

2 Peter 2:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Analysis

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. Peter transitions from true prophecy (1:19-21) to false prophecy, establishing historical pattern: "there were false prophets also among the people" (egenonto de kai pseudoprophētai en tō laō) among Israel, so "there shall be false teachers among you" (hos kai en hymin esontai pseudodidaskaloi, ὡς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσονται ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι) in the church.

These infiltrators "privily shall bring in" (pareisaxousin, παρεισάξουσιν, "secretly introduce") "damnable heresies" (haireseis apōleias, αἱρέσεις ἀπωλείας, literally "destructive sects" or "factions"). Hairesis (αἵρεσις) denotes divisive teaching creating factions, ultimately leading to apōleia (ἀπώλεια)—destruction or perdition. The core heresy: "denying the Lord that bought them" (ton agorasanta autous despotēn arnoumenoi). "Bought" (agorasanta, ἀγοράσαντα) uses commercial redemption language, indicating Christ's purchase through His blood (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Rev 5:9).

This raises the difficult question: Did Christ genuinely purchase these false teachers? Reformed theology typically understands this as

1. external covenant relationship without genuine regeneration
2. hypothetical redemption—Christ's work was sufficient for all but applied only to the elect, or
3. profession without possession—they claimed redemption but were never truly saved.

The warning: they "bring upon themselves swift destruction" (epagontes heautois tachinēn apōleian), indicating certain judgment despite temporary success.

Historical Context

Israel's history was plagued by false prophets who claimed divine authority while leading people into idolatry, immorality, and false security (Jer 23:9-40; Ezek 13; 22:23-29). Jesus warned of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15-20; 24:11, 24). Paul predicted grievous wolves entering the flock (Acts 20:29-30) and warned of deceitful workers transforming themselves as apostles of Christ (2 Cor 11:13-15).

The specific false teachers Peter addresses likely promoted antinomianism (freedom from moral law), denied Christ's return (3:3-4), and lived sensually (2:10-14, 18-19). Some scholars connect them to early Gnosticism, which devalued material existence and ethics while claiming secret knowledge. Others see similarities to Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15) or teachers combining Christian profession with pagan practices. Whatever their specific identity, Peter's description applies to all who corrupt Christian teaching while claiming Christian authority.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What false teachings currently threaten the church, and how do they subtly deny Christ's lordship?
2. How can churches balance welcoming seekers with maintaining doctrinal boundaries against false teaching?
3. What practices cultivate discernment to recognize false teaching before it causes damage?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐν τῷ λαῷ ὡς
there were **But** **also** **false prophets** **among** ^{G3588} **the people** **as**
G1096 G1161 G2532 G5578 G1722 G2992 G5613

καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσονται ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι οἵτινες
also **among** **you** **there shall be** **false teachers** **who**
G2532 G1722 G5213 G2071 G5572 G3748

παρεισάξουσιν αἵρέσεις ἀπώλειαν καὶ τὸν ἀγοράσαντα
privily shall bring in **heresies** **damnable** **also** ^{G3588} **that bought**
G3919 G139 G684 G2532 G59

αὐτοὺς δεσπότην ἀρνούμενοι ἐπάγοντες ἑαυτοῖς
them **the Lord** **denying** **and bring** **upon themselves**
G846 G1203 G720 G1863 G1438

ταχυνὴν ἀπώλειαν
swift **damnable**
G5031 G684

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 7:15 (Prophecy): Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Jude 1:4 (References Lord): For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace

of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 2:3 (Parallel theme): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Matthew 24:11 (Prophecy): And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

2 Timothy 4:3 (Parallel theme): For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

Galatians 2:4 (Parallel theme): And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

1 Corinthians 11:19 (Parallel theme): For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

1 John 4:1 (Prophecy): Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Colossians 2:8 (Parallel theme): Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:20 (Parallel theme): For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.