

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 12, 2020 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

WHAT TO KNOW TO ...



A STUDY IN 2 PETER

BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS – PART 2
2 Peter 2:1-3, 4-11

“A key to how well you understand other religious faiths and cults is how well you understand you own.” –Fritz Ridenour, “So What’s The Difference”

5 Important Background Information for the Book of 2 Peter:

1. The author of the book of 2 Peter is the **APOSTLE PETER**, the head and lead spokesman for Jesus’ twelve disciples - The New Testament had four different names for Peter: Simeon (the Hebrew for Peter’s original name, Acts 15:14, 2 Peter 1:1), Simon (the Greek name for Simeon applied 49 times in the New Testament), Cephas (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for rock [*κῆφας*]; this is used to play off of *πέτρα*), Peter (*Πέτρος*) the leader and spokesman for the early disciples. This is how he is addressed in the greeting emphasizing his authority to speak. The early New Testament Church almost exclusively regarded Peter as the author of the letter. And of course there is the internal evidence supporting Peter’s authorship, the letter claims to be from “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1), the writer claims to be the readers “fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1), the writer identifies “Silas” (Silvanus) as one who helped him to write the letter (1 Peter 5:12; see also Acts 15:22 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the writer also sends greetings from Mark (1 Peter 5:13; see Acts 12:12).
2. The book of 2 Peter (like Paul’s letter to the Galatians) is actually a **LETTER**, meant to be circulated to multiple early New Testament churches and believers - Peter is a letter written in normal epistle form and style. The rhetorical and didactic nature of the letter may mean that it was intended to be read aloud to the congregations. It is best to see this letter as a circular type of letter much like Peter’s first letter in its present form which was directed to all the churches in the areas mentioned in northern Asia minor in 1 Peter.
3. The recipient of Peter’s second letter were the same recipients of Peter’s earlier letter (1 Peter), a group of mostly **GENTILE BELIEVERS/CHRISTIANS** who were now living

throughout the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor – This area would be what is today, Turkey. Peter says nothing directly in the salutation to specifically name the recipients of this letter. But according to **2 Peter 3:1-2**, “*Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),² that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of ^[a]us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior...*” Peter was writing another epistle to the same people to whom he wrote 1 Peter. In his first letter, he spelled out that he was writing “to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). These provinces were located in an area of Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were mostly Gentiles.

4. **2 Peter is believed to have been written around AD 67-68, just before Peter death** – Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were victims of persecution under Nero at Rome after the disastrous fire in the city of Rome on July 19 of AD 64. Peter’s first letter (1 Peter) was written just after the burning of Rome as persecution broke out against Christians and they were literally scattered across the New Testament world, particularly into the area of Asia Minor. 2 Peter was written sometime later toward the end of Peter’s life as he himself faced persecution and martyrdom at the hands of Nero. Consensus is that Peter wrote this second letter from prison in Rome, where he was facing imminent death. Nero died in AD 68, and tradition says that Peter died by crucifixion (upside down) prior to Nero’s death. That would put the writing of the letter sometime in AD 67-68 just before his death.
5. **The purpose of 2 Peter was to warn these first century Christians of FALSE TEACHERS who had infiltrated church in the area of Asia Minor** - Unlike his first letter, written to encourage Christians being persecuted and scatter under Nero’s brutal and tyrannical rule, 2 Peter was written to warn again and alert these vulnerable believers to the dangers of false religions and false professors that could undermine their own faith and sabotage the early church already reeling from these terrible times of persecution. **Since the time of the writing and sending of his first letter, Peter had become increasingly concerned about false teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Mino. Though these false teachers had already caused trouble, Peter expected that their heretical doctrines and immoral life-styles would result in more damage in the future. Thus Peter, in an almost last will and testament, wrote to warn the beloved believers in Christ about the doctrinal dangers they were facing.**

Second Peter was written for the purpose of exposing, thwarting, and defeating the invasion of false teachers into the church. Peter intended to instruct Christians in how to defend themselves against these false teachers and their deceptive lies. Dr. John MacArthur calls 2 Peter, “... the most graphic and penetrating exposé of false teachers in Scripture, comparable only to Jude.” The description of the false teachers is somewhat generic. Peter does not identify some specific false religion, cult, or system of teaching. If anybody in the early church knew the importance of being alert, it had to be the Apostle Peter. Remember he had a tendency in his early years to feel overconfident when danger was near and to overlook the Master’s warnings.

2 Peter is particularly helpful and relevant for Christians and believers today in understanding not only how to recognize false teaching, but also in understanding why false teaching is so dangerous and how we may guard ourselves against it.

In important place to begin is to ask the reason for the relevance of a study like this on false teachers and their teaching. What is the relevance for Peter's second letter? In other words, why is it important for us. The main impetus for this letter was the growing number of false teachers in the church. Peter wanted believers to be able to discern these deceivers. Though Peter identifies no specific individual, cult, or teaching, he shows how to determine whether heresy is being taught.

2 Peter is relevant for us today as well, because some contemporary teacher and self-proclaimed experts also make remarkable claims about themselves and their teachings. This study is a textbook lesson on learning how to discern and defeat heresy, false teachers, and their teachings.

FOR DISCUSSION

How do you respond to the following statements/quotes?

"The cults have capitalized upon the failure of the Christian church to understand their teachings and to develop a workable methodology both to evangelize and to refute cult adherents. Within the theological structure of the cults there is considerable truth, all of which, it might be added, is drawn from Biblical sources, but so diluted with human error as to be more deadly than complete falsehood. The cults have also emphasized the things which the Church has forgotten." —Dr. Walter Martin, "The Kingdom of the Cults"

- (1) *How do cults capitalize on the failure of the Christian church? What and how exactly has the church failed in regard to false teaching?* (not grounded in the Word of God, a neglect of good, sound and solid Biblical teaching/preaching, not adequately discipling new believers and Christians young in their faith in the Word of God, neglect of deep truth and doctrinal teaching)
- (2) *Can you cite an example of false teaching that is based on a theological structure with some truth in it, but diluted with error?* (Universalism teaching that God is love, therefore He won't condemn anyone or reject anyone... all paths (religions) lead to God, and one is pretty much as good as another. Prosperity Gospel teaching that God will supply all your needs, or anything you ask in faith will be done, therefore God want you to be happy, healthy and rich and if you aren't it is a lack of faith on your part)
- (3) *Why do you think Martin says that false teaching more deadly than complete falsehood?* (Because ultimately "false teaching" leads one to compete destruction in hell. "False teaching" leads one away from Jesus Christ who is the "only way," and leads one into idolatry... worship of other gods – self, works, riches, etc)
- (4) *What things has the Church often forgotten?* (the Word of God, sound doctrine, Peter is going to remind us of previous examples of the consequences of false teaching, false teachers and false gods)

"The greatest danger to the church today is not humanism, paganism, atheism or agnosticism. The greatest danger is not increasing hostility against our faith from the culture. Our greatest danger is apostasy on the inside, arising from false teachers- theological liberals who deny and distort biblical doctrine and lead others down the same path." — Mark Hitchcock

- (1) *Why is humanism, paganism, atheism, and agnosticism so dangerous to the church and Christians today?*

- (2) *Why is our present culture so dangerous to the church and Christians?*
- (3) *As dangerous as these are, why do you think Hitchcock think these are not the greatest dangers facing the church and Christians today? (because they are outside of the church)*
- (4) *Why does the greatest danger come from within the church? What is the danger of it being “within”?*

DANGER FROM WITHIN

The history of the church is inseparable from the history of Satan’s attempts to destroy her. While difficult challenges have arisen from outside the church, the most dangerous have always been from within. It is often from within arise that false teachers, the peddlers of error who masquerade as teachers of truth. False teachers take on many forms, custom-crafted to times, cultures, and contexts. Here are seven of them you will find carrying out their deceptive, destructive work in the church today. Please note that while I have followed the biblical texts in describing them in masculine terms, each of these false teachers can as easily be female.

7 False Teachers in the Church Today:

1. **The Heretic** - The Heretic is the most prominent and perhaps the most dangerous of the false teachers. Peter warned against him in his second letter in 2 Peter 2:1, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.”* The Heretic is the person who teaches what blatantly contradicts an essential teaching of the Christian faith. He is an outgoing and charismatic type figure, a natural leader teaching just enough truth to mask his deadly error. Yet in denying the faith and celebrating what is false, he leads his followers from the safety of orthodoxy to the peril of heresy. From the earliest days, the church has been afflicted by the Heretic in his various forms, and the Heretic continues his evil work today, sometimes by contradicting the truth and sometimes by adding to it.

- He may reframe the doctrine of the Trinity, as Arius did in the third century and as “Oneness Pentecostals” do today.
- He may, like Marcus Borg and the Jesus Seminar and other prominent scholars, deny the virgin birth or the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Like Jehovah’s Witnesses, he may alter God’s finished word.
- Or like Mormons, he may add to it.

Always, he boldly tampers with *“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 1:3).

REMEDY FOR RECOGNIZING AND RESISTING THE HERETIC: Solid grounding and knowledge of the Word of God - To detect a “Heretic” one must be solidly grounded in the Word to be able to recognize the false. Remember that a heretical teaching is often a poisonous mixture of some truth and sprinkled with a distortion of that truth. Truth mixed with a lie.

2. **The Charlatan** - The Charlatan is only interested in the Christian faith to the extent that it lines his or her own pocket or can fill his wallet. The Charlatan is the person who uses Christianity as a means of personal enrichment. Paul charged Timothy to be on guard against this type of “false teacher” in 1 Timothy 6:3-5, *“³ If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the ^[a]doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes*

and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.” The Charlatan is only interested in the Christian faith to the extent that it can fill his wallet. He uses his leadership position to benefit from others’ wealth.

In Acts 8:9-24 we meet just such a “Charlatan.” Simon Magus was motivated by the love of money when he tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9-24). Peter’s words (this same Peter) were pretty harsh to him in Acts 8:20, “²⁰ But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” Since him, the Charlatan has appeared in many forms, always seeking prominence in the church so that he can live in extravagance.

- When Pope Leo X famously commissioned Tetzl to sell indulgences, the profits not only funded the reconstruction of St. Peter’s Basilica, but also his luxurious lifestyle.
- In the 1990s, televangelist Robert Tilton brought in tens of millions of dollars each year by exploiting the vulnerable and gullible.
- Today Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin and a host of others peddle the prosperity gospel to enrich themselves from their followers’ gifts.

HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY A PROSPERITY GOSPEL PREACHER?

In a 2014 sermon, John Piper outlined six keys to detecting the prosperity gospel:

1. The absence of a serious doctrine of the biblical necessity and normalcy of suffering, the absence of a doctrine of suffering.
2. The absence of a clear and prominent doctrine of self-denial is a tip off that something is amiss.
3. The absence of serious exposition of Scripture.
4. The absence of dealing with tensions in Scripture.
5. Church leaders who have exorbitant lifestyles.
6. A prominence of self and a marginalization of the greatness of God.

(See also: The Story Behind John Piper’s Most Famous Attack on the Prosperity Gospel)

3. **The Prophet** - The Prophet claims to be gifted by God to speak *fresh revelation* outside of Scripture—new, authoritative words of prediction, teaching, rebuke, or encouragement. In reality, though, he is commissioned and empowered by Satan for the purpose of misleading and disrupting Christ’s church. John offered an urgent warning about this sort of “false teacher” in 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Christians must “test the spirits” to determine if they originate with the Holy Spirit or with a demonic spirit.

Later, John declared that God has spoken fully and finally in Scripture and offered the most solemn warning against anyone who claims to bring revelation equal or contrary to Scripture in Revelation 22:18-19, “¹⁸For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God^[e]

shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

The Prophet appears throughout the history of the church. As early as the second century,

- Montanus and his disciples claimed to speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit.
- In the nineteenth century, Joseph Smith claimed to receive *The Book of Mormon* from the angel Moroni.
- Today the airwaves are chock-full of people claiming to speak in the name of God through the power of the Spirit.

Personal prophecies are just a phone call away. A word of caution here... there are many on the internet and web today that have produced list of names of well known preachers and teachers who they label as "false prophets" or "false teachers." Not all of these list are reliable or credible. Beware! Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit give the believer the discernment and the tools to be able to discern truth from error. We should hold all Biblical preachers and teacher to the standard and authority of the Word of God. There are false prophets in the world today and we need to think critically and be discerning The Prophet (false prophet) does continues to speak, and to lead astray.

4. **The Abuser** - The Abuser uses his position of leadership to take advantage of other people. Usually, he takes advantage of them to feed his sexual lust, though he may also desire power. Both Peter and Jude were aware of the Abuser's lechery Peter mentions this one in 2 Peter 2:2 (ESV), *"And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed."* And in Jude 4 (ESV), the half-brother of Jesus, *"For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."* The Abuser claims he is tending souls, but his true interest is ravishing bodies. He works his way into women's lives, confidence, homes, and beds. When he is not pursuing illicit sexual pleasure, he may be domineering people to gain power, abusing them on his path to prominence. He does this in the name of ministry, with the claim of God's anointing. He unapologetically uses and abuses others to feed his lusts.

Tragically, the history of the Christian faith features countless Abusers. Even in the church's earliest days, there were sex cults and other depraved perversions of the faith. For centuries, the papacy was little more than a corrupt power struggle. Today it seems that every week, we learn of another leader who has been found guilty of sexual sin with men, women, or even children. Meanwhile, we hear sad tales of survivors who have been abused and cast aside by a leader craving power. The Abuser carries on his work.

5. **The Divider** - The Divider uses false doctrine to disrupt or destroy a church. He almost seems to relish the prospect of dividing brother from brother and sister from sister. Jude warned about him in Jude 18-21, *"¹⁸How they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. ¹⁹These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. ²⁰But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²²And on some have compassion, making a distinction."*

The Divider is: *(some characteristics of the Divider)*

- Devoid of the Holy Spirit – Remember the Holy Spirit’s first fruit is love and whose special work is holding believers together in the bond of peace (Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:3). Jude tells us in verse 19 that this one does not have the Holy Spirit.
- This false teacher brings strife, not love -
- He generates factions, not unity -
- He desires discord, not harmony - Congregations and denominations have often been splintered by the Divider as he promulgates his lies
- He sometimes makes a minor doctrine into the mark of Christian maturity - Thus causing factions to arise within the body.
- He may slyly introduce unbiblical doctrines -
- He may seek to undermine the ordained leadership -

And He does it all for the perverse satisfaction that comes with destruction.

6. **The Tickler** - The Tickler is the false teacher who cares nothing for what God wants and everything for what men want... called the Tickler because he or she “tickles” men’s ear to say what they want to hear in order to please men and win approval before men. He is the man-pleaser rather than the God-pleaser. Paul thought of him as the ear-tickler in **2 Timothy 4:3-4**, *“³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*

- The Tickler craves popularity and praise from the world
- To maintain his follower’s respect, he preaches only the parts of the Bible they deem acceptable
- He speaks much of happiness but little of sin
- He speaks much of heaven but nothing of hell
- He gives them only what they want to hear
- He preaches a partial gospel which is no gospel at all
- He preaches an empty gospel to a packed out church

The Tickler is as old as the church itself.

Some example of this type of false teacher... the Tickler:

- In the nineteenth century he was Henry Ward Beecher
- In the twentieth he was Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller.
- Today he is Joel Osteen – Osteen is pastor of the largest church in America, who is known equally for his toothy smile and his vacuous content. He preaches an empty gospel to a packed out church.

There is nothing new under the sun and these types of false prophets, the Tickler, have been around since Old Testament times. Jeremiah the prophet spoke of the Tickler when he wrote in **Jeremiah 6:14**, *“They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is not peace.”* In other words, said what the people wanted to hear, rather than the truth that may at times be hard to hear, may step on toes, convict and make uncomfortable, but be the truth that needs... and must be heard. Like the false prophets of

Jeremiah's day, the Tickler and the thousands like him say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).

7. **The Speculator** - Finally, the Speculator is the one obsessed with novelty, originality, or speculation. The author of Hebrews warned his church of these "strange teachings" in Hebrews 13:9 when he wrote, *"⁹ Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them."* And the Apostle Paul seem particularly concerned about these kinds of false teacher when he said in 1 Timothy 1:3, *"³ As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine."* Teaching focused on speculation displaces the sure and steady doctrine of Scripture. The Speculator tosses aside the bulk of the Bible's content and the weight of the Bible's emphasis in order to obsess about matters that are trivial or novel. He grows weary of the old truths and pursues respectability through originality.

Today, as in every age, the Speculator obsesses about the End Times, and somehow his failed predictions dissuade neither himself nor his followers. Recently we saw him obscuring the clear message of Scripture to search for hidden codes in Scripture. Sometimes he plants himself in academia, where one of his recent masterpieces is a re-imagined God who is unable to see and know the future. Well did Paul label the Speculator a contradictory, irreverent babbler in 1 Timothy 6:20-21, *"²⁰ O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—²¹ by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith."*

NOTE: There is nothing wrong with studying the subject of the end times, Scripture deals extensively with the subject, nor with other more complicated doctrines and teachings of Scripture, but beware of those who make dogmatic claims and assertions and "tests of faith" that Scripture does not make. Keep it Scriptural! Where Scripture is silent, perhaps we should be also.

Satan's greatest ambassadors are not pimps, politicians, or power-brokers, but pastors. His priests do not peddle a different religion, but a deadly perversion of the true one. His troops do not make a full-out frontal assault, but work as agents, sneaking into the opposing army. Satan's tactics are studied, clever, predictable, effective. Therefore, we must always remain vigilant. AS Jesus, Himself, warned us in Matthew 7:15-16, *"¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits."*

ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACE OF FALSE TEACHERS (2 Peter 2:4-11)

The apostle Peter wrote his second letter to help churches stand against false teachers who were infiltrating their ranks. These teachers not only promoted false doctrine, but also ungodly living. He alludes to them (2:10) when he says that they indulged the flesh in its corrupt desires and despised authority, including the authority of the Master who bought them (2:1). They exploited people in the church with sensuality and greed (2:2-3). At the root of their false teaching was a denial of the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory to judge the world (3:3-13). They even encouraged people toward sexual "freedom" (2:19), assuring them that a loving God would never judge anyone.

In our text, Peter wants his readers to know that although God's judgment may be delayed, it is absolutely certain. He uses three historical examples of judgment and two examples of God's rescuing the righteous from judgment both to warn and to encourage. The warning is, God will righteously judge all the ungodly. None will escape. The encouragement is, God will rescue the godly from judgment. Therefore, we should have the courage to stand firm in following God in an ungodly world.

Since God judges all the ungodly and mercifully saves the godly, we should stand firm in following Him and resist all false teaching.

Our text is one long "if-then" sentence. The "if" part could be rendered "since," because there is no doubt in view. Peter builds this part of the sentence toward the final conclusion in verse 9. The skeleton idea is, "Since God did not spare the angels when they sinned; and since He did not spare the ancient world in the flood, but preserved Noah; and since He did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah, but rescued Lot; then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly and to keep the ungodly under punishment for the day of judgment." The examples of judgment are Peter's warning not to follow the false teachers. The examples of rescue are his encouragement to follow the Lord, even when many around us live as if there will be no judgment.

"⁴For ^(if) God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; ⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—⁹then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord." -2 Peter 2:4-11(NKJV)

3 Encouragements to Believers in the Face of False Teachers:

- 1. God righteously judges all the ungodly** - Peter is arguing that history gives us vivid examples to warn us that God will judge the wicked. We should think about these examples and apply them to our lives.

3 Biblical Examples of How God Judged Wickedness:

- (1) REBELLIOUS ANGELS: God's judgment of the fallen angels shows that He judges the ungodly** – Peter says in verse 4, *"⁴For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."* God created the angels as righteous spirit beings, but Satan, a leader among them, rebelled and many others (now called "demons") joined his rebellion. The Bible is sketchy about when and how this happened, although it had to happen before Satan tempted Eve. Many understand **Isaiah 14:12-14** to refer to the fall of Satan, who desired

to make himself like God. Also, many interpret **Ezekiel 28:11-19** to describe Satan's original perfection and subsequent fall due to pride.

Many reputable scholars understand our text to refer to a cryptic incident in Genesis 6:1-4, when the "sons of God" (interpreted as demons) took wives among "the daughters of men," resulting in a dominant race called the "Nephilim." This interpretation of Genesis 6 was prevalent among the first century Jews, and is explained in more detail in the 1st century B.C. Book of Enoch. In favor of this interpretation here (and in Jude 7) are that the story was common in Jewish literature; the three examples (angels, flood, and the destruction of Sodom) all come out of Genesis; and the incident in Genesis 6, which led up to the flood, would explain why some demons are now confined to "pits of darkness" (Edwin Blum, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 12:278).

A variation of that interpretation is that the demons themselves did not actually cohabit with women, but rather they possessed powerful men who cohabited with these women (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2 Peter & Jude* [Moody Publishers], pp. 86, 164-165; he is somewhat ambiguous as to which of these two views he believes).

While I could accept the second view, the first view to me is incredulous and supported only by unbiblical Jewish myths. How (physiologically) could demons, who are non-human spirit-beings, procreate children? While demons (and angels) sometimes take on male human bodies, there is no biblical evidence that they can produce offspring (Matt. 22:30). What kind of genetic makeup would those children have? Would they have human souls? What about their children? It seems to me that the demons mating with humans view creates far more problems than it solves.

Thus I prefer a third view that the "sons of God" refers to the line of Seth (Gen. 5) that intermarried with godless women, leading to the degrading sinfulness of the human race that led to the flood. (See my sermon, "Sin's Full Course," on Gen. 6:1-8, [3/3/96] on the church web site for a more thorough treatment of this issue.) This means that 2 Peter 2:4 refers to the general fall of the angels and that God relegated some of the fallen angels to confinement in pits of darkness, being held for their final judgment when they will be cast into the lake of fire. The Greek word here translated "hell" is a verb that means, "cast into Tartarus." It's the only time it occurs in the Bible. It was a word from Greek mythology with which Peter's readers would have been familiar. It referred to a place lower than Hades, where the especially wicked were consigned. Peter is not approving of Greek mythology, but rather is saying, "God judged these fallen angels by confining them in a really awful place until the final day of judgment."

★ **In this discussion, we shouldn't lose sight of Peter's point, that God is powerful enough to judge the angels that sinned. The Bible shows that these spirit-beings are powerful creatures that once dwelled in the very presence of God. Yet they sinned and God judged them. So we should be on guard against sinning, because God will judge all who sin against Him and do not repent.**

- (2) **THE FLOOD: God's judgment of the world through the flood shows that He judges the ungodly** – Notice verse 5, Peter adds, “⁵*and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.*” We'll look at the preservation of Noah and his family in a moment. But for now, Peter's point is that God brought the flood on the world of the ungodly. The flood destroyed all people and every living creature, except for those on the ark. That story is in the Bible to warn us that a day of judgment on the whole world is coming, when none of the ungodly will escape. Peter refers to the flood again 2 Peter 3:6 & 10, where he makes the comparison that just as the ancient world was destroyed by water, even so the present world will be destroyed by fire.

I think that with the flood we often get so hung up on the geologic issues or questions of how Noah could get all those animals on the ark that we miss the main point, namely, that the flood was a horrific judgment on the entire earth. Everyone and everything that were not on the ark perished!

★ The Bible uses the flood story as a warning to everyone since that time that a far worse future judgment is coming, when all the ungodly who are not “on board” Jesus Christ will perish eternally.

- (3) **SODOM AND GOMORRAH: God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah shows that He judges the ungodly** - Verse 6 says, “⁶*and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.*” This refers, of course, to the story in Genesis 19, when God rained fire and brimstone on the cities that were located near the southern end of the Dead Sea. Prior to God's judgment, the area was a fertile plain (Gen. 13:10), but afterward it was an uninhabitable wasteland. Genesis 19 shows how corrupt Sodom was. The men wanted to homosexually rape the two angels that came to Sodom to rescue Lot and his family. Even when the angels struck them blind, they didn't repent. Lot's future sons-in-law thought that he was joking when he warned them to flee the impending judgment. Ezekiel (16:49) also informs us that the people of Sodom were arrogant and had abundant food and ease, but they did not help the poor.

Peter states that God made the people of Sodom “*an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter.*” In other words, the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was not a one-time oddity. It is in Scripture as a warning of the judgment to come. Peter adds something that the parallel in Jude (5-7) omits, namely, God's preservation of Noah and Lot. Peter includes these stories to show that God not only will judge the wicked.

2. **God mercifully saves the godly** – Verses 9-11, “⁹*then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*¹⁰*and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,*¹¹*whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.*” The godly do not earn salvation by their godliness. Salvation is always by grace through faith apart from any good works. But those

who are truly saved live in obedience to God. Their godliness results from their salvation and culminates in their eternal deliverance from God's judgment. These stories of temporal judgment and rescue picture final, eternal judgment and deliverance. They show that God will punish the wicked, but spare the righteous... ultimately, even those sometimes the innocent and godly may suffer in this life right alongside of the ungodly. Our ultimate reward is coming. These Christians Peter is writing to knew this better than anyone just having gone through extreme persecution.

God's rescue of Noah and Lot from those temporal judgments is to give hope that if you will repent, He will rescue you from eternal judgment. But not all of the godly are exempt from temporal judgments (Luke 21:16-19). There are three examples of judgment, but only two examples of deliverance from judgment. But we can learn from the omission.

3 Important Reminders Concerning Salvation and Deliverance:

- (1) God did not provide salvation for the fallen angels to teach us that He does not owe salvation to anyone** - It is solely by His grace and mercy. It picture is ultimate Sovereignty. God provided deliverance for Noah and his family and for Lot and his two daughters, but there was no deliverance for the angels that sinned. They perished with no possibility of salvation.

There are some that rail against the biblical doctrine of God's sovereign election by saying that if He is able to save everyone but chooses only to save some, then He is immoral or unloving! That is not only blasphemous; also, it completely misunderstands the enormity of human sin and guilt.

God does not owe salvation to any creature that has sinned against Him, including the fallen angels. In many ways, angels are more glorious and powerful beings than man is. But they sinned and God was perfectly just to judge them without providing any means of salvation. And, He is not unjust if He chooses some people for eternal life and passes over others, leaving them under judgment for their many sins to display His wrath and justice (Rom. 9:11-23).

But the good news for sinful people is that the stories of Noah and Lot show us that God has provided salvation for sinners. Unlike the fallen angels, there is hope for all who will trust in Jesus Christ, turn from their sins, and obey Him.

- (2) God saved Noah through the flood as an example of how He mercifully saves the godly** - God "preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2:5). This is the only place where we are told that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but it is not surprising. He spent at least 100 years building an ark on dry land, while everyone around him must have thought that he was crazy. Tour guides probably organized trips to see this lunatic building this gigantic boat, miles from any body of water.

The people at that time were notoriously corrupt and violent (Gen. 6:11-12). Noah's actions in building the ark and probably his words warned them to repent of their sins

before it was too late. The Genesis account tells us (6:9) that *“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.”* But he did not merit God’s salvation by his righteousness. The verse just prior tells us (Gen. 6:8), *“Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the Lord.”* Noah was a sinner, as we learn in the aftermath of the flood, when he got drunk and lay exposed in his tent (Gen. 9:21). But the overall pattern of his life was that he obeyed God, even when it was very hard to do.

His story teaches us that if we will trust the salvation that God has provided in Jesus Christ and turn from our sin, we will be spared from the judgment to come.

(3) God rescued Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of how He mercifully saves the godly. Verses 7-8 (ESV), *“...and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), ...”* We can’t miss Peter’s point, in that he repeats three times that Lot was righteous, contrasting him with the sensual conduct and lawless deeds of the unprincipled men of Sodom. Their wickedness paralleled the conduct of the sensual, lawless false teachers. But how can Peter call Lot “righteous”? The story in Genesis seems to picture him as anything but righteous. When the Sodomites want to rape his two angelic guests, Lot instead offers them his two virgin daughters to rape! He only reluctantly leaves Sodom when the angels grab his hand and lead him away. He later allows his two daughters to get him drunk so that they can commit incest in order to get pregnant by him. This doesn’t fit the biblical picture of a righteous man! I cannot resolve this in a totally satisfactory manner, but several considerations may help. We must assume that like Abraham, who believed God and “He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6), Lot also had been declared righteous before God by faith. But in the context of 2 Peter, he is not referring to imputed righteousness, but to righteous behavior. There is a hint of an answer in Genesis 18, when Abraham gets God to agree that if there are ten righteous people found in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Abraham must have known that Lot was righteous enough not to have joined the Sodomites in their godless, sensual behavior. Also, although we can’t understand Lot’s offering his daughters to be raped, he did so in an attempt to protect his houseguests. Hospitality to strangers was an important virtue in that culture. Lot risked his own safety to protect his guests, although in a reprehensible way. And, (I assume that Peter received it by divine inspiration, because you cannot deduce it from the Genesis account), Lot was oppressed and tormented by the ungodly conduct that he saw and heard around him in Sodom. This point should convict us: To what extent are we tormented by the wickedness of our culture (see Ezek. 9:4)? Do we enjoy watching movies that flaunt immorality, profanity, and violence? Do we laugh at the filthy jokes of godless TV sitcoms? If so, we are not as righteous as Lot was! Also, Lot obeyed God by not looking back toward Sodom, in contrast to his wife who was turned into a pillar of salt. This leads to the inferred conclusion: Since God will judge the wicked and save the godly...

3. **We should stand firm in following Him and resist all false teaching** - In Ezekiel 14:14, God extols the righteousness of three men: Noah, Daniel, and Job. If Noah is one of the most righteous men in the Bible, Lot must barely be in the camp by the skin of his teeth. Perhaps these two are put together in 2 Peter to show us how we should stand firm against the godless

culture around us. Noah did a commendable job; Lot is an example of the weakest of the saints. But God was gracious to both men and their families. Verses 9-10a are the conclusion to verses 4-8: “then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation [or, trials], and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.” The godly are not immune to temptations or to the test of living in an ungodly culture. They need God to rescue them from it. And He knows how to do it! If He has saved you from sin by His grace, He will preserve you unto heaven by His grace. So Peter wants to encourage us to have the courage, like Noah (who did it well) and Lot (who barely passed the course), to stand firm against the tide of godlessness around us. He wants us to resist all teaching that downplays holy living. As we do, even if we suffer for it, we can have the joy of looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ and our eternal reward with Him.

Conclusion

Many years ago, I conducted a funeral for a man from my church. On the little brochure that the funeral home prints up for such occasions was John 3:16, printed as follows: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life.” But they left out some crucial words: “shall *not perish* but have eternal life”!

I don’t know whether the family or the funeral home was responsible for the omission, but I didn’t let it go. I pointed out during the service that while God has provided forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who will believe in Jesus, the verse also warns that all who do not believe in Jesus will perish.

Jesus didn’t come and die on the cross just to give us warm, fuzzy feelings about God’s love. He offered Himself to pay the penalty for sin that we deserved to rescue us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10). The angels who sinned, the world under the flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are there to warn us that God will surely judge all that have sinned against Him. The preservation of Noah and the rescue of Lot give us the hope that if we trust in Christ and turn from our sins, God will mercifully spare us from the judgment to come. Believe in Jesus Christ and you will not perish, but have eternal life!

Application Questions

1. *How would you respond to a professing Christian who said, “I believe in a God of love, not of judgment”?*
2. *How would you respond to a professing Christian who said, “If God only chooses to save some, then He is not fair”?*
3. *Discuss: Can God-fearing Christians watch TV sitcoms or go to movies depicting sex and violence and remain unstained?*