

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Judgment is Competent

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment...The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. (2 Peter 2:4-9)

Often when objectionable wickedness appears to thrive unchecked and unpunished or false prophets seem to promote their errors with flourish among naïve sheep, an observer might object, "It just isn't fair. Where is God in all of this?" You can almost read this question between the lines of Peter's writings in our study verses. He answers the objection before we raise it. Don't think for a minute that any appearance of success by those who contradict God's truth or His moral commandments to humanity shall escape His righteous judgment. Peter gives us three Old Testament examples of God's powerful and righteous judgment that would be far more difficult than any of our questions or issues. And in each case, God faithfully and righteously judged in His time and way. Rest assured; He is no less competent in judgment today than in any of those examples.

Let's look at the examples of God's judgment that Peter cites in this context.

1. **Verse 4. Angels that sinned.** This judgment is likely the most debated of the occasions listed. Given that Scripture mentions angels that sinned, "elect angels" (Leaving an implication of angels who were not elected), and angels who serve with Satan and at his direction, the existence of such angels cannot be reasonably doubted. Since God never judges any being capriciously or without a just cause, we must conclude that they exist, leading us to Peter's point. Angels are mysterious beings to us. We read of their existence in Scripture, along with their occasional appearance to defend, instruct, and bless God's children. Paul defines their purpose in Hebrews 1:14, "...to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Paul also writes of these wicked angels in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15. If God is competent to judge wicked angels who sin, why should we, even for a moment, doubt that He is more than competent to judge false prophets or depraved sinners?
2. **Verse 5. The world of the flood.** During a time when all of humanity other than one man and his family forsook God and His righteous commandments, God demonstrated two major Biblical truths. First, He does not suspend all judgment till the Second Coming. On occasion,

if He has good reason to do so, He can and does judge immediately and severely, though righteously. One might wonder. If a false prophet reads these lessons, why does he not repent for fear of such a judgment falling upon him? There are at least two reasons. First, wrong headed as they may be when weighed against Scripture, the false prophet is likely often persuaded that he is right by whatever twisted logic or twisted Bible interpretation he follows to convince himself. Secondly, Scripture abounds with examples that reveal that God often visits false prophets with judicial blindness. If the false prophet repeatedly refuses to heed God's revealed truth and conviction, God turns him over to his own imaginations, a righteous beginning of judgment quite suited to his sin. No different from Adam and Eve when God confronted them after their sin, the false prophet will always point the finger of blame to someone else to avoid acknowledging his personal sin. Point as many fingers as he will, God knows the sin of the false prophet, and no amount of blame-shifting or finger-pointing by the false prophet will deceive God. If the false prophet relies on his wicked, broken imagination for his beliefs, it is altogether an appropriate judgment to turn the false prophet over to his spiritually blind imagination. God righteously applied His judgment against all those who had abandoned His commandments in the flood, even as He sent a miraculous deliverance to the one man and his family who "...found grace in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:8) God's miraculous deliverance of Noah and his family is the second lesson that we learn from Noah and the flood. Despite the isolation and difficulty, Noah and his family remained faithful, and God had no problem taking care of them even as He sent immediate judgment upon the wicked world of Noah's day. Peter uses this amazing example of the Lord's judgment to strengthen our respect for His present judgment.

3. **Verses 6-8. Lot and Sodom and Gomorrha.** A study of Lot's life and choices reveals that he ended up in Sodom and Gomorrha by his own choice. Whatever his reasoning, in the end, it was a bad decision. If I read the Genesis

account of Lot's life in Sodom and afterwards, I honestly don't respect the man. He made some major mistakes (Sins) to his shame. I love his faithfulness in Sodom and Gomorrha, but his utter moral failure in the cave erases my respect for his former integrity. The Holy Spirit knew more about Lot's heart than we know, and He indicates in this lesson that he maintained a moral barrier between himself and the wicked culture of the city. It vexed "...his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." Human laws may approve or disapprove of the conduct of this city, but Lot respected a higher law, God's law, and, under God's law, the conduct of the city was "unlawful." A human law approving the conduct in no way alters God's higher law. If we consider that, despite an extended time in Sodom and Gomorrha, and despite gaining some recognition in the culture (He sat with the elders at the city gate. Genesis 19:1), Lot maintained a moral distinction from the wickedness of the city. It vexed his righteous soul daily. Think of the situation. Lot and his family live in a large city, but they live apart from its moral rot. For most of my adult life, I have lived in the shadows of Los Angeles, California, not a city well known for high moral integrity. As a pastor of a small church in the area for the entire time, I have witnessed far too many believers who stood apart from the culture's moral decay for a time, but eventually they slipped into it and walked away from our church and from their faith. Perhaps they became discouraged, "...choked with cares," (Luke 8:14), wondering if God was capable of judging righteously among so many people. Perhaps they lacked a strong root of godliness in themselves. (Matthew 13:21) Perhaps the deceitfulness of riches, or the deceitful hope for riches choked out the fruitfulness of the word of God. (Matthew 13:22) Whatever the cause, each of them became spiritually unfruitful in the word, following self and supposedly self-serving interests more than God-serving interests. The outcome is the same. They became unfruitful, a spiritual state that Peter explains fully in 2 Peter 1. Peter's obvious point in our study lesson reminds us that God is wholly competent to judge such difficult cases, even of one righteous man in a large city. The greater lesson of Lot is rich with instructive truths for us. In the age of television, internet, and various other electronic communication links, you need not live in the shadow of a wicked city to be exposed to its moral rot. It floods into your family room daily through the TV screen or the computer screen. Proof of this evil spread appears in the sad fact that drug abuse is often as rampant, or more so, in rural communities than in large cities.

Why did Peter list these three infamous examples of wicked rebellion against God in a context dealing with false prophets? 2 Peter 2:9 answers the question. The Lord knows "...how to deliver the godly out of temptations." He also knows how to reserve the unjust for the day of judgment to be punished. The more clearly godly people understand and keep in their memory God's righteous ability to deliver the godly and to punish the wicked the more clearly we will know our divine assignment and strive to complete it faithfully. Lot didn't know how he and his family would be delivered out of Sodom and Gomorrha, but he maintained a righteous life in the city. His "Story" would end on a far brighter note if he had kept that truth in his mind in the cave, the last appearance we read of him in Genesis. A brief observation. One of several contemporary doctrinal drifts confuses--1) God's faithful keeping of His people under the saving, cleansing blood of His Son so that none shall ever finally perish in eternal ruin or eternal separation from the love of God with 2) the Biblical admonition to believers to maintain their faithfulness steadfastly (God's sure preservation of His people from eternal separation versus Scripture's admonition to believers to persevere in their faithfulness; Ephesians 6:18, the only appearance of "perseverance" in the Bible). If the contemporary idea that, if you are really a child of God, you shall persevere in your faith, so that an outline of your life maps a growing advancement in your faith and godliness, is correct, advocates of this errant idea have a world of explaining to do with "Brother Lot." Under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Peter describes Lot as a righteous man who was daily vexed by the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrha. Yet, inspired Scripture leaves no doubt about the black sin into which Lot fell in the last chapter of his life. **He didn't persevere!** So what shall the advocates of this errant doctrine do with poor Lot? They can't send him to hell, for Scripture describes him as righteous. They can't call him a child of God, for he obviously didn't persevere or improve in his faith or godliness. For advocates of this errant doctrine, Lot is embarrassingly stuck in no-man's-land. If we accept the teachings of Scripture, we have no such problem with Lot. God always faithfully preserves His beloved children from final ruin or separation from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39) However, Scripture commands all of God's children to "...depart from iniquity," (2 Timothy 2:19b), to add godly habits to their faith, lest they become barren, unfruitful, and eventually become so callous that they forget that they were purged from their old sins. (2 Peter 1:9b) However, Scripture also teaches that children of God do fail to develop fruits to their faith, so much so that they actually may forget that God purged them from their sins. (2 Peter 1:9) The overwhelming teaching of Scripture affirms that children of God do not always persevere or grow in their faith and godliness. Lot, righteous and admirable in his steadfast separation

from the wicked culture of Sodom and Gomorrha, eventually fell to black sin, the last scene of his life that Scripture records. In this point, Lot serves to exemplify what a child of God may do when he/she chooses to ignore God and His commandments at any time or circumstance in his/her life, beginning, middle, or end. God's preservation of His elect is certain. Our perseverance in faith and godliness is by no means certain at all. Scripture teaches both points, even as God in Scripture commands us to faithful obedience.

We may not have a front row seat when the Lord judges a false prophet, but Scripture affirms that He knows precisely how to judge them. Scripture further teaches that He shall so judge them in His time and way. Live with that Biblical truth. Live confidently with it. That is Peter's inspired exhortation to us.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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