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MINISTRIES

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Confirm Your Calling: God Rescues the Righteous and Judges the Wicked (2 Peter 2:1-10a)

WARNING: The Subject material in this teaching may not be suitable for children.

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 2 Peter. In this teaching, we will be going through 2 Peter 2:1-10a. Here, Peter begins discussing a topic that will continue to the end of his letter: the danger of false teachers. He also gives biblical examples of how God rescues the righteous and judges the wicked.

But before we look at this section of Scripture, here’s a quick summary of what we discussed last time.

1. Peter defends the doctrine of Messiah’s second coming against the accusations of scoffers who claim that the doctrine is merely a cleverly devised myth.
2. To support his claim that the Messiah will return, Peter references his own eyewitness experiences of Yeshua’s transfiguration. Peter saw Yeshua’s glory and majesty with his own eyes—he caught a glimpse of what Yeshua will look like when he returns as the glorious Messianic king.
3. Peter also appeals to biblical prophecy as testifying of the Messiah’s return. Peter assures his readers that the words of Scripture are not contrived by men but are the very words of God, and therefore a reliable testimony to the truth.

In chapter 1, Peter mentioned how God’s word spoken through the prophets is faithfully conveyed in the Scriptures. Here in chapter 2, Peter notes that even though genuine prophecy existed, there were also false prophets among the people of Israel in the Old Testament. We shouldn’t be surprised to discover, then, that there were false teachers among the people in Peter’s day as well. Here is what he says:

2 Peter 2:1-3

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, 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.

So, just as there were false prophets in the past, there are false teachers who will rise among us today. Notice that Peter says the false prophets and teachers were “among the people” and “among you.” So they were not outside of the community but *members of* the community. These teachers probably identified as fellow believers but spoke their own words and teachings instead of God’s. As Richard Bauckham writes:

[W]e may conclude that the false teachers in 2 Peter are not, like those in Jude, itinerants who have arrived in the churches to which 2 Peter is addressed from outside, but members of those churches. They have brought their teachings in from outside, in the sense that these teachings are contrary to the apostolic message and so do not belong in the church.

—Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 239

How does Peter characterize these false teachers? What are they doing? Peter says they “secretly bring in destructive heresies.” In Greek, the word “heresy” means “school” or “sect,” and here in the plural it refers to the various opinions taught by a particular sectarian group (Duane F. Watson & Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), 178). So, these false teachings are “destructive”—that is, they bring destruction upon the false teachers and the “many” who will follow them.

What is the content of these destructive heresies? It is “denying the Master who bought them.” The “Master” is a reference to Yeshua (See Jude 4), who paid to redeem mankind with his blood. The Greek word here for “bought” is the same word used in Revelation 5:9:

Revelation 5:9

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you **ransomed** people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

In what way do these false teachers deny the Master Yeshua? Well, there are two aspects to this. Number one, as discussed in the previous teaching, these false teachers deny the reality of Messiah’s Second Coming and the judgment that will occur at the end of the age (2 Peter 3:3-4). Number two, they deny Yeshua as Master by their sinful lifestyle. Note the parallel in Jude:

Jude 4

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and **deny** our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua].

Like Jude, Peter highlights the false teachers’ sensuality. In Greek, this word conveys carnal indulgence, especially in regard to sexual immorality (Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 241). Peter will go on to compare these false teachers to the wicked who were destroyed in the stories of Noah’s flood and Sodom and Gomorrah.

It seems that the behavior of these false teachers is ultimately the result of their theology. Since they deny the reality of future judgment, they deceive themselves into believing they won't be held accountable for what they do. Peter reminds them of the truth, which, as we discussed last time, is validated by eyewitness testimony and biblical prophecy. The Messiah is returning, and judgment *is* coming.

Let's continue:

2 Peter 2:4-10a

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald 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 extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he 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); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Okay, there is a lot to unpack in this extremely long sentence! Peter's primary point here is that God knows how to rescue the godly and punish the wicked. Peter highlights examples from the Tanakh—the Old Testament—of God judging the wicked and delivering the righteous who were in the midst of the wicked. In this passage, Peter warns the wicked of God's coming wrath and also reassures the righteous of God's protection.

Let's go through each of these examples:

2 Peter 2:4

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

Here, Peter references a time when angels sinned, and God bound them in chains where they are now held until the day of judgment at the end of the age. Peter says God cast these angels into hell. In Greek, "cast into hell" comes from *ταρταρόω* (*tartaroo*), or tartarus. In Greek mythology, this word refers to the underworld, a type of subterranean prison for rebellious humans and gods. Tartarus was also where the Greek god Zeus is said to have imprisoned the Titans, who were supernatural giants that fought against the Greek Olympian gods (Homer, *Iliad* 8.13-14; Hesiod, *Theogony* 617–735). So Peter uses this Greek word, tartarus, which would have been known to his readers, to describe the place where these fallen angels are confined until the day of judgment. Peter is not alone in using this word to describe such a place, by the way. Philo and the pseudepigraphical book of 1 Enoch also use this word (Philo, *Rewards and Punishments* 152; 1 Enoch 20:2; 21).

The use of such language and imagery is perhaps to be expected from a Jewish writer attempting to convey biblical concepts to an audience which was highly influenced by Greek culture. This is not unlike the time Paul quoted passages from pagan poets when he spoke to his Athenian audience (Acts 17:28). Peter and Paul used what was familiar to their audience to explain biblical truths—in Peter's case, the truth that the wicked are held until judgment day. Josephus also used what was familiar to his

audience to explain things in the Bible. In fact, Josephus explicitly compares the Greek myths about the acts of the Titans to Jewish traditions about fallen angels (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.73).

This leads us to our next question: which incident in the Old Testament could Peter be referring to in this verse? The following references to Noah's flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are clear, but where does the Old Testament talk about God judging sinful angels?

Some have suggested that Peter is referring to passages such as Isaiah 14:12-20 and Ezekiel 28:1-19, which some take to be describing the fall of Satan and other angels before creation. While that is possible, many scholars believe that those passages are not about the fall of Satan, but rather are poetically describing the fall of actual human rulers during the time of the prophets (Douglas Moo, 2 *Peter-Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 111). Dr. Peter Gentry provides a detailed critique of the idea that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 describe the fall of Satan if you are interested in looking into this further (See Peter Gentry, "Is the Fall of Satan really described in the Bible?" *Southern Seminary*, www.sbts.edu).

If Peter does not have such passages in mind, what could he be referring to? Well, it is quite possible that Peter is drawing from popular Jewish traditions that are based on Genesis 6:1-4. This passage speaks about the "sons of God" marrying and having children with the "daughters of men." Jewish tradition in the intertestamental era prior to Peter's time expanded upon this passage and developed a story about fallen angels during the time of Noah's flood. As the story goes, these angels—the "sons of God"—disobeyed God by taking human wives, the "daughters of men." So, God punished these fallen angels. The collection of writings we know as "1 Enoch" provide a detailed account of how these events were traditionally understood (See especially 1 Enoch 19-21).

The idea that Peter is referring to this story has a lot going for it. First, it conforms to the chronological order of these Old Testament events. The passage upon which these traditions are based directly precedes the story of Noah's flood. So, you have the account of the "sons of God," followed by the story of Noah's flood, followed by the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Second, as we mentioned in our introduction to 2 Peter, there is an obvious literary relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. Regardless of which one depends upon the other, it is possible that Jude cites 1 Enoch (Jude 14-15), which tells the story about these fallen angels of Genesis 6 in detail. If Jude cites these traditions, it seems unlikely that Peter would be unaware of them. Jude and Peter both describe angels being kept in chains of gloomy darkness (Jude 6).

And this leads to the third point: Peter's description of fallen angels being bound and cast into Tartarus resembles the Enochian tradition. For example:

To Raphael he said, "Go, Raphael, and bind Asael [a fallen angel] hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness; And make an opening in the wilderness that is in Doudael.

—1 Enoch 10:4 (The Hermeneia Translation)

Finally, fourth, Peter's first letter possibly references this tradition as well. 1 Peter 3:19 speaks about the Messiah preaching to the "spirits in prison," which might be referring to these fallen angels. This might be further evidence that Peter is at least aware of these Jewish interpretations of Genesis 6, or possibly holds to them himself. For more on this verse in 1 Peter, see [Life in Exile: Hope Worth Defending \(1 Peter 3:8-22\)](#).

So what should we make of Peter's possible appeal to this known Jewish tradition concerning Genesis 6? Well, it should be noted that this does not mean that Peter, or Jude for that matter, considered 1 Enoch to be inspired Scripture. We know that the Jewish canon during the time of the apostles excluded 1 Enoch, so even though the apostles knew about these writings, they wouldn't have considered them part of Scripture. Also, 1 Enoch—at least the version of it we have today—contains some pretty serious false teaching, which directly conflicts with the teachings of the apostles. The traditions concerning Genesis 6 were widespread and spoken about in several Jewish writings, not just 1 Enoch. So, the fact that Peter appeals to popular traditions that also happen to be recorded in 1 Enoch does not validate the entirety of the teaching contained in 1 Enoch. And it certainly doesn't grant 1 Enoch divine authority.

For more on 1 Enoch, see our teachings [Testing the Book of Enoch](#) and [The Son of Man in the Book of Enoch](#).

There *is* one thing that Peter's appeal to these traditions might suggest—and that is, Peter agreed with the widely held interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 that the “sons of God” were fallen angels. That is something to consider when we interpret Genesis 6. The interpretation that Genesis 6:1-4 is about fallen angels marrying and having children with human women is disputed, but it is not impossible.

Now, if we accept that Peter relies on these traditions in this passage, one could perhaps argue that Peter did not actually agree with this interpretation and was merely using this popular story as an illustration. Maybe Peter didn't mean for his readers to think of this story about fallen angels as historical. While that is possible, it seems unlikely. Peter's other examples of God's judgment in this same passage are obviously intended to be understood as real historical events. Plus, Peter is attempting to persuade his readers that the doctrine of God's judgment is valid and not merely a “cleverly devised myth” (2 Peter 1:16). It would seem strange for Peter to use an example of something he considered a myth to support his argument that God's coming judgment is *not* a myth.

The evidence seems to favor the idea that Peter, in 2 Peter 2:4, has in mind these ancient Jewish interpretations of Genesis 6, and that Peter shares this interpretation. However, this view is not without its difficulties. Namely, the text of Genesis 6 itself mentions only the sins of mankind, not of angels. The Flood narrative is clearly about God judging wicked *humans*. If the point of the narrative were God's judgment of sinful angels, we would expect the text itself to mention that somewhere, but it doesn't. Furthermore, Yeshua seems to directly contradict the idea that angels could marry and have sexual relations (Matthew 22:30).

Unfortunately, resolving these difficulties is beyond the scope of this teaching, but hopefully this summary will help you determine some reasonable options in your studies. Let's continue:

2 Peter 2:5

[if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;](#)

In this verse, Peter reminds his readers of the great flood. Just as God did not spare the wicked angels, he also did not spare the wicked people in Noah's time. But God did protect Noah and his family. Peter refers to Noah as “[a herald of righteousness](#).” Just like Genesis does not mention fallen angels being punished, it also does not refer to Noah as a herald of righteousness. Nevertheless, Jewish tradition taught that Noah preached to the wicked. As Josephus writes:

But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their dispositions and their acts for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to their wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married; so he departed out of that land.

—Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.74 (translated by William Whiston)

So, Peter cites Noah, a herald of righteousness, in contrast to the false teachers he is confronting in his letter. Noah and his family were spared from judgment, but the wicked were destroyed. Similarly, according to Peter, God will spare those who are committed to the Lord and to sound doctrine, but those who deny the Master Yeshua bring destruction upon themselves. Let's continue:

2 Peter 2:6-8

if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he 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);

Here, Peter references the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is found in Genesis 19:1-29. It tells of God sending fire from the sky to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. Peter says that Lot, who lived in Sodom, was a righteous man who felt greatly troubled by the city's wickedness. Once again, Peter's teaching has some similarities with popular Jewish tradition of his time, which also highlighted Lot's righteousness (*Wisdom of Solomon* 10:6; 19:17). Peter references the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as another example of God judging the wicked and rescuing the righteous.

2 Peter 2:9-10a

then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Here, Peter reaches the conclusion of his argument. As we have seen, Scripture repeatedly testifies to the fact that God judges the wicked and rescues the godly. This is a great encouragement to followers of Yeshua who live righteously. However, for the unrighteous, this is a dire warning. Judgment is coming, and those who live in sin and refuse to repent will suffer swift destruction on the day of judgment.

Peter says that God “[knows how to rescue the godly from trials](#).” What “trials” does Peter refer to? In light of the reference to the day of judgment in the same verse, Peter is likely thinking of trials related to God's judgment at the end of the age. Note the parallel verse in Revelation:

Revelation 3:10

[Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.](#)

What does it mean that God will rescue or keep the godly from the trials in the end days? Some interpret this as support for the pre-tribulational rapture doctrine. This doctrine teaches that before the Great Tribulation at the end of the age, God will “rapture” all believers and bring them to Heaven so that they won't have to go through the Great Tribulation. However, this perspective is unlikely. Rescuing or keeping believers from trial does not necessarily mean that believers won't be *present* during the trial,

but they *will* be protected. The idea that believers are *present* but *protected* during the end times tribulation fits better with other passages from Revelation, which clearly show believers suffering and facing persecution (Revelation 12:11; 13:7) but still being protected in the midst of God’s judgments (Revelation 7:3; 9:4). So, Peter does not mean to imply that believers won’t suffer or face persecution in the end days—his first letter repeatedly promises that they will. However, believers will be spared from judgment.

The unrighteous, on the other hand, will suffer God’s judgment—“**and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion.**” What does Peter mean by this characterization? According to Douglas Moo:

Peter piles up some very strong words; a literal rendering is “going after flesh in a passionate longing for defilement.” The reference is to sexual sin, probably including, in light of Peter’s reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 6, homosexuality.

—Douglas Moo, *2 Peter-Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 107

So again, as in verse 2 of this chapter, Peter highlights sexual immorality. The false teachers in these communities reject God’s standards of sexual morality and are influencing “many” others also to abandon these standards (2 Peter 2:2). Later in this chapter, Peter will go on to say that these false teachers “**entice by sensual passions of the flesh**” (2 Peter 2:18). The parallel passage in Jude explicitly mentions sexual immorality:

Jude 7-8

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

This leads to the second characterization. Peter says that God’s judgment is reserved especially for the sexually immoral and those who “**despise authority.**” That is, those who deny Yeshua as Lord and Master (See Peter 2:1). Yeshua affirmed the ongoing authority of the Torah (Matthew 5:17-20); thus, to despise the Torah’s righteous standards, especially in regard to sexuality, is to despise Yeshua’s Lordship.

Again, this immorality is ultimately borne out of the rejection of God’s coming judgment. If a person denies this reality, we shouldn’t be surprised to see them living accordingly. In their mind, they won’t be held accountable for their actions, so what’s the point of obeying God’s rules? Why not indulge the flesh? But based on the testimony of Scripture, Peter warns them that they’re in for a rude awakening.

Today, we are closer to the end than ever before. Judgment is coming. Will you take Scripture’s warnings seriously? Will you be among the godly who are rescued, or among the unrighteous who will suffer judgment?

God’s Standards for Human Sexuality

Let’s talk about one of the characteristics of the unrighteous who will be judged. Peter characterizes the unrighteous as those who “**indulge in the lust of defiling passion.**” That is, they engage in sexual immorality (2 Peter 2:2, 18; Jude 7-8). Sexual immorality deviates from God’s design for human

sexuality. God's perfect will for sex is represented in the relationship between Adam and Eve in Genesis. We see this in the following command:

Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Here we see that the relationship between Adam and Eve in the garden sets forth God's pattern for human sexuality. Both Yeshua and Paul assume this pattern and appeal to Genesis 2:24 in their own teachings (Matthew 19:3-6; 1 Corinthians 6:16; 7:2; Ephesians 5:31).

Now, much could be said about this verse, and we have an entire series on sexuality in the Bible called "[One Flesh](#)," where we discuss this topic in depth. But we will highlight a couple of things here.

First, Scripture describes sex as becoming "one flesh." God's good gift of sex is certainly intended for physical pleasure—which, contrary to gnostic beliefs, is a *good* thing. But it is not limited to that. The concept of becoming "one flesh" entails intimacy. Sex is intended to produce a profound spiritual and emotional intimacy with one's spouse.

That leads to the next point: this one-flesh union is meant to occur within the context of a relationship that is exclusive to one man and one woman. In other words, a heterosexual, monogamous marriage covenant is the only appropriate context for sex. It is only within this framework that genuine intimacy can be found. Only this context provides the environment where husband and wife can truly feel "naked and unashamed" (Genesis 2:25).

Breaking from God's design and attempting to find sexual fulfillment outside of his expressed parameters is sexual immorality. It is a sin. And also, it is an exercise in futility. A sexual relationship without the commitment of the marriage covenant strips from sex the trust, security, and vulnerability required to truly experience emotional and spiritual wholeness with another person. It reduces God's gift to mere carnal pleasure-seeking, turning it into a cheap counterfeit of the real thing. Rather than satisfying the longing in our hearts for genuine connection, it instead leaves us feeling unfulfilled and more lonely than before. Moreover, breaking from the marital form that God established in creation—a loving heterosexual, monogamous union—is also to forfeit the sexual fulfillment that God's wants for us. Human sexuality outside of God's will leads to broken intimacy. It pretends to offer fulfillment but never satisfies the longing in our hearts.

God's will for sex is not arbitrary. God created the good gift of sex, and he knows that it can bring destruction to our lives if it is misused. Therefore, he made his standards very clear for our own good because he wants the best for us. The question is, will we trust that his ways are better than ours? Will we adhere to his expressed will for marriage and sex, or will we despise his authority and do whatever is right in our own eyes?

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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