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May 11th: Job 39 & 2 Peter 3

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Alastair Roberts

The Lord teaches Job from the animals. Vindicating the promise of the Lord's appearing.

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Transcript

Job chapter 39. Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the carving of the does? Can you number the months that they fulfill? And do you know the time when they give birth, when they crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young? Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open, they go out and do not return to them. Who has let the wild donkey go free? Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, to whom I have given the arid place for his home, and the salt land for his dwelling place? He scorns the tumult of the city, he hears not the shouts of the driver, he ranges the mountains as his pasture, and he searches after every green thing.

Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will he spend the night at your manger? Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes? Or will he harrow the valleys after you? Will you depend on

him because his strength is great? And will you leave to him your labour? Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain, and gather it to your threshing floor? The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, but are they the pinions and plumage of love? For she leaves her eggs to the earth, and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that her foot may crush them, and that the wild beast may trample them. She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers, though her labour be in vain, yet she has no fear, because God has made her forget wisdom, and given her no share in understanding. When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider.

Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying, he paws in the valley, and exults in his strength, he goes out to meet the weapons, he laughs at fear, and is not dismayed, he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin, with fierceness and rage he swallows the ground, he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet, when the trumpet sounds he says, Aha! he smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars, and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up, and makes his nest on high? On the rock he dwells, and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold, from there he spies out the prey, his eyes behold it from far away, his young ones suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is he.

Job chapter 39 continues the Lord's speech to Job from the whirlwind. Chapter 38, the first part of the speech, focused upon the cosmos, the meteorological elements, and began to speak of the animal kingdom at the very end. Chapter 39 continues this panoramic vision of the creation, especially focusing upon the animal kingdom.

The Lord grants Job a different perspective upon the creation. By his questions he offers Job a sense of how he looks at his creation, and in the process he shakes Job out of his narrow anthropocentric perspective. What might look like arbitrary divine power to Job in the middle of his sufferings, appears very differently when he steps back from the immediacy of his human situation.

Job's vision of creation, which had naturally focused upon and been ordered around his limited human vantage point, is answered by a divine vision of creation, where human beings are virtually entirely absent from the picture, and the cosmos is instead a place of immense and powerful celestial bodies, wastes and wiles, untamed and proud beasts, boisterous meteorological forces, and the dreadful deep and underworld, the engulfing primordial darkness, and all of these things operating under the rule of a gracious creator, who both sustains and bounds them. These forces and creatures and realities, threatening and indeed hostile to man on occasions, are nonetheless part of God's good creation, graciously given their place within the whole by the Lord. Robert Alter sheds light upon the way that the Lord's speech to Job from the whirlwind revisits and

reconsiders some of the imagery and examples that appeared earlier in the dialogues, and that we need to read the two alongside each other.

For instance, in Job chapter 4 verses 10-11, Eliphaz describes the lions as predators and images of oppressors and wicked people. The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions are broken, the strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered. However, when the Lord speaks about the lions, he presents them in a strikingly different light.

In chapter 38 verses 39-40, can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket? The lion's hunting is supported and aided by the Lord, and it is the means graciously ordained by God for them to sustain themselves and their cubs. In Psalm 104, the Great Creation Psalm, we have a similar expression in verses 21-22. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.

When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. Predation, which Job might regard as a force merely of death and chaos, is, in God's economy of creation, also a force of life. The Lord's speech is full of images of animals caring for their young.

Such images in the mountain goat and the eagle bookend this chapter and also, by strong implication throughout, these images afford us a way of thinking about how God himself relates to his creation. Altar especially foregrounds the relationship between Job's anguished discussion of the creation and existence in chapter 3, where he cursed the day of his birth, and the Lord's portrayal of it in these chapters. He writes, In direct contrast to all this withdrawal inward and turning out of lights, God's poem is a demonstration of the energising power of panoramic vision.

Instead of the death wish, it affirms from line to line the splendour and vastness of life, beginning with a cluster of arresting images of the world's creation and going on to God's sustaining of the world in the forces of nature and in the variety of the animal kingdom. Instead of a constant focusing inward toward darkness, this poem progresses through a grand sweeping movement that carries us over the length and breadth of the created world, from sea to sky, to the unimaginable recesses where snow and winds are stored, to the lonely wastes and craggy heights where only the grass or the wildest of animals lives. In Job's initial poem, various elements of the larger world were introduced only as reflectors or rhetorical tokens of his suffering.

When the world is seen here through God's eyes, each item is evoked for its own sake, each existing thing having its own intrinsic and often strange beauty. In chapter 3, Job wanted to reduce time to nothing and contract space to the small dark compass of the locked womb. God's poem, by contrast, moves through eons from creation to the inanimate forces of nature to the teeming life on earth and, spatially, in a series of metonymic links, from the uninhabited wasteland, in verse 26, to the mountain habitat

of the lion and the gazelle, the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 39, and the steps where the wild ass roams.

Job then wants to return to the darkness of the womb and the tomb and to extinguish life in that place. The Lord's response is the inverse of this. It's a bracing celebration of the manifoldness, the wonder and the goodness of life.

What has been presented as images merely of death and chaos in Job's curse upon the day of his birth appear in the Lord's response as elements of a vast vista of a glorious and good creation, each with their own part to play. If Alter is right, the Lord's speech sets itself up in responsive dialogue to Job's curse through presenting its own portrayal of the creation in careful literary contrast to Job's. For instance, chapter 3, verses 7 to 9, describes the night of Job's birth, wishing that all of its stars were extinguished.

Behold, let that night be barren. Let no joyful cry enter it. Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.

Let the stars of its dawn be dark. Let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning, because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes. In chapter 38, verses 4 to 7, the birth of the earth is described by the Lord, with the angelic stars themselves as a chorus of celebration.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? The Lord's response to Job is full of images of birth, accenting its wonder, glory and mystery, answering to Job's tragic and annihilationist desire.

Alter writes again, the poetics of suffering in chapter 3 seeks to contract the whole world to a point of extinction and it generates a chain of images of enclosure and restriction. The poetics of providential vision in the speech from the storm conjures up horizon after expanding horizon, each populated with a new form of life. In chapter 38, verse 8, the sea is an infant coming forth from a womb and being swaddled by the clouds.

The ice and the frost also come from their womb in chapter 38, verse 29. Beasts and birds giving birth and providing for their young are throughout chapter 39. Creaturally life is exuberant and overflowing.

This is seen most especially in its divinely given power of procreation. As Robert Alter observes again, the Canaanite cosmogonic myths, their stories accounting for the origin of the universe, tended to focus upon the act of creation as victory over a sort of chaos monster, creation through battle. While God's creative works are poetically depicted in such ways at points in scripture, what is notable is the way that such images are also

subverted.

In the Lord's response to Job, different motifs predominate. Rather than battle, creation is described in terms of procreation. Alter again, what we are invited to imagine in this fashion is creation not as the laying low of a foe, but as the damning up and channeling of powers nevertheless allowed to remain active.

The poet uses a rather unexpected verb, to hedge in, in order to characterise this activity of holding back the womb of the sea. And that is a double allusion to God's protective hedging round of Job mentioned in the frame story and to Job's bitter complaint toward the end of his first poem of having been hedged in by God. Images of warfare are also seen at several points in the Lord's speech.

The war horse is a notable example. The creation is a realm of awe, dread, fear and wonder and such responses to it are nowhere more elicited than when we see the might of the creation and its creatures exhibited in the full expression of their strength in battle or predation. The hailstorm, reserved for the day of battle and war in chapter 38 verses 22 and 23, and the power of the war horse, snorting, shaking his mane, stamping, every muscle poised and waiting for the release of the command to charge, are images of the power and terror of the creation and in the war horse an image of how that can be mastered by someone for the cause of battle.

The mighty elements are like the Lord's own war horses. The portrait of creation here is one in which God can set vast and mighty forces loose but he never loses absolute control over them. By great contrast, a human being like Job is incapable of mastering, truly understanding or controlling the dizzying array of forces and creatures enumerated by the Lord.

The chapter begins with the mountain goats and their giving birth. Once again the focus upon birth helps us to think of the creation as a place of burgeoning life and also of tender provision. There are also subtle plays off Job's initial speech to be found here.

For instance in verse 2, can you number the months that they fulfil and do you know the time when they give birth? The numbering of the months was also mentioned in Job's initial speech in chapter 3 verse 6, that night let thick darkness seize it, let it not rejoice among the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Like the mountain goats, the wild donkeys live in wildernesses, in uninhabited regions where human beings do not dwell. Men do not watch over them or see their comings and goings but the Lord does.

He knows their most hidden and secret ways. He has graciously provided their dwelling places for them. The wild ox, like the wild donkey, will not serve man.

He is a free and mighty beast, driven by his own will. The ostrich, which comes next in

verses 13-18 is an interesting case. She has an unusually careless attitude towards her young.

God the creator has made all of his creations gloriously different. In the process the desire to reduce everything to a universal principle is thwarted. God has given the ostrich speed to outrun its predators but also to compensate for its stupidity.

That stupidity also comes from God and is part of his good purpose of creation. While David Clines questions their legitimacy, many see in the figure of the ostrich a comparison with Job's own condition, being deprived by God of a degree of wisdom. Some commentators have seen in verse 18's reference to the horse and his rider, a transition that moves us to the figure of the war horse in verses 19-25.

The war horse is a majestic creature, seen in its full power in the context of battle. War horses fearlessly charging towards the enemy lines are a stirring sight. The images of this chapter are not just images of power, tamed and untamed.

There are many differences that the Lord highlights between the creatures that he portrays. He wants Job to recognise not just the untamed might of the creation, but also the variegated majesty of it. The chapter ends with the hawks and the eagles, who soar in the heavens, a nest in inaccessible heights from where they espy their prey.

These are birds of prey and carrion, but though associated with death, they too have a place within God's good order. The sucking up of blood and the eating of dead bodies is a means by which their young ones are given life. In Book 12 of the City of God, St. Augustine speaks about the goodness of the transitory character of animal life.

Although from a limited perspective it may seem to be a bad thing that animals die, in the larger scheme he sees it as a good thing. There is a fitting beauty to that which is transitory, to the seasons. Even the terrible process of death can be subordinated and the servants of, a good order of life.

Things have to perish in order that new things can come into existence. He writes, Of this order the beauty does not strike us, because by our mortal frailty we are so involved in a part of it that we cannot perceive the whole, in which these fragments that offend us are harmonised with the most accurate fitness and beauty, and therefore where we are not so well able to perceive the wisdom of the Creator, we are very properly enjoined to believe it, lest in the vanity of human rashness we presume to find any fault with the work of so great an artificer. He goes on later, All natures then, inasmuch as they are, and have therefore a rank and species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are certainly good, and when they are in the places assigned to them by the order of their nature, they preserve such being as they have received, and those things which have not received everlasting being are altered for better or for worse, so as to suit the wants and motions of those things to which the Creator's law has made them subservient, and

thus they tend in the divine providence to that end which is embraced in the general scheme of the government of the universe.

So that, though the corruption of transitory and perishable things brings them to utter destruction, it does not prevent their producing that which was designed to be their result. In this speech the Lord is in many respects giving Job something of the perspective upon the whole that Job naturally lacks from the limited vantage point of his own suffering. Graciously granted such a vantage point, Job might begin to be better placed to understand his own sufferings.

A question to consider. In this chapter the Lord sends Job to consider the animals. When we read accounts of creation in scripture, in Genesis 1-2 for instance, or in the great creation psalm of Psalm 104, animals are very prominent in the picture.

Why did God create the animals? What can we as human beings learn from reflecting upon them? And what do we lose when they drop out of our vision of creation? 2 Peter chapter 3 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn? But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as

he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with error of lawless people, and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. In 2 Peter chapter 3, the final chapter of the epistle, Peter underlines the importance of the coming of Christ in judgment.

This is his second letter to the people to whom he is writing, and he wants to stir them up by way of reminder. The earliest church's expectation of Christ's imminent return has long been a source of theological discomfort and apologetic embarrassment for many Christians. The apparent failure of New Testament prophecy throws the reliability of Christ himself as a prophet into serious question.

Christ and the apostles who bore witness to him declared firmly that he was coming soon, yet here we are almost 2,000 years later. Passages such as 2 Peter chapter 3 seem to accentuate the problem. Peter is writing to Christians, reminding them of the prophetic witness of Christ and the apostles, against the background of disbelieving, scoffing false teachers.

Even at the time of the epistle, people are starting to ridicule or reject the prophetic testimony of Christ and the apostles. Early in the letter, Peter declared his intent to write to remind his readers of what had been promised, knowing that he was going to die soon. He assured his readers that in their testimony concerning the coming of Jesus Christ, they weren't following cunningly devised fables.

He presents what he witnessed with James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration as evidence that the word concerning Christ's coming was certain. Christ's kingly glory was a reality and just waited to be revealed at the appropriate time. Yet Jesus had declared a period of time within which his prophecies would be fulfilled, and everyone could see that the time was swiftly running out.

In addition to saying that he was coming soon and that the time was near, Jesus had given more specific details concerning the time within which the prophecies would be fulfilled, and he seemed to be on an increasingly tight schedule. He had assured his hearers that his promised coming would occur before they had finished going through the towns of Israel. In Matthew chapter 10 verse 23, he had promised that it would occur while some of the apostolic witnesses were still alive.

In Matthew chapter 16 verse 28, that generation would not pass away until all of the Olivet discourse prophecy would come to pass. In Matthew chapter 24 verse 34, it was

this that represented the biggest challenge for the readers of 2nd Peter. The apostles and the witnesses of Christ, who are described as the fathers in verse 4, were dying, and Peter by his own admission was near death.

But the awaited coming of Jesus still had not materialized, and at this point it might look as if he was going to be a no-show. This throws everything into question. Against the scoffing of the false teachers, Peter reminds his readers of the example of the flood.

He also challenges some of his contemporaries' understanding of apocalyptic timetables. The Lord, Peter wants us to appreciate, never finds himself on a tight schedule. He is the Lord of the Ages, and he is never racing against the clock.

The vast scale of a millennium, a thousand years, doesn't weaken his memory of his promise, nor do the exigencies and time pressures of a day leave him in danger of overshooting his deadline. He preserved the old creation prior to the flood, a world symbolically formed by holding the chaos of the waters at bay, and then destroyed that in the flood, and now he's holding the present order, and he can bring that down too. Peter goes on to explain that the Lord's apparent slackness concerning his promised return is not a manifestation of his failure to keep his scheduled appointments, as if Christ struggled with punctuality.

No, it is his mercy and patience that leads him to tarry. Christ's apparent delay is his gift of time to his people, enabling them to prepare themselves for his return. Peter returns to a familiar image from Christ's own teaching in the Gospels, where Christ compares his return to the coming of a thief.

Peter's teaching in this passage, with its references to the flood and an unexpected thief, strongly recalls Jesus' own teaching in the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24, 27-51. The day of the Lord is a day for which many will be unprepared. Jesus warns both of a feverish climate of misguided predictions and excited expectations, and of the cynicism of those who dismiss his return entirely, pointing to the fact that things continue as they have always done.

When the day of the Lord does arrive, it will have dramatic and devastating effect. The heavens will pass away and be dissolved. The elements will melt with fervent heat, the elements here being the same term as Paul uses in Galatians 4, and the earth and the works within it will be exposed.

Considering the coming dissolution of the present world order, Peter charges his readers to be people distinguished by their holy conduct and godliness in verse 11, rather than by the insobriety and licentiousness that marks the false teachers. Their conduct is to be different from others, revealing the fact that they are people driven by hope in a promise concerning a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, both anticipating it and praying for its soon arrival. Stirring as Peter's message to his readers

may seem when read in its original context, I am sure that many Christians who have followed the train of his argument will find themselves disheartened by it.

Peter doubled down on the promises of Jesus, and yet they still failed to come to pass. If the reliability of Jesus as a teacher depends so much upon the accuracy of his prophetic predictions, where does that leave us? Unless, perhaps, all of these things did come to pass. In addressing this question, it is important to pay attention to two particular things.

The first thing to do is to attend to the specifics of the New Testament teaching concerning the last things. In the Olivet Discourse and the chapter that precedes it, the last days are focused upon the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. There is a judgment on the near horizon, and it will particularly relate to the Jewish people and their city Jerusalem.

I believe that the book of Revelation also most immediately refers to these events. In the Olivet Discourse, there are several references and allusions to the prophecies of Daniel which concern the end of days of the Jewish people, during which time the Messiah will come, followed by destruction and the tearing up of the world order. We see this in chapter 9 verses 24-27.

The decisive apocalyptic events there, associated with the work of the Messiah in bringing an end to sacrifice and offering, are the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. These events, while focusing upon the Jewish people in Jerusalem, are of cosmic and epochal significance. In Matthew chapter 23 verses 35-36, Jesus speaks of all the righteous blood that has been shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel to Zechariah, coming upon the Jews of his generation.

The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple would mark the conclusion and the judgment of an entire era of human history, and the collapse of an entire world order. The second thing to attend to is that the dramatic language of conflagration of the heavens and earth that Peter employs here resembles Old Testament imagery of epochal and cosmic judgment. We find such language in Isaiah chapter 13, 34, 51 and 65.

It's also like the language used by the author of Hebrews, who speaks of God currently shaking and removing certain temporary realities of the heavens and the earth, so that the enduring thing should remain, in chapter 12 verses 26-29. This does not refer to the annihilation of the physical order, but to the destruction of the divine world order. For Peter, the destruction of the temple would have closed a window of time in which the old covenant and the new covenant orders overlapped.

It changes the way that God relates to humanity in general. With the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, that route of access to God is completely closed off. It leaves nothing but judgment for those who continue to rely upon it.

This is the melting of the firmament and the elements. The temple was the model of heaven. It was the means by which you had access to God, and that has been destroyed.

It's removed a protective cover that the temple afforded the people of the land and their works, revealing their works, which are then burned up. With the decisive destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the entire theopolitical firmament is brought crashing down to the ground. After the destruction of the temple, the status of Israel changed.

There was no longer a nation with a special means of access to God. All the nations ordered relative to it. The rule of the Messiah, the King of Israel, has been declared, and all of the nations are now redefined relative to him.

The kingdoms of this earth belong to our Lord, and all rulers are but stewards responsible to administer justice and submission to him until his kingdom is consummated. After AD 70, Israel no longer enjoyed the unique status of a holy nation, and no sacred polity has taken its place. All humanity and every ruler is now called to prepare themselves for the consummation of the kingdom of the Christ, for which the church serves as an anticipatory sign and witness.

After AD 70, a new heavens and a new earth is established. God deals with people on different terms. A world order structured around the temple in Jerusalem, marked for condemnation in Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, is finally to be torn down, and a new world order structured around the New Jerusalem and the coming kingdom, where there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, is established in its place.

This is one that will eventually grow to fill the entire earth, as Daniel foretold. 2 Peter, like so much of the New Testament, is written in the shadow of the imminent day of the Lord, anticipating the near coming of Christ in judgment. Considering the imminent coming of their Lord in judgment, the recipients of the letter are charged to ensure that when the time comes, they will be found holy, without impurity, moral spot, or blemish, and at peace with God and each other.

The day of the Lord will be a day when the true character of things and persons are exposed, and we are called to live our lives as those readied for a great unveiling. As Peter declares in verse 10, the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed. The patience of the Lord, His delay in bringing judgment upon the world, is an act of salvation.

It ensures that all of His people can be gathered in. Peter has already spoken of this patience in verse 9. God is patient towards us. He does not wish any to perish, but that all should repent.

God's intent in delay is salvation. Peter claims that his teaching on this point is also supported by the witness of Paul's writings, by the wisdom given to him by the Lord.

Perhaps he has in mind passages of Paul's letters, such as Romans chapter 2, verses 3 to 4. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things, and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Peter's concern in this passage is helping the people to whom he is writing to understand the approaching day of the Lord.

However, much of the significance of this passage is found in material that is mostly tangential to Peter's driving point here, in his remarks concerning Paul. The first thing we ought to notice is the way that he speaks of Paul as our beloved brother. Who is the R here? Richard Borkham argues that it is very unlikely to mean my.

The most likely possibility is that the R refers to Peter's fellow apostles. The we in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 1 referred to the very core apostles, Peter, James, and John. As James had died by that time, one could perhaps even make a case that the we refers to Peter and John.

Paul is the beloved brother and fellow witness of these apostles, presumably two of the few remaining apostles who had not yet died. Paul is the beloved brother and fellow witness of these apostles. In Galatians chapter 2, Peter and Paul had a great confrontation in Antioch.

But here, at the end of his life, Peter expresses his union with Paul and appeals to him as a fellow witness. Peter was the one entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, and Paul with the gospel to the uncircumcised. Paul presents the fact of this mutual recognition in Galatians, and here Peter also expresses such a recognition of Paul.

The second thing that we ought to notice is that Paul's works seem to have been widely known to Peter. The leaders and teachers of the early church recognized and supported each other's ministries, seeing themselves as standing in unity in their presentation of the gospel. Paul's letters clearly were shared widely in the early church, beyond the churches and persons to whom they were first directly addressed.

The early church was tightly networked with lots of movement around. Paul's employment of letters was not accidental. It was a practice with much to commend it over the writing of mere abstract theological treatises.

As letters, these formed personal bonds and exchanges between churches, especially as churches were expected to pass them on to other churches. As the letters were passed around, servants of the churches would travel around with them, sharing news, encouragement, gifts and ministry, strengthening the unity of the church. Also, as the direct recipients of the letters shared them, they were ministering their particular gifts to others, and presenting themselves as examples from which other Christians and churches could learn.

By this point, it is not unlikely that collections of Paul's letters may have already been circulating among churches. The third and the most startling thing here, however, is the way that Peter speaks of Paul's writings. He talks of how they are difficult to understand, and how many twist them to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

The implication is that Peter considered Paul's writings to be scripture, alongside the scriptures of the Old Testament. He mentions the wisdom given to Paul. This expression is similar to that that Paul uses to refer to the ministry with which he was commissioned and for which he was equipped, in places such as Romans 12 verse 3, Romans chapter 15 verses 15 to 17, and Galatians chapter 2 verses 7 to 9, where he describes the grace given to him as something that was recognised by Peter and the other apostles.

Peter remarks on the fact that there are things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand, and that these elements have been twisted by the uninstructed and unstable to their own destruction. This is most likely referring primarily not to followers of false teachers, but to false teachers themselves. Theirs is a culpable lack of instruction and ignorance.

They have not desired to grow in their understanding of the truth, so have not properly instructed themselves in the faith. The condemned persons are also unstable. They are not rooted in a love for the truth, in moral integrity and consistency of life, and as a result they are unstable persons.

Their interpretation is not guided by a careful commitment to discovering the truth, but by ungoverned passions, by their desire to justify their sins, by the anger of those whose minds are not at peace, by the rebellion of those who do not want to submit to the clear instruction of the Lord, and by the sectarianism of those who wish merely to win arguments against others. It is crucial that we recognise that, for Peter, interpretation is a moral activity as much as an intellectual one. People who have not mastered their spirits, subdued their vices, learned to live at peace with their neighbour, developed a love of the truth, people whose minds are not guarded by the peace of Christ, and who are in rebellion against God, will not think clearly.

Rather, they will constantly twist the truth to their own destruction. Indeed, the cleverer they are, the better they will be at twisting the truth and rationalising their sins. There is a spirit of lawlessness and hatred for the truth at work in the world, and the recipients of Peter's epistle must be on guard against it.

They have been warned in advance, so that they might be firmly grounded and secure, in contrast to the instability of the false teachers and their followers. The alternative to the instability of the false teachers and their followers, and the way that Peter's recipients will be prepared for the coming day that he has described, is by growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is in looking to him that they will put down the roots that will hold them firm and secure when all others are

overthrown.

Ultimately, all of the glory belongs to him. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which moral and spiritual instability can compound people's errors and misunderstanding of the truth?