

At the end of chapter 1 Peter described how that God spoke through His prophets to write the Old Testament scriptures. He now warns his readers that just as there were also false prophets present in those days, there would continue to be false teachers today who will lead people away from the truth.

¹ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

“But there were false prophets also among the people” - While God was speaking through His prophets, there were also men who claimed to be speaking for God but had their own agenda and were speaking their own ideas. Not everyone who claims to be a prophet is sent by God.

“even as there shall be false teachers among you” - Satan is always at work trying to deceive and so just as he was working back then to deceive the people, so he will continue to send his false teachers to lead people away from the truth and into destruction.

“who privily [secretly or craftily] shall bring in damnable [destructive] heresies [self-chosen]” - These false teachers will not introduce their false teachings openly, but will do so gradually and “under the radar” so that many will not recognize the falsehoods that are being mixed in with the truth. Peter calls them “damnable” (destructive) heresies. Their teachings are destructive (or lead to destruction) because they lead people away from the salvation found in the gospel. The word for “heresies” carries the idea that these false teachers are choosing their own ideas and opinions over the truth of the gospel. They think they are too smart to believe the teachings of scripture and have superior ideas, a behavior consistent with the characteristics that Peter describes them to have in v. 10 (presumptuous and self-willed).

“even denying the Lord that bought them” - These false teachers pretend to follow Christ and yet their actions deny that Christ is their Lord. Christ died on the cross to purchase their salvation and yet they deny their need for Him to have borne their sins on the cross. These denials may be subtle but an examination of their teachings reveals that they do not depend on the cross for their salvation.

“and bring upon themselves swift destruction” - This doesn’t necessarily mean that their destruction will begin swiftly but that when God is ready to judge them, then their destruction will be swift. God handles things in His own time, as Peter later describes in chapter 3 where he deals with the skeptics who scoff at the idea of Christ’s return since it had been (in Peter’s day) decades since His death on the cross.

² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

“And many shall follow their pernicious [destructive] ways” - These false teachers will gain many followers, likely because their sinful ways and liberal interpretations of scripture will appeal to people who do not want to repent of their sins. However, sin always leads to destruction. Some commentators point out that many Greek manuscripts substitute the word “lascivious” (lewd or sensuous) instead of “pernicious” in this verse, which would be consistent with Peter’s description of their behavior later in this chapter.

“by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of [blasphemed]” - These that have followed the ways of these false teachers will blaspheme the truth that they have rejected as they perpetuate the false teachings. Also many unbelievers will see the hypocrisy and ungodly lifestyle of these false teachers and their followers and will come away with an unfavorable impression of Christianity, blaming the gospel of Jesus Christ for the behavior of these false teachers and their followers.

³ And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

“And through covetousness [greed] shall they with feigned words [formed; lies] make merchandise of you” - Peter reveals the true motivation of these false teachers: money. Their primary concern is not in teaching the truth for the benefit of their followers but to get whatever gain they can from them. This reminds us of some TV preachers whose teaching revolves around whatever “sales pitch” it takes to get people to send money to their ministry. The Greek word for “feigned words” refers to forming something out of clay or other mouldable material. They form their words to fit the occasion in order to serve themselves.

“whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not [is not idle], and their damnation [destruction] slumbereth not” - Just because God is delaying judgment on these false teachers doesn’t mean that His judgment has become idle or ineffective. Peter personifies their destruction as an executioner that has not fallen asleep on the job. We can imagine this executioner patiently sharpening his ax and making any other preparations needed for the day when he is allowed to perform his duties as an executioner. The judgment of these false teachers is waiting for the proper day to arrive and then their destruction will be swift.

Verses 4-8: In order to make his point that these false teachers will not escape judgment, Peter lists three OT examples of God’s judgment illustrating how the judgment of the wicked is often reserved for a later time, but God always preserves the righteous: (1) angels that sinned are reserved for judgment at a later time; (2) Noah and his family are preserved after God waited 120 years to judge the world; (3) God allows Lot to be vexed for a period of time before judging Sodom and Gomorrah. Oftentimes God delays the judgment of the wicked in order to prepare for the deliverance of the righteous, as He did for Noah and his family during the flood and Lot in the city of Sodom.

⁹ The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations [trials; testing]” - The examples Peter cited in verses 4-8 are evidence for the conclusion he draws here: God knows how to preserve His people in the midst of the trials of this world while preparing to judge the wicked.

“and to reserve [guard; keep] the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” - At the same time He’s preserving His people, God is also keeping tabs on the wicked so that when the day of judgment arrives, they can be punished according to their sins. The wicked may think they are getting away with their sins in this life but God will ensure that they will not escape judgment. God knows what He is doing.

¹⁰ But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. ¹¹ Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

“But chiefly [especially; above all] them” - God’s wrath is especially reserved to those who commit a particular group of sins.

“that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness [defilement]” - These false teachers crave sins that involve the defilement of the flesh. The more perverted it is, the more they like it.

“and despise government [dominion; lordship]” - The word used for government is related to the word often used for “Lord” when referring to Jesus Christ. At best that means that they do not like being told what to do and therefore despise any authority over them. At worst, they do not like the idea of Jesus Christ being their Lord because that would mean they would have to obey Him.

“Presumptuous [bold; daring] are they, selfwilled” - Rather than submitting themselves to authority, they are bold in their defiance and self-importance, stubbornly doing their own will rather than obeying God’s word or any other authority.

“they are not afraid to speak evil [blaspheme] of dignities [glorious things]” - The Greek word for “dignities” is translated “glory” or “glorious” in most other places it occurs in the NT. Peter seems to be saying that these false teachers are quick to blaspheme entities (such as Satan and demonic spirits) in the spiritual realm rather than being humble about things over which they have no authority and are beyond their understanding. This interpretation is borne out by Peter’s next statement.

“Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord” - Peter contrasts the false teachers, who are mere human beings, with angels who are greater in power and might. Even the angels, who are in a better position to confront Satan and his demons, do not do so for they understand that they lack the authority. Yet these false teachers arrogantly think that they can. Jude expands on this in his parallel passage in **Jude 8, 9**: *“⁸ Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”*

¹² But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; ¹³ And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

“But these, as natural brute [destitute of reason] beasts, made to be taken and destroyed” - In contrast to angels, who are supernatural beings, the false teachers are like natural dumb animals, which God has given to us to use (“taken and destroyed”). Peter is putting the false teachers in their place, bringing them down from their lofty pedestal that they have placed themselves.

“speak evil of [blaspheme] the things that they understand not” - They arrogantly act like they know what they are talking about but they have no clue as to what they are blaspheming in the spiritual realm. It is “above their pay grade.”

“and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” - Like the brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, that Peter compares them to, these false teachers are destined for destruction as a result of their own sin.

“And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot [indulge the flesh] in the day time” - These false teachers claim to be men of God and yet they will share in the same punishments as those that choose to engage in sinful fleshly indulgences during the day, of which they are also guilty. To commit such sins during the day without the cover of darkness was considered to be low-level wickedness in Roman society. These men are exposing the wickedness of their own hearts.

“Spots they are and blemishes, sporting [reveling; indulging] themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you” - These people are embarrassments to godly people during church gatherings as they engage in their sinful behavior even while they socialize with God’s people at fellowship meals.

¹⁴ Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

“Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin” - The sinfulness of their hearts will become apparent as they cannot behave themselves in any context. They have wandering eyes, checking out the women with lust in their hearts.

“beguiling unstable souls” - People who aren’t grounded in the word of God can easily fall prey to their religious talk and be deceived.

“an heart they have exercised with covetous practices” - Their heart has become trained through repeated use (exercise) to seek out opportunities to satisfy their greedy desires.

“cursed children” - This is a Hebrew expression literally meaning “children of the curse.” The idea is that these people are destined to die in their sins for they have rejected the truth.

¹⁵ Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶ But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Peter illustrates the waywardness of these false teachers by referring to the OT prophet Balaam, who allowed his greed to lead him to destruction. God rebuked the prophet by having Balaam’s donkey speak to prevent him from following his insane plan to disobey God and curse Israel.

¹⁷ These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

“These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest” - Peter uses imagery of two things that look like sources of water (a precious commodity in the Middle East) but fail to deliver. False teachers promise spiritual blessings but their teachings bring only ruin.

“to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever” - A description of hell. **Matt. 8:12** *“But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* A place in hell is reserved for those who lead others away from the truth of the gospel.