

THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER

Lesson 12– Study Questions

2 Peter 2:1-22

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3

NOTE: Much of the language in 2 Peter 2:1-10a is in the future tense as befits the genre of testament when the departing hero looks into the future and warns the listeners about what will happen and how they are to act then. But the switch into the present tense from 2:10b on indicates that these problems are already going on. *Sacra Pagina*

1a. Peter begins the second chapter of his letter warning his Christian audience that just as false prophets arose in the past, they will do so again. They will secretly bring in destructive opinions even denying the Master (verse 1). Recall that Peter also "denied the Master" (Matthew 26:69-75). How do you think that influences the message of this letter?

b. Look up one of the following scripture passages and record the behavior of a false prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:22

Matthew 7:15

1 Timothy 4:1-2

NOTE: What the false teachers were doing to "deny the Master" or other "deceptive words" is not specified anywhere in this letter, but given the charges leveled against them, in verses 10-22, it primarily means reverting to a former pagan way of life that in effect denies that they were "ransomed" by Christ and now belong to him. It probably also includes denying that Christ will come again and bring judgment to all. *Keating*

2. Despite the swift destruction that was predicted for the false prophets, the author states that many will follow their immoral ways and malign the way of truth (end of verses 1-2). What is your understanding of the way of truth? (see Acts 18:24-25)

3a. In the first sentence of verse 3, what threats does Peter say the false teachers present?

b. Peter is critical of the false teachers but they were successful in attracting many followers. False teachers are present in our culture today. What makes them so attractive and effective?

4. In a dramatic statement, Peter announces the judgment against them. In your own words, what will be their fate (end of verse 3).

5. Scholars believe that 2 Peter draws heavily from the Letter of Jude. Our Commentary states that it is also possible that Jude drew from 2 Peter or that they both used a common source. We will call attention to their similarities in this study. Refer to pp. 57-58 in the Commentary and record one thing you learn about the relationship between these two letters. (Note that the Letter of Jude is included in our Commentary, p. 51.)

6. CONNECTION: We read today that the false teachers will exploit others with deception and fabrication. As we journey on the way of truth, we sometimes listen to the wrong voices and, to find the right path, we have to admit we made a mistake. It is not always easy to admit that we are wrong. Why is that important in the search for the truth? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read and record Proverbs 28:13. In prayer today, ask God for the humility to always admit your mistakes.

DAY TWO

Read 2 Peter 2:4-6

NOTE: The false teachers were known to engage in sexual impurity. Peter implied as much when he selected the wicked angels (2:4) and Sodom (2:6) to exemplify sinners headed for destruction.
Ignatius Study Bible

7a. Today, we study three examples from the Old Testament that Peter uses to show that *if* God did not spare the sinful from punishment, *then* he knows how to rescue the godly from the threat of the false prophets. Record the first example of God's judgment from verse 4.

b. Look up one of the following passages and explain how you think it applies to verse 4.

Genesis 6:1-4

Isaiah 24:21-22

Revelation 20:2-3

NOTE: The reference to Genesis 6:1-4 in verse 4 may refer to Jewish traditions according to which the "sons of God" are rebel angels, called the Watchers, who had sexual relations with women and begot a generation of giants (1 Enoch 6-21). *Ignatius Study Bible*

8. The second example of punishment Peter uses is the flood of the ancient world. He also includes a positive example of how the Lord saved the righteous man, Noah, with seven others (verse 5). Read Genesis 6:5-9 that describes the mercy and actions of God at the time of the Great Flood. Record the phrases from Genesis 6:8-9 that describe Noah.

NOTE: Sometimes, Jewish retellings of Genesis portray Noah as a preacher of righteousness before the onset of the flood. This tradition probably developed from the biblical description of Noah as a godly man favored by the Lord (Gen 6:8-9; 7:1). *Ignatius Study Bible*

9. Peter's third example of punishment for the ungodly is the turning of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes and condemning them to extinction by God (verse 6). (see Genesis 19) This is one of the most terrible and dramatic stories of the Old Testament. Why do you think Peter used it to illustrate his message of God's judgment and mercy?

10. These familiar bible stories inspire and teach valuable lessons as they are adapted and retold. Can you think of other stories from the bible that are often used as moral tales today? Can you give an example of a favorite one that you have used?

11. Read Jude 6-7 and compare that passage with our readings today. While both authors use examples of God's punishment, Peter's message is different. What does he add and do you think it makes a difference? Refer to the Commentary on p. 65 for your answer.

12. CONNECTION: Today, Peter uses examples from the Old Testament to teach about God's justice towards sinners and the righteous. The negative examples confirm our belief as Christians that there will be a final judgment before God. This can be a frightening concept for some of us. However, in his encyclical on hope (*Spe Salve*), Pope Benedict explains that God's judgment is an essential element of Christian hope. How does knowing that all will be judged give you hope? Why is hope an important virtue in the life of a Christian?

Read and record Matthew 6:13. Pray today that like Noah, God will care for and rescue us in our time of need.

DAY THREE
Read 2 Peter 2:7-10

13a. Today's readings continue with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The author states that the Lord rescued Lot, a righteous man, greatly distressed by the immoral actions of those around him (verse 7). Complete the phrases below that describe him from verse 8.

for that righteous man

was tormented in his righteous soul

b. How would you characterize Lot's righteousness which is mentioned three times in verses 7-8 but actually not in any Old Testament passage? (see Genesis 19:1-3) Why do you think his story receives the most attention from Peter?

NOTE: Genesis does not elaborate on Lot's character by stating that he was outraged or offended by the depravity of Sodom. Nevertheless, his righteousness is presupposed in Abraham's dialogue with the Lord in Gen 18:22-23. See also Wis 10:6. These details may also have been taken from the wider Jewish tradition of Peter's day. *Ignatius Study Bible, Keating*

14a. In verse 9 Peter draws the conclusion to his "if...then" argument that began in verse 4. Complete the verse below that tells us two things the "Lord knows." (Good memory verse)

then the lord knows

and to keep the unrighteous

b. In verse 9 we are told that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly even while we are searching for answers. When have you seen this happen?

15. How does verse 9 relate to the bible stories of Noah and Lot?

16. In verse 10 Peter repeats two serious charges against the false teachers, that they indulge in depraved lust and despise authority. To this he adds another charge in the last sentence of that verse, that "they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones." What do you think it means?

NOTE: While some think that illustrious personages are meant or even political officials behind whom (fallen) angels stand, it is more likely that the reference is to glorious angelic beings.

NABRE

17. Compare 2 Peter 2:10 to Jude 8. Peter refers to false teachers or false prophets in his letter. In the Letter of Jude, they are called dreamers in verse 8. Why do you think Jude uses this term for the false teachers?

18. CONNECTION: Today we read that Lot was "tormented in his righteousness" and did not become complacent or accepting of the immoral actions of others and so was saved. In our world today, we have unlimited access to media that allows us to witness all kinds of offensive behavior. This can condition us to become tolerant of immoral actions and insensitive to the suffering of others. How can we overcome feelings of apathy or thinking that there is little one person can do to make a difference? Record some thoughts to share.

Let this thought lead you into prayer today, "Our great security against sin lies in being shocked by it." (Cardinal Newman)

DAY FOUR

Read 2 Peter 2:11-16

19a. Today we read the author's final positive example, comparing the false teachers with faithful angels. Though angels are greater in might and power than the teachers, they refuse to pass judgment on sinful men and beings of less power (verse 11). What virtuous qualities does this suggest? What failure of virtue is he charging the false teachers with in comparison?

b. In this verse Peter uses angels as an example of God's faithful servants. Angels have been present since creation serving the accomplishment of the divine plan. (CCC 332) Look up and record what the mission of angels is from one of the following scripture passages.

Psalm 91:11

Luke 22:43

Hebrews 1:14

NOTE: In verses 12-16, the accusation against false teachers crashes upon us like wave after wave of a surging tide. The language is dramatic and full of images. The primary purpose of this rhetorical display is not to explain carefully and dispassionately each charge against them, but rather to establish their overall guilt and immorality by stacking up the charges against them, and to awaken readers to the evils of the false teachers. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Peter raises his voice in sharp denunciation to warn against the impending judgment of God. *Keating*

20. Verses 12-13 include a number of images describing the actions of the false teachers. What immoral act is described by the phrases listed below? What virtues contrast with these behaviors?

they are like irrational animals, mere creatures of instinct
they slander what they do not understand

they count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime

NOTE: On the basis of verse 12 and similar verses, some identify Peter's opponents as Gnostics-heretics of the second century who claimed to possess a knowledge of secret revelation unknown to the Church. *Ignatius Study Bible*

21. Peter continues to accuse the false teachers of being sinful, enticing unsteady souls, having hearts of greed and leaving the straight road (verses 14-15). Record the example Peter uses of an insulting rebuke of a foolish person from the story of Balaam in verse 16.

NOTE: The way of Balaam (verses 15-16) is the way of stubbornness and greed. Numbers 22-24 tell how the Moabites hired Balaam to place a curse on Israel. Though Balaam was unsuccessful after several persistent attempts, his willingness to do evil for pay makes him a prototype of the false teachers who peddle their errors in order to pocket the proceeds. Numbers 22:28-35 tell the story of the rebuke of Balaam by a donkey who spoke with a human voice. *Ignatius Study Bible*

22a. In our verses today, Peter harshly describes the false teachers as bold, willful, irrational, slanderous, greedy and adulterous creatures of instinct who revel and entice the unsteady. Do you think he is exaggerating the problem and if so, why might he do that?

b. Can you briefly describe the false teachers we hear or read about in various media outlets today that make the author's words from this passage meaningful to us?

23. In comparing 2 Peter 2:11-15 to Jude 9-12 we read the noncanonical story of the Assumption of Moses, a contest between the Archangel Michael and the devil over the corpse of Moses in Jude 9. Why do you think this story was not included in 2 Peter? (see the Commentary p. 66)

24. CONNECTION: Today, Peter draws on the inspiration of the angels who are spiritual beings and God's messengers who also participate in our lives to help us in countless ways. Have you ever been aware of their presence in your life? How can you become more discerning of their existence or develop your belief and understanding of their role in your life as ministers of God's divine plan? Record some notes to share with your group.

The ministry of angels is one way God expresses his love and providential care for us. Write a prayer today to ask your guardian angel for protection.

DAY FIVE

Read 2 Peter 2:17-19

NOTE: Having assailed the false teachers for their stupidity, sensuality, and greed in 2:12-16, the author reflects on the harmful effects they bring on other Christians (2:17-19) and on themselves (2:20-22). Peter is no longer looking into the future but is speaking clearly about the present. *Sacra Pagina*

25. In the verses today, Peter uses a variety of colorful metaphors to indicate the morality of the false teachers and the judgment awaiting them. Select one of the images below from verse 17 and record how it describes or relates to the false teachers.

They are waterless springs.

They are mists driven by a storm.

For them the deepest darkness has been reserved.

26a. In the first part of verse 18, the author charges them with speaking bombastic nonsense. Look up the word “bombastic” and record a definition that describes the author's meaning.

b. While not overtly evil, how might this type of behavior by the teachers be harmful to spiritual life?

27a. Peter goes on to charge the false teachers with enticing recent converts to Christianity who have just escaped from those who live in error and the corruption of the world (end of verse 18). Why do you think recent converts would be most vulnerable to their teachings?

b. Tempting others to return to their previously immoral behavior is a very serious sin. Look up and record Matthew 18:6.

28. Peter states in verse 19 that the false teachers promise freedom but they are slaves of corruption. Record the proverb from the end of that verse. (Good memory verse)

NOTE: Presumably, the false teachers offered freedom from the moral restraints of the gospel. The promise is empty, however, because the deceivers cannot give what they themselves do not have. Having misused their freedom, they have become slaves to sin all over again. *Ignatius Study Bible*

29. This passage today compares to Jude 12-13, 16. Comment on one of the differences in the following verses that include colorful imagery and language by both authors.

2 Peter 2:17: These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the deepest darkness has been reserved.

Jude 12-13: They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved forever.

30. CONNECTION: The highly emotional language the author uses in our readings today suggests that this was a painful time of conflict in the early church. It is not surprising that faith communities would encounter false teachings, disagreements and factions as it was a time of growth and change for the church. If you have ever experienced a time of conflict in your faith community, what means were used to bring about a peaceful resolution? Share some ideas about how to resolve group conflict.

Read and record Philippians 2:4-5. Let this thought lead you into prayer today.

DAY SIX

Read 2 Peter 2:20-22

NOTE: In these verses Peter warns that genuine believers can fall from God's grace and ultimately lose their salvation. The false teachers exemplify such a danger, for they have slid back into wicked ways, even though they were "bought" by the Lord and once "washed" clean of their iniquities. One who has never known the Christian message is better off than one who has previously embraced it but later chooses to reject it. *Ignatius Study Bible*

31. In verse 20 Peter addresses the false teachers. What happens if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through their knowledge of Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered?

32. What does "the last state will become worse than the first" mean? Look up Hebrews 6:4-6 to help explain it.

33a. Continuing with the idea that things will be worse than before, what does the author say in verse 21? Complete the phrases below.

it would have been better for them

the way of righteousness

to turn back from the holy commandment

b. What do you think are the personal and spiritual consequences of turning back from your faith?

34a. What do you think the author means by "the holy commandment that was passed on to them" from verse 21?

b. What has been passed on to you in your life? Is it your faith, a family heirloom or a personality trait? How does that make it special?

35. Peter ends this chapter by quoting two proverbs. A proverb is defined as *a short wisdom expressing a commonplace truth or useful thought*. Summarize the message that reflects the themes of this chapter from one of the proverbs below.

The dog turns back to its own vomit.

The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.

36. CONNECTION: Today Peter warns that it is better to have never known God than to have been redeemed or converted and then "turn back" to old ways of life. While life as a Christian offers many blessings, it is not always easy and our secular society is enticing. Turning back is a very present and real threat. What can we do, as a faith community, to help those struggling with their faith? What are some ways to reach out to those who need our help? Share some thoughts.

Pray today for all those whom you know or do not know who may be struggling in their faith.

Read pages 64-67 in the *New Collegeville Commentary, James, First Peter, Jude, Second Peter*, by Patrick J. Hartin. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.