

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

2 PET. 2:10b 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.

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;

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:

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.

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

18 For when they speak great swelling *words* of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, *through much* wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

NOTES

The Deception of False Teachers

Lesson Text: 2 Peter 2:10b-22

Related Scriptures: Jude 1:8-16; Numbers 22:1-35;
Revelation 2:12-17; Matthew 7:15-23; 12:43-45

TIME: between A.D. 63-64

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“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” (2 Peter 2:15).

Lesson Exposition

DESCRIPTION OF FALSE TEACHERS—2 Pet. 2:10-14

Blasphemed glorious ones (2 Pet. 2:10b-11). Peter described the character and behavior of the false prophets in verses 1-10, and the description applies to false teachers today. They are not afraid to slander or speak evil of “dignities” or, more literally, “glories” (vs. 10). Scholars have proposed several possible meanings of the term “dignities,” including human authorities in the church, angels, and even fallen angels. False prophets may raise doubts about the existence of supernatural powers. They set themselves above even the angels in their behavior and speech. They are libertines who deny a judgment at the second coming of Christ. False teachers have no fear of judgment for their behavior.

Alternatively, the “dignities” in 2:10 may refer to the Father and the Son. By denying that Jesus is God’s Son and Christ’s coming in judgment, false teachers blaspheme the Father and the Son. “Dignities” may also encompass the revelation of God in Jesus

Christ in Scripture. False prophets set themselves above the Scriptures.

Blasphemous teachers (2 Pet. 2:12-14). In 2:12-13, Peter compared false prophets to brute beasts born to be caught and killed, a theme borrowed from Jude 1:10. Peter viewed false prophets as acting like beasts. This comparison to animals recurs until the end of the chapter. False prophets live by instinct and ignore or scoff at the power of both God and the evil in this world. They ignore the dangers of immorality.

These individuals are blemishes while they feast with people (2 Pet. 2:13). Peter may have been alluding to the common fellowship meal in his day. False prophets corrupted the feast through licentious behavior or false teachings (cf. vs. 2). False prophets are trained in capturing others, but their victims are weak and unsteady.

THE WARNING OF BALAAM—2 Pet. 2:15-16

The phrase “cursed children” is a bridge from the prior section that de-

scribed the character of false prophets to the statement about how they depart from the truth. In verses 15-16, Peter said that they go astray. At one time they may have followed the right road. Peter used the example of Balaam to illustrate this, who also went astray after a brief success.

In Numbers 22 through 24, Balaam was a prophet hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel. An angel told Balaam go with the men but only to speak what God told him to. Balaam blessed Israel. The story continues, however, in Numbers 25. After Balaam's oracle, he advised the Moabites how to destroy Israel's relationship with God. The Israelites were intimate with the women of Moab, who invited them to sacrifice to their gods (cf. Num. 31:16-17). That kindled God's anger, and He set a plague on Israel. Balaam's greed enticed him, and he was killed by the Israelites in Numbers 31:8 (cf. Rev. 2:12-17). We now see why the example of Balaam fit. Balaam initially sided with God but later advised the use of sexual immorality to corrupt Israel. False prophets in 2 Peter 2 were also using sexual immorality to corrupt the church.

DANGER FOR WEAK CHRISTIANS— 2 Pet. 2:17-22

Description of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:17-19). Peter continued with his description of false prophets. They are "wells without water" and "clouds that are carried with a tempest." False teachers lead people astray by promising liberty. However, false prophets themselves are enslaved to corruption, as are those who follow them.

Warning about false teachers (2 Pet. 2:20-21). False prophets target new Christians. Peter warned that if people escape the pollutions of this world but become overpowered by their prior lifestyle, they are worse off than before. Rejecting Christ, denying

His future coming, and adopting a carnal lifestyle bring judgment.

Old Testament proverbial warnings (2 Pet. 2:22). Peter ended verse 22 with two common parables. The first is from Proverbs 26:11. Those who follow false prophets return to the life that they once abandoned. In the second parable, a sow is washed and then returns to roll in the mud.

False teachers corrupt the gospel of Jesus Christ and lead many into a licentious lifestyle. They especially prey on new believers who are not well grounded in the faith of Jesus Christ. Returning to a life of sin after coming to faith in Christ makes people worse than when they started. Christians must guard against false teachings and practices.

—Robert Anderson

QUESTIONS

1. Who are false teachers not afraid to speak evil of?
2. What are possible interpretations of the term "dignities"?
3. What is the view of false teachers concerning angels?
4. What is the false teachers' view of God's judgment?
5. To whom did Peter compare the false teachers?
6. Why is this comparison appropriate?
7. Why is Balaam another good comparison to false teachers?
8. What practice did both Balaam and the false teachers in 2 Peter 2 advocate?
9. What do false teachers promise, and what do they actually deliver?
10. Who are the primary targets of false teachers?

—Robert Anderson

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Pride leads to consequences beyond our control (2 Pet. 2:10-13).
2. Giving in to sin can lead to an appetite for more sin (vs. 14).
3. God's examples in Scripture serve as warnings, but some do not listen (vss. 15-16).
4. Without God, human wisdom cannot provide spiritual benefit (vs. 17).
5. The allure of physical pleasure can lead us away from God (vs. 18).
6. True freedom is found only in Christ (vs. 19).
7. Knowing Christ is the path to overcoming sinful desires (vs. 20).
8. Once a person rejects God's righteousness, nothing can prevent further ungodliness (vss. 21-22).

—Glenn Weaver

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why may false teachers disparage angels (2 Pet. 2:10-11)?
2. Why may false teachers attend a gathering of believers?
3. How do false teachers behave in our modern churches?
4. What are some of the areas in which members of your church are vulnerable to false teachers?
5. How does the relationship between sin and rejection of Christ give insight into how to address addictions and sinful behaviors?
6. What freedoms do false teachers promise (vs. 19)?
7. Is it likely that a person who has rejected Christ will turn back to Him (vss. 19-22)?

—Glenn Weaver

Golden Text Illuminated

“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” (2 Peter 2:15).

The danger of false teachers cannot be overstated. Peter warned of those who follow the way of Balaam, who serves as a reminder of the allure of unrighteousness and the consequences of succumbing. Balaam temporarily resisted the enticements of the king of Moab, who sought to curse Israel. However, Balaam eventually succumbed (cf. Num. 22:1-35). Earthly gain blinded him. Wealth, power, and fame entice many.

The consequences of forsaking the right way are dire. False teachers “despise government” and are “presumptuous” and “selfwilled” (2 Pet. 2:10). They entice unstable souls and exploit the desires of the flesh (vss. 13-14). Their judgment will be severe. God did not spare angels who sinned, and He brought judgment upon the ancient world through the Flood (vss. 4-5).

Early Christians had to battle the Gnostics and Judaizers. As believers today, we must be vigilant in guarding against deceptive false teachers. We must hold fast to the Word of God and test everything against Scripture (1 John 4:1). Unrighteousness ultimately leads to spiritual ruin. We must forsake the fleeting pleasures of sin and choose obedience, even when it is difficult.

As we heed the warning of our golden text and consider the example of Balaam, let us commit to walking in the truth and resisting the allure of unrighteousness.

—Gene Kissinger