

Peter's Farewell Testament #4 How Can We Avoid Being Led Astray?

Intro: In our previous studies we've seen that Peter writes out of concern for the saints that he will soon leave behind. The Lord has made clear to him that he will die soon; and he wants the Lord's people to remain true to the faith that he has had a part in revealing. He wants them to be sure about their faith.

He helps them understand how they can know that they will enter the eternal kingdom.

He helps them understand how they can know that the gospel is true.

But Peter is concerned that God's people will be led astray. And thus after giving these assurances, he warns them of the danger of false teachers who might lead them astray. Disciples need to prepare for them. Thus Peter answers another important question, "How can we avoid being led astray?"

Peter begins the discussion by warning of the false teachers and describing them in unmistakable terms. They will be factious, apostate, self-condemned, popular, destructive, covetous, and doomed for destruction.

In that connection Peter reminds his readers of God's past judgments:

... their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 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; 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; 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 thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:1-10)

Perhaps these false teachers thought they had nothing to fear for their misuse of truth for their own purposes; but Peter makes clear that the false teachers will share in the fate of those who in the past rebelled against God's authority and lived in manifest disobedience to Him. Peter can confidently affirm that these false teachers are of kindred spirit with those God has judged in the past. Therefore their judgment is sure.

Those God judged in the past
Sinning angels

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; Peter appears to speak about what his readers are already familiar with. So we are left with some question about what OT text is Peter speaking of when he talks about sinning angels.

Many modern commentators associate these sinning angels with the actions of the "elohim" or "sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6 who are said to have married the daughters of men. The term is used for angels in the OT.

This point of view was popularized in the ancient book of Enoch. And if you've seen the movie "Noah," you may also have seen a representation of these ideas in the "watchers" that supposedly helped Noah build the ark.

I personally still find this point of view to have many difficulties; but I'm still studying the question. A more conservative view is that the "elohim" are the godly line of the descendants of Seth.

It may be that Peter simply refers to the ancient belief that Satan along with other angels rebelled against God and were sentenced to eternal judgment. Thus these fallen angels were punished by God for their rebellion. Jude describes them this way:

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 6–7)

In the meantime they are "cast into hell" (a phrase which translates a single verb "tartarao" that suggests someone being sent to Tartarus which was in ancient Greek thought the lowest part of Hades.

Antediluvian world

and did not spare the ancient world,...but brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly

Of course here the event is obvious, the great flood of Genesis 6.

Peter in both of his epistles sees the great flood not only as a historical reality; but also an indication of God's righteous wrath against sinners. *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them. (Gen. 6:5–8)* Just as God "brought" a flood on the ungodly world, so the false teachers "bring on" themselves swift destruction.

Sodom and Gomorrah

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 thereafter;

Again the reference is obvious. Sodom and Gomorrah are used throughout the Scriptures as a prototype of God's judgment against those who disobey Him. Their homosexual conduct would qualify as going after "strange flesh" and engaging in "gross immorality." Later Peter would call their conduct "sensual" or "lascivious" and their lifestyle "unprincipled" and lawless (unregulated by the law of God). Though some in our culture portray any objection to this kind of conduct as "hate speech" and "bigotry," the Scriptures are clear that this practice undermines God's creative purpose and dishonors His definition of marriage.

God's response is complete destruction. Only here is the term used in the NT: "reduced to ashes."

And so Peter's point is that all these events in the past make clear what the destiny will be for these false teachers who imbibe their spirit and behavior. In fact the false teachers may demonstrate traits from all these condemned groups:

the pride and rebellion of the angels, the apathy and disobediences of the antediluvians, and the sensuality of the cities of the plain (Michael Green, 99).

However, Peter also wants his readers to remember that in His acts of judgment we can also see:

Those God delivered from judgment

Noah and his family

but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

While destroying all mankind, God saved Noah and his family, eight people in all. Noah is portrayed as proclaiming to his generation the truth.

Peter supplements the revelation of Genesis by telling us what we surely would have expected from a righteous man--namely, that he sought to declare to His generation the truth about how to live and coming judgment of sinners.

Peter again clearly shows that God's judgment was upon "the world of the ungodly" or the impious; yet God graciously saved Noah and his family from that destruction.

Lot and his family

and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds),

Though Lot comes across badly in the narrative of Genesis in his poor decision to move to Sodom, at least this could be said about him. He

possessed an understanding of the way of righteousness and was tormented by the practice of evil all around him. Lot relative innocence at least is implied in the intercession of Abraham who asks if God would destroy the "righteous" along with the wicked. Clearly he believed that Lot was of a different character.

Peter tells us by inspiration that he was; at least it could be said that his commitment to righteousness made his life in Sodom most unpleasant as he saw the sin around him. And it may be well for all of us to ask how we feel when we see wickedness paraded around us. Do we have any sensitivity to it? Does it even bother us at all? Twice Peter speaks of the inner torment Lot's neighbors brought to him, referring to it as "torture."

What this OT history teaches us

... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:1-10)

What these examples tell us is that the God of righteousness judges the wicked and preserves the righteous in the Day of Judgment. And so it will be for all at the last great day.

But too He rescues the righteous from the temptation that living in a sinful world often brings to them.

Application for us

Though it is often considered a harmless thing for people to reject God's truth and substitute in its stead their own ideas, Peter shows that it is serious and consequential.

The doom of the rebellious is already at work and has been at work from ages ago. God is the unchanging God of both the OT and NT.

Those who defy the authority of God like false teachers do will at last experience the judgment of God as did those in the past. God's grace does not eliminate His justice. It simply offers an opportunity for escape.

However the faithful can be comforted in knowing that God will deliver them through the trials of living in a wicked world and from the day of wrath.

Conclusion: In this section, Peter not only has assured us of the judgment of false teachers, but given us a sense of the serious threat they pose to godly people.