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Who Were the False Teachers in 2 Peter?

Scholars have struggled to connect the false teachers in 2 Peter with some identifiable group known to us from history.

Two suggestions have been offered.

Christians Influenced by Gnosticism

Gnostics used creative mythologies to promote their ideas (cf. 1:16) and also were known for collecting the letters of Paul and interpreting them in ways that supported their way of thinking (cf. 3:15–16). Some gnostics were given to moral libertinism, based on a spiritualized notion of resurrection that defined salvation as a present experience that could have rendered the need for a parousia or final judgment obsolete. And gnostics rejected the role of God as creator of the earth, a point that is also emphatically proclaimed in this letter (3:5).

Christians Influenced by Epicureanism

Epicureans rejected divine intervention into human affairs, claiming that the continuity of history revealed there was no need to appease the gods or fear their wrath (cf. 3:4). And even though the philosophy was intended to inspire wise and responsible choices, it sometimes had the opposite effect, causing some Epicureans to become crass

pleasure seekers who celebrated what was supposed to be freedom from anxiety as a total freedom from accountability instead (cf. 2:19).