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2 Peter: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

As we start into the book of 2 Peter, we should remark upon some of the distinctive qualities of the book and its difficulties at the outset. The first thing to say is that almost anyone who has read the New Testament carefully has noticed that the book of Jude and the book of 2 Peter have extensive similarities. Beyond this, it has a very different style from the book of 1 Peter.

This is something that was recognised back in the time of the early church, Calvin and others have commented upon it, and various theories have been presented for why it might be the case. Not least the possibility that the creative hand of an amanuensis is very much in evidence in this letter. The Hellenistic concepts and language have also provoked debate, people wondering whether a Galilean fisherman would write in such

terms.

The book of 2 Peter also struggled to be accepted as canonical, which might seem strange for a book of genuine Petrine origin. Others have noticed similarities with 1 and 2 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, which date from the end of the 1st century, but are post-apostolic works. Then there are internal issues as well.

Many read chapter 3 verses 2 to 4 as suggesting that the apostles have already died, which would cause problems as Peter is clearly one of the apostles himself. We also know that in the early centuries of the church there was various pseudepigraphical material going around, material that claimed to be written by a particular author, but was not actually written by that historical character. There were a number of such works that claimed to arise from Peter.

In light of such considerations, the vast majority of scholars do not believe that the book of 2 Peter was authored by Peter himself. Richard Borkham, who is one who doubts that Peter is the author, puts forward a theory that somewhat cushions the blow, a theory that need not undermine the authority of scripture. He maintains that the book belongs to a testamentary genre, a genre that was known to be fictional, and so people reading the text would not be deceived, they would know that they were reading a fictional work, and interspersed with it there were things relating to the present day situation of those reading it, so they would clearly know that it was not written by the historical Peter.

Rather, a fictionalised personification of Peter was addressing their situation as a faithful yet fictional construct. Attractive as such a theory may be, as a way of cutting the Gordian knot of the questions of the authorship and dating of the book, it is not ultimately satisfying. Thomas Schreiner has raised a number of problems with this theory, observing that the early church was far more hostile towards pseudepigraphical works than Richard Borkham's theory would suggest.

Such works were not merely regarded as pious fictions, but as actual misleading of people. While this might be slightly overstating the situation, it is noteworthy that, of all the books that claimed to be written by Peter that were clearly pseudepigraphical, none of them actually found their way into the New Testament, except for the book of 2 Peter, if it were in fact pseudepigraphical, written by someone other than the person it purports to be written by. Then there is the question of the testamentary genre.

Is it in fact the case that this genre is always fictional? We seem to find examples of this sort of material at various points in the Old Testament, for instance at the end of Jacob's life, or the end of Moses' life, or the end of David's life. Are there established norms of genre that make clear that these are in fact fictional? It's not clear that there are. As for the relationship with the book of Jude, various theories have been put forward.

Some have suggested a common source for the two books, others have suggested that

Jude borrowed from the book of 2 Peter, but the most likely explanation to me seems to be that 2 Peter uses a lot of the material of Jude, Jude being the earlier of the two texts. As for questions of literary style, we are working with very little material, and it is tricky to judge on such a limited basis. It is even more difficult to judge when we consider the possibilities of different sectaries being involved, and the possibility in both books of the use of extensive prior material.

In the case of 1 Peter, there is suggestion that there might be extensive liturgical material included into the book, and in the case of 2 Peter, the use of material from the book of Jude. Thomas Schreiner has also noted the possibility of allusions to material from the book of 2 Peter back in works from the end of the 1st century AD, referring his readers to scholarly research that has been done on the subject. The claim that the book of 2 Peter suggests that the apostles have already died is not compelling.

The letter begins with a familiar form of introduction, a style that we find both in Pauline letters and in other secular letters of the time. Peter introduces himself as Simeon Peter, a name used of him elsewhere only in Acts chapter 15. He refers to Jesus Christ as our God and Saviour.

Now that could be read as our God and our Saviour, but it seems most likely it should be read as our God and Saviour. Usually when such distinction is intended, it is far more clear within the Greek. At the very outset then, we would have a very high Christology.

The faith of the Christians to whom Peter is writing is no less precious than that of the apostles themselves. Their faith is described as being of equal standing, seemingly with the apostles themselves. He goes on to talk about the basis of our salvation, relating it all to his divine power, which in the context would seem to be a reference back to Christ.

We have come to know Christ by his effectual call to glory, and through coming to know Jesus, we have been granted divine power that gives us everything that we need for eternal life. Christ, through his glory and goodness, has given great promises to his people, promises that make them partakers of the divine nature, releasing them from the corruption of this present world on account of sinful desire. In speaking of being partakers of the divine nature, Peter is using Hellenistic language.

We should think about this in terms of what theologians have talked about as God's communicable and non-communicable attributes. God's non-communicable attributes are things like his infinity, his aseity, his omnipotence, his omniscience. No creature can take on these attributes.

However, God's communicable attributes can be taken on by creatures in an analogical sense. So God's holiness, God's humility, God's kindness, God's love, and all these other characteristics are things that we can take on, and in the process become more godlike. We can become godly, being conformed to the image of God in Christ, taking on

something of his character and his glory.

Our faces shine as we reflect his glory. In the light of the fundamental fact of our salvation in Christ, we have an imperative of growth. Verses 3-4 present our salvation in its most comprehensive and fundamental character as a gracious work of God and of his own initiative, and a gracious work that has sufficiently provided us with everything that we need.

Faith must become fruitful, however, maturing into something fuller. The fundamental posture of trust in God must work itself out into a fuller and richer set of qualities that derive from it. In this, however, we will be growing from the rich soil that God's grace has provided for us, not from our own resources.

As verses 3 and 4 make clear, God has given us everything that we need. He presents a chain of qualities, but it's not necessarily a sequence. We don't need to develop these one by one in succession.

Rather, we should be developing them all at the same time. However, the movement from faith at the beginning to love at the end is probably significant. Love is the capstone of everything.

It is the theological virtue that's prized over all the others, in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, for instance. Because Christ has given us everything that we need for life and godliness, we must pursue such growth. Peter singles out virtue, which we might understand as moral courage, knowledge, which will be a deep apprehension of God's truth in Christ, self-control, self-mastery in the book of Proverbs, for instance, is a mark of maturity, steadfastness or patience, godliness, a God-fearing character and a life that is oriented to and around God, brotherly affection, a concern for each other in Christ, and then, as the culminating quality, love.

We must pursue these qualities and seek to increase in them, lest we become ineffective or unfruitful. That is the key danger, that our faith is not actually growing. There's a danger of forgetting sins that we have been forgiven and the new life that we have been brought into.

He charges them to confirm your calling and election. The calling and election stresses God's unilateral action. However, God's unilateral grace to us must be confirmed in our faithful response.

Peter's point here is not dissimilar from that which we find in Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 to 13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. The salvation that we have been given is not just a sort of spiritual life

insurance.

Rather, it is something that brings us into a new form of life and fellowship. And we confirm this by actually living the life that we have been given, living out the salvation that has been granted to us. To be given a life and not to live it is a mockery.

And so we are called to live out what God has given us, thereby confirming his unilateral work of grace towards us. There is a last judgment according to works. And in God's judgment upon our works, our initial justification will be confirmed.

This will not be a matter of us adding to what God has given us, as if there needs to be some works to complement God's grace, as if God's grace was not enough. As Peter has already said, God has given us everything that we need. Rather, this is the form that God's salvation takes.

This is the path that God has furnished for us. And so those who receive God's salvation enter into it fully by living it out. This is how God's calling and election is confirmed in our lives.

Peter is shortly about to die, and this gives its book some of its testamentary character. He notes that Jesus had told him about the manner in which he would die. In John chapter 21 verses 18-19 Peter wants to make preparation for them in the future.

He is writing not merely for the present, but for the time when he leaves, to ensure that they are prepared for what will come. And to confirm them in what they have been taught, he talks about the event of the Transfiguration. In the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw something of the glory of Christ, a glory that was a reality-filled sign of the glory to come in the great unveiling of Christ at the end.

Also a glory that confirms the Old Testament teaching. The Transfiguration is the unveiling of Christ as the majestic King, and of his kingdom rule in his Father's glory. The Transfiguration, Douglas Haring argues, is an anticipatory apocalypse, much as that experienced by John on Patmos or Saul on the road to Damascus.

He writes, that he will in fact come to judge the earth and its inhabitants, and set up his eternal reign over all things and all peoples. The Transfiguration, then, is a guarantee of the coming realisation of all of the prophetic promises. It is the prophetic word made more sure.

It is also important to recognise that, for Peter, the future coming of Christ is framed less by the times and dates for some future divine action than it is by the person of Jesus Christ. The future coming of Christ is the coming revelation of the glory of Christ, a glory that he already possesses, and which Peter saw for himself. What we look forward to is not so much a series of eschatological events, but the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, as Peter proceeds to argue in verses 20-21, the Transfiguration serves to validate and confirm the prophetic word of Scripture. It demonstrates that it is not of human origin or will. It is given by the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

And in the Transfiguration, both the unifying origin, Jesus Christ, the one who speaks God's word, and the referent, the one to whom it points, Jesus, the glorified son, of the prophetic word of Scripture is disclosed. The Scriptures find their coherence in their common, Spirit-inspired witness and revelation of the glory that is seen in Jesus Christ. The prominence that the Transfiguration is accorded within the second epistle of Peter, then, merits closer attention.

In his commentary on the epistle, Harring suggests that, for Peter, it is the Transfiguration, rather than the cross or the resurrection, that is put forward as the decisive Christological event. This revelation of the glory of Christ is the revelation of the final truth and reality of all things. The same light that first illumined the world is the light that will dawn in the coming final day.

It is the light witnessed on the holy mountain. Harring remarks, or to an a priori, universal religious sense, variously modified by historical and cultural experience, the standard post-enlightenment modes of apologia for religious truth. Instead, Peter goes directly to his and the other apostles being eyewitnesses of an apocalypse of the truth of Jesus Christ.

That apocalypse of the truth of all things is itself the origin and criterion of all claims about God and the beginning and end of all things. A question to consider, how might we retell the story of Scripture in a way that presented the dazzling glory of Christ seen on the Mount of Transfiguration as the centre of the entire thing? 2 Peter 2 presents an extended warning about false teachers. They have arisen in the church, and as Peter is departing, he wants to prepare his hearers to address them.

The substance of this chapter is pretty much the same as Jude 4-16. While there are several differences along the way, much light can be shed upon 2 Peter 2 by comparing it with the book of Jude. There is a sort of typological necessity that the great exodus that Jesus brings about follows patterns found in the exodus from Egypt.

In that exodus there had been false teachers, and now there will be false teachers again. Part of the challenge of these particular false teachers seems to be a denying of the coming of Christ again. If the return of Christ is denied, and with that coming judgement, ethics start to unravel.

At the end of the preceding chapter, Peter had presented the hearers with true prophecy, and the confirmation of the substance of true prophecy in the event of the Transfiguration. And now he moves on to the question of false teachers. Against the background of true prophecy, we'll see what is the false.

Richard Boulkham suggests that the key characteristics of these false teachers, as Peter describes them, is as follows. First, they are not divinely authorised. Second, they give false assurance of peace.

And then third, they will be judged. False teachers are already present, but more will arise. And this has all been foretold beforehand, so they should not have a sense that God's purposes have been thrown off.

In Matthew 24, verses 4-13, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus had declared, And Jesus answered them, And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. We find similar sorts of warnings in places like 1 John or in 2 Thessalonians. The word for heresies here might refer to factions.

However, false teaching is clearly involved. They deny the Master that bought them. They have participated in Christ's redemption.

They have been brought into the Church. They've experienced the truth of God in that context. They've seen something of the way that Christ transforms lives.

These are apostates. The Church is not an unmixed group. The Church contains both wheat and tares.

This section of the chapter parallels with Jude verses 4 and 5. For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation. Ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

They practice and advocate a licentious lifestyle. This is likely chiefly seen in sexual immorality and greed. As a result of their behaviour, God's truth will be blasphemed.

When people see their wickedness, they will speak ill of the Gospel. They are motivated by greed, and they will exploit the naive. Their motivations are quite impure, but they have persuasive words, and they can lead people astray very effectively.

But yet their judgement will certainly come. There is no doubt that God will call them to account. Peter supports his point with a succession of examples.

In contrast to Jude, Peter's examples follow the chronological order of biblical history. He begins with the judgement of the angels of Genesis chapter 6, and then moves to the judgement of Noah's generation, and then finally to Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot. This

parallels with Jude verses 6-7.

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgement of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality, and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Like Jude, Peter here seems to refer to the sin of the sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 verses 1-4 as the sin of angels having sexual relations with human women. This is also seen in 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 19-20.

There is extensive reference to this reading of Genesis in the Jewish tradition. Jude seems to go on to quote the book of 1 Enoch in verses 14-15. It was also about these that Enoch the 7th from Adam prophesied, saying, As the book of 1 Enoch has an extensive account of the sins of the angelic watchers who slept with human women, it would be natural to think that Jude and Peter are working with the same reading.

The language of sons of God is used of angels in places such as Job chapter 1 or Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 8. We see angels taking human form in the book of Genesis, for instance in the visitors to Abraham and Lot in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. These angels eat, walk, talk and engage in typical human interactions. They appear to have genuine human bodies with ordinary faculties.

They are not merely possessing bodies, like demons do. There is no reason to believe that prior to their judgement, the wicked sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 did not have such human bodies. While angels do not have sexual relations as angels, when occupying human bodies there is no reason to believe that they could not have done.

The fact that it is sons of God having relations with daughters of men is also important. There is a sexual asymmetry. Sons with daughters.

It is not just an intermarriage of two groups as such. Here we should remember that the angels do not have male and female. The angels are seemingly all male.

We are also told of the mighty men that are born to the women. This would also fit with the mythologies of a great many cultures that have myths of such unions. For Jude, the false teachers are represented as those who have crept in, as those infecting the church as if from without.

In 2 Peter chapter 2 they are from within the church. Both of these things can be true. It is like the parable of the wheat and the tares.

The tares come from without, from the enemy who sows them. But they are also within the field. Peter contrasts with Jude in his focus on the Lord's preservation of the righteous few, discussing Noah and Lot, whereas Jude focuses almost entirely upon the punishment of the wicked.

Peter brings in this other theme of God's preservation of the righteous. The flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are paradigmatic judgements in the New Testament. For instance, in Luke chapter 17 verses 26-32, These stories are evidence of the Lord's power both to judge the wicked and to preserve the righteous.

They are examples of the judgement to come. Noah is presented as a herald of righteousness, and Lot as a righteous man in a wicked city, who are saved with a small remnant around them. These figures provide examples for the church, as heralds of righteousness like Noah and as those who like Lot are being grieved by the sin that surrounds them.

The mention of Lot may be surprising. He clearly has a very flawed character in Genesis chapter 19. However, Lot is also distinguished from the city around him, by the hospitality that he shows, by his strong opposition to the sin of the men of the city, and by his loyalty to the angels.

Whatever his failings, he stood out from those people who surrounded him. The men of Sodom were distinguished by their sensual conduct and by their lawless deeds. Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 49-50 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom.

She and her daughters had pride, excessive food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me, so I removed them when I saw it. God is able to keep his people and to mark out the wicked for judgment.

Peter especially singles out those who indulge their flesh in unclean lusts and those who despise authority. The focus on sexual sin and perversity is present as an inciting cause of judgment in both the flood and in the case of Sodom. Like the rest of the New Testament, sexual sin is treated as a matter of a special seriousness.

These people also resist authority, presumably the authority of God in particular, which lies behind all other authorities. They are rebellious in their fundamental character. Peter then proceeds to unpack their sins in verses 10-16.

Insubordination and rebelliousness, sexual immorality and greed. The false teachers are brazen and arrogant in the way that they speak about authorities. The startling thing here is that Peter is probably referring not merely to righteous authorities, but in the first instance to evil angels.

Once again the Jude parallel is instructive. Jude verses 8-10. Yet in like manner these people also rely on their dreams to file the flesh, reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones.

But when the archangel Michael contending with the devil was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord

rebuke you. But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Righteous angels, even Michael, who may be Christ himself, do not revile the glorious ones, the exalted yet wicked angels.

There seems to be an allusion here back to Zechariah chapter 3. The authority and the power of these wicked angels should be taken seriously. They are wicked servants of the Lord and must be dealt with accordingly. We should take a similar attitude towards wicked human authorities.

We must speak of them with a proper fear and honour of the authority that they have been given by the Lord. False teachers are creatures of brute instinct and impulse. They are untamed beasts and will suffer the same ignoble fate as such creatures.

They are like wild animals to be hunted. These false teachers are also so given to sensuality that they revel in the daytime. This is not just the activity of the night.

They give their whole lives to such things. They are described as blots and blemishes, the things that would defile what should be a spotless sacrifice. They pollute the worship of the people of God.

We might here think of 1 Corinthians chapter 5, and Paul's challenge to the Corinthians, and their failure to deal with the man who was sleeping with his father's wife. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. You must purge out the old leaven, that you may faithfully keep the feast.

He describes them as adulterous. Their eyes are scanning rooms for potential partners in their sexual immorality. They never have their fill of sin.

They are always hungry for it. They are filled with greed and desire for material goods. They lead unstable people astray.

They give the impression that people can live for the world and its pleasures, avoid suffering, indulge the flesh, and ultimately face no judgement from God. Peter compares them to Balaam. In Jude verse 11 we find the same comparison.

Balaam was a mercenary who wanted money, and didn't like the Lord's first answer, so inquired again, hoping for a large reward. He was rebuked by his donkey, who stopped when he was prevented by the angel of the Lord, and spoke the words that God gave to him. The concluding verses of the chapter are similar to those found in Jude verses 12-13 and verse 16.

They are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favouritism to gain advantage. Here then he describes the effects of the false teachers.

Like waterless springs, they offer water but give none. Like the fallen angels, they have been marked out for the gloom of utter darkness. They are especially dangerous to recent converts.

People who are just escaping the Sodom and Gomorrah of the world. They are boastful, they present themselves as superior in their insight. They tempt such people to look and turn back.

They assure them that it is possible to retain much of their old sinful ways of life. They promise freedom, but their own lives betray the fact that they are lying. They are slaves of their own lusts.

Once again it seems that the focus is particularly upon sexual immorality. Such false teachers can be known by their fruits, as Jesus declared. It is not entirely clear whether verses 20-22 refer to the false teachers or to the people who are led astray by them.

Ultimately they belong together though, and they share the same destination. So these statements could refer to either of them. Their fate is a tragic warning.

They are like Lot's wife. They seem to escape before looking back. They come to some knowledge of the truth of Christ.

But then they turn back and are hardened in their ways. They end up so much worse off, becoming more fully and willfully entangled in those things that Christ set them free from, and in the process more and more hardened and inured to the truth. Their apostasy reveals something about their true nature.

As they turn back, like a dog to its vomit or a pig to its wallowing in the mire, they reveal something about who they are, that they are like pigs and dogs, unclean animals. People who, despite appearances, never actually had the deep transformative work of the Spirit of God. A question to consider.

Why do you think that Peter so emphasises sexual immorality in connection with the false teachers in this chapter? In 2 Peter 3, the final chapter of the Epistle, Peter underlines the importance of the coming of Christ in judgement. 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 two thousand years later.

Passages such as 2 Peter 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 10, verse 23, he had promised that it would occur while some of the apostolic witnesses were still alive. In Matthew 16, verse 28, that generation would not pass away until all of the Olivet Discourse prophecy would come to pass.

In Matthew 24, verse 34, it was this that represented the biggest challenge for the readers of 2 Peter. The apostles and the witnesses of Christ, who were 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 materialised, 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, verses 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 is 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 has 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 in 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 2, verses 3-4.

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 16-18 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 recognised 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?