his audience to continue to resist the false teachers' encouragement to immoral living.

c. The examples of God's judgment of the ungodly in the flood and in the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah are well known biblical occurrences, but his casting of sinning angels into Tartarus to be held for judgment in v. 4 is not described in Scripture. Since Peter assumes his audience knows and accepts this story, it must be a story of some notoriety and weight.

(1) Some believe Peter is referring to the initial fall of Satan and other angels who chose to rebel against God. But even if one can read a fall of Satan out of Isa. 14:12-20 and Ezek. 28:1-19, which is doubtful, and can infer a fall from the existence of demons (fallen angels) in what originally was a very good creation, it is much more likely in the context of first-century Judaism that Peter is referring to a subset of the *fallen* angels, those fallen angels who were confined to Tartarus in distinction from those fallen angels who were not.

(2) Michael Green states, "Tartarus, in Greek mythology, was the place of punishment for the departed spirits of the very wicked, particularly rebellious gods like Tantalus. Just as Paul could quote an apt verse of the pagan poet

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<sup>50</sup> Moo, 118.

Aratus (Acts 17:28), so could Peter make use of this Homeric imagery."<sup>51</sup> The word was used in the LXX of Job 40:20 and Prov. 30:16 for some kind of netherworld or realm of spirits.<sup>52</sup>

(3) As the vast majority of commentators conclude, Peter probably is alluding to a traditional Jewish understanding and elaboration of Gen. 6:1-4. According to that understanding, the "sons of God" refers to certain angels who married and procreated with human women and who consequently were confined to a dreadful spiritual realm awaiting final judgment.

(a) This was a widespread (but not uniform) understanding of that text in first-century Judaism. It is frequently reflected in extrabiblical Jewish literature of the period, most extensively in *1 Enoch*, which book is expressly cited by Jude in vv. 14-15.

(b) Since Jude without question knew *1 Enoch* and speaks in v. 6 of an angelic judgment that is consistent with *1 Enoch*, he very likely shared *1 Enoch's* understanding that Gen. 6:1-4 involved angels who sinned. Schreiner adds, "It is unlikely that Peter veered off in another direction from Jude, for regardless of the question of literary dependence, it is obvious that Jude and 2 Peter both drew from common tradition in some form."<sup>53</sup>

(c) If the angelic sin to which Peter refers is based on the popular Jewish understanding of Gen. 6:1-4, then the examples are given in the order in which they appear in Genesis: angelic sin (Gen. 6:1-4), the flood (Gen. 6:5-8:22), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).

(d) Peter's wording echoes the language of the popular Jewish understanding. For example, *1 Enoch* 10:4 speaks of binding a disobedient angel hand and foot and throwing him "into the darkness."

(e) The dominant view in the early church was that Gen. 6:1-4 referred to angels who had sinned. According to Sydney H. T. Page, this view was held by Justin Martyr (c. 100-c.165), Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Tertullian (c.160-c.225), Lactantius (c.240-c.320), and Ambrose (c.339-c.397). He states, "This view held the field in the East until early in the third century, when it was rejected by Julius Africanus (c.160-c.240), and in the West until much later."<sup>54</sup>

(3) If Peter is indeed referring to this popular understanding of Gen. 6:1-4 in first-century Judaism, it does not mean that he (or Jude) endorses all of that understanding. He speaks only of the angels' sin and their punishment and thus may

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<sup>51</sup> M. Green, 110.

<sup>52</sup> Davids, 226.

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, 402.

<sup>54</sup> Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 47.

only be endorsing that angels married and procreated with human women and are held for final judgment in an unpleasant spiritual realm as a consequence of doing so. He by inspiration acknowledges that those aspects of the extrabiblical tradition are correct, which is all he needed for his point. He says nothing about how the angels executed their sin and nothing about their offspring being giants or their sin being responsible for the flood.

(4) Angels procreating with human women certainly strikes us as bizarre. God sometimes dispatches *faithful* angels in human form, but unless Gen. 6:1-4 is an exception, demons, fallen angels, never in Scripture become or appear to become physical so as to be visible to all.

a. The serpent in the Garden was clearly animated by Satan, the prince of demons, but the serpent was one of the wild animals God had made (Gen. 3:1). The only other times Satan or demons are seen are in visions (Zech. 3:1; Mat. 4:9-10; Rev. 9, 12:7-9, 16:12-16, 18:1-3), and the only time we are told anything of their appearance is in Revelation 9 (nightmarish locusts and fiendish cavalry), 12 (Satan portrayed as a great red dragon), and 16:12-16 (frogs).

b. In the popular Jewish understanding of Gen. 6:1-4, the fallen angels took human form, but neither Peter nor Jude says anything about that aspect of the tradition. It is possible that the fallen angels married human women and procreated with them by possessing human males rather than by materialization. Perhaps that was sufficient to satisfy their lust for the women, which lust is implied in Gen. 6:2 (the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive). Page remarks, "The New Testament portrays demons as longing to possess human bodies, and one could understand what happened in Genesis 6 in terms of spirit possession."<sup>55</sup> William Cook states:

Admittedly, these passages don't provide a definitive answer as to how spiritual beings could have sexual relations with women. But in light of examples we see in the New Testament, it seems best to assume that these evil spirits took possession of the bodies of wicked men and used them for their own sinful purposes.

The New Testament gives us clear examples of demons – and even Satan himself – indwelling human beings and causing them to act in horrific ways.<sup>56</sup>

(5) Jesus' indication in Mat. 22:30 that angels in heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage does not necessarily conflict with the angel understanding of Gen. 6:1-4. He may be referring only to faithful angels rather than fallen ones, may be referring only to what happens in heaven rather than on earth, or may be referring only to actions not carried out through possession of human beings.

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<sup>55</sup> Page, 49.

<sup>56</sup> William F. Cook, "[Who Are the Sons of God in Genesis 6?](#)" (January 6, 2020), accessed on 3/23/22.

(6) As I noted in teaching 1 Peter, accepting this view of Gen. 6:1-4 does not require one to conclude that 1 Pet. 3:19-20 refers to a declaration made to these imprisoned angels. As Wayne Grudem states:

Our understanding of this point is not crucial, for one could be convinced that Peter's readers all thought that Genesis 6:2, 4 referred to fallen angels who took human wives and still hold that 1 Peter 3:19-20 spoke of human beings who disobeyed during the building of the ark. (Peter does not, of course, say 'he preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed by marrying human women' but rather 'spirits . . . who disobeyed when the ark was being built'.)<sup>57</sup>

### 3. Sins of the false teachers (2:10b-16)

**Brazen, arrogant men, they do not tremble when they revile glories,<sup>11</sup> whereas angels, though being greater in strength and power, do not bring against them a reviling judgment before [the] Lord.<sup>12</sup> But these men, like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct born for capture and destruction, reviling [those] about whom they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction,<sup>13</sup> suffering harm as wages of unrighteousness. Considering indulgence in the daytime a pleasure, [they are] blots and blemishes, indulging in their pleasures while feasting with you,<sup>14</sup> having eyes full of [desire for] an adulteress and that do not cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having hearts trained in greed, [they are] accursed children!<sup>15</sup> Abandoning [the] straight way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam son of Bosor who loved [the] wages of unrighteousness<sup>16</sup> but had a rebuke for his own transgression: a speechless donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the prophet's madness.**

a. The false teachers are so arrogant that they do not fear when they blaspheme or revile "glories," meaning when they mock, ridicule, belittle, or speak contemptuously of them.

b. It seems clear, as most commentators recognize, that "glories" refers to some kind of angelic being. Though angels are not referred to as "glories" in the OT, they are linked with glory and actually called glories in some extrabiblical Jewish texts.<sup>58</sup> It is less clear, however, whether Peter is referring to fallen, evil angels (demons) or to good angels. Some think fallen angels could not qualify for the label "glories," but perhaps, as many believe, that label reflects the glory of their original state rather than their present condition.

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<sup>57</sup> Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 212.

<sup>58</sup> See Moo, 121 (fn. 4).

c. In Jude 8-9 the archangel Michael is contrasted with the false teachers in that they "revile glories" whereas he refused to bring a "reviling judgment" against *Satan*, saying instead, "The Lord rebuke you." Given the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude, the statement in 2 Pet. 2:11 that angels do not bring a reviling judgment against "them" most likely means that angels do not bring a reviling judgment against *fallen angels*, of which Satan is the chief. That means that "glories" in 2 Pet. 2:10b refers to fallen angels.

d. So I think Peter is saying in 2:10b-11 that the false teachers are so cocky in their error that they react to warnings that their immorality is playing into the hands of the spiritual forces of evil by scoffing at the idea and speaking of demons in skeptical, mocking, and scornful terms. The recklessness of this arrogance is evident in the fact that, even though good angels are more powerful than demons (e.g., Rev. 12:7-8), they still have respect for their power (and perhaps the greatness of the station from which they have fallen) and thus do not speak contemptuously or insultingly of them.<sup>59</sup> They oppose them but do not underestimate them.

e. Though they see themselves as the epitome of rationality and insight, they are, in their ignorant dismissal and reviling of evil spiritual powers, acting like unreasoning animals, creatures of mere instinct that lack the intelligence to avoid capture and destruction. As wages of their unrighteousness, they are going to join the demons in their destruction.<sup>60</sup>

f. The false teachers are so shameless that they have no qualms about indulging their sinful appetites in broad daylight. They are "blots and blemishes" in the church, living in sin while continuing to "feast" with the church.

(1) This is probably a reference to the early Christian "love feast," which Jude mentions explicitly in v. 12 and which is presupposed in Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. The love feast was a fellowship meal in conjunction with which the church often celebrated the Lord's Supper proper, meaning the symbolic bread and fruit of the vine.

(2) The love feast was a permissible rather than a commanded practice. It was separated from the Supper by the second century and then eventually dropped, at least as a regular practice.

(3) In 3:14 Peter exhorts his audience to be the opposite of the false teachers. Whereas the false teachers are "blots and blemishes," they are to strive to be found "spotless and blameless" by God.

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<sup>59</sup> The translation "before [the] Lord" at the end of v. 11 assumes *παρὰ κυρίου* is the original reading (see NET note).

<sup>60</sup> With Bauckham (p. 263-264), I take *en hois agnoousin blasphemountes* in v. 12 as a reference to the glories in v. 10 ("the masculine *οἷς* is natural despite the fact that *δόξαι* is feminine"; see also NET) and understand "their destruction" at the end of that verse as a reference to the destruction of those evil powers.

g. The false teachers have eyes full of desire for an adulteress and that do not cease from sin. They were always on the hunt for the next partner in adultery, constantly viewing women from that perspective.

h. But they not only were immoral; they were through their teaching actively enticing or seducing the spiritually unstable to join them in their sin. They offered a theological rationale for their lawless living.

i. The false teachers have hearts *trained* in greed, meaning they had worked at developing hearts that desired without proper restraint, hearts that put money (2:3) and sexual pleasure above God. They are accursed children, meaning they are destined for condemnation.

j. These heretics follow Balaam's way of disobedience to God for the sake of financial profit. He gave advice on how to lure the Israelites into sexual immorality at Baal Peor (Num. 25:1-3, 31:7-8, 15-16), which effort was linked in Jewish tradition to his greed.<sup>61</sup> Jesus describes Balaam to John in Rev. 2:14 as one "who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality." The false teachers were likewise seeking to lure the church into sexual immorality, presumably also motivated by financial gain.

(1) The tradition of Balaam's greed may be rooted in Numbers 22, which contains hints that he was motivated by the hope of financial gain.

(a) According to Walter Kaiser, God's permission to Balaam in v. 20 was conditioned on the *emissaries* coming to Balaam (rather than Balaam going to them) after Balaam told them in v. 19 to stay for the night. In other words, God told Balaam that *if* the emissaries sought him out again (instead of leaving in disgust) after being put off when Balaam told them he needed to consult the Lord, *then* he could go with them. (For this view, v. 20 is translated as in the NKJV: "If the men come to call you, rise *and* go with them.") But instead of waiting for that condition (the emissaries coming once more to him), Balaam took the initiative in v. 21 and rose to go with the emissaries. Perhaps Balaam feared the emissaries would not return and was not willing to give up all hope of financial gain in the situation. There are indications that Balaam was torn: he failed to mention in Num. 22:13 God's reason for refusing to let him go and curse Israel (that Israel was blessed - Num. 22:12) and he continued to press God for permission when it had been clearly denied. We know that he later succumbed to the temptation to harm Israel (Num. 31:7-8, 15-16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14).<sup>62</sup>

(b) Despite Balaam's disobedience, God in his mercy did not kill him. Instead, he allowed the donkey to see the angel. This donkey possessed sounder prophetic vision than the prophet whose moral sense had been perverted by greed or other impure motives. In that encounter, the angel warned Balaam in 22:35 that he must

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<sup>61</sup> E.g., G. Green, 285.

<sup>62</sup> Walter Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 88-91.

speak only what he was told, and having been chastened, he refused to curse Israel but instead blessed them four times.

(2) Peter's reference to Balaam as "son of *Bosor*" rather than "son of *Beor*" probably is a word play derived from the Hebrew word for "flesh" (*basar*). Balaam was not a man of the Spirit but a man of the flesh, which is true of the false teachers.

#### **4. Warning against false teachers by elaborating on their fate (2:17-22)**

**<sup>17</sup>These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup>For while uttering high-sounding [words] of nonsense, they entice with lusts of [the] flesh, acts of licentiousness, those who are barely escaping from those who live in error, <sup>19</sup>promising them freedom while themselves being slaves of corruption – for by what someone has been overcome, to this he has become enslaved. <sup>20</sup>For if, after escaping the pollutions of the world by [the] knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are overcome by again becoming entangled in these things, the last [state] has become worse for them [than] the first. <sup>21</sup>For it was better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing [it] to turn from the holy commandment that had been passed on to them. <sup>22</sup>It has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to its own vomit and a sow, after being washed, to wallowing in the mud."**

a. Peter describes the false teachers as waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. Both metaphors describe circumstances that suggest the provision of refreshing and life-giving water but which prove false and thus are bitterly disappointing. Mists driven by a storm probably refers to mists that are dissipated or blown away by winds without producing any rainfall. Schreiner states, "The mists promise water that is so desperately needed in a dry climate, but the wind sweeps through and drives the hazy mists away, leaving the land parched."<sup>63</sup> The false teachers promise the refreshing and life-giving truth of God, but whoever is drawn to them will be bitterly disappointed.

b. He describes the judgment that is in store for them as "the gloom of darkness." They will for eternity suffer in a dreadful environment away from the presence of God and all that is good. Other texts, of course, portray that judgment in terms of fire. Both depictions are true because neither is intended to be a literal description but a picture that communicates the truth of suffering and dreadfulness.

c. They will endure that fate because they are opposing God by luring immature Christians, those barely escaping the pull of the world, into a lifestyle of

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<sup>63</sup> Schreiner, 426.

sexual sin. They promise them freedom, meaning freedom from moral restraints, but the reality and irony is that they themselves are enslaved to sin, to moral corruption, especially to their sinful sexual appetites. They are preaching freedom to others while being unable to extricate themselves from sin.

d. The false teachers probably supported their case for freedom from moral restraints by denying Christ's return and the future judgment associated with it (3:3-7) and by distorting Paul's gospel of freedom (3:15-16). Their appeal was wrapped in high-sounding nonsense, which too often is able to draw the gullible.

e. Peter elaborates further on their condemnation by explaining that their repudiation of their conversion to Christ by returning to the sinful lifestyle from which they escaped at the time of their conversion makes them worse off than those who never converted. It would have been better for them never to have converted, never to have entered the way of righteousness, than to have converted and turned from the holy commandment, the call to walk in faithfulness to Christ. Their situation is worse than one who never converted because they will for eternity know that they had once been saved, had once known the love and mercy of the Savior, but chose to abandon that precious state for the fleeting glitter of sin.

f. The false teachers are examples of a proverbial statement that was a modification and expansion of the first part of Prov. 26:11: "A dog returns to its own vomit and a sow, after being washed, to wallowing in the mud." In returning to the moral corruption of the world after having been cleansed by Christ and delivered from that filth, they are like a dog returning to its vomit and a washed sow wallowing in the mud. That is getting pretty high on the rebuke scale!

## C. Hold fast to the promise of Christ's return (3:1-13)

### 1. The false teachers deny the return of Christ (3:1-7)

**This [is] now, beloved, [the] second letter I am writing to you in which I arouse your pure intention with a reminder <sup>2</sup>to remember the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the command of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. <sup>3</sup>Know this first [of all] that in the last days scoffers will come with scoffing, proceeding according to their own lusts <sup>4</sup>and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For from which [time] the fathers fell asleep, everything continues as from [the] beginning of creation!" <sup>5</sup>For this is concealed [from] them wishing [concealment], that by the word of God [the] heavens existed long ago and [the] earth was formed from water and through water, <sup>6</sup>through which things the world then [existing], having been deluged with water, perished. <sup>7</sup>And by the same word the present heavens and earth have**



**been reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

a. Peter mentions that this is his second letter to them. His first letter may well have been 1 Peter, but it is possible that he is alluding to a letter that God chose not to preserve, like the letter to which Paul refers in 1 Cor. 5:9.

b. Peter wants to arouse their pure intention by having them recall the prophetic word about the Messiah's coming in judgment, to which he referred in 1:19-21, and having them recall Christ's insistence that they live righteously as his disciples, which command "their" apostles had passed on to them.

(1) As Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, those who are participants in God's revolutionary activity on earth, those who have submitted to the reign of the King, are to live lives that reflect his righteousness.

(2) The reference to "*your* apostles" is to the particular apostles who evangelized and taught his audience, as distinct from the full set of apostles. This apparently included Paul, but the reference does not necessarily exclude Peter.

c. He indicates that they are seeing in the false teachers a fulfillment of earlier predictions that mockers would arise in the last days. New Testament writers emphasized that the last days had begun with Christ's redemptive work.

(1) Peter explained in Acts 2:16-17 that what was happening at Pentecost was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that the prophet Joel promised would occur "*in the last days*." The "last days" is the prelude, the runway, to the final state. It is the era between Christ's first coming and his return, between the inauguration of the kingdom of God and its consummation in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:18; Jude 18).

(2) The writer of Hebrews declares in Heb. 1:1-2, "Having long ago spoken to the fathers many times and in many ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>*in these last days* God spoke to us by [the] Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the universe."

d. These false teachers were people who, while indulging their own lusts, scoffed at the idea of Christ's return in judgment. These two things go together: indulging lusts and scoffing at divine judgment.

e. They asserted that the physical world had always been characterized by continuity and stability and thus that it was foolish to expect the kind of radical transformation of the world that was taught would occur in conjunction with Christ's return.

f. Because of their desire for sin, they chose to be unaware or unappreciative of the fact God by his word previously had a dramatic effect on the physical world.

(1) By that word he brought into being the heavens and formed the earth/land (*gē*) from water and by water in the sense he made the dry land appear from under the water by gathering the waters into a place called seas (Gen. 1:9-10). In Gen. 1:10 God calls the dry ground that he caused to appear from under the water "earth" or "land" (LXX *gē*). Peter probably is emphasizing water in the creation account because of the following clause dealing with the flood which reverses the process of making land.

(2) And through that same word and water, the world of Noah's day perished in the flood. So it is not the case that this world has always "rocked on" without major upheaval through divine intervention.

g. The same mighty word that dramatically affected the physical world in the past has reserved the present heavens and earth for fire in the day of judgment at Christ's return. At that time, creation will pass through a purifying transformation; it will be "heavenized" as depicted in Rev. 21:1-4 to become the eternal dwelling of God and all the redeemed.

## **2. Christ will certainly return with cosmically transforming results (3:8-10)**

**<sup>8</sup>But do not let this one thing be concealed [from] you, beloved, that with [the] Lord one day [is] like a thousand years and a thousand years [are] like one day. <sup>9</sup>[The] Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some regard slowness, but is patient toward you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup>But [the] day of [the] Lord will come like a thief, at which [time] the heavens will pass away with a roar, and [the] elements will be dissolved by being burned up, and the earth and the works in it will be exposed.**

a. Peter cautions his readers not to allow the apparent slowness of Christ's return to become a cause for doubting the certainty of it. He tells them that God operates from his own perspective of time – with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day – so that he cannot be judged by human perceptions of slowness. Moo remarks, "God views the passage of time from a different perspective than we do. We are impatient, getting disturbed and upset by even a short delay; God is patient, willing to let centuries and even millennia go by as he works out his purposes."<sup>64</sup>

b. The Lord is not slow in fulfilling the promise of Christ's return in the sense the passage of decades (and now millennia) does not have the connotation that the

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<sup>64</sup> Moo, 186.

false teachers apparently attached to it. God is not slow concerning the promise *as they regard slowness*, as they interpret his not having already sent Jesus back. Rather than indicating an intent to leave things as they are, it is a reflection of God's deep concern for human beings. "For in God's patience, he is waiting for people to repent before it is too late. He does not want 'anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'"<sup>65</sup>

c. However long God chooses to wait before sending Jesus, he is definitely going to send him. Peter emphasizes that certainty by placing the verb "will come" at the beginning of the sentence in v. 10. God is patient, but the day of the Lord will come, and it will come "like a thief," meaning at a time not specified beforehand.

d. At Christ's return, creation will get the ultimate makeover, passing through a purifying fire (3:7). The heavens as presently constituted will pass away with the roar of a cosmic conflagration, and the elements,<sup>66</sup> the stuff of which the physical things in this world is made, will be burned up. Somewhere in connection with that process, all that has transpired on the earth will be exposed,<sup>67</sup> laid bare, before God in the judgment.

### **3. Living righteously in light of Christ's transforming return (3:11-13)**

**<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are thus being dissolved, what sort of [people] ought you to be with regard to holy forms of conduct and godly deeds <sup>12</sup>while awaiting and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which [the] heavens will be dissolved by being set on fire and [the] elements will melt by being burned? <sup>13</sup>But, in accordance with his promise, we are awaiting a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

a. Given the certainty of the final, history-ending judgment he has just described, what kind of people should they be with regard to godly living as they expectantly wait for and hasten that day?

(1) The question is, of course, rhetorical. The understood answer is that they are to live godly lives, lives that reflect their allegiance to God, so as to be on the desirable side of that judgment. Living by the standards of this fallen world is a fool's move because it is aligning oneself with the old age or order that is doomed to destruction.

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<sup>65</sup> Moo, 187.

<sup>66</sup> With many commentators (e.g., Moo, Schreiner, Neyrey) and with most English translations, I take στοιχεῖα here to mean "elements" rather than "heavenly bodies" or "spiritual beings."

<sup>67</sup> With NIV, NRSV, ESV, and NET, I accept *heurethēsetai* ("will be found") as the original text and per Bauckham understand it as virtually equivalent to "will be disclosed" or "will be manifested." Other translations (KJV, ASV, NAS, RSV, NJB) assume *katakaēsetai* is the original text and thus read "will (or shall) be burned up."

(2) Peter does not explain how disciples can hasten the coming of the day of God while they await it. My guess is that he has in mind the endurance of the persecution and suffering that come with living for God in this sinful world. (Remember that he is about to be executed, and 1 Peter, which may have been written to these same Christians, says much about enduring persecution for the faith.)

(a) It seems from Rev. 6:9-11 that there is a predetermined quantity of Christian suffering that will occur before Christ's return. So with each episode of Christian persecution there is that much less of the set quantity of righteous suffering to be experienced, and thus the day of judgment draws closer to that extent.

(b) I think this lies behind the exhortation in Heb. 10:25 to encourage one another *all the more as they see the Day approaching*. They see the day of judgment drawing nearer each time they see Christians suffer for their faith, so the writer is telling them to be more diligent in encouraging the saints as they see them experience hardships.

(c) This almost certainly is the idea behind Paul's statement in Col. 1:24, "Now I rejoice in the sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church, . . ."

[1] Obviously Paul's filling a deficiency in "Christ's afflictions" does not mean that Christ's death lacks anything in atoning or reconciling efficacy (see Col. 1:20, 22). Rather, "Christ's afflictions" refers to what in Jewish apocalyptic literature was called the "woes (or birthpangs) of the Messiah."

[2] The Jewish idea was that the Messianic Age would be preceded immediately by the suffering of God's people. This concept continues in the NT, but it is modified. The "coming age" already has been inaugurated, but it overlaps with the "present age." This dual state will continue until Christ's return. The woes of the Messiah, the afflictions of Christ, continue as the sufferings of his people (Acts 9:4) throughout this dual age until they reach their *appointed limit*. Then Christ will return, consummating the "age to come."

[3] Paul rejoices because his bodily sufferings contribute to the total of sufferings to be endured before the consummation of the age to come. By helping to fill up this predetermined measure, Paul brings the end so much closer. By personally absorbing a disproportionate share of the affliction of Christ, the predetermined measure of suffering the righteous must endure, he reduced the amount of suffering left for fellow Christians.

b. The new heavens and new earth that will come through this purifying fire is described as a reality in which righteousness dwells, which implies the exclusion of the false teachers and their followers. Moo comments:

We live in a world where wrong often prevails; a world in which faithful Christians are often persecuted for doing God's will, while evil people enjoy the rewards of their sin; a world in which innocent lives are ripped from wombs and God's laws are flaunted [sic] and mocked. All that will be eradicated in the next world. As John puts it in Revelation 21:3-4:

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.<sup>68</sup>

c. Rather than annihilating the first heaven and earth and replacing it with something entirely new, the idea is that the first heaven and earth will be reduced to another form by fire and then reconstituted as something radically different. It is analogous to the transformation of our bodies in the resurrection; there is both continuity and discontinuity between the seed and what God brings out of that seed (see 1 Corinthians 15).

(1) The continuity aspect is suggested by Jesus' reference in Mat. 19:28 to the "renewal of all things," by Peter's comment in Acts 3:21 that God would "restore everything," and by Paul's statement in Rom. 8:21 that creation would be liberated from its "slavery to decay."

(2) It is also suggested in many Jewish apocalyptic writings. Bauckham says of the relevant Jewish and Christian literature, "Such passages emphasize the radical discontinuity between the old and the new, but it is nevertheless clear that they intend to describe a renewal, not an abolition, of creation (cf. 1 Enoch 54:4-5; Rom 8:21)."<sup>69</sup>

### *III. Closing – Strive to live right and be on guard against the false teachers (3:14-18)*

**<sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, since [you are] awaiting these things, strive to be found spotless and blameless by him, at peace, <sup>15</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord [as] salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, <sup>16</sup>as indeed [he does] in all [his] letters, speaking in them about these things. In them are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist (as [they] also [do] the other scriptures) to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, since you already know this, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of lawless men, you fall from your own stable position. <sup>18</sup>But grow in [the] grace and knowledge of our**

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<sup>68</sup> Moo, 200.

<sup>69</sup> Bauckham, 326.

**Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] the glory both now and to [the] day of eternity. Amen.**

A. Since they are looking forward to Christ's return and the things associated with it, they need to live in light of that expectation. In Moo's words, "They need constantly to look beyond the circumstances of this life and to gauge every thought and every action in light of the eternal state that Christ's return in glory will introduce."<sup>70</sup>

1. Specifically, they need to strive to be found spotless and blameless by God on that day. Moo states:

Peter's point is clear: Motivated by the Day of the Lord that is coming, believers should work hard to be found perfectly pure and blameless when God in Christ assesses their lives. They should strive to be the opposite of the false teachers, who are "blots and blemishes" (2:13). Remember, however, that this is a goal we are to strive for, not a condition that we will finally be able to achieve. For the New Testament makes clear that the believers will always have sin to confess (1 John 1:8) and that our struggle with sin will never finally end until our bodies themselves are "redeemed" (see Rom. 8:23). But this realization should not diminish our sincere effort to get as close to that goal as possible.<sup>71</sup>

2. In other words, they are to strive to be found at peace with God, meaning to be found living in submission to him rather than in rebellion against him. They must guard against the false teachers' lie that it does not matter how one lives.

B. They are to regard the patience of our Lord, which 3:9 makes clear refers to the time he waits before bringing the final judgment, as salvation. They are to recognize the time before Christ's consummating return as an opportunity to repent of rebellion into which they may have been drawn by the false teachers. Regarding the time before the final judgment as salvation also may imply a responsibility to bring others to a knowledge of Christ while the door is still open.

C. He notes that Paul, whom he calls "our dear brother," also had written to them about the need to live holy lives in light of Christ's coming. He probably cites Paul's agreement because some were distorting Paul's teaching (v. 16), presumably twisting his views on salvation by grace and turning them into a license to sin.

1. We do not know the letter to which Peter is referring, other than that it was directed to his audience, but as Moo states, "Paul touches on this subject in virtually every letter he wrote."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Moo, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Moo, 208.

<sup>72</sup> Moo, 210.

2. Peter notes that Paul wrote to them according to the wisdom given to him, meaning given to him by God. It is recognition of God's working through Paul in the things Paul wrote. He adds that Paul writes by that divine wisdom in all his letters and speaks in them about these things, about holy living in light of Christ's return. Peter is referring to all Paul's letters that he had seen, not necessarily to all letters Paul had written.

3. He says that Paul wrote some things that are hard to understand, probably meaning that some of his statements easily could be misunderstood if removed from their context. In other words, Paul wrote things that when isolated from their context seemed to mean something Paul never intended. Indeed, his own letters document people twisting his words (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:12, "Everything is permissible for me"; Rom. 3:8, 6:1). James also was probably dealing with this phenomenon in Jas. 2:14-26.

4. Peter labels those who so twist Paul's teaching as "the ignorant and unstable," no doubt referring to the false teachers, whom he referred to in 2:14 as "unstable." They apparently cited Paul in support of their error, perhaps twisting his teaching on grace into a license for immorality.

5. Peter says their twisting of Paul's writings was in keeping with how they twist the *other scriptures*, so he clearly recognizes Paul's writings as having a status equal to that of the Old Testament scriptures. The end of these scripture-twisting false teachers will be condemnation in the final judgment. Moo states, "As a metaphor for judgment, the word [destruction] does not carry the literal meaning of 'annihilate' or 'cease to exist' but, with 'salvation' as its opposite (2 Cor. 2:15), denotes the eternal loss of fellowship with God (see also John 12:25; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18; 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10)."<sup>73</sup>

D. Since they know the certainty of the coming final judgment, the kind of lives they should live in light of that judgment, and the fate of those who deny those truths, they must be on their guard so as not to be carried away by the false teachers and fall from their stable position.

E. Rather than being pulled away by the error of the false teachers, they are to grow spiritually, grow in their responsiveness to Christ's transforming grace and in their knowledge of him.

F. He ends with a doxology, an expression of praise, directed to the Lord Jesus. May he have the glory both now and in the day of eternity that will arrive with his return.

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<sup>73</sup> Moo, 93.