

2 Peter 2:4-9
September 24, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Peter wrote his first epistle to encourage his readers to respond properly to external opposition. His second epistle focuses on internal opposition caused by false teachers whose “destructive heresies” (2:1) can seduce believers into error and immorality. The best antidote for error is a mature understanding of the truth.

If you were with us last week, we used Peter’s discussion of true prophecy at the end of Chapter 1 as our spring board to prepare us for his extended denunciation of false prophecy in the churches. These false teachers were especially dangerous because they arose within the church and undermined the confidence of believers, which we studied last week (2:1-3).

And that brings us to today. We’re going to focus on how the Lord deals with false teachers or prophets. It’s an uncomfortable lesson because it is reminder that we serve a holy and just God who deals appropriately with those who skew His teachings or tries to speak for Him when He hasn’t spoken. Our hour will be filled with historical examples of God’s condemnation on those who speak falsehoods.

Q: Before we delve into the Scripture passage, what do you think God’s condemnation looks like? [Let people engage]

Transition: Now let’s strengthen our understanding of what God’s condemnation looks like by studying the historic EXAMPLES of God’s judgment on those who were false prophets or teachers. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read 2 Peter 2:4-10]

V.4:

- For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell (“Tartarus,” which is a Greek word for the underworld), putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;

V.5:

- if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

V.6:

- if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

V.7:

- and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men

V.8:

- (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

V.9:

- if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold (**tērein, “keeps under guard”**) the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.4: What is the first example of who God has judged in the past? [Fallen angels]

Q: Bible trivia – How did fallen angels come into being? Does anyone know?

- **X-REF Isa 14:12-15** (Some Bible scholars believe this describes the fall of Lucifer)
- **X-REF Ez 28:11-19** (Some Bible scholars believe this describes the fall of Lucifer)
- **X-REF Rev 12:4** (The Bible suggests that one third of the angels fell with Lucifer.)

Q: Where are these fallen angels now? [God sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment. Tartarus may be a special section of hell where these angels are chained in pits of darkness, between the time of judgment and their ultimate consignment to the eternal lake of fire. Their doom is already sealed.]

Q: So let's make sure we have a healthy interpretation of this verse. WHY did God judge these angels and put them in hell? [He wasn't willing to tolerate rebellion and will not spare those who reject His will. ***If God in His justice punished angels, surely He would not hesitate to punish people.*** False prophets will taste the same judgment as the rebellious angels.]

Q V.5: What is the next example of who God has judged in the past? [God brought the Flood on all of the ungodly people, but protected Noah and seven others who were his wife, his three sons and their wives because they had faith in God (Heb. 11:7).]

Q: How many years did God wait before He sent the Flood? [120 years! See Gen 6:3)]

Observation: All during that time, Noah ministered as a “herald” of God’s righteousness. Gentile civilization had become so corrupt that it was necessary for God to wipe the earth clean. But nobody believed Noah’s message! No doubt there were plenty of “experts” who laughed at Noah and assured the people that a rainstorm was out of the question. Besides, had anybody ever seen one?

X-REF Luke 17:26–27: What did Jesus say about the Flood? [Jesus made it clear that people were enjoying their normal lives up to the very day that Noah and his family entered the ark!]

Q: When you compare our world with Noah’s world, do you see any parallels? [Sure. Our population is multiplying just like it did in Noah’s day (Gen. 6:1), and the world is filled with growing wickedness (Gen. 6:5) and violence just like it did in Noah’s day (Gen. 6:11, 13). Lawlessness abounds. True believers may be a minority in our world, and majority doesn’t want to pay any attention to teachings like the Day of the Lord is coming.]

Q V.6-8: What is the next example of who God has judged in the past? [He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah]

Q: Why did God destroy these cities? [(Gen 13:13) - The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” Peter said they were “ungodly,” and Jude said they were given to “fornication and going after strange flesh” (Jude 7). The men of Sodom practiced filthy behavior and unlawful deeds (2 Peter 2:7–8).

Q: In what sense were their filthy deeds “unlawful”? [They were contrary to nature (see Rom. 1:24–27). The flagrant sin of Sodom and the other cities was unnatural sex, sodomy, or homosexual behavior, a sin that is clearly condemned in Scripture (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9).]

Q V.7: Why was Lot rescued? [He was a righteous man.]

Q: So if neither angels, the ancient world, nor Sodom and Gomorrah were spared from God’s wrath against sin, how is that a comfort to Peter’s audience? [Let people engage]

Q V.9: Peter states in v.9 that the Lord will “*hold*” the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while “*continuing their punishment.*” What can we conclude about those who live in hell? [That God’s punishment is ongoing, not just an event where someone is placed apart from God.]

X-REF “Hold”: Luke 16:23 (Rich man “in torment in hell”)

Q: We know that we serve a holy and just God. Based on today’s study, what should we conclude about who God judges? [Any ungodly person. They are in rebellion to God and they will face eternal judgment.]

LOOK:

God’s people, as weak as we are, will be delivered from judgment by the grace and mercy of God. God could not judge Sodom until Lot and his family was out of the city. Likewise, God will not send wrath on this world until He takes His own people out and home to heaven. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep [live or die], we should live together with Him” (1 Thes. 5:9–10).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 448–451). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In this section, Peter proved that judgment finally does come, no matter how secure the sinner might feel. He used three examples to verify this truth (see also Jude 6–8).

The fallen angels (v. 4). We wish we knew more about the creation of the angels and the fall of Lucifer and his host, but most of these details are shrouded in mystery. Many Bible students believe that Isaiah 14:12–15 describes the fall of Lucifer, the highest of the angels. Some students feel that Ezekiel 28:11–19 also deals with the same topic. It would appear that Lucifer was God's deputy, in charge of the angelic hosts, but that his pride made him grasp after the very throne of God. (John Milton imaginatively portrayed this in the famous poem, *Paradise Lost*.) Revelation 12:4 suggests that perhaps one third of the angels fell with Lucifer, who became Satan, the adversary of God.

Where are these fallen angels now? We know that Satan is free and at work in the world (1 Peter 5:8), and that he has an army of demonic powers assisting him (Eph. 6:10–12), who are probably some of the fallen angels. But Peter said that some of the angels were confined to Tartarus ("hell"), which is a Greek word for the underworld. Tartarus may be a special section of hell where these angels are chained in pits of darkness, awaiting the final judgment. It is not necessary to debate the hidden mysteries of this verse in order to get the main message: God judges rebellion and will not spare those who reject His will. If God judged the angels, who in many respects are higher than men, then certainly He will judge rebellious men.

The old world (v. 5). Genesis 6:3 indicates that God waited 120 years before He sent the Flood. All during that time, Noah ministered as a "herald" of God's righteousness. If you want to read a description of the world before the Flood, read Romans 1:18ff. Gentile civilization had become so corrupt that it was necessary for God to wipe the earth clean. He saved only eight people, Noah and his family, because they had faith in God (Heb. 11:7).

But nobody believed Noah's message! Jesus made it clear that people were enjoying their normal lives up to the very day that Noah and his family entered the ark! (Luke 17:26–27) No doubt there were plenty of "experts" who laughed at Noah and assured the people that a rainstorm was out of the question. Had anybody ever seen one? The apostates in Peter's day used that same argument to "prove" that the Day of the Lord would not come (2 Peter 3:3ff).

When you compare our world with Noah's world, you see some frightening parallels. The population was multiplying (Gen. 6:1), and the world was filled with wickedness (Gen. 6:5) and violence (Gen. 6:11, 13). Lawlessness abounded. True believers were a minority, and nobody paid any attention to them! But the Flood came and the entire population of the world was destroyed. God does indeed judge those who reject His truth.

Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 6, 9b). The record is given in Genesis 18–19, and God's opinion of the people of these cities is found in Genesis 13:13—"But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Peter said they were "ungodly," and Jude said they were given to "fornication and going after strange flesh" (Jude 7). The men of Sodom practiced filthy behavior and unlawful deeds (2 Peter 2:7–8). Since the Law of Moses had not yet been given, the word *unlawful* cannot refer to some Jewish law. In what sense were their filthy deeds "unlawful"? They were contrary to nature (see Rom. 1:24–27). The flagrant sin of Sodom and the other cities was unnatural sex, sodomy, or homosexual behavior, a sin that is clearly condemned in Scripture (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9).

In spite of Abraham's intercessory prayer (Gen. 18:22ff) and Lot's last-minute warning, the people of Sodom perished in fire and brimstone. Again, up to the very minute that Lot left the city, the people were confident that everything was safe; but then the fire fell (Luke 17:28–29). God did not spare them, nor will He spare sinners today who willfully reject His truth and deny His Son. God buried Sodom and Gomorrah, probably under the Dead Sea. They are examples to sinners today to beware the wrath to come.

Having cited these three examples of certain judgment, Peter then applied the lesson to the subject at hand, *the false teachers* (2 Peter 2:9b). God has reserved the unjust for special punishment on that day of judgment. The false teachers may seem successful (for "many" follow them), but in the end, they will be condemned. Their judgment is being prepared now ("lingereth not," 2 Peter 2:3), and what is prepared will be reserved and applied on the last day.

What a contrast between the false teachers and the true children of God! We have an inheritance reserved for us (1 Peter 1:4) because Jesus Christ is preparing a home for us in heaven (John 14:1–6). We are not looking for judgment, but for the coming of the Lord to take His people home to glory! "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:9).

Peter next turned his attention to the believers themselves. How could they stay true to the Lord in such a wicked world?

The True Believers Delivered (2 Peter 2:5–9a)

Peter's purpose was not just to denounce the apostates; he also wanted to encourage the true believers. He once again reached back into the Old Testament and cited two examples of deliverance.

Noah (v. 5). This man of faith experienced a twofold deliverance. First, God delivered him from the pollutions of the world around him. For 120 years, Noah faithfully proclaimed the Word of God to people who would not believe it. He and his family were surrounded by moral and spiritual darkness, yet they kept their lights shining. God did not protect Noah and his family by isolating them from the world, but by enabling them to remain pure in the midst of corruption. Through Jesus Christ, we too have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

Our Lord petitioned the Heavenly Father, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Imagine Noah and his wife raising a family in a world so wicked that they could have no believing friends! Yet God found believing wives for their three sons, and God guarded this home from the pollutions of the world.

But God also delivered Noah and his family from the judgment of the world. The flood waters that brought condemnation to the world only lifted Noah and his household up above the judgment. They were secure in the ark of safety. In his first epistle, Peter had seen in the ark a type of our salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:20–22). The world, as it were, was "buried" in the baptism of the Flood, but Noah was lifted up, a picture of resurrection and salvation.

Certainly Peter was assuring his readers that, when the great day of judgment does come, they will be kept safe. Jesus Christ is our "ark of safety." He delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thes. 1:10). God has promised that the earth will never again be judged by water, but there is coming a judgment of fire (2 Peter 3:10ff). But those who have trusted Christ will never face judgment (John 5:24), because He bore their judgment on the cross.

Lot (vv. 6–9a). Abraham took his nephew, Lot, with him when he left Ur and went to the land of Canaan, but Lot proved to be more of a problem than a blessing. When Abraham, in a lapse of faith, went down to Egypt, Lot went with him and got a taste of “the world” (Gen. 12:10–13:1). As Lot became richer, he had to separate from Abraham, and this removed him from his uncle’s godly influence. What a privilege Lot had to walk with Abraham who walked with God! And yet, how Lot wasted his privileges.

When Lot had to choose a new area for his home, he measured it by what he had seen in Egypt (Gen. 13:10). Abraham took Lot out of Egypt, but he could not take Egypt out of Lot. Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12), and then finally moved into Sodom (Gen. 14:12). God even used a local war to try to get Lot out of Sodom, but he went right back. That is where his heart was.

It is difficult for us to understand Lot. Peter made it clear that Lot was saved (“just Lot ... that righteous man”), and yet we wonder what he was doing in such a wicked place as Sodom. If we understand Genesis 19 correctly, Lot had at least four daughters, two of whom had married men of Sodom. All the while Lot lived in Sodom, his soul was “tortured” and “greatly troubled” by the filthy conduct of the people. Perhaps he thought he could change them. If so, he failed miserably.

God enabled Lot and his family to remain unpolluted, even though they were living in the midst of a cesspool of iniquity. God also rescued Lot and two of his daughters before the judgment fell on Sodom and the other cities of the plain (Gen. 19). Lot was not rescued because of any merit on his part. He was rescued because he was a believer and because his Uncle Abraham had prayed for him. Abraham outside of Sodom had more influence than Lot inside the city. Lot even lost his testimony to his own family, for his married daughters and their husbands laughed at his warning, and his wife disobeyed God and was killed.

Lot *chose* to live in Sodom and could have avoided the filthy influence of the place, but many people today really have no choice and must live surrounded by the pollutions of the world. Think of the Christian slaves who had to serve godless masters, or Christian wives married to unsaved husbands, or believing children with unsaved parents. Christian employees working in offices or factories are forced to see and hear things that can easily stain the mind and heart. Peter assured his readers and us that God knows how to “be delivering the godly out of testing and temptation” (2 Peter 2:9, WUEST) so that we may live victoriously.

He also is able to rescue us from judgment. In Noah’s case, it was a judgment of water, but in Lot’s case it was a judgment of fire. The cities of the plain were caught in a violent overthrow as the area became a vast furnace of fire and brimstone. This certainly would parallel Peter’s warning about the coming judgment of fire (2 Peter 3:10ff).

Peter was not pointing to Lot as an example of separated living, but rather as an example of one whom God rescued from pollution and condemnation. In a sense, Lot was even rescued against his will, because the angels had to grasp him by the hand and pull him out of the city (Gen. 19:16). Lot had entered Sodom, and then Sodom had entered Lot, and he found it difficult to leave.

Our Lord used both Noah and Lot to warn us to be prepared for His return (Luke 17:26–37). The people in Sodom were enjoying their regular pleasures, careless of the fact that judgment was coming; when it came, they were unprepared. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (1 Peter 3:14).

But the same God who delivers the godly also reserves the ungodly for judgment. It has well been said that if God spares today's cities from judgment, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. Why is God's judgment lingering? Because God "is long-suffering ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Society in Noah's day had 120 years in which to repent and believe, yet they rejected the truth. Though Lot's example and testimony were weak, he at least represented the truth; yet his immoral neighbors wanted nothing to do with God.

Our present age is not only like "the days of Noah," but it is also like "the days of Lot." Many believers have abandoned the place of separation and are compromising with the world. The professing church has but a weak testimony to the world and sinners do not really believe that judgment is coming. Society is full of immorality, especially the kind of sin for which Sodom was famous. It appears as though God is slumbering, unconcerned about the way rebellious sinners have polluted His world. But one day the fire will fall; then it will be too late.

God's people, as weak as they are, will be delivered from judgment by the grace and mercy of God. God could not judge Sodom until Lot and his family were out of the city. Likewise, it is my belief that God will not send wrath on this world until He takes His own people out and home to heaven. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep [live or die], we should live together with Him" (1 Thes. 5:9–10).

One day soon, the fire will fall. Are you ready?

Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 870-871). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. EXAMPLES OF HISTORIC JUDGMENT (2:4–6)

In verses 4–10a, Peter gave several illustrations to demonstrate both the Lord's judgment and His deliverance. After citing three examples of punishment (vv. 4–6), Peter then cited a case of deliverance (Lot, v. 7). In fact, verses 4–9 are a single sentence, one of the longest in the New Testament. Peter was intent on demonstrating that God will judge false teachers and others who sin against Him and His Word. History, Peter wrote, gives ample verification of this truth.

2:4. The first example is that of fallen **angels**. This refers either to their fall with Satan in his rebellion against God (Ezek. 28:15) or to the sin of angels in Genesis 6:1–4. Since Peter's other two illustrations in this section are from Genesis (chaps. 7; 19), perhaps this one is too, though it is difficult to be sure. **If God** in His justice punished angels, surely He would not hesitate to punish people. He plunged the angels into **hell**, literally, "tartarus" apparently a prison of custody (**gloomy dungeons**) between the time of the **judgment** and their ultimate consignment to the eternal lake of fire. There will be no future trial for their doom is already sealed. False prophets, Peter argued, will taste the same judgment as the rebellious angels.

2:5. Peter was greatly impressed by the significance of **the Flood** for he referred to it three times in his two epistles (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:6). **Noah ... and seven others** is the rendering of the Greek "Noah, the eighth person." The others were his wife, his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), and their wives (Gen. 6:10, 18). Noah was a righteous man (Gen. 6:9), an obedient servant of God, and a shipbuilder (Gen. 6:13–22). Peter added that he was also **a preacher** (*kēryka*, "herald") **of righteousness**, who spoke out against the vile corruption all around him.

The primary focus of 2 Peter 2:5 is the unsparing hand of God on the antediluvian civilization, **the ancient world with its ungodly people**. Do false teachers today think they can escape God's judgment because of their large numbers? Peter reminded them and those who are the targets of their delusions that God can judge evil even when it involves the entire human race (with the exception of only eight people). The word **brought** (*epaxas*, from *epagō*, "to bring on") suggests the suddenness of God's judgment in the Flood. Peter used the same verb in verse 1 in speaking of heretics who are "bringing" destruction on themselves.

2:6. God's destruction of **Sodom and Gomorrah by fire** is a classic example of universal destruction of the ungodly (Gen. 10:15–29). The participle *tephrōsas* (**burning them to ashes**), used only here in the New Testament, means "reduce to ashes" or "cover with ashes." Peter concluded this illustration by saying that God **made them an example** (*hypodeigma*, "model, pattern") **of what is going to happen to the ungodly** (cf. Jude 7). The apostle's purpose here was to cite this historical incident of judgment, not to elaborate on the cause for such severe destruction. In the present day homosexuality, which is scarring so much of Western culture, recalls the same shameful conduct in those two ancient cities (Gen. 19:4–5; cf. Gen. 13:13; Rom. 1:27).

3. EXPLANATION OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE (2:7–9)

2:7–9. Peter had spoken (v. 5) of one deliverance (of Noah and his family); now he cited another, God's rescue of **Lot**. Here again is an interesting New Testament commentary on a familiar Old Testament passage (cf. comments on v. 5). In Genesis 19 Lot hardly comes across as **a righteous man**; possibly godliness was not a consistent mark in his daily conduct. But in his standing before God he was a justified man ("righteous," occurring three times in 2 Peter 2:7–8, is *dikaion*, "justified"). This is evidenced by the fact that Lot **was distressed** (*kataponoumenon*, "tormented, oppressed"; used only here and in Acts 7:24 in the NT) by the enormity of iniquity all around him. The people in those twin cities were **filthy** (*en aselgeia*, "in sexual debauchery"; in 2 Peter 2:2 *aselgeia* is "shameful"), **lawless** (*athesmōn*, "unprincipled"; used only twice in the NT: here and in 3:17), and involved in **lawless** (*anomois*, "without any standard or law") **deeds**. Besides being distressed, Lot **was also tormented** (*ebasanizen*, "tortured, tormented"; cf. Matt. 8:29) **in his righteous soul** (lit., "he tormented [his] righteous soul"). Seeing and hearing about all their vile ways **day after day** grieved Lot to the point of inner torture.

In 2 Peter 2:9 the point of his words in verses 4–9 unfolds. **The Lord knows how to rescue the righteous and to punish the unrighteous**. That God can deliver the **godly ... from trials** is a source of comfort to believers, exemplified by Noah and his seven family members and Lot and his wife and daughters. On the other hand God holds (*tērein*, "keeps under guard") **the unrighteous for the coming day of judgment** (cf. 3:7), the great white throne judgment and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15). Meanwhile God continues **their punishment** in this life (cf. Rom. 1:27b) and in hades after death (Luke 16:23). The participle *kolazomenous* ("punishing, injuring") is another of Peter's words that occurs only once in the New Testament.