

## 2 Peter 2:4–10a

### Introduction

Last time, in 2 Peter, we saw how there's a sense in which Peter has turned now from defensive to offensive mode. The Apostles have been accused of following cleverly devised myths when they made known the coming in power of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's been suggested that the Old Testament prophets were misinterpreting the visions and dreams that they had received when they proclaimed the coming "Day of the Lord." So Peter responds to these accusations by reminding us first of all of the firm foundation of the testimony of God which has come to us through the eyewitness testimony of the New Testament Apostles *and* also the inspired testimony of the Old Testament prophets who spoke from God as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. Peter reminds us of how the testimony of the Old Testament prophets has been even more fully confirmed for us in its fulfillment "already" on the holy mountain. There *is* a coming Day of the Lord—a day of judgment and reckoning—when we will all be rewarded or condemned based on the lives we've lived – whether a life of Gospel (evangelical) obedience, or a life of disobedience to the Gospel and to the Law of God as it's interpreted by that Gospel. So who is it, *really*, that's lying and making things up? Peter writes in chapter two, verses 1-3:

- 2 Peter 2:1–3 — But *false* prophets also arose among the people [of Israel], just as there will be *false* teachers among you, who will bring in teachings that lead to **destruction**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift **destruction**. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with *false* words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their **destruction** is not asleep.

The terrible irony, here, is that the destruction these false teachers are denying—not only in their teaching, but by the lives they live—this is the very destruction that they're bringing down upon themselves *by that denial* – and also upon those who follow after their sensuality. These false teachers are telling people what they want to hear; they're peddling what "sells." But denying the reality of coming judgement doesn't make it "not so." In fact, the opposite is true. Denying the reality of coming judgment—practically, by the lives we live—only guarantees the very judgment we deny. We need to remember, here, that just like the writer of Hebrews, Peter is convinced of better things concerning us—things that belong to salvation (cf. Heb. 6:9). And yet Peter also knows that the means to attaining this final salvation includes warnings and reminders of coming judgment and destruction. One of the divinely appointed means to attaining salvation is to be warned against following the sensuality of these false teachers and being swept away with them in their destruction.

It can be so easy to put out of our minds something that's still future. If it's still future, and if it's already been future for so many years, then maybe that's where it will stay – always, perpetually in the future – and therefore something we don't really ever need to worry about. We may not actually say those words, but it's how we're always tempted to think, isn't it? This explains why Peter ended last time with this warning: "Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." Peter describes this coming, future destruction as something that's

awake and active even *now*, in the present. In other words, it's *not* just something in the future. "Their condemnation from long ago [in the past] is not idle [now, in the present], and their destruction [from long ago (in the past)] is not asleep [now, in the present]." No matter how many days or years it may still be until the coming judgment and destruction of the ungodly, we should never think of this as something remote and far off, but rather as something already at work even now, in the present, and something that's always been at work even from long ago. Peter writes in verse four:

**I. 2 Peter 2:4** — For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into the underworld and committed them to pits of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

What Peter's thinking of here are the days just prior to the flood when "the sons of God [angels] saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And [the angels] took as their wives any they chose" (Gen. 6:2). There's certainly a lot here that we don't understand and that's a mystery to us, but I'm convinced that this is exactly what Genesis six tells us happened (see sermon on Gen. 6:1-4 and 1 Pet. 3:18-22). What Genesis six doesn't explicitly tell us, however, is that God cast these angels into the underworld and committed them to pits of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment. We don't hear about any of this until we come to some of the "uninspired" Jewish writings that were produced in between the Old and New Testaments. One of these writings, in particular (1 Enoch), develops the story of the angels' sin *and also* the story of God's judgement of these angels in great detail. For the most part, these details are invented, but we can still assume that they didn't come entirely out of nowhere. The simple fact that since the days of Noah there has never again been a case of angels cohabiting with women clearly implies some form of divine judgment on the angels. If there had been no such judgment, then these wicked angels would no doubt have continued to take as their wives any they chose. So, without endorsing all the fanciful details invented by the intertestamental writers, Peter does authenticate, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the one thing that he considers to be clear from the Old Testament text itself and the subsequent history of the human race: *Clearly*, "God did not spare [these] angels when they sinned, but cast them into the underworld and committed them to pits of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment."

Almost all translations say that God cast them into "hell," but the Greek word here is not "Gehenna" but "tartarus" ("tartaroo"), which stands for the deep pits and dungeons of the underworld in Greek mythology. When we think of hell, we think of the place of final judgment and everlasting punishment, but these angels haven't yet been cast into hell. They've been cast into the underworld and committed to pits of gloomy darkness **to be *kept until the judgment***. I assume this must have included *all* the evil angels because if it didn't, I think it's safe to say that we would have had Genesis 6:1-4 all over again by now. So this leads me to believe that the language of being cast into the underworld and committed to pits of gloomy darkness is a figurative way of describing an entirely new kind of existence for these evil angels (or demons). They're no longer free to do entirely as they please, but are even now kept in bonds that restrict their freedom and are a constant reminder to them of the fate that awaits them on the final day of judgment. I think of how the demons cry out in Matthew eight:

□ Matthew 8:29 — “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”

The demons know that the final judgment is coming because they know it’s already at work in the present – and has been from long ago.

It’s easy for us to get distracted by all the questions that surround this example, but for Peter’s original readers, the sin of these angels and their judgment “already” was well known. It wasn’t a distraction for Peter’s readers, and so we can’t let it be a distraction for us, either. Peter’s point is simple: God’s righteous judgment is *not* something only or entirely future, but something already *at work* in the present – something that’s already been working even from long ago. We see this very practically in the reality that Genesis six has never been repeated, ever, in the history of the world. The reason for this is that God has already judged (in the *past*) the angels who sinned, and that judgment is even now (in the *present*) the constant guarantee of a *future* and final day of judgment that’s coming upon all the world.

**II. 2 Peter 2:5a&c** — ...[and] if [God] did not spare the ancient world... when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Once again, for Peter the flood is not just an event that happened at some long ago time in the past, and neither is it *primarily* an event to help explain geological data and refute evolutionary theory. Instead, the flood of *long ago* is the sure guarantee *even in the present* of the *coming* Day of the Lord. Even as the flood came already upon the *whole* “world,” so even now it’s always foreshadowing the *worldwide* judgment that’s still to come. Even as God *did not spare* the angels that sinned, and even as He *did not spare* the world of the ungodly in the days of Noah, so also, today, there’s no hope that any of the ungodly or any unrepentant sinners will ever be spared. There’s absolutely no hope that God will show any mercy or relent from judging the world and destroying the ungodly and sinners (Schreiner). The teaching of Universalism that all people will eventually be forgiven and welcomed into heaven is a teaching that “sells” and it’s certainly a teaching that appeals to us in *our* fleshly “wisdom,” but it’s also a lie that only guarantees the eternal destruction that these people deny. (Cf. “Christianized” Universalism – Confidently stating as a fact that a deceased loved one who did not clearly confess the true Gospel or who did not clearly bring forth the true fruits of the Gospel is in heaven.) If God didn’t spare *in the past*, then we can know that He doesn’t spare *in the present* and that He will not spare at any time *in the future*. Even now, the condemnation from long ago is not idle, and destruction is not asleep. The future, final judgment is already working.

But Peter actually says more than this; he says: “*Their* condemnation [the false teachers’ condemnation] from long ago is not idle, and *their* destruction [from long ago] is not asleep.” God’s judgment and destruction of the ungodly is ultimately all of one piece, and so the judgment and destruction of the ungodly in Noah’s day *is* also the judgment and destruction of the false teachers in Peter’s day and of all those who follow after their sensuality. Think about it like this: If the flood of Noah’s day is already *my own* destruction at work, then I should be just as certain of the final day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly as are the demons themselves. But again, Peter is convinced of better things concerning us, and so into the midst of

all this gloomy language of judgement and destruction we have suddenly the bright light and hope of rescue and deliverance.

**III. 2 Peter 2:5b** — ...[and] if [God] 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;

Doesn't this verse make you want to be counted with Noah, the preacher of righteousness, rather than with the world of the ungodly? So, then, *we too* must be bold preachers of *true righteousness* by the lives we live and by the words we speak.

Here, again, it's not until the "uninspired" Jewish writings that were produced in between the Old and New Testaments that the idea of Noah as a preacher of righteousness is really developed. Some of these writings describe Noah's preaching and even the response to his preaching in great detail. But even though the details aren't inspired and may not actually be true, we can still assume that they didn't just arise out of thin air. We read in Genesis chapter six:

□ Genesis 6:9, 13–14 — Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God... And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood."

The fact that Noah obeyed God and built a massive boat far from any body of water clearly implies that he must have explained to the people in his day *why* he was building the ark (cf. Schreiner). So without endorsing all the details invented by the intertestamental writers, Peter does authenticate, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the one thing that he considers to be clear from the Old Testament text itself: Clearly, Noah was a preacher of righteousness to the ungodly world in which he lived.

But what is this "righteousness" that Noah preached? The righteousness that Noah preached was *God's* righteousness and specifically the reality of God's righteous judgments, and therefore our responsibility to shape our lives always in the light of His righteous judgments. That's what true righteousness is. It's not just keeping a moral code, but rather living in full accountability and full Gospel obedience to *the one* who has revealed *His* righteous requirements and who has also warned us of *His* righteous judgments. Noah preached the righteous requirements and warned of the righteous judgments of God. And yet, as Peter reminds us, nobody listened. In the end, it was only Noah and seven others from his own household who were saved while all the rest of the ungodly world was destroyed. The righteous will always be a minority in an ungodly world, but brothers and sisters, how much better it is to be in the minority than to be swept away in the judgment.

How wonderful it is to know that though God did *not* spare the ancient world, yet He *did* rescue and preserve Noah, a preacher of righteousness. I have to ask again: Doesn't that make you want to be counted with Noah, the preacher of righteousness, rather than with the world of the ungodly? Shouldn't this embolden us to be, like Noah, preachers and heralds of *God's*

*righteousness*—of His righteous requirements and His righteous judgments—by the lives *we* live and by the words *we* speak?

**IV. 2 Peter 2:6** — ...[and] if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to destruction, appointing them as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

Almost all the translations say that God “*made*” these cities an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, but I don’t think this fully captures Peter’s point. The Greek word, here, always has the sense of doing something very purposefully, or with a specific purpose in mind and so it’s often translated with the word “appoint” – as I think we should do here (cf. NET; Schreiner). In other words, Sodom and Gomorrah didn’t just happen to end up as the proverbial example of what’s going to happen to all the ungodly. From the beginning, God Himself appointed Sodom and Gomorrah to this very end. And so it’s in this divine appointment that we see the final, *future* judgment already at work in the *past* and therefore still active and still at work even today, in the *present*.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone is proverbial wherever the Bible is known or read, and that’s not by accident. It was already proverbial even in the days of the Old Testament (cf. Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11; Isa. 1:9; 13:19).

- Zephaniah 2:9 — Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever.
- Deuteronomy 29:22–24 (Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11; Isa. 1:9) — Your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick— the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath— all the nations will say, “Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?”

The destruction of Babylon (cf. Isa. 13:19), of Edom (cf. Jer. 19:17-18), of Moab, and even of Old Testament Israel is compared to the archetypal destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and even seen in some sense as a *continuation* of that *same* destruction. Can you see what this means? It means that by God’s divine appointment, not only in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but also in each one of these successive destructions we see already the future judgment and destruction of the ungodly. This is what explains how in speaking of the false teachers and of those who follow after their sensuality Peter can even refer to the “long ago” destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as “*their* destruction.”

We should stop for a moment and remember what it is about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that causes it to always be so proverbial. It’s the suddenness of that destruction (without any warning; cf. Lk. 17:26-30), it’s the swiftness of that destruction (in a single day), it’s the totality of that destruction (not a single sinner spared), and it’s the lasting effects of that destruction (“the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing

growing, where no plant can sprout”; “a waste forever”). It’s *this* destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that God has *appointed* as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. Shouldn’t that cause us to tremble? Should this not be more than enough to teach us wisdom? No matter how many days or years it may still be until the final judgment, we should never think of this as something remote and far off—as something “idle” or “asleep,” but rather as something already working even now, in the present, and something that’s always been at work – even “from long ago.”

But once again, Peter is convinced of better things concerning us, and so into the midst of all this gloomy language of judgement and destruction we have suddenly—once more—the bright light and hope of rescue and deliverance.

**V. 2 Peter 2:7–8** — ...and if [God] rescued *righteous* Lot, greatly distressed by the *sensual conduct* of the *wicked* (for as that *righteous* man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his *righteous* soul over their *lawless deeds* that he saw and heard);

Do you see how Peter places in such bold relief the “sensual conduct” and “lawless deeds” of the “wicked” on the one hand and the “righteous Lot”—“that righteous man”—whose “righteous soul” was distressed and tormented by all the wickedness that surrounded him? And don’t these verses make you long to be counted with righteous Lot whom God rescued rather than with the lawless citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah who were condemned to destruction?

Lot’s faults aren’t overlooked in Genesis (for example, the fact that he chose to leave the land of promise and settle in Sodom and Gomorrah in the first place), but remember that it was in answer to Abraham’s prayer that God would not sweep away the *righteous* with the wicked that God rescued Lot (Gen. 18:22-33; 19:29). Lot’s offering of his daughters should not be acceptable in any culture at any time, but an understanding of the ancient near-eastern culture of Lot’s day would definitely give us a much better understanding of why Lot did what he did (cf. Gen. 19:8). It was Lot who showed the strangers in his town such generous hospitality and pressed them strongly so that they would not spend the night in the town square (cf. Gen. 19:1-3) – in stark contrast with how the rest of the town received the strangers. It was Lot who said to the men of the city: “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly” (Gen. 19:7). And it was to Lot that the men of the city responded:

□ Genesis 19:9 — “Stand back! ... This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot...

It seems clear that Lot was already hated and resented by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because as a prominent man in the city (cf. Gen. 19:1) he used what influence he had to curb and rebuke the sensual conduct of the wicked.

In light of all this, it’s also clear that righteous Lot must have been “*greatly distressed*” by the sensual conduct of the wicked. How could it be otherwise? As a righteous man, he *must* have been tormenting his righteous soul over the lawless deeds that he saw and heard. How could he

not? And so out of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, it was *only* righteous Lot and some from his household who were rescued. The righteous will always be a minority in an ungodly world, but brothers and sisters, how much better it is to be in the minority than to be swept away in the judgment.

How wonderful it is to know that though God did *not* spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet He *did* rescue and preserve righteous Lot.

Here's a most powerful warning and encouragement to us. Doesn't this make you long to be counted with righteous Lot? When we see and hear of the sensual conduct of the wicked in TV shows and movies, are we tormenting our righteous souls? Do we laugh at the sensual conduct in the sitcom, or—more likely—do we sit apathetically and wait until that part has passed, or are we truly tormenting our righteous souls? And if so, then why are we watching that sitcom, or that movie at all – just so we can be tormented? It's not enough to be smugly self-righteous and prudishly “disapproving.” We all need to know what it is to be “greatly distressed” – precisely because we know that it's on account of these very things that judgment and wrath is coming (cf. Col. 3:5-6). *These* are the truly righteous; these are those whom God will rescue and preserve on that final day. “Lot suffers... because he is a genuinely righteous man, a man who loves righteousness, who longs to see righteousness done in the world, and is afflicted by its absence. If 2 Peter's readers can identify with him, they too may [confidently look] for deliverance.” (Bauckham)

□ Ezekiel 9:4–6 (cf. Ps. 119:136) — The LORD said to [the angel], “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.” And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark.”

So far, verses 4-8 have all been building the premise: For **if [or “since”]** God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into the underworld and committed them to pits of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; **if** he 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; **if** by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to destruction, appointing them as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and **if** [God] rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)...

If all this, then *what*?

**VI. 2 Peter 2:9–10a** — ...**then** the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under [the sentence/doom of] punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who go after the flesh in the lust of defiling passion, despising authority.

For the godly, the coming destruction of the wicked actually accomplishes their rescue and deliverance because it sets them free forever from the distress and torment of living among lawless men. So therefore, lest we grow weary of walking in the way of righteousness, we must always be fully convinced that the unrighteous are *even now* being kept under the sentence or the doom of eternal punishment until the day of judgment comes. We must fully understand and be fully convinced that “their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” – it’s active and at work even today. This is especially the case, Peter says, for those who “go after the flesh in the lust of defiling passion, despising authority.” Peter’s thinking of those who transgress or go beyond the boundaries—especially the sexual boundaries—that God has set. In verse 2 he spoke of the sensuality—or the sinful abandon—of the false teachers. In verse 7 he spoke of the sensual conduct—the unrestrained sinful abandon—of the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah. Here we see that the ultimate sin of *all* the ungodly is a deifying of their own sensual, fleshly desires so that they despise and reject the authority of God (cf. 2:1). The two Greek words Peter uses for “*going after* the flesh” are the words used in the Greek Old Testament for going after false gods (cf. Davids; 1 Kings 11:10; Isa. 65:2; Hos. 11:10).

- Deuteronomy 6:14 — You shall not **go after** other gods...
- Deuteronomy 4:3 — The LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who **went after**... Baal.
- Deuteronomy 28:14 — If you do not turn aside... to **go after** other gods to serve them.

And so the ungodly, Peter says, are those who “go after” the flesh as the god that they serve and worship while the truly righteous are those who are “greatly distressed” and who are even “tormenting” their souls day after day by the sensual conduct of the wicked.

### **Conclusion**

Let us, then, not be guilty of deifying the desires of the flesh. Let us not be guilty of despising God’s authority by transgressing the boundaries that He has set. Instead, let us live righteous and godly lives KNOWING that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous always under the doom of punishment until the day of judgment.

- Psalm 58:11 — [In that day] Mankind will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.”