

# Notes on Peter's Second Letter

## Authorship and Date

The author calls himself "Simeon Peter," using a different spelling than the spelling found in 1 Peter. Both letters appear to have been unknown to the author of the "Muratorian Canon" (late second century), so no clue as to acceptance can be found there, for the letter is not rejected there, either.

Studies of the writing styles of the two letters reveal strong differences and only vague similarities. However, this letter was written with the notions behind the Letter of Judah in mind, and if (as many suppose) the Letter of Judah was used as a source for this letter, the writing styles would be different understandably. It is possible that the letter was written by someone acting as Peter's scribe. The reference to this being the second in a series of letters (3:1) presupposes that a first letter from Peter had been circulating in recent times.

Not merely signing himself as Peter, the author certainly makes direct connections between himself and the one and only Peter -- something that someone in Peter's school of thought would have been unlikely to do. For example, 1:14 indicates that Peter was still living and contains a reference to a revelation of his death. 1:16 invokes Peter's status as an eyewitness. Therefore, it is much more likely that Peter himself used a scribe to write this letter than that someone else forged the letter in Peter's name. The school of thought that makes this letter out to be a forgery is a large one, however, and some ancients did doubt its authenticity.

The topics of discussion place the time of writing somewhat later, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans but after the last of Paulus' letters. Its similarity to the Letter of Judah tends to date the two letters near one another in time. A date prior to Paulus' death is required by 3:15-6, which mention Paulus without any indication of his demise, and so the letter is probably to be dated to c. 61-62 CE, with the direct author being a scribe of Peter, writing as Peter directed him.

## Commentary

*Simeon Peter, a slave and an envoy of Anointed Jesus,*

*To the ones who have obtained a trust in our God's justification and in our savior, Anointed Jesus, a trust which is equally valuable as ours.*

The author introduces himself as first a slave and then an envoy of Anointed Jesus. In doing so, he places his own allegiance to the teachings of Jesus above even his calling to declare that message. It is more important for him to follow the Messianic principles than to teach others, and yet the readers would be familiar with his calling to teach.

The letter is addressed to Jewish people who realize that the principles of Jesus lead to the justification that comes from God. To Peter, the readers' relationships with God are as important as his own.

**1:1** *Hello to you, and let peace be multiplied to you in the recognition of God and of Jesus our Lord, just as his divine power has given us all things which direct toward life and piety, through the recognition of the one who called us to his own glory and virtue, through which the valuable and great promises have been given to us, so that through this you might become partners in a divine nature, since you have fled from the corruption which is in creation in strong desire.*

"Let peace be multiplied..." has a stipulation. Peace should come "in the recognition" of the Messiah. The readers' problem is alluded to briefly here, for there are people among them who have returned to Priestly Judaism and who are trying to persuade the readers to do so as well. The letter addresses several of their arguments.

Reinforcing the necessity to recognize Jesus and the Messianic teachings, the author refers to the "divine power" of holy breath that had been granted by God to the followers of the Messiah in order to distinguish them from those who did not acknowledge Jesus. The holy breath centered on the confirmation of those spiritual teachings that "direct toward life and piety." By comparison, the adherence to ritual religion led away from those things.

Peter ties the teachings of Jesus directly to the identity of Jesus. In order to recognize Jesus as the Anointed One, it was necessary to accept his interpretation of the Torah, an understanding that this author is about to allude to. But this teaching brings with it more than philosophy, for it leads to God's own glory and virtue and carries with it certain promises (not yet detailed by Peter but known to the readers).

The readers are already aware of the dependence by ritual religion on doing and saying specific things -- performing ritualized actions. But by rejecting rituals and instead living by the spiritual principles that the Torah intends to teach, the readers will not share in rituals but in a divine nature. They will be living by the same principles as God's personality shows to us.

Finally, "the corruption that is in creation" does not extend to the gentile realm. As we will see later on, the intention of the author was to point to the motives of those people who had left Jesus, returning to Priestly Judaism. Peter calls their way of life corrupt. The word signifies decay. The old teaching tool had become a ritual religion on account of strong human desire, but Peter points out that the readers had left such things behind when they realized that Jesus' teachings were true.

**5** *And now, for this same reason, bring in all diligence and add virtue to your trust, and to the virtue add knowledge, and to the knowledge add self-control, and to the self-control add endurance, and to the endurance add piety, and to the piety add brotherly affection, and to the brotherly affection add love. For if these things belong to you and become abundant, they will set you down to be neither idle nor unfruitful in the recognition of our Lord, Anointed Jesus. For the one for whom these things are not present is blind since he is nearsighted, having received a forgetfulness of the cleansing of his old sins.*

Jesus had taught that the principles of trust and love summed up everything in the Torah and comprised the whole duty and goal of human existence. Therefore, the author creates a "stepladder" of virtues, beginning with trust and culminating in love.

The first thing to add to trust is virtue, in Greek ἀρετή. The word signifies excellence of any kind in Greek, and in Jewish usage normally indicated a goodness that was worth seeking. It is an attitude of shining fidelity toward God and therefore comes from trust (which also signifies fidelity). The author has already said that living by Jesus' principles of trust and love is what makes this possible, for God gave the faithful person what he needs to attain "glory and virtue."

Next on the list is knowledge, a deeper understanding of the Messiah's coming and of his teachings. It is one thing to realize that Jesus must have been the Messiah, accepting that therefore his teachings are correct, but it is another thing to search through the Torah and to make that understanding personal. In the progression established in this letter, the readers ought to step up to knowledge -- to full assurance that what they believe is true.

Once someone really knows that the path he is on is right, then the allure of returning to Priestly Judaism is greatly diminished. Why turn back to something that you know is wrong? Why return to a ritual way of life that leads to destruction? From knowledge, then, one develops self-control -- the ability to withstand any temptation to follow the easier path of reinstating one's self in mainstream Jewish society. Even today, with any struggle, it is easy to return to whatever is familiar, even if that familiar thing is unhealthy. The self-control to resist the things that aren't good for us comes from knowing deeply that those things have no place in our lives.

Following that, we have endurance. The word signifies perseverance, standing fast. This is not some sort of bravery, because it is not connected here with human strength. The term implies resistance to hostility without being unsettled and is an inner strength. In this passage, it can indicate only the resistance to the lure of a seemingly easier life but in all probability includes a resistance to those people whom Peter identifies as the readers' opponents. These people were trying to coax the readers back to Priestly Judaism, probably including both positive and negative incentives. Return and they'd be rewarded, but stay with Jesus' principles, and they would suffer social consequences. Endurance is the ability to resist such hostile forces.

Piety follows from endurance. Piety (Gk. εὐσεβεία) indicates a respectfulness for order, in this case a deep acceptance of the principles of Jesus. But piety is not focused only on one's self but on others as well. Thus, it is at this point in Peter's list that the listed characteristics turn to other people. The fact that someone adheres to Jesus' spiritualized Torah in the face of opposition is apparent to others, and those others recognize the godly walk of the Christian.

But that godly walk would be incomplete without its focus on relationships, and in particular the reference to brotherhood signifies Christian relationships. A true camaraderie develops between enlightened followers of Jesus, an affection that is easily recognizable and desirable. As each Christian sees piety in others and becomes pious, he truly recognizes other Messianics as his brothers and sisters, in the same way that Jesus said that those around him who followed his teachings were his true family.

The capstone of the list is love. In following the teachings of the Messiah, the Christian pursues love above all things, participating in relationships that put others' needs above one's own. Love sets priorities, and whoever reaches complete love thinks not of himself first but of those whom he loves.

Peter then continues to say that when these good characteristics become abundant, they overflow with good deeds. Such demonstrations of trust and love serve to demonstrate the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, because every one of those things is demonstrably good and noble. Who would want to return to ritual religion after recognizing and observing such beautiful things? Only someone who has entirely blinded himself. Only someone who has forgotten the emptiness of his former life.

**10** *So, brothers, try hard to make your calling and choice sure. For if you do these things, you won't ever fall. For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior, Anointed Jesus, will be provided richly to you.*

Peter's stepladder is not intended as a single method of enlightenment, but to provide characteristics for the walk of love and trust found in Jesus' teachings. He hopes that the readers will latch onto those things, thereby becoming certain that they would not return to ritual religion. Whoever lives by all of these things "won't ever fall." And after all, it is these principles that lead to eternal life, and Peter would mention later that Priestly Judaism was about to be destroyed.

**12** *So I will remember always to remind you about these things, although you know and have been confirmed in the truth which is present. Now I think it is just to stir you up in reminding you for as long as I am in this tent, knowing that the time of laying aside my tent is coming quickly, just as also our Lord Anointed Jesus pointed out to me. Now I will also try always to have you make a reminder of these things after my departure.*

Peter doesn't wish to come across as though he believes the readers to be stupid. He realizes that they already know most of the things that he has written, but he is determined to remind them whenever need be about the truth -- that the Torah does not consist of rituals but is a teaching tool leading to love and trust. It can only do good to write of such things, and so Peter feels justified in reminding his readers.

The personal note about Peter's impending death places the time of writing in first half of the decade of the 60's, and when his death comes, the author hopes that his own reminders will have served to assist the readers in providing their own reminders for one another of the truth and beauty of the Messianic way of life.

**16** *For we were not following around fables that add wisdom when we made known to you the power and presence of our Lord Anointed Jesus. On the contrary, we became onlookers of that magnificence. For when Jesus received value and glory from Father God, this kind of voice was brought to him by the magnificent glory: "This is my son, my beloved one, in whom I am well pleased." And this is the voice that we heard, which was brought from heaven, with him being on the holy mountain.*

Continuing to make personal references, the author reminds the readers now of his own connection to Jesus. He was not merely someone who had been told a story about Jesus -- a story that may or may not have been true. He saw Jesus with his own eyes, and any doubts he might have had about Jesus' identity as the Messiah were completely removed. Peter and his friends saw what has come to be called the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-8 and parallels) -- when Jesus' body shone with a brightness that came from God (Mt 17:2). And with what they saw, they also heard God tell them for a second time (the first time was at Jesus' baptism) that Jesus was the Messiah - God's son. Therefore, Peter, Jacob, and Johannes had both seen and heard miraculous confirmation that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Instead of following someone else's made up story, they knew for sure that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be. He was the Anointed One as God said he was! In Lukas' chronological account, the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-36) is said to have occurred eight days after Peter's own acknowledgement that Jesus was the Messiah (Lk 9:18-22).

*19 And we hold more firmly the prophetic message, which you are doing well to heed, as you would heed a lamp shining in a dirty place until the daylight shines through and the light-bringer arises in your hearts. Know this first: that no written prophecy becomes its own explanation. For at no time was prophecy brought by human wishes, but people from God spoke as they were carried by holy breath. Yet it happened that there were also false prophets among the people, as there will also be false teachers among you. These ones will bring in secretly destructive schools of thought, denying also the Sovereign who bought them, bringing on themselves a quick destruction.*

After reminding his readers of the clear truth found in the teachings themselves, and after testifying to them about the proofs of Jesus' identity that he had seen as an eyewitness, the author returns to the Torah and Prophets for further reinforcement. Peter and the other envoys had been given a miraculous understanding of the teachings in the Hebrew Bible about the Messiah, but even without that miraculous status, Peter asserts that Jesus' interpretation of the Torah fits in more logically with the prophetic writings than anything else that the readers might have heard.

The message of Jesus is compared to ritual religion as follows: it is a lamp shining in a dirty place. But it would be very soon that Priestly Judaism would no longer exist, for fewer than ten years remained until the destruction of the temple (70 CE), and only a few years would pass before the First Revolt began. At that time, the "daylight would shine through." That is, it would be clear to them that Jesus had been right.

Meanwhile, they should rely on the things that Peter told them thusfar and on the Hebrew Bible. These prophecies that foretold of the Messiah were not written down by people for their own purposes. They weren't written to rationalize something that was happening back then. Instead, they were genuine glimpses of the future by people whose lives had been touched by God.

Those genuine prophets had been granted holy breath from God to speak as he led them to speak, but there were also false prophets in the land. The "false prophet" was someone who knew that what he was saying was wrong. He knew that God had not actually spoken to him, but for his own purposes he pretended to others that his own words were from God. Just as there had been

false prophets when the Hebrew Bible was still being written, so also there were similar figures in Peter's time.

"False teachers," he says, would emerge "among you." By this statement, he certainly intends to include the readers' opposition. Like the false prophet, the false teacher knows what he is doing. He is not someone who thinks he is right but is mistaken. No, the "false teacher" is more dangerous than that, for he deliberately teaches what he knows to be untrue. Peter's warning has the familiarity of God's warning in 1 Sam 8:10ff. about the dangers of selecting a king. Just as choosing a human superior to follow was a rejection of God's sovereignty in ancient times (1 Sam 8:7), so also these false teachers would knowingly want people to follow them instead of God.

The term "schools of thought" is normally a neutral one, indicating a choice -- a way of thinking. However, the term appears here with the qualifier "destructive," and it is the author's intent for the readers to recognize that their opponents were already doing these things. We do not know exactly what their goals were, but Peter will sketch out some of them in the verses that follow. It appears that these "false teachers" wanted to set themselves up as paid advisors of some kind (see 2:2f.), taking money in exchange for leading the Christian readers back into ritual religion. Of course, their religion was about to be destroyed, and so the destruction of their way of life would be speedy.

**2:2** *And many will follow their debaucheries around; on account of them the way of the truth will be spoken evil of. And in greed they will profit financially from you by using deceptive words. Their judgment waiting since ancient times is not lingering now, and their destruction is not sleeping. For God did not spare the sinning messengers, but he imprisoned them in Tartarus with chains of gloom and handed them over to custody for judgment.*

At this point, the letter begins to focus on the opposition. What are they up to, and what will happen to them in the future? Peter's certainty of the future will be backed up by familiar quotations and with an assurance of God's impending judgment on Israel.

Aside from it being ridiculously wrong to pay these liars to lead them astray, had the readers considered that people would think of their way of life as being a money making scheme -- if they decided to pay? The liars were intent on obtaining money through their deception, and that practice would be recognized publically.

Therefore, it is clear to Peter that they would be judged along with Priestly Judaism, and that their own judgment would be a harsh one. The author views this judgment as having been designated long ago for anyone who knowingly and foolishly rejects God.

His first analogy comes from the book of 1 Enoch, an apocryphal writing that was rejected from the official collection of Jewish writings but which was widely read. First Enoch was written and attributed to Enoch perhaps as early as the III century BCE, although some sections were written later, with the book completed perhaps in the I century BCE. The original language of the book was Aramaic, and fragments exist in that language from the scrolls found in cave 4 at Qumran (i.e., the "Dead Sea Scrolls"). The Aramaic book appears to have been translated first into Greek

and then into other languages. The complete book appears in an Ethiopic manuscript -- copied much later but discovered in the 18th century.

In the book, Enoch is taken up into the "seven heavens" prior to the Great Flood, where he observes several things. One central theme of 1 Enoch concerns the divine messengers who produced giants (titans) by mating with human women (a popular fable based on Genesis 6). Enoch (more properly Henoch) was given a charge to herald a message to them about their judgment. This legend reappears in both Petrine letters and in the letter of Judah.

Unlike Judah, Peter does not quote Henoch directly, nor does he attribute the saying to Henoch. Some commentators make this out to mean that Peter is not "authorizing" the book when he alludes to it. Yet he clearly allows the Henoch tradition to stand. The idea that whole books and not merely concepts were "authorized" was a rabbinical one that asserted itself later. Peter most likely refers to the tradition without any concern for its veracity; he is concerned instead with the truth of the teachings contained there.

The section alluded to here is from the beginning of the book, which concerns Henoch's travels through the heavens. It is possible that this section was written during the II century BCE, when the Jewish people were in danger of losing their temple permanently (under the rulership of Antiochus IV). The first chapter introduces a harsh judgment, coming soon to those who were unjust (1:7). Although God would make peace with those who were right (1:8), tens of thousands of messengers were coming with him to eradicate the impious (1:9, quoted in Judah).

Peter's application is simple: if God did not spare divine messengers when they knowingly rejected him, then it was certain that the coming judgment on Israel would also engulf these "false teachers."

*And he did not spare the original creation, but he guarded Noah (the eighth, a herald of Right) and brought a drenching rain to a creation full of impious people.*

Directing himself to the Hebrew Bible now, and coming forward chronologically in his references, Peter brings up Noah (Noah). In contrast to the impious people who were destroyed in the judgment, Noah was God's person. Instead of rejecting God's teachings, he was instead "a herald of Right." God saved him in the judgment, even as he destroyed the ones who rejected him.

In the same way, Peter implies, God was about to destroy the readers' opponents along with Priestly Judaism, but the way of life of the Christian would be preserved.

*And he turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, overthrowing and condemning them, placing them as an example for those who were about to be impious. And he rescued Lot the just, who was tired of the behavior of the unprincipled ones in their debauchery. For when the just one kept seeing and hearing it, as he dwelt among them day by day, his just soul was tormented with lawless deeds.*

Again moving ahead in time, Peter cites the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19). In this letter, he contrasts piety and impiety. Lives that display their reverence for God and his teachings are "pious," and the pious people would be protected. But those who reject the Messianic teachings in favor of ritual religion were about to have their way of life destroyed. And so, just as Sodom and Gomorrah served as warnings then for "those who were about to be impious," so also any of the readers who were even considering accepting the false teachers should look to God's past destroying actions as warnings for the coming future judgment of Priestly Judaism.

They ought to be like Lot, who refused to involve himself with the impious people. Lot could not stand to see and hear the sort of disgusting behavior of the impious people around him. The readers ought to look at the false teachers and their enticements to return to ritual religion with the same sort of recoil. The very notion of returning to their past ought to repulse them.

*9 Yahweh knows to rescue pious people out of trial, and to keep unjust people for a day of judgment to be cut off -- especially those who go after the flesh in polluted strong desire and who have their attitudes opposed to lordship. These people are daring, selfish. They do not tremble when they speak evil of glorious beings, whereas messengers who are greater in strength and power do not bring a harshly spoken judgment against them from Yahweh. Now like the natural irrational animals, these ones were made for capture and decay. Since they speak evil of things about which they are ignorant, they will decay in their corruption. As wrong's reward, they are being wronged.*

"The Lord," here is an invocation of God's name as it appears translated into Greek in the Septuagint. In the context of justice from God, such use would have been quite appropriate. Peter puts it simply: that the all-knowing God knows how to keep his pious people safe and how to punish the ungodly. Again the reference is to piety, which Peter has limited in scope to those who follow the spiritual teachings of Jesus. By contrast, the people who were about to face judgment were setting themselves up as teachers in opposition to God's own lordship. Their strong desires, then, had been polluted. That is to say that they were defiled, as compared to clean, and fleshly (or physically focused) as opposed to spiritual.

In the author's assessment, in their efforts to set themselves up as paid instructors -- and indeed teachers of a ritual religion that they knew was not spiritual -- these teachers by contrast are more daring than the divine messengers. Peter views the messengers to be careful, heeding the warnings that come from the examples of the past and not daring to speak against glorious beings because they realize that any harsh judgments on their part will be met with harsh judgment from God. Here, Peter also possibly recalls the saying of Jesus (Mt 7:1) concerning the judgment of others -- that it is necessary to take care to judge accurately.

So, were these opponents, these teachers, judging others? Peter refers to them as speaking evil against God's message and his people in their efforts to lead others to follow them. This is the very same kind of thing that the messengers refuse to do. Now, these so-called teachers should realize that God will oppose them, but they seem not to care. To the author, this is so utterly irrational as to be inhuman. He likens them to wild animals that are destined to be captured and destroyed. Their destruction, however, would soon come at the hands of God. Because they had returned to ritual religion, and because they had lured people back into it, they would be



destroyed along with it in the first revolt, finding justice in receiving destruction for the wrong that they caused.

*They regard as pleasure their revelry in the daytime. They are spots and stains who revel in their self-deception while feasting together with you. They have eyes that are full of an adulteress and which sin unceasingly. They entice unstable souls; their hearts have been trained in greed. They are children of a curse.*

Revelry, consisting of drunken parties and the like, was normally done at night. Peter likens the boldness of his opposition to "revelry in the daytime," for they were quite up front about their efforts to have members of the Christian group follow them.

Again using a metaphor for God's rejection of something improper for worship, Peter calls them "spots and stains." Just as God would accept nothing defiled, neither would God accept anything blemished or stained, nor could anyone who was blemished or stained bring offerings to God (for example, Lev 21:16f.) Yet these people are not merely "stained"; they are "stains." There is no way that God will accept such people.

If any of them seem to believe what they teach, it is because they are trying to deceive even themselves. Peter realizes that these people were still posing sometimes as fellow believers in the teachings of Jesus, for they were continuing to participate in brotherly celebrations with the readers. But even this was "revelry," for they were knowingly "staining" the readers' good names (as mentioned earlier) and their relationships.

The adulterer/adulteress was a figure mentioned negatively throughout the Hebrew Bible, and the metaphor appears occasionally that someone who follows another god or idol is called an adulteress. By pretending to be followers of Jesus' spiritual teachings and still urging others to return to religion, these teachers were spiritually unstable, portrayed here like the weak or stumbling women of the book of Proverbs -- tricking the unsure and weak into violating a sacred commitment. Just as children born from adulterous unions were regarded as cursed, so were these people children of adultery -- conceived in unfaithful spirituality and returning to their unfaithful parentage. Illegitimate children were not permitted to participate in the assembly of the people (Dt 23:2), and Peter's implication is that his readers should consider the false teachers to be similarly marked. This is probably gentler to informing them to treat the teachers like adulterers, for adultery invoked a death by stoning.

**15** *After leaving a straight path, they went astray, following along the path of Balaam of Bosor, who loved wrong's reward. But he had a reproof for his own wandering: a soundless beast of burden, uttering with a human voice, restrained the insane attitude of the prophet.*

Peter's review of Jewish history is still a chronological one. After alluding to certain points from the Torah, he mentions Balaam, who is written about in the Torah. Following p<sup>72</sup>, the *Non-Ecclesiastical New Testament* reads "Balaam of Bosor." Since the word Bosor does not appear anywhere in the Septuagint translation of any passage referring to Balaam, some later scribes of 2 Peter (especially in languages other than Greek) replaced Βοσορ with Βεωρ, "Beor," which was the name of Balaam's father (Num 22:5). Apparently Peter was aware of another reading for

the father's name or of a place name associated with Balaam but not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.

Balaam's folly was this: although he first realized that he should do only what God directed him (Num 22:18), and although God told him to only go with Balak's men if they came for him again (22:20), Balaam got up the next morning and went to Balak knowing that God did not approve. God tried to provide a warning for Balaam by placing a messenger in the path of his donkey (22:22), but Balaam tried to force his donkey to bypass the messenger, whom he did not see. After twice beating the donkey and forcing it to bypass the messenger, on the third occasion, God caused the donkey to speak, rebuking Balaam for not realizing that the donkey's unusual behavior (stopping in the road) was because of something important. Finally, God told Balaam that the donkey had spared his life by turning away from the messenger, because God had been about to strike him dead for his disobedience. Finally, Balaam realized his error and relented. Until that point, Balaam had been so blind to the fact that he was following his own wishes instead of God's that he was about to get himself killed!

The author of this letter says that the false teachers were also blinding themselves to the same degree; he has elsewhere pointed out that they would soon be destroyed.

*17 These people are waterless springs and mists led along by a whirlwind. For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved. For in uttering swellings of worthlessness, in strong fleshly desires and debauchery they entice those people who have barely fled from the ones who have turned themselves over to error. They are promising them freedom, when they themselves are slaves to corruption. For whatever someone has been overcome by, to it he is also a slave. For if they have fled from the pollutants of creation, in recognition of our Lord and savior Anointed Jesus, yet if they are ensnared again with these and are overcome, the last things have become worse than the first for them. For it was better for them not to have recognized the path of Right than to have recognized it and to have turned away from the holy precept that was delivered to them. It has transpired to them as in the true analogy: "To its own vomit, the dog has turned back. And the washed hog has returned to its wallowing in the mud."*

Both "waterless springs" and "mists led along by a whirlwind" at first seem to be providing life-giving water, but unlike genuine springs and steady rain they actually give nothing useful. Therefore, Peter expresses his certainty that the worthlessness of the teachings of his opponents is assuring them of a time of judgment, of destruction.

He likens their greedy desires of self-importance to "debauchery," and this likeness is an easy one to make. Ritual religion is contrasted in other New Testament writings as "fleshly," compared to Jesus' "spiritual" teachings, because it focuses on physical activities and participation rather than adherence to internal principles. These teachers were knowingly luring people away from ritual religion who had just barely escaped it. Peter's audience had left Priestly Judaism behind, trading religion for a way of life that was not about to disappear, and yet these so-called teachers were about to lead them back into it, just as they themselves had fallen back into it.

Supposing that they brought freedom from the strict notion of having to follow the Torah genuinely and from the heart, the teachers were actually bringing slavery to corrupt (i.e., decaying) religion, which the author likens to "wallowing in the mud" and to "vomit" -- detestable things that some people cannot stay away from.

Some commentators wonder about Peter's statement that it would have been better for such people to never have understood what was right. After all, how could that be? But this makes sense, for the ignorant person who does what is wrong never has to face judgment knowing that he had the shining gems of spiritual devotion in his hand and discarded them in favor of "vomit." The regret and humiliation would be far greater for such people than for the ignorant.

**3:1** *Beloved: I am already writing this second letter to you, in both of which I have been stirring up your sincerely judging minds in reminding you to recall the declarations that were spoken previously by the holy prophets and of the precept of our Lord and savior spoken by your envoys. Know this first: that in the last days mockers will come in, mocking, walking according to their own strong desires and saying, "Where is the promise of his presence? For from the time when the ancestors went to sleep, all things have continued this way from the beginning of creation."*

One argument that the "teachers" had been using to lead people away from Jesus was that Judaism was NOT about to be destroyed. After all, Jesus had promised that all of the judgments on Israel (Mt 24-25) would happen to the people of his own generation. The temple and their whole way of life were about to be taken down (John 4). And yet those things had not happened. But they had been deliberately neglecting the fact that Jesus had only said that some people alive then would live to see the judgment (Mk 9:1; Mt 24:34). Peter himself was still living, as were other members of the Twelve, and so the time for the promise had not yet concluded. Peter had written earlier that he realized that he would die before these things happened, but he wanted the readers to know that the time was soon.

Instead of heeding the advice of the envoys, and instead of paying attention to what Jesus had said, the teachers were trying to convince Peter's readers that it was ridiculous to think that God's people would be regarded any differently than the physical means that had been used for years. The Aaronic priesthood had been around a long time, after all.

**5** *For it willingly escapes them that the heavens were of old, and the land was put together out of water and through water by God's statement. Through a statement, the creation that existed then was drenched in water and was destroyed. But the present-day heavens and land have been treasured up by the same statement and are being kept until a day of judgment and of destruction of the impious people.*

Could God make such sweeping changes? He had done it in the past. In creating the universe with a statement, God had changed whatever the state of affairs was prior to that beginning. And yet he wiped the whole land out with a statement, too. The state of affairs since then had seen no such sweeping changes, but Peter reverts to the language of Isaiah ("heavens and land") because he is about to remind his readers that Isaiah predicted a radical change of affairs. He had forecast a day of judgment, and again this judgment is against the "impious" who had not been faithful to God.

**8** *Now don't let this one thing escape you, beloved, that one day with Yahweh is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. Yahweh of the promise is not slow, as some consider slowness. On the contrary, he is being longsuffering toward us, not wishing for anyone to be destroyed, but for all to hold to a change of mind. Now Yahweh's day will arrive like a thief. In it, the heavens will be released with a roar. Now the elements will be released and burnt up, and will the land and all the deeds in it be found?*

Here's a statement that has caused many interpreters to stumble. The context, above, shows that Peter was pointing ahead to events that would happen soon after his own death. Indeed, the First Revolt appears to have begun very soon after Peter was executed -- within less than two years. His advice is for a specific set of people regarding specific opponents who taught specific things about Priestly Judaism.

Put simply, Peter was NOT changing his tune to suddenly say that the judgment wouldn't take place for thousands of years! Instead, he looks back on the thirty to thirty-five years that have passed since Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, saying that to God such time has been nothing. Would it be so much, then, to wait a few more years? For God, that time was an instant.

God hoped that Peter and his readers would remain steadfast and was desirous that as many of their fellow Jews as possible would accept Jesus' Messianic teachings, and so he had given a reasonable time of about forty years for the people of that generation to acknowledge him.

Yet the day of judgment on Israel was about to seem very sudden, if indeed the people were not diligent in watching for it. Like a thief who burglarizes the homes of the unexpected, the Jewish person who was unaware would suddenly find his way of access to God removed.

"The elements" normally refers in the NT to basic teachings of some kind, here including the tenets of ritual religion that bound Priestly Judaism together. When these central things -- including temple devotion, the priestly lineage, and sacrifice -- were destroyed in judgment, how could the whole way of thinking possibly remain the same (like the false teachers claimed it would)? No, the whole system was about to be destroyed.

*Since these things will all be released in this way, what sort of people is it necessary for you to exist as, in holy conduct and piety? We are expecting and hastening the day of God's presence, through which the heavens will be on fire and will be released, and through which the elements will be burnt up and melted. But, according to his promise, we are expecting "a new heaven and a new earth" in which right dwells.*

Not intending to leave the readers with only an image of destruction and judgment, Peter turns to the faithful. The pious people, the ones who live in strength and deep respect for God's spiritual Torah, they also lived with a full expectation that God was about to keep his promises and to destroy ritual religion. Being "released" here is the same as being "destroyed," and "fire" is (as often) a metaphor for the act of destruction. The old state of affairs was about to be destroyed, and from that point on it would cease to exist. Even the basic elements from which Priestly Judaism was constructed would no longer exist.

So what would remain? The entirely new state of affairs promised by Isaiah. This new paradigm, mentioned in Isa 65:17ff., consists of a world without a "ritual" means of relating to God. Instead, the spiritual teachings about personal relationships would prevail, and "the former things will not be remembered" (65:17). Many Jewish people were expecting these things to come physically, but Jesus had taught that the physical way of thinking was inaccurate and would soon be removed.

*So, beloved, since you expect these things, try hard to be found by him in peace, without spots and without stains, and regard the long suffering of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paulus also wrote to you, according to the wisdom that was given to him (just as he speaks in all of his letters about these things). Some things are difficult to understand in them, and the unlearned and unstable people distort them to their own destruction, as they do the remaining writings.*

Again the author shows confidence in his readers, here saying that he knows that the readers expect the judgment that was soon to come. Therefore, they ought not to be in turmoil but in peace. "Without spots and ... stains" naturally has the double significance of Peter's metaphor. The readers themselves ought not to blemish their devotion with any form of idolatry (including that of the "teachers"), but also the teachers themselves (who are spots and stains) should be entirely ignored.

Peter recognizes Paulus as a brother here, borrowing a metaphor from him. Paulus had advised to treat Jesus' patient endurance as salvation, for it served as an example to the readers that they could endure their relatively painless times ahead. As an aside, Peter hedges against anyone trying to distort Paulus' intent to their own devices by recalling that he is aware of people doing just that -- deliberately distorting the intent of Paulus' letters. Yet the readers know Paulus' intent and should remember that.

The "remaining writings" refers to any other writings by Christians that the readers might have access to. By this time, possibly all of Paulus' letters were gaining in circulation, and letters by Jacob and Johannes were probably known. It is also possible that the readers possessed at least one written account of Jesus' life and teachings by this time. Peter doesn't want the readers to listen to any efforts to distort these writings, either.

**17** *Therefore, beloved, since you know beforehand, guard yourselves, so that you will not be carried away by the deceit of unprincipled people and will not fall from your place of stability. Now grow in generosity and knowledge of our Lord and savior, Anointed Jesus. To him be the glory, even now and into the day of the age. [A-mein.]*

Knowing ahead of time that the "teachers" would try such trickery, the readers should remember that Peter had said so. Expecting such behavior, Peter's audience hopefully would "not be carried away by the deceit." If only they followed what they already knew to be the true principles of the Messiah, they would continue to grow spiritually and would not face judgment.

Peter's concluding blessing is slightly different from a normal "end of the age" because the end is so near. The "day of the age" that would mark the destruction of the temple and siege of

Jerusalem was again being pointed out as coming soon, although Peter's closing statement was a subtle one. Within a few years of this letter, Paulus died, followed by Peter. Then the First Revolt began, signaling the judgment foretold by Jesus and here by Peter. We do not know whether or not these readers remained faithful to the spiritual Torah, but hopefully they did continue in trust and love, just as it was Peter's hope for them.

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