

2Peter 2:4-9 "God's Sure Judgment"

2 Peter 2:4-9 ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; ⁷ and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), ⁹ *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

How many of us have ever wondered at different times in our lives, why is it that the ungodly of this world seem to prosper when those who love and follow the Lord seem to hang on only by their finger nails?

Why is it that those who despise God and the things of God appear to be blessed and the ones who truly love the Lord suffer trials and temptations which don't ever appear to go away?

Of course this question is as old as sinful mankind. In fact, the psalmist posed a similar set of arguments.

PSA 73:3-5,10-12 "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like - always carefree, they increase in wealth."

We along with the psalmist may have said these things and yet we would all be overstating the problem. You see it is not as though the wicked don't have their difficulties, or that God's people aren't blessed, but when our lives, which are dedicated to God, appear to be turned upside down, our perspective has a tendency to change.

We may think we should be free from such adversity since we love the Lord and since the ungodly are just that, ungodly, and they

should be the ones suffering. And it's often in times of trials and tribulations that we might be tempted to arrive at a conclusion the psalmist does.

PSA 73:13 "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence."

'What's the point in following God if my life is not going to be free from trials?' 'What's the point in placing my faith in God if He's not going to make my life carefree, like the pagans' life?' 'Why is it that the ungodly are never called to task for their unbelief and we seem to be judged every time we turn around?'

These are questions we usually ask ourselves when we're in the midst of trials. But, these are questions which are misplaced and out of focus. These are questions which don't take into account that God is still the judge of all. These are questions which are not looking at life from a heavenly perspective. And this is what the psalmist finally realized in his own life.

PSA 73:16-20 "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. 18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. 19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! 20 As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies."

God always has the final word. And though we should never wish destruction upon anyone, even our enemies, His sure word will come to pass and His judgment of the ungodly will not escape them.

This is part of what Peter is conveying in our text this morning. And in an odd sort of way he is actually encouraging his readers with the faithfulness of God, despite the fact that often His judgment is not swift. And for the sake of the unbeliever that is a very good thing.

To understand our text this morning which starts in verse 4 and ends with verse 9 we must quickly go back to verse 3 as Peter is explaining the destructive attitude these false teachers have toward the people of God in Christ.

2PE 2:3 "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

The idea here is that their destruction has "appeared to be sleeping". In other words, it appears that they are getting away with their ungodly and treacherous treatment of the church of Jesus Christ. But God has something to say about this and it is not very encouraging for those who would rebel against the Creator of the universe.

2PE 2:4-9 "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 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; 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; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 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) - 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment."

Peter is about to embark on a walk down the halls of God's judgment. He gives three examples, which include the cosmic and the worldly. He begins with judgment on celestial beings we know as angels. And one of the reasons Peter starts with angels is that they were the first ones to rebel against a holy and loving God.

The other reason is to show that no matter how powerful and influential a person may be, no one will escape God's judgment. And so, as if Peter were trying to show us that though some might appear to escape judgment, he makes it crystal clear that that is simply not the case, for not even angels will escape this judgment.

2PE 2:4 "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;..."

Peter doesn't give us the details as to what sin is being referred to here. Some have assumed that Peter is talking about a judgment on angels who had sexual relations with women and therefore were punished for such an unnatural act.

As we've seen in our study on Thursday nights in the book of Genesis, when it spoke of the sons of God coming into the daughters of men, many have taken that to mean demons cohabiting with women and then producing offspring to them resulting in the Nephilim.

This theory falls woefully short in light of the fact that God made all creatures after their kind and only within those groups can they produce offspring. Cats cannot be cross-bred with dogs. And angels cannot be cross-bred with humans who are flesh and blood.

Add to that, what would be produced would be a hybrid being; not human or angel, but human/angel. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we know of such a being. If that were the case they would still exist despite the fact that the flood wiped all mankind from the face of the earth, for even after the flood the Nephilim were still around.

In fact, when Moses sent the spies into the land of Canaan to spy out their strength this is the report that came back.

NUM 13:33 "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

There were giants in the land. And the people of Israel knew they were no ordinary foe. But they were every bit as human as the Israelites were.

More likely, what Peter is referring to here in our text is the pride and rebellious hearts of these angels. After all, they were created perfect beings who were made by God to serve in His courts for all eternity. And yet that did not seem to satisfy them.

REV 12:7-9 "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

Interestingly enough Peter does not say that the angels were hurled to the earth, rather he says they were cast into hell and committed to pits of darkness reserved for judgment. Is there therefore a contradiction here? Not at all.

There is a sense in which being cast to earth could very well include being cast to hell. The Greek word for hell here is *tartaroo* which comes from *Tartaros* (the deepest abyss of Hell).

This was actually the Greek understanding of a place of torment and it was essentially "the name of the subterranean region, doleful and dark, regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead, where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds" (Strong's Concordance, NIV)

Peter is not creating a new place of torment from ancient Greek mythology. He's simply using language which would have been familiar to the Greek world to help them understand the sure punishment which came as a result of God's judgment.

But how does that square with being cast to the earth in Revelation? Well, the rest of this verse could shine some light on that because there is another possible translation which reads, 'putting them into chains or pits of darkness' instead of 'putting them into gloomy dungeons'.

^{NAU} **2 Peter 2:4** For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

Can this earth be a sort of hell or holding place where they are spiritually chained for a time until their final judgment comes upon them? Most certainly. Their proper abode was continually being in the presence of God. They are now separated from God forever as they are bound to this earth, which is part of their temporal punishment.

That doesn't mean they aren't given the freedom to roam in the confines God has set up for them, which could include places outside of our immediate atmosphere, it simply means that they are under God's chain (His authority and punishment) as they are not only restricted to a location God has for them but they are also restricted in the sense that they are not able to lash out at us with their full power and fury.

This is clearly revealed in the case of Job where God and God alone set the boundaries for Satan in regards to his involvement with Job's testing by God.

Job 1:12 ¹² Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

By the way, hell, which is sometimes referred to as Hades, is not the final place of torment for either angel or man. Hell is the place all persons go to at death from this world who have rebelled and rejected God, until the final judgment comes upon all. The apostle John speaks of this in Revelation.

REV 20:10-15 "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

This will be the final eternal judgment for both angels and men who have chosen their own rebellious path instead of God's. They are delivered from hell and thrust into the lake of fire. And what Peter is doing here is driving home the point that this judgment of God is sure and not even angels will escape it. How much less men? The second example Peter gives is in verse 5.

2PE 2:5 "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;..."

This second illustration is instructive in a variety of ways. The first example involved angelic beings not escaping judgment. This one in verse 5 is different in that it does not involve angelic beings, but human beings.

Yes, God will judge human beings. But like rebellious angels, whom we know as demons, this final judgment is in the future. Even in Noah's day, the judgment of the earth did not take place

for some 120 years after Noah was instructed to build the ark for himself and his family, 8 in all.

The ancient world had some 120 years to heed the warning of Noah that God would bring destruction upon them. Our text speaks of Noah as a preacher of righteousness. He preached in two ways. He preached through his actions and he preached with his mouth.

Imagine all of the questions he had to field as he was building this huge boat on dry land. 'Noah, have you lost your mind?' Noah certainly responded that God instructed him to build such a boat, and that it was designed to save all who would come into it as they followed the Lord and trusted Him.

What do we know about the flood? We know that it actually happened. And by the way, notice that Peter doesn't talk in allegory here. He doesn't treat this as though it were some fable. The ark of Noah and the flood actually happened. Even Jesus Christ Himself treats the days of Noah and the flood as a fact of history as He compares it to His coming to take His church out of this world.

MAT 24:36-39 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."

The flood really happened and our Savior bears witness to this. But the reason it happened is the point Peter is making here. It came as a result of God's judgment on the sin of mankind. It may have taken 120 years, but it most certainly came.

But what is different about this judgment from the previous one is that, unlike angels, men are given the opportunity to repent of their sin and embrace God's salvation. Upon their rebellion angels were cut off from God and their fate was sealed forever. Sinful men still have the good news preached to them. And in Noah's day the good news included escaping the judgment of the flood in the ark.

But, like Noah we must hold on to the promises of God and His salvation in Christ. And like Noah we must persevere even in the

midst of mockers and rebels who don't seem to want any part of the good news we have. Simply because the world may reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not mean we shouldn't continue to offer it to them while we remain faithful to the work our Lord has set before us.

Unfortunately, as was the case in Noah's day, their rejection is the judgment which God will most certainly bring upon them.

The last example Peter gives in our text is found in verses 6-8.

2PE 2:6-8 "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; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 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) -.."

This particular example is the last in the line of three. All three are in chronological order in the book of Genesis. Angels were the first to rebel and therefore the first to be judged. The second was the flood which destroyed all of rebellious mankind. And so we go from angelic to humanity on a global scale. The third involves mankind after the flood, but it's local or regional instead of global.

God is narrowing down the fact that men in general are judged but ultimately it is the individual who will stand before a holy and righteous God. And we're getting closer to that picture here with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Peter tells us how Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. However, Sodom and Gomorrah were not the only two cities destroyed in that fiery judgment from God. They were probably the two largest cities among many and therefore were used to make a point, but there were others involved.

GEN 19:24-25 "Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah - from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities *and the entire plain*, including all those living in the cities - and also the vegetation in the land."

The entire plain included all the cities surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah including those mentioned in Gen.14:2: Admah, Zeboiim and Bela, also known as Zoar.

Again, what's interesting about this judgment is that though it appeared that those living in that plain seemed to get away with gross immorality God's judgment did finally come.

And yet even in that judgment Peter points out that it was designed by God to draw people away from their sin and rebellion against God as He drew them to Himself.

That's what Peter meant when he says in verse 6 that God "made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;..."

In other words, God was setting a clear sign post in the sand that He will not tolerate such rebellion and godlessness. This was designed to have people repent of their sin and seek the loving and merciful God who invites men to Himself.

I mean, even in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah God placed a righteous man in their midst to be a testimony that God was extending mercy and compassion if they would simply seek the God of Lot.

Now the book of Genesis doesn't specifically mention how Lot's life was an example of righteousness in the midst of evil. And yet the Holy Spirit has made it clear that he was a righteous man who did not condone what was going on around him.

2PE 2:8 "... (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) -..."

Lot had placed himself in an atmosphere where evil reigned. And for whatever reason he stayed there. But it would appear that God used him in that situation to be a testimony of the righteousness of God. And we see that it tormented Lot day and night to see his neighbors and friends continuing down a path of destruction.

And so, it must be assumed that these people in that region knew of Lot's devotion to God and how he would not personally succumb to their sin. This together with his verbal witness must have made him many enemies in that region. But he still remained faithful to God.

And yet, what are we told about God's faithfulness to Lot? God "rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men..." (verse 7)

God is faithful to be with His people even in the midst of sin and perversion. I know people today who believe we live in a similar environment as Sodom and Gomorrah, and they would probably be right.

Ruth Graham once made the comment: 'If God does not one day judge America He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.'

But what's the point to all of this talk about judgment? Why is Peter going on like this? Well, he answers it in verse 9.

2PE 2:9 "if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment."

We who have placed our faith in the Son of the living God for our salvation can know with certainty that no matter how the world comes against us, God will be faithful to be with us and that the wicked will not ultimately prosper against God. The gates of hell will not prevail against the kingdom of God.

But just because God will judge the unrighteous does not mean He delights in it.

EZE 18:23,32 "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? 32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"

God is compassionate and loving and has done everything to accomplish our salvation so that we might come into a peaceful relationship with Him. We see it in this second letter of Peter's.

2PE 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

The apostle Paul essentially says the same thing.

1TI 2:3-6 "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time."

God is not some ogre waiting to pounce on unsuspecting men. He is a God who is holy and just and must punish sin. But He has poured out His justice and wrath on His Son in our place. But all men must repent and embrace that gift by faith to actually receive it. If they will not, just as Peter has been saying, they will receive God's condemnation.

The days are short and we can be assured that God will not leave us, but He will also not allow sinful men to find any comfort in their sin. This is where we come in, because you see we have this good news as did Noah and Lot. May we continue to be witnesses by what we say and what we do to the honor and glory of God.

1PE 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

In Christ we do not look forward to a judgment for our sin, because Christ bore our judgment in our place on the cross and sealed it with His resurrection. May we live the resurrected lives He has given in the power of the Spirit. And may God be pleased to draw sinful men to Himself through us as we are faithful to give the world the truth in love.