

2 Peter 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 09 October 2020

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Peter chapter 2 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. 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. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin.

They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed, accursed children. Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression. A speechless donkey spoke with human voice, and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm.

For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them. The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. 2 Peter chapter 2 presents an extended warning about false teachers. They've arisen in the church, and as Peter is departing, he wants to prepare his hearers to address them. The substance of this chapter is pretty much the same as Jude verses 4 to 16. While there are several differences along the way, much light can be shed upon 2 Peter chapter 2 by comparing it with the book of Jude. There is a sort of typological necessity that the great exodus that Jesus brings about follows patterns found in the exodus from Egypt. In that exodus there had been false teachers, and now there will be false teachers again. Part of the challenge of these particular false teachers seems to be a denying of the coming of Christ again. If the return of Christ is denied, and with that coming judgment, ethics start to unravel. At the end of the preceding chapter, Peter had presented the hearers with true prophecy, and the confirmation of the substance of true prophecy in the event of

the transfiguration.

[4 : 15] And now he moves on to the question of false teachers. Against the background of true prophecy, we'll see what is the false. Richard Baucombe suggests that the key characteristics of these false teachers as Peter describes them is as follows. First, they are not divinely authorized.

Second, they give false assurance of peace. And then third, they will be judged. False teachers are already present, but more will arise. And this has all been foretold beforehand, so they should not have a sense that God's purposes have been thrown off. In Matthew chapter 24 verses 4 to 13 in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus had declared, And Jesus answered them, See that no one leads you astray, for many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place. But the end is not yet, for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. We find similar sorts of warnings in places like 1st John, or in 2nd Thessalonians. The word for heresies here might refer to factions. However, false teaching is clearly involved. They deny the master that bought them. They have participated in

Christ's redemption. They have been brought into the church. They've experienced the truth of God in that context. They've seen something of the way that Christ transforms lives. These are apostates.

The church is not an unmixed group. The church contains both wheat and tares. This section of the chapter parallels with Jude verses 4 and 5. 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. Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. They practice and advocate a licentious lifestyle. This is likely chiefly seen in sexual immorality and greed. As a result of their behaviour, God's truth will be blasphemed. When people see their wickedness, they will speak ill of the gospel. They are motivated by greed, and they will exploit the naive. Their motivations are quite impure, but they have persuasive words, and they can lead people astray very effectively. But yet their judgment will certainly come. There is no doubt that God will call them to account. Peter supports his point with a succession of examples. In contrast to Jude, Peter's examples follow the chronological order of biblical history.

[7 : 16] He begins with the judgment of the angels of Genesis chapter 6, and then moves to the judgment of Noah's generation, and then finally to Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot. This parallels with Jude verses 6 to 7.

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

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.

Like Jude, Peter here seems to refer to the sin of the sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 verses 1 to 4 as the sin of angels having sexual relations with human women. This is also seen in 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 19 to 20. There is extensive reference to this reading of Genesis in the Jewish tradition.

Jude seems to go on to quote the book of 1 Enoch in verses 14 to 15. It was also about these that Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

[8 : 36] As the book of 1 Enoch has an extensive account of the sins of the angelic watchers who slept with human women, it would be natural to think that Jude and Peter are working with the same reading.

The language of sons of God is used of angels in places such as Job chapter 1 or Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 8. We see angels taking human form in the book of Genesis.

For instance, in the visitors to Abraham and Lot in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. These angels eat, walk, talk, and engage in typical human interactions. They appear to have genuine human bodies with ordinary faculties.

They are not merely possessing bodies, like demons do. There is no reason to believe that prior to their judgment, the wicked sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 did not have such human bodies. While angels do not have sexual relations as angels, when occupying human bodies there is no reason to believe that they could not have done. The fact that it is sons of God having relations with daughters of men is also important.

[9 : 37] There is a sexual asymmetry. Sons with daughters. It is not just an intermarriage of two groups as such. Here we should remember that the angels do not have male and female.

The angels are seemingly all male. We are also told of the mighty men that are born to the women. This would also fit with the mythologies of a great many cultures that have myths of such unions. For Jude, the false teachers are represented as those who have crept in, as those infecting the church as if from without. In 2 Peter chapter 2, they are from within the church. Both of these things can be true.

It is like the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares come from without, from the enemy who sows them, but they are also within the field. Peter contrasts with Jude in his focus on the Lord's preservation of the righteous few, discussing Noah and Lot, whereas Jude focuses almost entirely upon the punishment of the wicked.

Peter brings in this other theme of God's preservation of the righteous. The flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are paradigmatic judgments in the New Testament. For instance, in Luke chapter 17 verses 26 to 32, Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

[10 : 48] They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all. So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day let the one who was on the housetop with his goods in the house not come down to take them away.

And likewise let the one who was in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. These stories are evidence of the Lord's power both to judge the wicked and to preserve the righteous.

They are examples of the judgment to come. Noah is presented as a herald of righteousness and Lot as a righteous man in a wicked city who are saved with a small remnant around them.

These figures provide examples for the church as heralds of righteousness like Noah and as those who like Lot are being grieved by the sin that surrounds them. The mention of Lot may be surprising.

[11 : 52] He clearly has a very flawed character in Genesis chapter 19. However, Lot is also distinguished from the city around him by the hospitality that he shows, by his strong opposition to the sin of the men of the city and by his loyalty to the angels.

Whatever his failings, he stood out from those people who surrounded him. The men of Sodom were distinguished by their sensual conduct and by their lawless deeds. Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 49 to 50 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom.

She and her daughters had pride, excessive food and prosperous ease but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them when I saw it. God is able to keep his people and to mark out the wicked for judgment. Peter especially singles out those who indulge their flesh in unclean lusts and those who despise authority.

The focus on sexual sin and perversity is present as an inciting cause of judgment in both the flood and in the case of Sodom. Like the rest of the New Testament, sexual sin is treated as a matter of a special seriousness.

[12 : 58] These people also resist authority. Presumably the authority of God in particular which lies behind all other authorities. They are rebellious in their fundamental character. Peter then proceeds to unpack their sins in verses 10 to 16.

Insubordination and rebelliousness, sexual immorality and greed. The false teachers are brazen and arrogant in the way that they speak about authorities. The startling thing here is that Peter is probably referring not merely to righteous authorities, but in the first instance to evil angels.

Once again, the Jude parallel is instructive. Jude verses 8 to 10. Yet in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, the Lord rebuke you. But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Righteous angels, even Michael, who may be Christ himself, do not revile the glorious ones, the exalted yet wicked angels.

[14:11] There seems to be an allusion here back to Zechariah chapter 3. The authority and the power of these wicked angels should be taken seriously. They are wicked servants of the Lord, and must be dealt with accordingly.

We should take a similar attitude towards wicked human authorities. We must speak of them with a proper fear and honour of the authority that they have been given by the Lord. False teachers are creatures of brute instinct and impulse.

They are untamed beasts, and will suffer the same ignoble fate as such creatures. They are like wild animals to be hunted. These false teachers are also so given to sensuality that they revel in the daytime.

This is not just the activity of the night. They give their whole lives to such things. They are described as blots and blemishes, the things that would defile what should be a spotless sacrifice. They pollute the worship of the people of God. We might here think of 1 Corinthians chapter 5, and Paul's challenge to the Corinthians and their failure to deal with the man who is sleeping with his father's wife.

[15:11] A little leaven leavens the whole lump. You must purge out the old leaven, that you may faithfully keep the feast. He describes them as adulterous. Their eyes are scanning rooms for potential partners in their sexual immorality.

They never have their fill of sin. They are always hungry for it. They are filled with greed and desire for material goods. They lead unstable people astray. They give the impression that people can live for the world and its pleasures, avoid suffering, indulge the flesh, and ultimately face no judgment from God.

Peter compares them to Balaam. In Jude verse 11, we find the same comparison. The concluding verses of the chapter are similar to those found in Jude verses 12 to 13 and verse 16.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves, waterless clouds swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead uprooted, wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame, wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage. Here then he describes the effects of the false teachers.

[16:53] Like waterless springs, they offer water but give none. Like the fallen angels, they have been marked out for the gloom of utter darkness. They are especially dangerous to recent converts, people who are just escaping the Sodom and Gomorrah of the world.

They are boastful, they present themselves as superior in their insight. They tempt such people to look and turn back. They assure them that it is possible to retain much of their old sinful ways of life. They promise freedom, but their own lives betray the fact that they are lying. They are slaves of their own lusts. Once again, it seems that the focus is particularly upon sexual immorality.

Such false teachers can be known by their fruits, as Jesus declared. It is not entirely clear whether verses 20 to 22 refer to the false teachers, or to the people who are led astray by them.

Ultimately, they belong together though, and they share the same destination. So these statements could refer to either of them. Their fate is a tragic warning. They are like Lot's wife. They seem to escape before looking back.

[17:55] They come to some knowledge of the truth of Christ, but then they turn back and are hardened in their ways. They end up so much worse off, becoming more fully and willfully entangled in those things that Christ set them free from, and in the process, more and more hardened and inured to the truth.

Their apostasy reveals something about their true nature. As they turn back, like a dog to its vomit or a pig to its wallowing in the mire, they reveal something about who they are, that they are like

pigs and dogs, unclean animals, people who, despite appearances, never actually had the deep transformative work of the Spirit of God.
A question to consider. Why do you think that Peter so emphasises sexual immorality in connection with the false teachers in this chapter?