

The Depravity to Come (2 Peter 2:12-22)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Review from the Previous Lesson

- a. The main theme of this letter (which we began considering in the prior lesson and will continue today) is that false teachers are coming into the church.
- b. Read **2 Peter 2:1-2:11**. (This is for review; we covered this material in the previous lesson in this series.)
 - i. Peter says that just as there were many false prophets in Israel, there will be false teachers in the church.
 - ii. Many believers will follow them.
 - iii. Don't be surprised when you see it happen.
 - iv. Be confident that God will deal with them in the end, just as He dealt with the wicked in the past. The Lord will deliver the righteous but punishes the wicked. Examples cited:
 1. Fallen angels,
 2. Wicked people in the days of Noah, and
 3. People of Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - v. Peter's advice to stay safe in the face of the coming false teachers: pay attention to the Scriptures as to a light shining in a dark place.
 1. The Scriptures were given by holy men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. (**2 Peter 1:19-20**)

II. How Corrupt These False Teachers Will Be

- a. Read **2 Peter 2:12-22**.
- b. Consider also the parallel passage in the letter of **Jude**, where the same points are made using similar examples and imagery.
 - i. Read **Jude verse 4** and **verses 8-22**.
- c. Points developed in these passages from **2 Peter** and **Jude** include:

- i. False teachers to come into the church will be filled with sins of the flesh. These people will be:
 1. Sensual people, not having the Holy Spirit;
 2. Consumed by lust;
 3. Greedy for money;
 4. Flattering others to gain advantage (**Jude v. 16**);
 5. Grumblers and complainers (**Jude v. 16**);
 6. Despising authority (**Jude v. 8**); and
 7. Promising *liberty/freedom* to others, while they themselves are *slaves* to corruption.
- ii. Descriptions of these people:
 1. Like brute beasts (animals);
 2. Attending the Christian love feasts *to feast on the other people* attending;
 3. Like clouds without water;
 4. Like trees without fruit, pulled up by the roots (**Jude v. 12**);
 5. Like waves of the sea foaming up shame (**Jude v. 13**);
 6. Like wandering stars; reserved for blackest darkness forever;
 7. Like those who rebelled with Korah (**Jude v. 11**);
 8. They have gone the way of Cain (**Jude v. 11**);
 9. Like Balaam;
 10. Like a dog returning to its vomit; and
 11. Like a pig that has been washed, that returns to wallowing in the mud.
- d. Things we learn about the human condition.
 - i. There are evil people in this world, and there always have been.
 1. One of the great errors that keeps coming back is the mistaken belief that people are all *inherently good*, but have had bad experiences. If we create the right environment and bring

people up in the right way (perfect parenting, etc.), they will do always good. That simply is not true.

- ii. There are evil people who often pretend to be good, to deceive people and to get away with doing even more evil.
 - 1. Desires for illicit sex (pleasure of the flesh) and wealth are often major motivations behind their corruption.
 - 2. Peter speaks of them “having eyes full of adultery”; “a heart trained in covetous practices”; and being like Balaam in that they “love the wages of wickedness”.
- iii. Evil people will enter the church, and many will be deceived by them.
- iv. Good people can go bad. Someone can be on the narrow road and then turn away to evil.
- v. Someone can become a sincere Christian, having their sins forgiven and experiencing Christ, and then turn to evil and lose their salvation.
- vi. The idea that if we ‘do it right’, we can build the church that will be a wickedness-free organization is *a fantasy*, according to Peter, Paul, Jude and even Jesus. They all knew that corrupt people would enter the church. However, when we become aware of evil in our midst, we are instructed to:
 - 1. Not be surprised. Rather, be vigilant.
 - 2. Warn those involved in evil to repent; and expel them from our midst if they do not turn away from their sins (like the yeast after the Passover lamb was slain).
 - a. See **Matthew 18:15-18** and **1 Corinthians 5**.

III. The Way of Balaam

- a. “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” (**2 Peter 2:15–16**, NKJV)
- b. As a teenager, I remember my father asking me what “Balaam’s ass (donkey)” referred to. The Commissioner of the New Jersey State Department of Environmental Protection, who was Jewish, had made a reference to that at a public meeting. While everyone nodded in agreement, no one knew what the speaker was referring to.

- c. Jesus, Peter, Paul and Jude all assumed that those who heard them speak or read their letter would be familiar with not only the accounts in **Genesis** and **Exodus**, but also the stories in the Book of **Numbers**.
 - i. Jesus referred to the bronze serpent story in **John 3:14-15** (referring to **Numbers 21**).
 - ii. Paul referred to the story of the Israelite men committing sexual immorality with the Moabite women in **1 Corinthians 10:8** (referring to **Numbers 25**).
 - iii. Peter and Jude also referred to the story of Balaam, as we just read from their letters (referring to **Numbers 22-24**).
 - 1. If we understand the story of Balaam, what Peter and Jude are saying will take on much greater significance for us.
- d. Read **Numbers 22:1-35**.
 - i. The storyline:
 - 1. Balak, a Moabite king, is worried about the vast number of Israelites who had come out of Egypt, who are approaching the land of his people.
 - 2. He and his leaders ask Balaam (the first time) to go with them and put a curse on the Israelites.
 - a. Clearly, Balaam must have quite a reputation as a powerful spiritual force to be reckoned with. The king sends for him, and he is the only one the king wants to take care of his new problem.
 - b. Balaam tells them he must ask the Lord about this. The Lord tells him not to go; therefore, he declines to go with them.
 - c. Even though Balaam is not a Jew he somehow believes in the Lord, the one true God.
 - 3. Balak and even more leaders ask Balaam a second time.
 - a. Balaam insists regardless of the money, he will do only what the Lord says. This time the Lord tells him to go with the men, but do *only* what He says.
 - b. Therefore, Balaam agrees to go with the men.

- c. HOWEVER, God is angry with Balaam and sends an angel to stop him.
 - 4. Balaam's faithful donkey sees the angel with the drawn sword and tries to save his master's life by diverting him and then stopping and lying down on the ground.
 - a. Balaam gets mad and beats the donkey with his staff.
 - b. The Lord opens the mouth of the donkey, who then speaks with Balaam to explain why he stopped.
 - c. Peter says he "spoke with a man's voice" to "restrain the madness of the prophet".
 - d. The Angel of the Lord reiterates the Lord's instructions to Balaam, and he continues on his journey.
- ii. **Question:** Thus far in the story, does Balaam seem to be a *good* man or a *bad* man? Outwardly it seems like Balaam is doing what God told him to do. However, the angel is upset with him.
 - 1. Based on the instructions given by the Angel of God (and Peter's comments later), it seems to me that Balaam had changed his mind and was planning to 'sell out' and make lots of money by cursing the Israelites.
 - 2. God knew this, and the Angel of God was sent to warn or kill Balaam as a result.
- iii. **Question:** Who is this who appears to Balaam, referred to as: "*the Angel of God*"? Does this refer to one of the angels, which are created beings, or to someone else?
 - 1. Early Christians understood references to "*the* angel of God" (such as at the appearance to Moses in the burning bush account, in **Exodus 3**) as referring to the Son of God, the Word of God.
 - 2. That is why translators often capitalize the word 'Angel'.
 - 3. The Greek word used in the LXX that is translated "angel" here (ἄγγελος / angelos) means 'messenger'. That term can refer to the spiritual beings we call 'angels', a class of created beings that are indeed special *messengers* of God.
 - a. Although the early Christians saw the term "*the* Angel of God" as applying to the Son of God, they certainly *did*

not believe that the Son of God was being a created being (like one of the angels).

4. For more on this, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, articles on 'Angel of the Lord' and 'Theophany' (a term that refers to appearances of God in the Old Testament).

e. Read **Numbers 23:7-12**

- i. Balaam consults with the Lord. The Lord speaks to Balaam.
- ii. The *Spirit of the Lord* (the Holy Spirit) comes upon Balaam, and he issues four oracles, or prophecies.
- iii. In refusing to curse the Israelites, Balaam *obeys God* and *disobeys Balak*, the Moabite king.

f. Read **Numbers 24:1-19**.

- i. Balaam, inspired by the Holy Spirit, utters prophecies that will be fulfilled about 1400 years later by Jesus.
 1. One man to come from the seed of Israel.
 2. He will rule the nations.
 3. God led Him out of Egypt.
 - a. "Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.' When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'" (**Matthew 2:13-15**, NKJV)
 4. "He lies down like a lion, and like a lion's cub; who shall rouse him?" This ties back to a prophecy in **Genesis 49:8**.
 - a. Jesus is revealed as "the lion of the tribe of Judah".
 - i. "But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.'" (**Revelation 5:5**, NKJV)

- b. The “cub of a lion” reference suggests his sonship from one like Himself, pointing to the fact that he will be the Son of God.
 - c. Sleep is used frequently in Scripture as a metaphor for death; likewise, rising from sleep can be a metaphor for rising from the dead. There is nothing unusual about a lion going to sleep (natural sleep) or waking up; all lions do it every single day! The prophetic aspect of this statement is understood when we see it pointing to the *death and resurrection* of “the lion of Judah”.
 - 5. “I will show Him, but not now; I bless Him, but He is not near.”
 - a. The Son of God will appear about 1400 years later, when Jesus is born.
 - 6. “A star shall rise out of Jacob; a man out of Israel...shall break in pieces the rulers...”
 - a. Consider this in light of **Psalm 2** and **Psalm 110:1**.
- ii. Clearly, Balaam (although not Jewish) was a true prophet of God.
1. He spoke with God, and God spoke to him.
 2. He resisted temptation for great wealth from the king.
 3. The Holy Spirit was upon him.
 4. He was used by God to deliver some amazing prophecies about Jesus.
 - a. One man to come *from the seed of Israel*.
 - b. He will come *out of Egypt*.
 - c. He will be the *lion of Judah* (descended from Judah).
 - d. He is the *cub from a lion* (Son of God)
 - e. He is as the *sleeping lion, who shall be roused* (figuratively referring to his death and resurrection).
 - f. He will *rule over the nations*.
 - g. He will come, but *not soon* (Jesus would be 1400 years after Balaam issued these prophecies).

- g. **Question:** Considering all the good things Balaam ended up doing, why would Peter refer to him as the archetype for wicked, corrupt teachers who would infiltrate the church?
- i. Read **Numbers 24:25-25:9**.
 1. Balaam departs. Immediately after that comes a story that many might think is totally unrelated. This is the story about the Israelites falling into sacrificing to pagan idols, worshipping the idols and engaging in fornication with the Moabite women.
 - a. A plague results, in which 24,000 die.
 - b. Paul refers to this event in **1 Corinthians 10:8-11** as a lesson to us, warning Christians of the dangers of sexual immorality.
 - c. Phinehas is the hero who stops the terrible plague of death by dramatically killing two sinners with a javelin.
 2. Read **Numbers 31:1-16**.
 - a. Balaam dies as a casualty in the war with the Midianites.
 - b. Balaam was the one who had advised the Moabites to have their women seduce the Israelite men and pull them into pagan idolatry.
 - c. Jesus refers to this event in his admonition to the church at Pergamum, in **Revelation 2**.
 - i. “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of *Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*” (**Revelation 2:14**, NKJV)
 - h. At the end of his life, Balaam went bad. Very bad. He advised the Moabites on how to defeat the Israelites: lure them with sexual immorality to pull them into pagan idolatry.
 - i. He switched sides, as Judas did.
 - ii. He began as a great and powerful prophet of God, a true prophet, but ended up doing Satan’s work. He told the Moabites the key to how to defeat Israel: get them involved in sexual immorality and idolatry.
 1. I am reminded of what Jesus said in **Matthew 7**.

- a. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (**Matthew 7:15–20**, NKJV)
 - b. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?*’” (**Matthew 7:22**, NKJV)
- iii. Understanding Balaam’s sin will help us to grasp the significance of what Peter is saying here in his warning. Peter warned us that there will be men who are *just like Balaam* who will come into the church.
 - 1. There will be genuine God-inspired men, spiritually powerful and close to God, who will fall into some of the most depraved sins and lead others to do likewise.
 - 2. Let us not be surprised when we see it happen.
 - 3. Sometimes it will turn out that they were wicked and corrupt from the beginning. However, there will also be more complicated cases like that of Balaam, where someone was close to God but was overcome by their lust for pleasure, power or wealth.
- i. Peter says that Balaam “loved the wages of unrighteousness”.
 - i. He had a problem with the love of unrighteous wealth.
 - ii. He did not take the first warning seriously enough, and it led to his downfall in the end.
 - iii. Ironically, the Greek word translated “loved” in **2 Peter 2:15** (ἀγαπάω) is the same word (in verb form) as the celebrated Greek word “agape”. That word is commonly (but incorrectly) said to refer specifically to a *higher, selfless form* of love.
 - 1. Clearly, from the context here, the Greek word is very similar to our English word “love” in the sense this word can cover a WIDE range of meanings. It certainly is not restricted to a pure, selfless type of love!

IV. Wandering Stars, Fruitless Trees, Dogs and Pigs

- a. Peter uses some graphic illustrations to describe these false teachers.
- b. They are like brute beasts.
 - i. We are made in the image of God, with an eternal soul and the ability to choose good or evil. In that way, we are not like the animals.
 - ii. These people are abandoning their divine nature and become, essentially, like animals who are to be caught and killed.
- c. Trees without fruit, wells without water, clouds without rain.
 - i. They have the outward form but never realize what they were made for.
 - ii. They are useless. It is tragic; what they *could have been*.
- d. Jude refers to them as “wandering stars”.
 - i. Our word “planet” comes from the Greek word used here that is translated “wandering” (πλανήτης, planetes = a wanderer).
 - ii. Looking up at the sky, one can see a few distant lights that wander through the pattern of the night, in their own peculiar orbit. This is the picture of what these sinful people are like.
- e. Dogs and pigs were considered *unclean animals* based on **Leviticus**, and therefore could not be eaten.
 - i. Dogs had paws (not split hooves).
 - ii. Pigs had split hooves but did not chew the cud.
 1. They eat garbage, unlike cows and sheep that eat only clean grass and chew the cud.
 2. Also, they like to wallow in mud.
- f. A dog returning to his vomit.
 - i. Read **Proverbs 26:11**.
 1. Note that while Masoretic Text says, “so a fool repeats his folly”, the LXX is more pointed regarding turning back to sin.
 - ii. Dogs may be treated rather well here in Massachusetts, in the US (where we have professional dog-walkers and commercial establishments devoted to grooming, bathing and providing

accessories for pets), it is not like that in much of the world. Furthermore, dogs certainly were not treated like this in the first century!

- iii. I recall that when our family lived in Tirana, Albania, in the early 2000s, we saw packs of wild dogs roaming the streets. They were mangy looking and often ate what they could find from piles of garbage along the side of the road.
- iv. Peter says that someone who becomes a Christian and then turns back to their old sinful ways is like a dog that vomited up something rotten that it had eaten, and then after that goes back and licks up that vomit. *Disgusting!*
- g. A pig, when washed, goes back to wallowing in the mud.
 - i. Pigs (like dogs) are “unclean animals” according to the criteria of **Leviticus 11**.
 1. A “clean” mammal (one that is acceptable for a Jew to eat) must have split hooves AND chew the cud.
 2. Dogs have paws rather than hooves, so they are unclean.
 3. While pigs do have split hooves, they *do not* chew the cud; therefore, they are unclean.
 4. Several early Christian writers saw in the clean/unclean animal distinctions of **Leviticus 11** some illustrations of the lives we Christians should live (following the pattern of the “clean” animals) as well as the habits we should avoid (learning from the bad examples of the unclean animals). Peter’s comments here regarding not being like the dog or pig, both of which are unclean animals, are in line with that understanding.
 - a. For early Christian writers commenting on lessons we should learn from the clean vs. unclean animals, see:
 - i. *Epistle of Barnabas*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 143–144
 - ii. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 534
 - ii. In the lifestyle of pigs, we see a graphic picture of the old life of sin. Pigs eat garbage (they are not discerning in their diet) and love to wallow in mud.

1. The application that Peter is making here is that we were “dirty” before in our old life of sin. However, after we have been “washed” by Christ, we must not return to the old life (wallowing in the mud of spiritual filth and sin).
- iii. **Question:** What does Peter’s reference to a pig having been “washed” referring to? What is this *spiritual washing*? Let us consider passages from the New Testament that speak about the spiritual washing that Christians have received.
1. “And such were some of you. But *you were washed*, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 **Corinthians 6:11**, NKJV)
 2. “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the *washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...*” (Titus **3:4–5**, NKJV)
 - a. This passage reminds me of what Jesus said in **John 3:3–5**, that we must be *born again* “of water and the Spirit”. Early Christian writers understood these passages from Titus and John as referring to water baptism.
 - b. For more information on the early Christian understanding of these passages connecting baptism with spiritual regeneration, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, quotes from the article ‘Baptism: 1. Meaning of Baptism’.
 3. “... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience *and our bodies washed with pure water.*” (**Hebrews 10:22**, NKJV)
 4. From the apostle Paul, recounting what Ananias had said to him right before Paul’s baptism: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and *wash away your sins*, calling on the name of the Lord.” (**Acts 22:16**, NKJV)
- iv. **Question:** Does Peter believe that someone who is saved (whose sins have been washed away) can lose their salvation (become filthy again)?
1. Clearly, yes.
- v. **Question:** Does baptism wash away “all your sins, past, present and future”?

1. "But *IF* we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7, NKJV)
2. This is a *conditional* promise.

V. Promising Freedom, but Being Slaves

- a. **Question:** Are all punishments for those who are lost going to be the same?
 - i. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning." (2 Peter 2:20, NKJV)
 - ii. "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:28-31, NKJV)
 - iii. "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47-48, NKJV)
- b. Peter says these people promise us freedom, yet they themselves *are slaves*.
 - i. Consider all the famous, wealthy and powerful people in the world around us who are, in reality, slaves to their own passions (manifested in rampant immorality, serial divorces and remarriages, alcohol abuse, drugs, etc.).
 - ii. Consider also those in churches who preach the popular 'cheap grace' so-called gospel, under which all you need to do to be saved is believe in Jesus. They incorrectly teach that after "accepting Christ" in your heart, you cannot lose your salvation regardless of how you live your life and regardless of whether you are enslaved by the passions of your own flesh. *This is still slavery.*
 - iii. Paul also teaches that we are slaves to the one who has conquered us (including being slaves to our own flesh, if we have not been freed from the power of sin in our lives).

1. Consider what Paul said in **Romans 6:16-23**.

- c. If you have been victorious against Satan for the past 10 or 10,000 days, regarding not being enslaved to the passions of your flesh, and are living as a truly free man or woman, guess what. Satan and the forces of evil with him will be lining up today, and again tomorrow, to see, yet again if they will be able to defeat you. Satan does not give up easily.
 - i. Don't go back to the vomit and mud.
 - ii. The Israelites were slaves under Pharaoh, and after they were liberated, they were told to never return to the land of their slavery. (**Deuteronomy 17:16**)
 - iii. Decide to live as a *truly free* man or woman. Don't be a slave to your flesh!