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Numbers 29; Psalm 73; Isaiah 21; 2 Peter 2

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IN 2 PETER 2:1-3, AND THROUGHOUT much of the rest of the chapter, Peter warns against false teachers.

(1) These false teachers emerge *from within* the believing community—in precisely the way that the most dangerous false prophets in Old Testament times were those who emerged *from within* the old covenant community (2:1). False teachers and false prophets are a lot easier to spot when they stand outside the fellowship of God's people and criticize. A David Hume or a Bertrand Russell seduces far smaller numbers of God's people than many popular "televangelists." Even on a smaller scale, the most dangerous false teachers in a local church are those with either little biblical grasp or perverse biblical grasp who in the name of the Gospel twist the community into their particular mold. Expect such people. All of the Bible attests the frequency of their attacks and the tragic damage they cause.

(2) What they "secretly introduce" are "destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them" (2:2). They never describe their teaching in such terms, of course, nor do they stand in the pulpit and say something like "I disown Jesus" or "I deny that Jesus fully redeemed me from my sin." If they did, they would be turned out. Their approach is almost always to relativize Jesus, diminish his significance, or allow him to stand as part of the background noise while they direct the attention of believers to their own agenda—legalism, perhaps, or endless self-help, or sentimentalized therapy, or a Jesus who is no more than one of many options. Thus by their teaching they disown the Jesus whose death potentially embraced all, not least these false teachers who nominally submit to him but who in reality domesticate him or reinvent him.

(3) Very often these false teachers are popular (2:2). In fact, their popularity has two painful effects. In the eyes of many, it legitimizes these teachers—and then their ostensible legitimacy destroys the credibility of genuine Christianity, for their conduct brings "the way of truth into disrepute."

(4) Quite commonly these false teachers "exploit you" (2:3). Sometimes this exploitation is blatantly fiscal: always watch where the money goes. At least as commonly it is manipulative: they shape your mind and direction by their fluent storytelling.

(5) God has the last word; the condemnation of these false teachers is inevitable (2:3). As the following verses (2:4-10) make clear, God is perfectly capable of saving the righteous remnant and of bringing these false teachers to condemnation.

For each of the preceding five points, think of two examples, one drawn from the Bible and one from Christian history, recent or otherwise.

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