

The Book of 2 Peter Study Guide

Chapter 2

Having warned in the previous chapter about “cleverly devised tales,” and affirmed that “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,” Peter now addresses the rise of false teachers in the midst of the congregations in the part of the Roman Empire that is modern Turkey.

2:1-3

- v 1 Peter shows that just as false prophets existed in Israel's history, counterfeit teachers will slip into the believing community unnoticed. They introduce divisive, damaging errors that undermine true faith. Peter writes that they “deny the Master who bought them.” That phrase only appears in a similar fashion one other place in Scripture. As part of Moses’ farewell song in Deuteronomy 32:6, He sang:

“Do you thus repay Adonai, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you.”

According to Exodus 15:16; Leviticus 25:42,55, that purchase specifically refers to the Lord buying and bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And because of the national failure of the first generation of believing God, Moses was showing that the people were foolish and unwise. The same is true for false teachers who were brought into the present generation of people claiming to follow God, but who make an equally foolish and unwise decision about faith.

There is a second important factor regarding Peter’s choice of words. His use of the Greek word *despotēs*, translated as “Master,” directly infers a master-slave/servant relationship. Again, that requires consideration of the underlying foundation in the Torah. Deuteronomy 15 describes how people with sufficient means would buy the services of another person with great debt. But, regardless of the extent of the debt, the servant/slave could be released from the situation and leave the household and return to their former lives. However, as we are told, if the servant loved the master, he or she could stay and become an *eved olam*—an everlasting servant who would remain in the master’s household forever.

The key to our understanding of the context in 2 Peter, is that the servant had an initial experience with the master, but didn’t love him enough to stay with him forever.

- v 2 There are several ways that false teachers spread error among the believing community:

1. Promoting “Grace” as a License to Sin

What it looks like: Teaching that because God forgives all sins, believers can live flagrantly immoral, substance-abused, or sexually unfaithful lives without consequences. The rejection: This denies Messiah’s authority as Lord over daily conduct and directly rejects His command to “go and sin no more.”

2. Prioritizing Personal Revelations Over Scripture

What it looks like: A leader claiming, “*God spoke to me and told me to do X*,” even when “X” directly contradicts clear biblical commands.

The rejection: This elevates human opinion or emotion above the word of Messiah, stripping Yeshua of His ultimate authority as the final word on truth

3. Modifying the Gospel for Popular Approval

What it looks like: Intentionally removing offensive but core truths from the gospel—such as the reality of sin, the necessity of repentance, or the exclusivity of salvation through Messiah—to maintain a larger, happier audience.

The rejection: It treats Yeshua as a customizable product rather than an absolute Sovereign whose message cannot be compromised.

4. Cult-like Demands for Unquestioned Loyalty

What it looks like: Leaders demanding that followers obey *them* blindly, using phrases like “*Do not touch God’s anointed,*” and isolating members who ask healthy, critical questions.

The rejection: This usurps the place of Messiah. It forces people to bow to a human master rather than pointing them to the leadership of Yeshua alone.

5. Exploiting Followers for Financial Gain

What it looks like: Using high-pressure tactics, fake miracles, or emotional manipulation to convince vulnerable people to give money, often promising a guaranteed financial return from God.

The rejection: This treats the people Messiah died to save as “merchandise” to be used, directly violating His model of sacrificial, servant leadership.

He discerns that many believers will be enticed by and follow their shameful, sensual ways. As a result, their immoral lifestyles will damage the reputation of believers, causing outsiders to slander and blaspheme the faith of following Yeshua.

- v 3 These leaders are driven by material covetousness, using smooth, fabricated stories to take advantage of their followers. Peter guarantees that God’s ancient judgment against such corruption is active, and their ultimate destruction is inevitable.

2:4-9

Here, Peter illustrates God’s dual nature of justice: He never lets the wicked escape judgment, but He always delivers the righteous. He uses three historic Old Testament examples to prove this point:

v 4 The Sinning Angels

The Action: God did not spare heavenly beings when they rebelled.

The Outcome: He cast them into hell, binding them in darkness until final judgment.

Note: The word translated as “hell” is *tartaros*, which was the Greek word for a subterranean abyss lower than Hades, reserved specifically as a prison for rebellious demigods and Titans who revolted against the higher gods. Peter borrows this cultural imagery not to validate Greek myths, but to use a term that his audience understood to describe a special, high-security holding cell of dense spiritual darkness. The

implication is that if God did not spare the highest, most powerful heavenly beings when they rebelled, He will certainly not spare human false teachers.

v 5 The Ancient World and Noah

The Judgment: God brought a catastrophic flood upon an ungodly, rebellious world.

The Rescue: He preserved Noah, a “preacher (*kēruux*, lit. “a herald”) of righteousness,” along with seven others.

v 6-8 Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot

The Judgment: God reduced these corrupt cities to ashes as a permanent warning to the ungodly.

The Rescue: He delivered righteous Lot, who was physically and spiritually tormented by the rampant lawlessness around him.

Note: In light of the narrative in Genesis, one might question Lot’s description as being “righteous.” In biblical theology, righteousness is primarily a gift from God based on faith and covenant relationship, not personal perfection. Like his uncle Abraham, Lot believed in the true God, making him “positionally” righteous compared to the completely godless culture of Sodom. Even though Lot lacked the moral courage to leave Sodom, his conscience was not dead. The rampant sin around him caused him daily grief. He hated the evil, even if he was trapped by his own poor choices. Peter uses Lot to comfort struggling believers. The lesson is that God’s ability to rescue you does not depend on you being a flawless hero. If God could mercifully rescue a compromised, struggling believer like Lot from total destruction, He knows how to rescue you from the corrupting influences of your own culture.

v 9 The Core Conclusion

For the Godly: The Lord knows exactly how to rescue the devout from their trials.

For the Unrighteous: He keeps the wicked under punishment while moving them toward the day of final judgment.

Peter now exposes the depraved character, arrogance, and spiritual emptiness of the false teachers.

2:10-17

v 10-12 They indulge in corrupt desires and completely reject any spiritual or physical authority over them. They are so bold and self-willed that they insult celestial beings (glorious ones), whereas even holy angels, who are vastly more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against them before the Lord. They act like irrational beasts made only to be caught and destroyed, speaking evil of things they do not understand, and will perish in their own corruption.

v 13-14 Unlike most who hide their sin at night, these leaders feast openly in broad daylight, acting as dirty blots and blemishes while eating with unsuspecting believers. They are never satisfied with sin and actively entice unstable souls into their trap. Peter explicitly calls them experts in

greed (having hearts trained in covetousness), labeling them as “accursed children.”

- v 15-16 They have wandered off the right path to follow the example of Balaam, son of Beor, an Old Testament seer who loved the financial wages of unrighteousness. The narrative in chapters 22-24 of Numbers shows that Balaam was offered a bribe to curse the Israelites. And even though Adonai explicitly told Balaam not to curse Israel, Balaam wanted the money so badly that he kept asking God for permission, hoping God would change His mind. Balaam’s lawless rebellion was so severe that God used a mute donkey speaking with a human voice to restrain his prophetic madness.

While Balaam ultimately couldn’t curse Israel verbally, he found a workaround. He advised King Balak to send Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men into sexual sin and idolatry (Numbers 31:16).

Peter uses Balaam as the biblical prototype of the spiritual mercenary. He represents leaders who use their spiritual platform, theological knowledge, or ministry influence as a business model for personal enrichment and self-gratification.

- v 17 Peter compares false teachers to springs without water and mists driven by a storm—they promise spiritual refreshment but offer absolutely nothing of substance. Because of their severe deception, the deepest, gloomiest spiritual darkness has been permanently reserved for them.

In the final section of chapter 2, Peter explains exactly how these leaders hook their victims.

Read 2:18-22

- v 18-19 The false teachers target “unstable souls”—often new believers who have just barely escaped a lifestyle of pagan sin. They entice them using arrogant, empty words and appealing to raw physical desires. They promise these new believers absolute “freedom” (likely teaching that a Christian is free to do whatever they want).

Peter exposes the irony by describing how the teachers themselves are slaves to corruption, because whatever overcomes a person masters them.

- v 20-22 Peter describes the path followed by false teachers and what lies ahead for them. First, they have escaped the “defilements of the world,” which describes people who have adopted the environment of the believing community. They fully entered into the life, language, and social structure of the early Messianic community, and adopted a moral lifestyle. Or to put it another way, they cleaned up their outward behavior.

They have knowledge (*epignōsis*) of Yeshua being Lord, Savior and Messiah. They fully understood the mechanism of the gospel. But there is no mention of their hearts being spiritually transformed.

Having a clear, accurate comprehension of Yeshua makes their ultimate turning away far more damning. They didn’t reject a vague rumor of Yeshua; they rejected the fully articulated Gospel after living right alongside those who practiced it.

And then, they return to the manner of their former life, characterized as a dog returning to its vomit, and a pig superficially being washed, but returning to the mud. Notice that the animals in this metaphor never change their identity as dogs and pigs – they don’t

become sheep who are part of the flock of Yeshua.

This view is consistent with the greater context of Scripture, such as Yeshua's words in John 10:27-29, where He declared:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

Altogether, this passage in 2 Peter is speaking about individuals who get as close to salvation as humanly possible without actually crossing the line of true, saving faith. But then, when they become entangled and overcome by their old life all over again, Peter states it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness, rather than to know it and consciously turn their backs on the sacred commands. In other words, rejecting Yeshua after experiencing the life, miracles, and blessings of the believing community is the ultimate form of spiritual treason.

And it proves that such a person's accountability is vastly higher, and their judgment will be correspondingly more severe, because they chose to turn back to darkness after standing directly in the light.