

XVII. False Teachers

April 26/28/29, 2021

2 Peter 2:1-10a

Aim: To understand that God can and will certainly rescue the righteous from eternal judgment, but that He will by no means allow the unrighteous, such as false teachers who lead God's people astray, to escape their just condemnation.

Moo: With these verses, Peter introduces the subject that will occupy the rest of the letter body: a denunciation of false teachers. Peter hinted at the existence of these false teachers in 1:16, implying that they were accusing him and other apostles of basing their predictions of the *Parousia* on 'cleverly invented stories.' Now he turns his full attention to them. Peter begins simply by introducing them and briefly characterizing them (2:1-3). The key word in these verses is 'destruction/destructive'; the false teaching itself is destructive (v. 1), and will bring destruction on the false teachers themselves (vv. 1, 3). He develops the theme of condemnation in 2:4-10a, citing biblical examples of judgment to make his case. Then come two paragraphs of further characterization (2:10-16 and 17-22). Finally, the argument comes full circle as Peter returns to the issue of the *Parousia*, showing that the false teachers' skepticism is unwarranted (3:1-10) and urging his readers to live in light of the coming day of judgment (3:11-13).

A. Portrait of False Teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3a)

1. Prediction of False Teachers (2:1ab)

¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you...

a) False Prophets (2:1a)

¹But false prophets also arose among the people...

(1) Defense

Moo: The *also* in verse 1 suggests a close connection between this verse and what has preceded in chapter 1. This connection is to be found in the topic of *prophets*. Because God Himself speaks reliably through His prophets, we must pay close attention to their words (1:19-21).

Gardner: The words *but* and *also* of the first verse help us understand that Peter is developing the same train of thought. He has been speaking about the truthful testimony in the message of the apostles and in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. They have spoken the mind and will of God on the matter. The apostles were able to do so because they had seen the glorified Lord and heard the Father pronounce on the matter. The writers of the Old Testament were able to do so because they had been moved by the Spirit of God to record and speak out the mind of God. Peter has thus defended biblical authority and the specific content of the message which has been challenged by false teachers (1:16).

MacArthur: Having just discussed the sure word of truth (1:19-21), Peter now shifts his focus to the deceptive words of false prophets (chapter 2). The coordinate conjunction *but* marks this contrasting transition. Through genuine prophets, God has spoken the truth to His people, *but*, through false prophets, Satan has always tried to obscure or contaminate God's message.

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(2) Offense

Moo: But, Peter reminds us, *there were also false prophets among the people*. Indeed, the history of God's people in the Old Testament is strewn with examples of people who claimed to be speaking for God but were really advancing their own ideas or programs.... These Old Testament false prophets regularly shared three characteristics: 1) they did not speak with divine authority; 2) their message was one of 'good news,' promising peace and security in contrast to the warnings about judgment given by true prophets; and 3) they were shown to be worthy of condemnation. Peter applies all three characteristics to the *false teachers* he denounces. And we should especially take note that these false teachers, like the false prophets of old, scored the idea of a judgment to come (see 3:2-10).

Gardner: Having defended his position, Peter now moves on to the attack. Not all prophets can be trusted for, just as in the past, there are and will be false prophets and false teachers around and this is a problem for the Christians to whom Peter is writing, and the issue which he now addresses.... During the whole history of God's people there have been false teachers and false prophets.... The true prophets of old such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah forcefully warned of the great danger of such people (e.g., Jer. 23:16-17; 14:14; Ez. 13:1-12; Zech. 13:2-6).... The characteristic traits of those false prophets were usually the same, and are well reflected in those whom Peter will go on to attack in this chapter: 1) they would scorn and pour contempt on God's true prophets; 2) they would invent visions and dreams in order to deceive God's people; and 3) they would deliberately deny any prospect of God's imminent judgment.

MacArthur: Throughout their history, these spiritual mercenaries have always plagued God's flock. Even in Old Testament times they *arose among the people* of Israel, spreading their deceptions and causing devastation. That Old Testament Israel is in view here is evidenced both by Peter's terminology, where similar usages of *the people* clearly refer to the Jewish people, and His Old Testament illustrations. Even during Jesus' ministry, false prophets were still a serious problem for the Jewish people (Mt. 7:15-20).

b) False Teachers (2:1b)

...just as there will be false teachers among you...

(1) Teachers vs. Prophets

Moo: Two points about Peter's initial reference to these false teachers should be noted. 1) Peter refers to them as *false teachers* rather than as 'false prophets.' The latter designation would have seemed more likely, both because Peter has already used that phrase to describe their Old Testament counterparts and because it was widely used in Jewish, New Testament, and early Christian predictions about the future (cp. Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mk. 13:22; Lk. 6:36; Acts 13:6). *False teachers*, on the other hand, are never explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, although Paul does refer, in a passage similar to this one, to 'teachers' who 'say what [people's] itching ears want to hear' (2 Tim. 4:3; cp. also 1 Tim. 4:1). If the phrase is not simply a stylistic variant of 'false prophets,' then *false teachers* may have been deliberately chosen by Peter because he knew that these people did not claim prophetic authority.

Gardner: Some commentators see a significance in Peter's moving from talk of false 'prophets' to false 'teachers' here. The change may simply be stylistic, or it may be that these evil people were not actually calling themselves 'prophets' on this occasion. Either way, the words of the

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true prophets and of the Lord and of the apostles are all directly relevant to the false teachers whom Peter confronts.

(2) Future vs. Present

Moo: 2) Peter uses the future tense: *there will be false teachers among you*. And this is no stray reference or slip of the pen, for Peter continues to describe them with the future tense in verse 1-3.... Why the future tenses here? Three explanations have been offered. a) the unknown author of 2 Peter, writing after Peter's death, quotes predictions from the apostle Peter about the rise of heresy in the last days, which the author applies to the situation he is addressing. This explanation, of course, assumes that 2 Peter is a pseudonymous letter, a view we have found good reason to reject. b) Peter wants to warn his readers about false teaching that has not yet affected his readers but which he knows to be present elsewhere and suspects will be bothering them shortly. But this explanation does not account satisfactorily for the realistic description of the false teachers in verses 10-22 and in 3:4-13, where Peter uses the present (e.g., 2:11, 17, and 18) and aorist tenses (3:15) to describe them. c) I prefer, then, to think that Peter is himself 'quoting' early Christian prophecies about the rise of false teaching. Jesus Himself warned His followers about such false teaching (see esp. Mt. 24:11, 24; Mk. 13:22)... Jesus is warning His disciples not to be surprised at the deviant teaching that will quickly begin to compete with the true teaching of the gospel. Paul sounded similar warnings as he addressed church leaders (e.g., Acts 20:29-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-6). Thus Peter refers his readers to these predictions as a means of indicating to them that the false teaching infecting their communities should be no surprise.

Gardner: No doubt Peter knows that this will always be a problem for God's people until Christ returns in glory, but, as he writes, he may have in mind some specific prophecies about false teachers in the church that he had heard from the mouth of the Lord Himself. This is particularly likely when we read 3:1-4. There Peter asks his readers to remember both the words of the prophets of the past and the Lord's own words that have come through the apostolic teaching. The Lord Himself had urged His disciples on a number of occasions to take note of the existence of false prophets (e.g., Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24).

MacArthur: Just as he knew false prophets had assaulted Israel, Peter understood that *there will also be false teachers among the church*. Years before, Jesus had predicted that in the last days the church would have to endure a variety of false teachers (Mt. 24:4-5; cp. vv. 11, 24)... False teachers arise when the church begins to embrace the worldly culture around it. As a result, congregations no longer desire to 'endure' [hold to] sound [healthy] doctrine.' God-centered worship and preaching is replaced by man-centered antics and entertainment. A biblical emphasis on sin, repentance, and holiness is replaced by an emphasis on self-esteem and felt needs. People look for teachers who proclaim only pleasant, positive ideas 'in accordance to their own desires' because they want 'to have their ears tickled.' As a result, these popular teachers (whom 'they will accumulate for themselves') will 'turn' the minds of the people from the truth, leaving the vulnerable to Satan's deceptive influence. (cp. 2 Tim. 4:2-4).

2. Profile of False Teachers (2:1c-3a)

...who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

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a) *Devious (2:1c)*

...who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...

Moo: 1) They are *devious* in their manner. Realizing that an open resistance to apostolic teaching would be useless, they introduce their false ideas *secretly*. Paul uses a form of this same word to characterize the Judaizing false teachers who had ‘infiltrated’ the ranks of some believing communities (Gal. 2:4). (The Greek verb in 2 Peter is *pareisago*, while Paul used an adjective—*pareisaktos*.) Since Peter accuses the false teachers of arrogance later in the chapter, he probably does not mean that they are hiding what they are teaching. Rather, he suggests, they are covering up the degree to which their teaching differs from the accepted apostolic teaching.

Gardner: Furthermore, these will be secretly introduced. This will always be the way of false prophets and teachers, so there can be no grounds for complacency. ... There is a general naïveté around among many Christians that somehow false teachers will be easily recognized. Peter is as adamant as Jude in Jude 4, that these people do not announce themselves as imposters! It may sound almost silly, but if they did they would quickly get thrown out of most churches. Nevertheless, people are all too easily conned by those who have an appearance of godliness. Perhaps they appear loving and caring. Maybe they proclaim what they call their ‘spiritual gifts’ for all to see. Maybe they have a way with words. But one way or another they worm their way into the congregation and *secretly introduce* falsehood. It is time for the church to wake up again. There is no doubt that many sections of the church have been and are being wooed away from biblical truth. Sadly, this truth is often seen as a bit too ‘heavy’ or dictatorial among people and even some churches that at best lack godliness and at worst thoroughly ignore God’s Word.

MacArthur: False teachers are never honest and straightforward about their operations. After all, the church would never embrace them if their schemes were unmasked. Instead, they *secretly* and deceptively enter the church, posing as pastors, teachers, and evangelists. That is why Jude describes them as ‘certain persons [who] have crept in unnoticed’ (Jude 4).

b) *Doctrine (2:1c)*

...who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...

Moo: 3) The *outcome* of their teaching is destruction (a fair paraphrase of the Greek here, rendered *destructive* [*heresies*] in the NIV). This word here (and in v. 3) refers to eschatological condemnation. As a metaphor for judgment, the word does not carry the literal meaning of ‘annihilate’ or ‘cease to exist,’ but with ‘salvation’ as its opposite (2 Cor. 2:15), denotes the eternal loss of fellowship with God (see also Jn. 12:25; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18; 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Th. 2:10).... The NIV reinforces the seriousness of the false teachers’ doctrine by labeling it *heresies*. But this translation may go too far. In the New Testament period, the Greek word Peter uses (*haireseis*; our English ‘heresy’ is taken from it) generally means ‘party, sect’ (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22), or ‘faction’ (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20). Only in the late first century AD does the word come to have the technical sense ‘heresy’: deviation from orthodox teaching. So while the NIV certainly captures the basic point, a translation such as ‘destructive opinions’ (NRSV) may be more accurate. In any case, Peter’s point is clear enough. Those who follow the theology of the false teachers will be led not to final salvation but to condemnation.

Gardner: The future tense continues as Peter reminds his readers of these prophecies.... The word ‘heresy’ does not carry with it the fully developed meaning it has in modern English of a set of teachings that are wrong and pitted against orthodoxy. Rather, the word can simply refer

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to a particular, perhaps variant, teaching. For example, it is used in Acts 24:5 of the Nazarene ‘heresy’ which the NIV rightly translates as ‘sect.’ This is why Peter qualifies the word. What these false teachers will teach are not permissible ‘variants’ but rather *destructive heresies*.

MacArthur: Posing as true shepherds, false teachers *introduce destructive heresies* (or literally, ‘heresies of destruction’). *Destructive (apōleias)* means ‘utter ruin’ and speaks of the final and eternal condemnation of the wicked. In this context, the term indicates that the antics of these men has disastrous eternal consequences, both for them and their followers.... The term *heresies (haireseis)* denotes ‘an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to the division and formation of sects’ (W. E. Vine).... By using this word, Peter indicated that those false teachers had exchanged the truth of God’s Word for their own self-styled opinions. As a result, they distorted the truth to their own ends, convincing the gullible with their lies. Their teaching, then, was nothing more than a religious counterfeit—a pseudo-Christian knockoff. While *haireseis* can simply refer to a sect of division (Acts 24:14; cp. 5:16; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5; 28:22; 1 Cor. 11:19), here it refers to the worst kind of deviation and deception—teaching that claims to be biblical but is actually the very opposite.

c) Deniers (2:1d)

...even denying the Master who bought them...

(1) Denying the Master

Moo: 2) They are perpetrating a *serious error*.... *Sovereign Lord* translates *despotēs* (from which we get our word ‘despot’), a term applied to God or Christ only four other times in the New Testament (Lk. 2:29; Acts 4:24; Jude 4; Rev. 6:10). It carries a strong sense of commanding authority, and Peter probably uses the title here to underscore the seriousness of the false teachers’ denial.... But how were these false teachers *denying* the Lord? Was it a theological denial, related to their skepticism about Christ’s return in glory? Or was it a practical denial, according to which their licentious lifestyle amounted, in effect to a denial of the Lord? The parallel in Jude 4 and the reference to their ‘shameful ways’ in verse 2 suggest that the latter was part of the picture. But Peter also emphasizes their teaching in this context. Probably, then, the denial involved both teaching and practices that were incompatible with acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

Gardner: He singles out the fact that they are *even denying the sovereign Lord*. Here the overlap with Jude (v. 4) is obvious.... In both epistles the word appearing in the NIV as ‘Sovereign Lord’ is *despotēs* which might better be translated ‘Master.’ This rare word brings to mind the picture of slaves with a master. Slaves have to obey their master or suffer the consequences. In the Christian faith there is a commitment to Christ as the covenant Lord who demands our obedience. By using the word ‘Master’ in this way, Peter may be drawing attention to this aspect of what the false teachers are saying. They are leading people away from obedience and ‘the way of truth’ (v. 2) to follow ‘their [own] shameful ways.’ ... Jude links this denial of the Master to the licentious behavior of the false teachers. In that context, ‘denial’ seems to mean that they are *living* in denial. In other words, they are denying the Master by not obeying Him and living as He commanded. The denial of the Master to which Peter is referring could be a reference to their denial of Christ’s coming or, since Peter immediately talks of their *shameful ways* and later of their immorality, it could be this to which he is referring. Either is possible and perhaps both are on Peter’s mind. Christ’s sovereign Lordship is denied in practice if people refuse to heed

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God's Word and the Lord's own word on the matter of His return, but it is also denied if people reject a godly lifestyle and live immorally.

MacArthur: The conjunction *even* underscores the unthinkable magnitude of the false teachers arrogance—a pride that evidence itself by *denying the Master*. *Denying* is a strong term meaning 'to refuse,' 'to be unwilling,' or 'to firmly say no.' The same verb appears in Hebrews 11:24 to describe Moses' refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Here in this passage, Peter used the present tense participle (*arnoumenoi*) to denote a habitual pattern of refusal, indicating that false teachers characteristically reject divine authority (cp. Jude 8). *Master* (*despotēs*, from which the English *despot* derives) means 'sovereign,' 'ruler,' or 'lord.' The word appears ten times in the New Testament and always refers to one who has supreme authority. In four occurrences (1 Tim. 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9; 1 Pe. 2:18) it refers to the master of a household or estate, who has full authority over all the servants. Here and in the other five occurrences (Lk.2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Tim. 2:21; Jude 4; Rev. 6:10) it directly refers to Christ or God. Thus for Peter the supreme sacrilege of false teachers is that they deny the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. Granted, they may not outwardly deny Christ's deity, atonement, resurrection, or second coming. But internally, they adamantly refuse to submit their lives to His sovereign rule. As a result, their immoral and rebellious lifestyles will inevitably give them away.

(2) Who Bought Them

Moo: As in Jude 4, a somewhat parallel text, the *sovereign Lord* is here probably Christ—an identification suggested also by the qualifier *who bought them*. As the New Testament testifies everywhere, Jesus paid the price of His life at the cross that he might buy out, or 'redeem' human beings from their slavery to sin (the same verb, *agorazō*, describes this transaction in 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4).

Gardner: The phrase *who bought them* is one that has caused considerable discussion. At face value its meaning seems obvious. These people are denying the very (slave) Master who purchased them for Himself. The phrase is a simple and moving qualification of who the Master is. He is the one who went out of His way to purchase these people for Himself and now they are even denying Him. What a sad reflection on the depth of their sin and of their rejection of His Lordship! However, an important theological question is raised by this statement. If the 'buying' refers, as seems most natural, to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross through which He 'purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Rev. 5:9), then it would appear some have been saved only to lose their salvation later.... Perhaps the best explanation of what is actually happening here in 2 Peter is that these false teachers were never truly 'saved' though they were claiming to have committed themselves to the Lord who redeems His people.... They made it known that Jesus had bought them, but they eventually rejected Christ and left the Christian community. As John writes, 'They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us' (1 Jn. 2:19). Hence their denial of Christ showed that they were not redeemed.

The phrase *who bought them* fits Peter's analogy perfectly. He is alluding to the master of a house who would purchase slaves and put them in charge of various household tasks. Because they were now regarded as the master's personal property, they owed their complete allegiance to him. While false teachers maintain that they are part of Christ's household, they deny such professions through their actions—refusing to become servants under His authority. *Bought* (*agorazō*) means 'to purchase,' or 'to redeem out of the marketplace,' and in this context is

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parallel to Dt. 32:5-6 (cp. Zep. 1:4-6). The false teachers of Peter's day claimed Christ as their Redeemer, yet they refused to accept His sovereign lordship, thus revealing their true character as unregenerate enemies of biblical truth.

Sproul: [This clause] has also been the focus of much controversy. It is the text used by those who deny the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.... As was typical among the Apostles, Peter is speaking here of those who claim to be Christians but deny the very act of the atonement. There are many in churches today who profess to be Christians yet deny the atonement of Christ. Peter was saying that the heresies plaguing the early church were so severe they included even a denial of Christ himself. These were not Christians who had lost their salvation; as John says elsewhere, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us' (1 Jn. 2:19). Jesus said of Judas that he was a devil from the beginning (Jn. 6:70). It is not as if Judas became a believer and then lost his salvation when he committed apostasy. The sin of apostasy, or falling away, is something that a pagan can never do, because a pagan has never made an affirmation of faith in the first place. No true believer can commit apostasy, but apostasy happens in the church every day among those who claim to have faith but then repudiate it, like Demas, who abandoned Paul when Paul was in prison (2 Tim. 4:10).

d) *Destiny (2:1e)*

...bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Moo: 4) The *destiny* of these false teachers is, like those who follow them, *destruction*. In saying that this destruction will be *swift*, Peter may mean that the eschatological judgment will soon take place. And certainly such an idea of imminence, in the sense of a conviction that the last day *could* come at any time, is widespread in the New Testament. But rather than predicting the time of judgment, *swift* probably indicates its certainty. Peter makes the same point at the end of verse 3.

Gardner: Notice Peter's double irony as he comments upon the end of their work: *they bring swift destruction on themselves!* A person whose teaching is *destructive* to God's people, will be *destroyed* by God.... Pete will develop the certainty of their condemnation from verse 4 onwards in this chapter.

MacArthur: Those who reject Christ's sovereign lordship will face *swift destruction* if they do not repent from such rebellion (cp. Heb. 10:25-31). *Swift* (*tachinos*) means 'quick' or 'imminent,' and *destruction* (*apōleia*) refers to perdition or eternal damnation in hell (cp. Mt. 7:13; Jn. 17:12; 2 Th. 2:3). This horrible fate, coming either at death or at Christ's return awaits false teachers and all who follow their unrepentant path.

e) *Deceivers (2:2a)*

²And many will follow their sensuality...

Moo: 5) The *popularity* of these teachers is great.... Sadly, there are always those within the church who are attracted to new and different teaching, especially if, like the ideas peddled by these false teachers, it removes the bounds of moral constraint and accountability to a holy judge.

Gardner: Herein lies one of the greatest tragedies faced by the Christian church. There were, are, and always will be people who will follow these false teachers in their *shameful ways*. There are always people around who are gullible and swept along by kind words or powerful

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leadership, but there are others who are always on the lookout for anything that is new or might give them a slightly different so-called ‘spiritual’ experience. *Shameful ways* here may simply mean that everything taught by the people leads away from *the way of truth* and that is always shameful. It is more likely that it refers to immorality that so often accompanies those who teach falsely and lead away from the truth.

MacArthur: The Bible is clear that *many* more people *follow* the broad way that leads to destruction than adhere to the narrow way that leads to life (Mt. 7:13-14; cp. 24:10-12). In part, credit is due to false teachers for the popularity of the ‘wide road,’ as they usher people onto the broad way and encourage them not to look back. Their message of independence, personal freedom, and self-exaltation is inherently appealing to fallen human hearts, who would rather serve themselves than submit to Christ.... *Sensuality* is a strong word referring to habitual sexual immorality and unrestrained, debauched conduct. By using the plural form of the noun (*aselgeiais*), Peter emphasizes that the false teachers’ sexual lewdness came in many forms an extremes. Because they had rejected the lordship of Christ, their lives were characterized by unrestrained indulgence and lawlessness. They intentionally refused to place any restraints on their fleshly desires or their sexual escapades.... As he repeatedly addressed their sinful behavior, Peter made it clear that unmitigated *sensuality* is a distinguishing mark of these spiritual counterfeits. A teacher may claim to be God’s spokesman, but if his life is characterized by corruption, lust, and immorality, it proves that he is actually a fraud.

f) *Disrepute* (2:2b)

...and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Moo: 6) The *impact* on the Christian movement is disastrous. For by following this erroneous teaching and lapsing into the kind of licentious behavior that Peter ascribes to the false teachers in 2:10-22, professing Christians bring *the way of truth into disrepute*. The New Testament writers borrowed the term *way* from the Old Testament and Jewish world to summarize the Christian way of life—the beliefs and practices that characterized followers of Jesus (see esp. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). When believers deviate from that way, and especially when they live immoral lives while professing Christ as Lord, they cause the Christian movement to be *blasphemed* (*blasphemeo*, NIV ‘bring...into disrepute’). Paul expressed a similar concern about the effect of false teaching (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:5), and Peter himself, in his first letter, urged believers to lead exemplary lives before unbelievers so that their ‘blasphemies’ against the Christian way would be shown to be groundless (1 Pe. 4:4).

Gardner: *The way of truth* recalls Peter’s emphasis on the revealed truth of the apostolic gospel in chapter 1. It is the way of Christ as Lord and Master, following His teaching, trusting and believing in Him, seeking to obey Him and, specially in this context, looking for His return.

MacArthur: *The way of the truth* refers to right doctrine and the accurate proclamation of the gospel. But *because of* false teachers, and the spiritual wreckage they leave behind, the biblical message has often been reproached in the eyes of the world.... By their deceptive teaching and immoral behavior, false teachers have *maligned* (literally ‘blasphemed,’ ‘slandered,’ or ‘defamed’) the gospel. Of course, their mode of operation is consistent with Satan’s mission. On the one hand, he seeks to undermine the church from the inside, by introducing deceptive heresies and false doctrines. On the other hand, he seeks to tarnish the church’s reputation from the outside, by periodically unmasking false teachers before a watching world. When

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unbelievers associate the conduct of false teachers with the practice of the true church, the name of Christ is inevitably defamed.

Sproul: Every time there is a scandal in the church—the moral failure of a priest, minister, or teacher—it is delicious fodder for unbelievers and skeptics. They say that Christians are hypocrites, which is an unfair evaluation because Christians do not proclaim the sinlessness of clergy. We do not hold up the sinlessness of the pastor but the sinlessness of Christ. Christianity must, in the final analysis, be evaluated not on the basis of us but on the basis of Him. However, the reality is that because of heretics and immorality within the church, the truth itself is blasphemed.

g) *Desire (2:3a)*

³*And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.*

Moo: 7) The false teachers are *motivated by greed*. Peter alludes to this motivation latter in the chapter as well, comparing the false teachers to Balaam, ‘who loved the wages of wickedness’ (2:15; cp. v. 14, ‘experts in greed’). The ancient world was filled with wandering teachers who had the reputation of propagating almost any doctrine that would earn them a living. So the false teachers, Peter claims, are exploiting’ the believers, trading in ‘stories they have made up.’ 8) This phrase brings us to the final characteristic of the false teachers. The *basis* of their teaching is *stories they have made up*. Peter probably intends us to see here a contrast with 1:16: it is the false teachers, not the apostles, who build their doctrine on the basis of ‘cleverly invented stories,’ that is, on fabrications and forgeries. (Josephus uses the Greek word Peter uses here—*plastos*—to refer to ‘forgeries.’)

Gardner: It appears from 1:16 that the false teachers had accused Peter and the apostles of following ‘cleverly invented stories’ (myths). The reality is the opposite. These teachers have themselves exploited people, and drawn them from the truth *with stories they have made up*. No doubt they had asked those who followed them for financial support in their ‘ministries,’ hence what Peter calls their *greed*. This is a matter that he addresses again in verses 15-16 where he uses Balaam as an example of one who was greedy.

MacArthur: False teachers are not ultimately motivated by a fascination with false doctrine, rebelliousness, or even a penchant for sexual immorality. To be sure, the actively participate in each of these activities. But people can do all such sins without being teachers. Instead, the primary motivation driving false teachers is an unbridled love of money. The term for *greed* (*pleonexia*) connotes an uncontrolled, covetous desire for money and wealth. Later in this chapter Peter describes false teachers as ‘having a heart trained in greed’ (v. 14). They crave as much money as possible (cp. 1 Tim. 6:3-5, 10) and are experts at bilking people in the church out of their wealth. This is a standard biblical indictment and characterization of religious charlatans. To accomplish their materialistic goals, false teachers *will exploit* people *with false words*. *Exploit* (*emporeuomai*) means ‘to traffic in,’ or ‘to realize gain from.’ Such men want to get rich from the people to whom they ‘minister.’ Although they claim to serve others, they are only interested in serving themselves, using *false words* to enrich their own pockets. Interestingly, the English word *plastic* is derived from the term *false* (*plastos*). In keeping with its etymological roots, *plastic* originally had the connotation of something not completely authentic. After all, plastic items often look as if they are manufactured from another substance, such as wood, metal, china, and so forth. Thus plastic at first glance ‘deceives’ consumers. In a

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similar way, false teachers deal in phony doctrine. Their theology is not really based on biblical truth, but only molded by false reasoning to appear genuine.

B. Portraits of God’s Judgment (2 Peter 2:3b-10a)

Gardner: Peter has already maintained (1:19-21) that the Scriptures are the word of God, revealed to the prophets by His Spirit, and are therefore utterly to be relied upon. So it is to these that Peter now turns to draw out two vital lessons for the church of all ages. First, he wants to demonstrate that the fate of false teachers is certain. But secondly, he also wants God’s people to know that God protects the righteous. In these verses these two themes are intertwined.

Moo: The idea that God reserves evil people for judgment is the key idea in this paragraph. Characteristically, Peter mentions the idea both at the beginning (‘held for judgment,’ v. 4) and at the end (‘hold...for the day of judgment,’ v. 9) of the section. The concluding words of 2:3 announce this theme.

1. Promise of Judgment (2:3b)

Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Moo: The false teachers may think that they will not have to reckon with God’s judgment (see 3:2-5). But *destruction* for leading others to ‘destruction’ is inevitable.

Gardner: Peter makes the point again: *their condemnation has long been hanging over them.* This will not be a pleasant message for those who are still scornfully asking, ‘Where is this “coming” He promised?’ (3:4). Great force is added to the point as Peter says the same thing again in the second half of the sentence but using different words, *and their destruction has not been sleeping.* Both condemnation and destruction are somewhat personalized by Peter here. The idea is that the one has not been ‘idle’ and the other is not ‘sleeping’! The picture is vivid that judgment will appear as an active force and it is on its way, *long* prophesied. Peter has already argued that the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of Christ and the final judgment, but in the verses that follow he also looks at Old Testament examples of God’s judgment and sees in them a foretelling of the final judgment of God.

MacArthur: Although false teachers will not face their eternal *judgment* until death, their sentence was decreed by God *from long ago.* (the phrase *from long ago* translates one word, *ekpalai*, which simply means ‘from a long time.’) ... The expression *is not idle* strengthens the sobering reality of divine retribution; God’s sentence against every lying teacher is actively accumulating wrath until each perishes in hell.... With the words *destruction is not asleep*, Peter personifies eternal damnation as if it were an executioner, who remains fully awake, ready to administer God’s just sentence of condemnation on those who falsify His word.

2. Portraits of Judgment (2:4-8)

a) Introduction

(1) Examples

Moo: In verses 4-6, Peter cites three traditional examples of God’s judgment to illustrate his claim that God will swiftly (cp. v. 1) and certainly judge the false teachers who are beginning to make their appearance. Two of these examples are well known from the Old Testament: the Flood in Noah’s day (v. 5) and the spectacular destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

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(v. 6). But the first illustration, God’s judgment of ‘the angels that sinned,’ does not immediately bring to mind any particular Old Testament incident. In fact, nowhere does the Old Testament cite an unambiguous reference to God’s judgment on angels.

MacArthur: As the apostle gives an overview of three Old Testament examples, he highlights the height of God’s wrath (in the case of the fallen angels), the breadth of God’s wrath (in the case of the ancient world at the time of the Flood), and the depth of God’s wrath (in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah). In other words, there are no creatures too lofty, too numerous, or too base to escape divine judgment—His vengeance will be meted out on all who oppose Him. And as Peter points out in this passage, the false teachers of his day were no exception.

Helm: [In 1:16-21] Pete was defending that central aspect of his teaching that declared that Jesus, God’s Son, would come again in power and judgment. He was combating the notion, picked up and advanced by others, that coming judgment was a clever myth. Here he follows up with compelling portraits meant to communicate, ‘Where in the world did you ever come up with the idea that God would never judge anyone? Biblical history is filled with historical events that confirm the opposite. God has always judged those who follow the ways of the world rather than the ways of His Word.’

DSB Note: In our study of Jude, the brother of James repeatedly characterized false teachers with a triad of sinful behaviors: they were insubordinate (rebels against authority), irreligious (blasphemous, unconcerned with true worship or reverence), and immoral (given to sensual passions). These categories broadly describe the three examples in verse 4-6.

(2) Grammar

Moo: The structure of 2:4-10a is simple: Peter writes one long conditional sentence. The protasis (the ‘if’ part of the sentence) is long, extending from verses 4 through 8. The NIV helps the reader of the English text to make sense of it by breaking it up into four parts and repeating the word ‘if’ (the Greek word for ‘if’ appears only in v. 4).

Moo: In the four ‘if’ clauses Peter reminds his readers of events in the Old Testament that he uses to draw his conclusions in the ‘then’ clause in verses 9-10a (and note that Peter mentions the Old Testament event in their canonical order). The first three examples are negative; Peter cites famous instances of God’s judgment in order to establish his second conclusion, that God knows how to condemn evil creatures. The fourth example, the reference to Lot in verses 7-8 (as well as the reference to Noah in v. 5b), establishes Peter’s first conclusion, that God knows how to rescue the righteous. The parallel section in Jude 6-7 lacks any reference to God’s rescue of the godly. Perhaps Peter includes this point because his readers are getting frustrated and discouraged at the need to resist the false teachers. Thus he encourages them by reminding them of God’s sovereign protection of the righteous in times of trial and adversity.

Gardner: The sentence structure is very complicated here. In fact, in the Greek, there is a single sentence running from the start of verse 4 through the middle of verse 10 all introduced by a single ‘if’ at the start! The NIV helps considerably by introducing not only verse 4 with the word ‘if,’ but also verses 5, 6, 7, and 9 and starting a new sentence with verse 10.

MacArthur: The short phrase *for if* introduces a conditional sentence that extends through verse 8. *If*, however, does not imply uncertainty here and is probably better rendered ‘since.’

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b) *Insubordinate Angels (2:4)*

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;*

(1) Angels (2:4a)

⁴*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned...*

Moo: Some interpreters have thought that passages such as Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 may refer to a fall of Satan and other disobedient angels from heaven before the creation of the world and that Peter is alluding to this punishment. But a more likely candidate for Peter's reference emerges when we consider Jewish tradition. A number of writers in the intertestamental period developed a story about angels who sinned and were punished by God at the time of the Flood. The story finds its most developed form in the pseudepigraphal book *1 Enoch*, but it is alluded to in several other writings as well. This tradition was not simply made up from whole cloth; the writers were elaborating on Genesis 6:1-4, a passage that tells about 'sons of God' who were attracted to the 'daughters of men,' married them, and had children with them. In the Jewish tradition we are referring to, the 'sons of God' were angels, and their cohabitating with women was a basic reason why God judged the world of Noah's day.... I think it is likely that Peter has this story in mind. 1) An allusion to the Jewish tradition fits the apparently chronological order of Peter's examples in verses 4-7: the fall of angels (Gen. 6:1-4, the Flood, (6:5-8:22), Sodom and Gomorrah (chapter 19). 2) In a passage that has many parallels with this one, Jude explicitly quotes *1 Enoch* (Jude 14-15; cp. v. 6): 'Bind Azazel [a disobedient angel] hand and foot and throw him into the darkness.' Although not clearly taught in the Old Testament, the story is one that Peter seems to assume familiar to his readers.

Gardner: This first illustration is likely to appear thoroughly obscure to the modern reader. The Old Testament does not explicitly refer to God judging the angels. However, there are passages in the Bible as a whole that some take as referring to the judgment of angels and specially Satan (e.g., Rev. 12:7-9)... Others see a reference to Satan's fall and perhaps the fall of his angels in Isaiah 14:9-17 and in Ezekiel 28:11-19.... The view adopted here, in common with most modern commentators, is that Peter is most likely drawing upon an understanding of Genesis 6:1-4. In the biblical text this is a lead-in to the account of the judgment of the flood which Peter picks up in verse 5.... This difficult and somewhat obscure text in Genesis was taken in inter-testamental Jewish teachings (specially the Book of Enoch) to refer to fallen angels who had unlawful sexual intercourse with women. In other words, the phrase 'sons of God' is taken to refer to angels. These angels were then subject to the judgment of God who did not destroy them but has kept them *in chains* under the earth for the final judgment day when they will be banished to eternal fire. The account in the book of Enoch elaborates on this in all sorts of far-fetched detail, giving names to the leaders of the angels and suggesting that these angels helped teach human beings about even greater depths of sin. The problem for us is that it is not at all clear that Genesis 6 is talking about angels at all. Certainly, this has long been a matter of debate among Christian scholars.... It remains likely that...Peter does indeed have Genesis 6 in mind as he speaks of God's judgment on the angels for their sin. If this is so, then a couple of more things need to be said. First, given the context of Peter's reciting examples from history, these happenings with the angels must also be treated as history.... In other words, whatever Peter's source for what he says here about the angels who sinned and their judgment, we may assume that the incident is historical and that it is true as God's word and properly interpreted by the apostle as he is guided

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by the Holy Spirit. Second, and most importantly, it is vital we interpret God's word in Scripture that, just as we should not take away from that word, so we should not add to that word. The fact of the matter is that, apart from serving as an example from which we must learn, what happened to angels and God's subsequent judgment of them is not elaborated upon in Scripture and is not really the business of human beings!

MacArthur: Since *God did not spare the angels of heaven when they sinned* against Him (nor does He provide any means for their salvation), humans who pervert His truth should not expect to escape vengeance either.... The spiritual dynamics of how and why angels *sinned* remains, in many ways, a theological mystery. The highest ranking of all the angels, Lucifer, wanted to exalt himself to a position of equality with God.... But Peter is probably not referring her to the angels who originally fell, since they were not immediately incarcerated in *hell* nor confined permanently *to pits of darkness* to await their final judgment. In fact, they are the demons who are now loose in the world, securing Stan's unholy purposes.... What Peter does not expand on, Jude does (Jude 6-7).... These demons 'did not keep their own domain,' meaning that they moved out of their proper sphere of existence and behavior—"their proper abode." Jude 6 is a reference to the events of Genesis 6:1-4 in which certain fallen angels possessed mortal men and then cohabited with women. The egregious transgression of those demons was a clear violation of the boundaries God had set for them.... It should be noted that Peter also referred to those same demons in his first epistle—1 Peter 3:18-20.... Of course, Peter's primary purpose here was not to get lost in the details of this account about fallen angels, especially since his readers were apparently already familiar with it. Instead, he used this illustration to emphasize the main thrust of his argument—namely, that God severely judges all those who oppose Him and His truth. Like those angels, rebellious false teachers will face divine wrath.

Helm: Peter may not be referring to the Milton-like description of the angels' early fall from Heaven, but the later act of demonic activity found in the opening verses of Genesis 6. There the sons of God (at times a biblical term for angels) transgressed their proper domain and began to take up demonic residence in some men for the purpose of pleasing their own insatiable, lustful appetite for ravishing women. In either case, the message for us is clear. By way of contrast, we have seen just how far autonomy will take us. God's righteous judgment will descend to earth. Make no mistake. Do not be misled. Are you in danger of forgetting that God did not even spare the angels? When tempted to follow today's cadre of teachers, those who have abandoned belief in a fixed and final judgment because of sensuality and greed, come and stand before this portrait in Peter's gallery—be reminded to stay the course by following in the apostolic way.

Sproul: Some believe this refers to the account of Genesis 6 about the sons of God marrying the daughters of men and bringing forth a race of grotesque people. A view widely held in the church is that the Genesis account is about the rape of women by angels.... The Genesis account of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men is not about angels marrying women.... Anyone who is obedient to God is called a 'son of God.' yes, angels are sometimes called the 'sons of God,' but so are human beings. In stark contrast, we see the descendants of Cain from whom came a rapid expansion of godlessness and wickedness. The two lines remained separate until they intermarried, and the righteous marrying the unrighteous is what produced grotesque offspring.... So then, to what does Peter's text refer? It refers to the original fall of angels. When Lucifer and his minions rebelled against God, God cast them out of heaven and gave to them the habitation of hell. That is the penalty they received.

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(2) Hell (2:4b)

...but cast them into hell...

Moo: The presence of a metaphor here is further suggested by the Greek word that lies behind the NIV's 'but sent them to hell.' This word is *tartareo*, 'consign to Tartarus.' In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the subterranean abyss to which disobedient gods and rebellious human beings were consigned.... Other Jewish writers had already borrowed the language to describe place where the ungodly were punished. (This is another example of Peter's penchant for using Hellenistic terminology.). The translation 'hell,' while accurate enough in some ways, may be misleading. For Peter makes clear that this consigning of the angels to Tartarus is only a preliminary punishment; they are being *held for judgment*. Tartarus in Peter's conception appears not so much to represent a place of final and endless punishment (as our 'hell' often does), but the limitation on sphere of influence that God imposed on the angels who fell.

Gardner: Peter emphasizes two points as he continues to describe the judgment of the angels. The first is that they have been *sent to hell*. The word Peter uses here is connected to the Greek mythological location known as Tartarus. Of course, Peter is by no means affirming a belief in the Greek myths in which Tartarus is the place of punishment in the depths of the underworld. He is simply using a word that would have been recognized in the culture of the day as referring to a place of judgment. Just as people today will often use the word 'hell' to describe a difficult period in their lives without any reference back to the biblical place of eternal punishment, so Peter was able to use the word 'Tartarus' to describe a place of judgment but without all the Greek mythological baggage attached. The angels have been judged.... We need to realize also that *hell* is not an ideal translation for us today. Normally in biblical terms we use the word 'hell' to describe the place of permanent and eternal judgment, the place to which people will be consigned at the return of Christ if they have refused to acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. Here Peter is clearly describing a temporary confinement or limitation upon the fallen angles, pending that final judgment that has yet to come.

MacArthur: *Cast them into hell* is actually the translation of a single word, *tartarōsas*. The verb, used only here in the New Testament, is derived from Tartarus, which in Greek mythology identified a subterranean abyss that was even lower than Hade (hell). Tartarus came to refer to the abode of the most wicked spirits, where the worst rebels and criminals received the severest divine punishment. Much like Jesus used the term *Gehenna* (the name for Jerusalem's garbage dump, where fires burned continuously) to illustrate the inextinguishable torments of external anguish (Mt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5), Peter used a familiar word from popular Greek thought to designate hell. The pseudepigraphal book of *1 Enoch*, a well-known work to most New Testament (cp. Jude 14) also mentions Tartarus (1:9). Peter must have been confident that his readers understood exactly what he meant, since he offered them no additional explanation of the term.

Sproul: God did not spare them but cast them down to hell. The word used her in verse 4 for *hell*, *Tartarus*, refers in Homer's poetry to the darkest portions of hell. Later Dante, in his famous *Inferno*, wrote of the various circles of hell. Each circle contains those of increasing degrees of wickedness. In Homer's poetic vision of the underworld and the place of punishment, *Tartarus* is where the most wicked offenders are consigned. Here Peter borrows an image from the Greek poet, even as the Apostle Paul did from time to time.

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(3) Chains/Dungeons (2:4c)

...and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Moo: God punished these sinful angels, Peter claims, by *putting them into gloomy dungeons*. The NIV rendering quoted here is not the only possible one; the TEV, for example, says the angels were ‘kept chained in darkness’ (cp. also KJV and NRSV). The difference is a single Greek word: the NIV accepts the word *sirois*, which means ‘pits’ or ‘caves,’ while the TEV reads *seirais*, ‘chains.’ The latter word is what we find in the parallel passage in Jude, where the author speaks of the angels as ‘bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day’ (c. 6)... In any case, Peter probably does not want us to think of the angels as literally confined in dark caves or dungeons. The language is metaphorical; he is using a popular conception of the afterlife to denote God’s judgment. Perhaps the metaphor is intended to suggest that God restricted the scope of the (evil) angels’ activity as a result of their sin.

Gardner: However, the second point Peter is making is that the *final* judgment has yet to come. The angels are being *held for judgment*. Jude talks of them being *kept* for judgment just as the righteous are being *kept* for salvation. The false teachers Peter is fighting are saying there is no judgment to come. Peter argues from this example that there *is* a final judgment and that the fallen angels are evidence of that event, for they yet await their final destiny.

MacArthur: Further, Peter describes this demonic incarceration by saying that God *committed* the fallen angels *to pits of darkness*. *Committed (paredōken)*, as in Acts 8:3 and 12:4, means to turn over for imprisonment. *Pits of darkness* (cp. Mt. 8:12) is the best translation, even though some ancient manuscripts read ‘chains’ (hence the King James translation). Whether the rendering is *pits* or ‘chains,’ the idea is the same—it refers to loss of freedom in a place of confinement, a fate demons feared (cp. Mt. 8:29; Lk. 8:31). Those who were sent there were *reserved for judgment*, like guilty prisoners awaiting final sentencing and execution at the last day.

Sproul: They *delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment*. These angels have a reserved seat for the final judgment, and they have to face the judgment of God without a mediator. God gave us a God-man, the only Mediator between us and Him, but He has made no such provision for fallen angels. They are reserved in hell, in chains and darkness, for judgment.

c) Irreligious Ancient World (2:5)

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;*

(1) Those God Judged (2:5a, c)

⁵*...if he did not spare the ancient world...when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

Moo: Peter’s next warning example comes from the most famous judgment of God found in the Old Testament: the Flood in Noah’s day. Peter uses similar wording to connect these first two examples: God *did not spare* the angels who sinned, and He *did not spare* the *ancient world* either.

Gardner: This time his reference is back to God’s judgment at the time of the Flood which is recounted in Genesis 6:5-7:24. ‘Noah’s flood’ as it has become known in modern English is proverbial for God’s judgment as much as the next example in verse 6.

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MacArthur: Not only did God judge certain fallen angels, but He also *did not spare the ancient world*. In fact, He wipe out the full breadth of earth's population by drowning all of the *ungodly* in the Flood. *The ancient world* refers to the people living at the time of the Flood, all of whom were wicked (Gen. 6:5-7)... *Flood* translates *kataklysmos*, from which the English *cataclysm* derives. The Genesis account, along with current geological evidence, indicates that the Flood was *cataclysmic* in every sense (cp. Gen. 7:10-24). Because of man's sinfulness, God destroyed every person and every land animal (except those in the ark, covering the entire planet with water—even the peaks of the highest mountains (Gen. 7:19-20)... *Ungodly* (cp. 2:6, 3:7; Jude 4, 15, 18), from the Greek *asebeia*, is the one-word characterization of ancient humanity—a term that refers to a complete lack of reverence, worship, or fear of God. The early church fathers used it to describe atheists and heretics. Like the false teachers of Peter's time, the *ungodly* of Noah's day—through their rebellious immorality—eventually brought God's judgment upon themselves.

(2) Those God Spared (2:5b)

...but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others...

Moo: Peter quickly reminds us that Noah and his family were an exception to this world of *ungodly people*; thus God *protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others*. The Old Testament makes no mention of Noah's preaching, although intertestamental Jewish tradition does. But the Old Testament gives a sound basis for this tradition, because, as Calvin remarks, '[Noah] tried to bring a degenerate world to a sound state of mind, and because he did so not only by teaching and exhortations to holiness but by his constant and anxious toil for a hundred and twenty years in building the ark.' Paul's reference to the *seven others* who were saved with Noah is intriguing. After speaking about the 'spirits in prison who disobeyed' in Noah's day, he adds that 'in [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water' (1 Pe. 3:20). The 'eight' were Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives (see Gen. 6:18; 7:7, 13). In this first letter, the word 'only' suggests that Peter's purpose in referring to the number is to encourage Christians who are being persecuted by reminding them the godly are often in the minority. This may be his purpose here as well. The false teachers may be attracting quite a following, and some of Peter's readers may be discouraged about that. They need to remember that the godly are often few but that God is always faithful to preserve them.

Gardner: Here is amazing encouragement for believers. Here is that wonderful demonstration of God's grace in the midst of dealing with the most sinful people. God *protected Noah*. One of the most comforting doctrines in Scripture is that once we belong to God, once we have been called to be His and received His saving and forgiving grace in our lives, then we are held secure by Him (cp. Jn. 10:27-30; Phil. 1:6)... We have no record of Noah 'preaching' in Genesis, but what we do read is that 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.' Peter is insisting that the 'ungodly' are judged and will be judged. Noah was truly 'godly.' Godliness and ungodliness have to do with the way people are in their life and thought and speech. Either they live righteously, that is, in accordance with the will and purposes of God, or else they do not and are to be classed as 'ungodly.' What is so easily forgotten is that we are all able to see godliness or ungodliness in each other's lives. Noah 'preached' no doubt with his speech as he pleaded with people to repent or to join him in the ark, but the Bible does not tell us that. Rather, we have every indicated that Noah 'preached' through his lifestyle and the way he continued to obey the Lord in the midst of ungodly people. This is the idea picked up in Hebrews 11:7 where Noah is commended for his faith.... His very actions

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of obedience served further to condemn those around. We should take the matter of ‘preaching’ through our way of life, our obedience and day to day living for the Lord very seriously. So often Christians do not really stand out from the crowd and so the appeal for righteousness is rarely seen or heard.

MacArthur: God, however, *preserved Noah*, who was righteous, a true worshipper of God immersed in a wicked and corrupt society. Resisting the suffocating evil around him, Noah walked with God, along with his wife, his sons, and their wives, who constituted the *seven others* whom the Lord *preserved*... While building the ark, Noah also labored as *a preacher of righteousness*, warning people of impending death and divine retribution and calling them to repent.

Sproul: Peter refers to Noah as *a preacher of righteousness*. Scripture tells us that Noah, relatively speaking, was a righteous man in the midst of a fallen and corrupt world and that he was devoted to building the boat as God had commanded... The sermons of this preacher, Noah, went completely unheeded until the whole ungodly world was inundated by the relentless deluge, which was not an accident of nature but a judgment of God. We see here a portrait of judgment, but we also see a portrait of grace. The ark was the instrument God used to save His people from the flood, just as His church is the instrument that God uses to save His people today.

d) *Immoral Cities (2:6-8)*

6...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; 7and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8(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);

Moo: We should not be surprised that Peter moves from the Flood to Sodom and Gomorrah in order to illustrate God’s judgment; the pairing of these two famous disasters was well established. Jesus Himself used these two events to warn about God’s sudden judgment on sensuous people (Lk. 17:26-29).

Gardner: There are no two more evocative images of the horror of divine judgment than the Flood and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). And this is precisely why Peter uses them both as examples. His main points that he made with the judgment of the angels are both again to be seen here, but now the judgment concerns *people*. These judgments which happened in history demonstrate that God has judged and will judge the ungodly. Yet even these fearful judgments are but *an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly* at the return of Christ. The emphasis in both examples is first and foremost on the *extent* of judgment. It is *all* the ungodly who are judged... The staggering thing to remember here is that both Noah and Lot had tried to persuade others of the danger of such ungodliness and yet none had taken any notice at all. The fact of the matter is that the depth of the depravity of sin takes over people so entirely that they cannot see righteousness for what it is, nor hear about it, nor begin to understand it... Both examples were widely used in Jewish writings as warnings. But as Peter refers to them he may well have been specially recalling the teaching of the Lord on the matter of His return as the ‘Son of Man’ and the final judgment ‘day’ in Luke 17:26-30. There Jesus Himself referred to both the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah.

MacArthur: More than twenty times in Scriptures these cities are used *as an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter* (see Mt. 10:14, 15; 11:23, 24; Lk. 17:28-32). God used

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them and their holocaust to send an unmistakable warning to future generations of rebellious sinners—namely, that depraved people cannot pursue ungodliness and also escape God’s vengeance and everlasting judgment.

(1) Those God Judged (2:6)

⁶...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;

Moo: Peter’s description of God’s judgment on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is straightforward enough, although we discern again the influence of tradition. According to the Old Testament, God destroyed these sinful cities by raining down sulfur on them (Gen. 19:24). Peter chooses to focus on what was undoubtedly the result of this sulfurous deluge: the cities were *burned...to ashes*. The word Peter uses (*tephroō*, ‘reduce to ashes’) was also used by Dio Cassius to depict Pompeii after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. More to the point, Jewish writers before Peter had described the destruction of the two wicked cities in the same terms. For example, Phil, the first-century Alexandrian philosopher, says that God ‘consumed the impious and their cities, and to the present day the memorials to the awful disaster are shown in Syria, ruins and cinders and brimstone and smoke.’ And as Philo calls the site of the disaster a ‘memorial,’ so Peter also brings out the lasting implications of the terrible destruction; God *made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly*.

MacArthur: For his third historical illustration of divine judgment, the apostle descended to the perverted depths of *Sodom and Gomorrah*. At one time, they were the main cities of the Jordan plain or basin (Gen. 13:12; 14:8; Dt. 29:23), located in the Valley of Siddim or Salt Sea, near the southeast corner of the Dead Sea. Before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis favorably describes the area as fertile—an ideal place for raising crops and animals (13:8-10). Because of their gross sin, God *condemned* both cities to *destruction*. The judgment described in Genesis 19:1-28 was a small-scale parallel to the worldwide Flood (which occurred about 450 years earlier). Like Noah and his family, Lot and his daughters were the only inhabitants to escape. All of the other citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated, this time by incineration and asphyxiation rather than drowning (Gen. 19:24-25)... The word rendered *destruction* (*katastrophē*, of which the English word *catastrophe* is a transliteration) indicates complete overthrow and total ruin). The devastation was so thorough that it reduced those cities to nothing more than *ashes*. (The phrase *reducing them to ashes* is described by one word in the original—*tephrōsas*—an aorist participle from a root verb that can also be translated ‘covered in ashes.’) In fact, God’s judgment was so complete that the ruins remain undiscovered, and the cities’ precise location is still unknown. It is possible, but not substantiated, that they were buried under what is now mineral-dense water in the southern portion of the Dead Sea. That this *destruction* refers to more than physical death is clear from the parallel text in Jude 7, which says the people of those cities are ‘an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.’ Divine judgment not only buried the people’s bodies under the ashes, but it plunged their souls into eternal judgment. It is because of eternal punishment that the cities are examples, as are the angels.

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(2) Those God Spared (2:7-8)

⁷...and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸(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);

(a) Righteous Lot

Moo: But, like the Flood narrative, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah also has a positive side. God *rescued Lot, a righteous man* from the disaster, just as he rescued Noah and his family. Describing Lot as a *righteous man* may seem like a bit of a stretch. The Old Testament portrays him as, at best, weak and compromising. He was rescued almost against his will, the credit going not to his own virtue but to God, who graciously intervened at the request of Abraham (see esp. Gen. 19:29). Again, however, Peter's description of Lot lines up with some Jewish traditions, which also portrayed him as *righteous* (Greek *dikaios*). Yet Peter's brief characterization of Lot is not without some basis in the Old Testament text. As Peter points out, Genesis 19 suggests that Lot did not participate in the rampant homosexuality that characterized the cities and was, indeed *distressed* by it. While certainly far from perfect, Lot never lost his basic orientation to the Lord. The word *righteous* that Peter uses need mean no more than this. In the New Testament, this word often refers to a person's status before the Lord rather than to one's innate moral virtue. Moreover, it is important to note that Peter does not say that the Lord rescued Lot *because* he was a righteous man. Similarly, it will not be by virtue of their inherent goodness that God will deliver Christians in Peter's day, or in ours, from the judgment that He will bring on the ungodly. Rather, it will be because of their 'knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord' (2 Pe. 1:2) and because they are distressed, as Lot was at the rampant sin around them.

Gardner: Lot lived in Sodom (Gen. 18-19), one of the cities of the Jordan valley. God graciously *rescued* him from the devastating judgment He brought upon the city and its people as a result of their sin.... Here was a whole culture that exhibited the depravity of men and women. The people were *lawless*. They were quite the opposite of Lot who was *righteous*. They led *filthy lives*, which speaks of their sexual depravity.... Commentators spend much time discussing why Lot should be regarded as *righteous*. The most likely answer lies in a combination of two facts. The first is that in Genesis 18:23 Abraham intercedes on behalf of the 'righteous' who may be living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Since Lot is eventually delivered as an answer to that prayer, it is a legitimate deduction to assume that Lot was *righteous*. However, something deeper than that was going on. As a member of Abraham's extended family, Lot was being protected by God as a member of the covenant family, the 'righteous.' Lot's rescue from Sodom in answer to Abraham's prayer is not only the rescue of a 'righteous' man but a clear keeping of covenant promises to Abraham.

MacArthur: As in the previous illustration of the Flood, Peter comforted his readers by remind them of those who escaped punishment. During the Flood, God graciously preserved Noah and his family. In this instance, during the demolition of Sodom and Gomorrah, God *rescued righteous Lot*, along with his two daughters. Those who are familiar with the Genesis account may wonder why Lot is designated as *righteous* no less than three times in verses 7-8. After all, when he first appears in Scripture, Lot is described as implicitly superficial, selfish, and worldly (Gen. 13:5-13). During the events of Genesis 19 he displayed unambiguous moral weakness and incredibly poor judgment when, in place of the visiting angels, he offered his daughters to the lusty Sodomites (vv. 6-8). Later, he hesitated when the angels urged him to leave the city

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immediately (vv. 15-22). Even after he escaped God's wrath, he displayed shockingly sinful behavior, including drunkenness and incest (vv. 30-35). There are, nonetheless, reasons to designate Lot as *righteous* (i.e., a believer). For instance, like his uncle Abraham (cp. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3, 20-24), Lot was righteous in the sense of being a believer to whom God had credited righteousness by faith. This did not mean that either Lot or Abraham was freed from sin, but they were righteous in the forensic sense. God imputed His own righteousness to them because they were true believers (cp. Ps. 24:3-5; Phil. 3:9). Thus Lot, like Abraham, is an Old Testament illustration of justification. To be sure, Lot also showed several signs of the Holy Spirit's work in his heart. For example, his reverence toward the holy angels who visited him provided a stark contrast to the perverted advances of his neighbors (Gen. 19:1-8). And, although he was initially hesitant to leave the city, he ultimately obeyed God's command and even warned his sons-in-law about the impending doom (19:14). Furthermore, when he finally left, he obediently refused to look back (cp. 19:17).

(b) *Tormented Lot*

Moo: The importance of this last point is evident from Peter's elaboration of Lot's *distress* in verse 8. The NIV rightly makes this verse a parenthesis (as does also KJV, NRSV, NASB). Lot *was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard*. The NIV correctly links what Lot *saw and heard* with *their lawless deeds*. But it obscures the fact that in the Greek, the verb 'torment' is in the active voice. Lot 'tormented his righteous soul.' ... We recall that Lot ended up in Sodom by his own choice. And Genesis makes clear that Sodom was already a notoriously sinful place when Lot made this choice (see Gen. 13:11-13). Perhaps, then, Peter has used the active voice here to suggest that Lot was himself considerably responsible for the anguish that his *righteous soul* experienced.

Gardner: Lot *was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard*. At first, this may seem strange to us who know from the narrative of Genesis 18-19 that Lot seemed very reluctant to leave Sodom. After all, it was he who had chosen to live in that area (Gen. 13:10-13). ... The closest the text of Genesis gets to showing Lot as *distressed* and *tormented* is when the men of the city call upon him to send out his two visitors so they can be sexually used (Gen. 19:5). Lot's response to such wicked behavior (Gen. 19:6) is genuine torment and horror. Lot may not have always been wise in choosing where to live or what friends to have, but he was indeed concerned at serious evil and was rescued by the Lord from destruction.

MacArthur: Peter, then, is pointing out that Lot was righteous in heart, as is clear from the fact that he was *oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men*. His abhorrence for the sin of those around him was a sure indicator that he was a believer. At times, Lot might have been materialistic and morally weak, but he did not want any part of the *sensual conduct* that characterized Sodom's *unprincipled* culture. The term *sensual* (*alselgeia*) means 'outrageous behavior' while *unprincipled* (*athesmos*) denotes actions that are 'unrestrained,' and 'without lawful standards'—violating both the conviction of conscience and the commandment of God. The blatant immorality of his fellow citizens greatly *oppressed* Lot; the Greek word (*kataponeō*) conveys the idea of exhausting someone by wearing him down and deeply troubling his soul. The depth of Lot's dismay is found in Peter's parenthetical statement (v. 8).... The word *tormented* (*basanizō*) literally means 'to torture,' and demonstrates the sheer excruciation Lot experienced as he was exposed to the lewdness all around him. Peter knew his readers, living in the midst of their corrupt culture, could identify with Lot's difficult position. Their own situations were equally soul-distressing as they witnessed the immoral excesses of the false

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teachers and their followers (cp. 2:18-20). Like Noah and his family, Lot stood against the sin of his day and refused to follow the demonic doctrines and immoral practices that permeated ancient society. By recalling the account of God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter warns his readers of the doom that all of God’s enemies (and, specifically, false teachers) will face. But, by highlighting the salvation of Lot the apostle simultaneously comforts the righteous, reminding them that they have nothing to fear.

3. Pattern of Judgment (2:9-10a)

⁹...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Gardner: It is in verse 9 that we see what Peter wants us to conclude from his examples.... Two deductions from the Scriptures must be held together. Throughout trials and temptations, the righteous will be preserved and rescued, as were Noah and Lot; but the unrighteous will experience judgment while themselves being preserved by God for final judgment. This, then, is the conclusion of this section of the epistle and needs to be borne in mind.

MacArthur: Earlier in this section (in verse 4), Peter began a lengthy conditional clause. Now, in verse 9 and 10, he provides the conclusion—if (or *since*) God knows whom to judge and whom to rescue in the past, *then* He certainly *knows how* to do the same in the present and future.

a) Rescue the Righteous (2:9a)

⁹...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials...

Moo: The Old Testament shows again and again how God has intervened to judge sinners and save the righteous.... Peter’s readers are invited to put themselves in the category of *godly men*. They need to be reassured that their sacrifices in living by God’s rules in an ungodly environment will be rewarded. But what are the *trials* from which they will be rescued. The NIV takes some liberty here, translating a Greek word that is singular (*peirasmos*) with a plural English word. The Greek word has two distinct meanings. It can mean ‘temptation,’ the inner enticement of sin—as in 1 Timothy 6:9 (where Paul warns that ‘people who want to get rich fall into *temptation*’)—or it can mean ‘trial’ or external affliction—as in 1 Peter 4:12 (‘Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful *trial* you are suffering’). If the word means ‘temptation’ here, then Peter is probably promising rescue from temptation to sin, such as Lot experienced in Sodom. But Peter’s two other uses of *peirasmos* both mean ‘trial’ (1 Pe. 1:6; 4:12), and that is the more common meaning in the New Testament.... Thus I think that he includes in ‘trial’ here all those challenges to faith that Christians experience in the world.

Gardner: We have seen how God rescued these godly men from *trials*. *Trials* here has to do with what godly people experience as they live in this fallen world. In 1 Peter 1:6 Peter has also talked of God’s protection of His people in this age and continues: ‘In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.’

Helm: Within two of the portraits we see that God had the ability to call some in history *righteous*. In verse 5 we find *righteous* Noah and seven others *rescued* on the day of wrath. And later, in verse 7, we find Lot, three times called *righteous*, *rescued* from disaster.... Before he dies, [Peter] wants everyone throughout all time, to remember that God knows how to rescue and reclaim the righteous, as well as to punish the wicked.... Notice [in v. 9] who does the rescuing—Peter calls Him ‘the Lord.’ This is not the ancient term for Yahweh; it is the Greek

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term that is used in reference to Jesus of Nazareth. This is the One who not only comes to judge but to save as well. By His grace and in His strength may we continually find ways for our faith to grow, and may we always follow in the apostolic way.

MacArthur: For Peter, then, the pattern of divine judgment is clear. First, there is comfort in the fact that *the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation*. God knows how to save those who belong to Him, therefore they have absolutely nothing to fear. In this context, the word rendered *temptation* (*peirasmos*, which usually conveys the concept of testing) connotes the idea of an attack with intent to destroy (see Mk. 8:11; Lk. 4:12; Acts 20:19; and Rev. 3:10 for other instances where *peirasmos* is used in this same way). Believers, then, are called to trust in the infinite wisdom and sovereign power of their divine protection (cp. Rom. 8:28, 38-39).

b) Punish the Unrighteous (2:9b-10a)

(1) Their Punishment (2:9b)

...and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...

Moo: In the second part of the verse, Peter draws his negative moral from the Old Testament examples he cites in verses 4-8.... Along with most contemporary English versions, the NIV finds Peter here promising not only a future judgment for the unrighteous but also a punishment that is already underway. This is not the only way to take the Greek here, however, and the KJV, for instance, speaks only of future judgment: ‘The Lord knoweth how...to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.’ (The ambiguity in the Greek lies in the participle *kolazomenos*, ‘being punished,; which modifies *terein*, ‘to keep.’ The NIV understands the participle to be denoting action taking place at the same time as the verb it modifies: ‘keep while punishing.’ The KJV, however, assumes that the participle has a future reference: ‘kept to be punished.’). Many commentators think this latter option is correct. But two points favor the interpretation assumed by the NIV. The Greek word ‘being punished’ is in the present tense, most naturally suggesting that the punishment is taking place at the same time as the keeping. Furthermore, the combination of present, preliminary judgment and future, final judgment is found also in verse 4, where Peter says that disobedient angels have been put into gloomy dungeons ‘to be held for judgment.’

Gardner: The false teachers ought to have known from history that God judges the ungodly and then holds them for the final day of judgment. This is Peter’s direct application in verse 9.... The warnings are dire and must be heeded. Christ will return and judge. The judgment of angels in the past, of the ungodly at the time of the Flood, and in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are all to be seen as warnings and even foretastes of the final judgment day and the future experience of all who are unrighteous. As none of the ungodly survived the Flood or the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, so none will survive the return of Christ but will rather be judged to eternal hell.... Even during this life people find themselves experiencing a foretaste of what will come as God brings judgment that continues even while people are kept for the final judgment day.... We have also seen how God has judged the ungodly. Once again Peter stresses that their final judgment is certain and such people are currently being held *for the day of judgment*. We often fail to realize that as the ungodly of this world continue in their way of sin and evil they are actually being *held* by God for that final judgment. More than this, Peter is teaching that what they are experiencing even now is a continuing punishment.... It is a common thought in Scripture that people receive *now* in their lives a foretaste of the judgment to come (cp. 2:3)....

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These people have pointers in their normal lives, given by God, which indicate that they are already being judged as they are held by God for that final day.

MacArthur: God not only knows how to rescue His children but how to *keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment*. He is holding them *for the day of final reckoning* while continuing their *punishment* in the meantime. The *unrighteous* are like prisoners in jail who await final sentencing and transfer to their final fate. While they wait, they continue to accumulate more guilt (cp. Rom. 2:3-7). They will then face *judgment* at the Great White Throne, the future tribunal where God condemns all the ungodly from all the ages to eternal hell, the lake of fire.

(2) Their Sin (2:10a)

¹⁰*and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.*

Moo: The NIV again follows most English versions by splitting verse 10 into two sentences, putting the first one with verses 4-9 and the second with verses 11ff. This is a good decision. The first part of verse 10 is tied grammatically to verse 9, as Peter gives an example of those *unrighteous* who will be judged. But verse 10b, which is not tied grammatically to the first part, shifts the focus to a more extended description of these unrighteous people.

Gardner: The first part of verse 10 summarized this part of Peter's writing: the false teachers he and his readers face will most certainly be condemned.

MacArthur: The Lord *especially* targets *those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority*. Thus Peter brings the discussion full circle, again recounting the false teachers two primary characteristics. Like the wicked contemporaries of Noah and Lot, false teachers are slaves to sin. The Greek indicates that their lives are characterized by a continual 'going after flesh in defiling lust.' They are dishonest, disrespectful, and displeasing to God—actively pursuing their sensual fantasies (as mentioned earlier in 2:2; cp. Jude 6, 7) and eagerly parading their irreverent blasphemies (cp. 2:1).

DSB Note: The triad of characteristics of false teachers reappear here in verse 10: they are immoral (*indulge in the lust of defiling passion*), insubordinate (*despise authority*) and irreligious (*they blaspheme the glorious ones*, v. 10b).

(a) Defiling Passion

Moo: In verse 10a, then, Peter brings us back to the beginning of the chapter. In verses 1-3, he warned about false teachers, in verses 4-9, he cited Old Testament examples to support his claim that they would be condemned; now he suggests that prominent among these false teachers destined for condemnation are the very people who are disturbing his readers' churches. Peter contents himself with two general characteristics of these unrighteous false teachers. They *follow the corrupt desire of their sinful nature*, and they *despise authority*. The NIV rendering of this first description is too mild. 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, homosexuality.

Gardner: Peter lays the greater emphasis on the pending judgment for those who are immoral, indulging, as the Greek puts it, *the polluting lust of the flesh*. He is comparing the people Lot faced and whom Noah faced with people of his day. Such a comparison is easy enough to make with the modern age as well.

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MacArthur: *Corrupt* translates *miasmou*, meaning ‘pollution.’ The English word *miasma*, meaning unpleasant and unwholesome, is derived from this term.

(b) *Despising Authority*

Moo: The second general characteristic of these false teachers is more difficult to understand. Specifically, what kind of *authority* were these teachers despising? We outline four options. 1) In the second part of verse 10, Peter claims that they ‘slander celestial beings.’ This translation (NIV) is an interpretation of another difficult Greek word, but it is probably correct. The singular *authority* in verse 10a may then be an unusual way to refer to angelic beings. 2) Peter may be referring to the *authority* of the church, which the false teachers were refusing to heed as they pursued their own heretical ideas. Yet there is little in the context to support the identification. 3) The most important *authority* for Christians is, of course, the Lord. And many interpreters think that it is this authority that the false teachers are despising. 4) The third option may be correct, but I prefer a more general reference. In both this verse and in the similar Jude 8, we find the accusation that the false teachers are despising *authority* followed immediately by the charge that the *slander celestial beings* [angels]. It makes good sense, then, to see this second accusation as a specific example of the former. *Despising authority*, in other words, is a general charge to the effect that the false teachers are self-willed and rebellious. Peter is not thinking of any specific authority; he is thinking of the principle of authority.

Gardner: What is meant by despising authority is not altogether clear. The word translated *authority* is *kuriotētos*. The next part of verse 10 and into verse 11 talks of angels. So it is possible to take this despising of authority to refer to despising angelic beings (see a somewhat similar use of the word in Ephesians 1:21). In a roughly parallel sentence in Jude 8, however, the word refers to despising the authority of the Lord. And it is perhaps better to take it this way here too. This would then be recalling 2:1 where they deny the sovereign Lord. The word *kuriotētos* really means ‘lordship,’ in this case probably the Lordship of God Himself. Hand in hand with following the lusts of the flesh goes a despising of the authority of the Lord Himself. Such people are lawless (v. 7).

MacArthur: *Authority* (*kuriotēs*) means ‘lordship’ (cp. Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; Jude 8) and in this context indicates that the false teachers rejected the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives. As discussed in verse 1, they superficially identified with Him but refused to live by His commands.

(c) *Encourage the Righteous*

Gardner: So, the Christians Peter writes to are encouraged. They are reminded that God will always keep and protect and rescue them in the midst of a world that is deeply sinful and evil, a world in which godliness is despised and where Christians will be subjected to all sorts of trials. But they are also reminded that those who are evil and cause great suffering to Christians are already experiencing something of God’s final judgment while awaiting the certainty of final judgment at the return of Christ. It is of course the greatest irony that the very event they are suggesting will never happen is the event that will bring about their final and complete condemnation.

For next time: Read 2 Peter 2:10b-22.

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Lesson Summary

XVII. False Teachers (2 Peter 2:1-10a)

Aim: To understand that God can and will certainly rescue the righteous from eternal judgment, but that He will by no means allow the unrighteous, such as false teachers who lead God's people astray, to escape their just condemnation.

A. Portrait of False Teachers (2:1-3a)

Peter reminds his readers that false teachers will arise in their midst as they have done throughout the history of God's people. Peter provides a brief portrait of their methods, motivations, impact, and destiny.

1. Prediction of False Teachers (2:1ab)

- Just as there were true prophets in the past who wrote the Old Testament Scriptures through the Spirit of God, there were also false prophets without God's Spirit
- In the same way, false teachers will continue to arise in the church (cp. Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24)

2. Profile of False Teachers (1:12)

- Devious: they worm their way into the congregation and *secretly* introduce falsehood
- Doctrine: *destructive (apōleias) heresies (haireseis)*; false teaching leading to ruin
- Deniers: *denying the Master (despotēs) who bought (agorazō) them*; rejection of God's authority; claimed to be redeemed (bought) but lifestyle proves it isn't so
- Destiny: *swift (tachinos) destruction (apōleia)*; certain and sure judgment
- Deceivers: *many will follow their sensuality (aselgeiais, 'shameful ways')*; popular!
- Disrepute: *the way of truth will be blasphemed*; church/Christ's reputation smeared
- Desire: *in their greed they will exploit you with false (plastos) words*

B. Portraits of God's Judgment (2:3b-10a)

Peter cites three examples from the Old Testament of God's judgment against notorious sinners: 1) the fallen angels; 2) the ancient world; 3) Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter's point is that if God can completely judge these sinners for their wickedness, while at the same time rescuing the righteous (Noah and Lot), he can do the same today. The false teachers, who deny the coming of Christ in judgment, will surely be condemned by that same judgment.

1. Promise of Judgment (2:3b)

- *Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep*; judgment is certain, from the earliest pages of OT; personified—it is active and alert

2. Portraits of Judgment (2:4-8)

- Three major sins (from our study of Jude): insubordinate, irreligious, immoral; verse 4-10 are one long sentence in the Greek with an if-then construction (4 ifs, 1 then)
- Fallen Angels (insubordinate): from Gen. 6:1-4; *God did not spare angels when they sinned*; cast into hell (Tartarus); held in chains/dungeons of *gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment*; their final destiny yet awaits
- Ancient World (irreligious): *He did not spare the ancient world...when he brought a flood (kataklusmos) upon the world of the ungodly (asebeia)*; Genesis 6:5-7:24; but *God preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness (preached in word/deed) and 7 others*
- Immoral Cities (immoral): God turned Sodom and Gomorrah *to ashes, condemned them to extinction* or 'destruction' (*katastrophē*) as an example of judgment on the ungodly; but *He rescued righteous (dikaios) Lot and his 2 daughters*; Lot was

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righteous because He had faith in God, not because he was inherently good; Lot was *greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked and was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard*

3. Pattern of Judgment (2:9-10a)

- If God could do all the above, therefore *then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials (peirasmos)*
- God is also able *to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment*; there is an element of ongoing or preliminary punishment before the final judgment (consequences of sin)
- The unrighteous (false teachers) engage in the *lust of defiling (miasmou) passion and despise authority (kuriotētos, 'lordship')*; these are two of the three categories of sins identified by Jude (the third, irreligious, is picked up in the second half of v. 10).
- Encouragement: God keeps the righteous for glory and He keeps the ungodly for condemnation. The return of Christ in glory and judgment is real, despite what the false teachers say, and they will be condemned by the very thing they deny!

In 2 Peter 2:1-10a, Peter goes on the offensive. He is no longer defending the apostolic doctrine of the *Parousia* of Christ in glory and judgment. Now he is attacking the position of the false teachers who have been denying apostolic authority. In verses 1 to 3a, Peter gives a portrait of these false teachers, who will continually appear in the church, even as false prophets did in the Old Testament. These false teachers are devious, worming their way secretly into the church, even as they promulgate a doctrine that is no more than destructive heresy. They scorn the authority of Jesus, denying the Master who they claim 'bought them,' but with their words and actions prove it to be untrue. Their destiny is swift and certain destruction. They deceive many with their message and lifestyle of sensuality, but all that does is bring disrepute and shame upon the church and the name of Christ. Ultimately, these false teachers have only one desire: they are greedy and are seeking to take care of themselves. That is why they will exploit naïve listeners with false words and myths to tickle ears and generate support for their sinful lifestyles.

Having exposed their methods, motivations, impact, and destiny, Peter goes on in 2:3b-10a to demonstrate the certainty of God's judgment upon these false teachers, using three historical examples of judgment and condemnation from the Old Testament. The fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 are an example of gross insubordination, and they have been cast down and kept in gloomy darkness until the final judgment. The irreligious ancient world was so ungodly that the Lord destroyed it by a cataclysmic Flood, sparing only Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and 7 others of his immediate family. Sodom and Gomorrah are legendary, both for their gross immorality, and for the complete, catastrophic destruction God brought down upon them, again as an example of the fate of the ungodly. As in the Flood, God did spare righteous Lot and his two daughters. Peter describes these examples of judgment against ungodliness and the rescue of the righteous to assure the readers of his day (and ours), that God is completely capable of doing the same thing with respect to these false teachers, who are immoral and insubordinate (and irreligious). Thus, although these false teachers have denied the doctrine of Christ's *Parousia* in glory and judgment, it is that very event that will ultimately deliver them unto eternal condemnation.