The Judgment of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:4-9 and Jude 5-15 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 10

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Last time we read Peter's second chapter beside Jude and watched the false teachers come into view. This time we go back into the Old Testament, to the judgments both writers point to, and ask why they chose those particular examples.

Notice how Peter gets to them. He has just said of the false teachers, "for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Pet. 2:3). Then: "*For* if God did not spare the angels who sinned..." (2:4). The angels, the ancient world, Sodom and Gomorrah: every one of them is offered as an example of what waits for the false teachers. Jude does the same with his list (Jude 5-11).

That raises a question. Some of the people in those lists were God's own. Jude names "the people" the Lord saved "out of the land of Egypt" (Jude 5), and Korah, a Levite (Jude 11; Num. 16:1). Others are "the world of the ungodly" and the cities of the plain (2 Pet. 2:5-6). How can both kinds of judgment picture what's coming to the false teachers, men "the Lord... bought" (2:1)?

What ties the examples together is what each one did. Every one of them had been given a place by God: a domain to keep, a purpose to fill, a land to go up and take, an offering to bring, a word to speak, a service near Him. And every one of them turned away from it. That's what the false teachers are doing too. They've been given the work of leading God's people in the way of righteousness, and they're walking away from it, which is why Peter and Jude reach for these examples to picture their judgment.

I. "Like Sodom to Me"

Before we look at the examples, look at how God spoke about false prophets in Israel. Jeremiah 23 is His fullest word on them:

> "Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah." (Jer. 23:14)

"Like Sodom to Me." When Peter and Jude reach for Sodom to picture the false teachers' judgment, they aren't reaching far. God had already made the comparison.

Jeremiah goes on. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer. 23:21). And here's what they should have done: "But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from

their evil way and from the evil of their doings" (23:22). They had a calling, to stand in His counsel and bring His people His words, and they left it for something of their own: "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'... The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (23:25, 28). Jude calls the false teachers the same thing: "these dreamers" (Jude 8).

Standing in His counsel and bringing His people His words, with a right view of what lies ahead: that was the prophets' calling in Israel, and it's the teacher's calling in the Church. The false teachers leave it the same way. Instead of bringing God's people His word about what's coming, they bring their own, the very thing Peter said true prophecy never is: "of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). And instead of turning people from their evil way, they do what Jeremiah's prophets did. They "strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness" (Jer. 23:14). Peter says "many will follow their destructive ways" (2 Pet. 2:2), and these men "allure... the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error" (2:18).

II. The Angels Who Left Their Domain

> "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6)

Jude's word for "domain" is *arche*. It's the word Paul uses for the angelic rulers in "the heavenly places": "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities [*archas*]" (Eph. 6:12). These angels had a principality, a place of rule, and they didn't keep it. They left their own abode.

Keep them distinct from Satan and his angels. Satan's rebellion is real, and his judgment is coming, but he and his angels are still in the heavenly places, still in office, the ones we "wrestle against" now (Eph. 6:12). The angels Peter and Jude describe are in "chains of darkness" (2 Pet. 2:4). Peter's word there is *tartaroo*, Tartarus, and he doesn't explain it. These angels are held separately, and Jude says why: they left the place they'd been given.

What did they do? Read Genesis 6:

> "Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.... There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown." (Gen. 6:1-2, 4)

In the Old Testament, "sons of God" is used of angels: "there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6; also 2:1; 38:7). No one verse says the angels of Jude 6 are the sons of God in Genesis 6, so this is an inference. But several passages point the same way:

- Peter lists the angels who sinned immediately before "the flood on the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:4-5).
- In his first letter he places the imprisoned spirits "in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared" (1 Pet. 3:19-20).

- Jude says Sodom sinned "in a similar manner to these," going "after strange flesh" (Jude 7). The comparison only works if the angels' sin was of the same kind.

Someone will say Jesus taught that angels don't marry. What He said is that in the resurrection people "are like angels of God *in heaven*" (Matt. 22:30). These are the angels who didn't stay there.

Genesis says the giants were on the earth "in those days, and also afterward" (Gen. 6:4), and the spies later reported, "There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants)" (Num. 13:33). It's the same Hebrew word in both places, and it looks as though there was a purpose behind what produced them. God had promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Corrupt the line of man, and that Seed has no line to come through.

III. The World of Noah's Day

> "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth." (Gen. 6:5, 11-12)

"All flesh had corrupted their way." Man had been made for two things, and both were being corrupted. He was made to rule: "let them have dominion... over all the earth" (Gen. 1:26). And he was made to multiply through the union of a man and his wife: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). By Noah's day, man showed no interest in the first, and the second was being polluted at its source. Man had walked away from both things God made him for.

So "God 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" (2 Pet. 2:5).

IV. Sodom and the Cities of the Plain

Jude ties Sodom directly to the angels:

> "As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7)

"In a similar manner to these." "Strange flesh" is literally *other* flesh, flesh of a different kind. Now look at what happened the night the two angels came to Sodom: "the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally'" (Gen. 19:4-5). The men they demanded were angels (19:1). In Noah's day angels went after the daughters of men. In Sodom, men went after angels. Either way, both had left the order God made.

The Lord had said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see" (Gen. 18:20-21). And the angels told Lot, "we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD" (Gen. 19:13).

Peter says why he names those cities. God turned them "into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:6). They were made an example, and that is what he is doing with them here.

V. The Way, the Error, and the Rebellion

Jude adds three men, and he names them in an order:

> "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah." (Jude 11)

A way walked, a course run for pay, and a rebellion that ended in perishing. And look at who these three men were. A worshiper, a prophet for hire, and a Levite. Not one of them was a stranger to God: He spoke to Cain face to face (Gen. 4:6), He spoke to Balaam face to face (Num. 22:9, 12), and Korah was a Levite God had brought near to Himself (Num. 16:9). Every one of them had the real thing, God's own word or a service God Himself assigned, and every one of them turned it toward his own gain. And not one of them went down alone.

Cain brought an offering (Gen. 4:3). God didn't respect it, and He told Cain what to do about it: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Cain wouldn't rule it. He killed the brother whose offering God had respected, and John tells us why: "And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). A man who won't have his own service corrected gets rid of the one whose service was accepted.

Balaam was no Israelite. Balak sent for him at "Pethor of Mesopotamia" (Deut. 23:4), the men who came for him carried "the diviner's fee in their hand" (Num. 22:7), and Joshua names his trade: "Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer" (Josh. 13:22). He was a hired man from outside. And yet God spoke with him directly, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (Num. 22:12), and "the Spirit of God came upon him" when he opened his mouth over Israel (Num. 24:2). Balaam knew the limit he was under, and said so: "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18). He never did curse Israel, which is what Balak had hired him to do.

But he found another way to earn the fee. Israel was camped across from Moab, and what Israel's own weapons couldn't do, Moab's women did: "the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel" (Num. 25:1-3). Twenty-four thousand died in the plague that followed (25:9). Years later Moses named whose idea it had been: "these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD" (Num. 31:16). The prophet kept his credentials and sold his counsel. Peter says these men have "forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15).

Korah was a Levite, with a service that brought him near God, and Moses put the question to him: "Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD...? And are you seeking the priesthood also?" (Num. 16:9-10). It was a small thing to him. He wanted the priesthood, the one position in Israel God had kept from him, and with it Aaron's place at the head of the nation's worship. Listen to how he went after it. He took two hundred and fifty of Israel's own leaders with him and told Moses and Aaron, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" (Num. 16:2-3). The man reaching for an exalted position accused God's appointed men of exalting themselves, and he did it in the language of everyone's equality.

And it worked. "Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (16:19). Then God settled it Himself. The ground split under Korah and his company, "and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up," and "a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense" (16:32, 35). Jude's word for it is exact: they "perished in the rebellion of Korah." They went down with him.

A brother dead, twenty-four thousand dead in a plague, and two hundred and fifty leaders of Israel swallowed up and burned. That's what Jude is holding up. Peter describes the false teachers doing the same three things. "By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words" (2 Pet. 2:3), which is Balaam. They are "enticing unstable souls" (2:14) and "many will follow their destructive ways" (2:2), which is Korah's congregation. And Peter's word for the "destructive heresies" they bring in (2:1) is the word for a faction, a party drawn off to itself, which is what Jude says at the end of his letter: "These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 19).

VI. What Lot Lost

Peter has been naming judgments, and in the middle of them he stops on a man who came out of one:

> "and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—" (2 Pet. 2:7-8)

Three times in two verses: righteous Lot, that righteous man, his righteous soul. Lot is the one man in this chapter who is neither a false teacher nor one of the ungodly swept away with them, and Peter puts him here because his conclusion has two halves. The Lord knows how "to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment," and He knows "how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2:9). Lot is the second half. And what Scripture shows of him is sobering, because being the godly man delivered out of a judgment turned out to be a very different thing from coming out of it with anything.

Start with how he came to be living there at all. "Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan.... and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD" (Gen. 13:10-13). He chose it with his eyes open.

By the time the angels came, he couldn't persuade his own family to leave. He warned his sons-in-law, "Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!" But "to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (Gen. 19:14).

And he didn't move quickly himself. Genesis doesn't tell us what he was thinking, but it shows us what he had there. A seat in the gate of the city (19:1). Daughters married to men of Sodom (19:14). And when the angels said, "Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed," Lot argued with them: "I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there" (19:17, 19-20). Told to get clear of the plain altogether, he bargained for a smaller town. He wanted out of the fire, not out of that life.

So the angels took him by the hand: "while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city" (19:16). His wife came out with him, then "looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (19:26). Lot was delivered, and everything he had built in Sodom burned with the city. He had bargained for Zoar, and he didn't keep even that: "Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains, and his two daughters were with him; for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he and his two daughters dwelt in a cave" (19:30). He took the mountains in the end, with nothing, by the long way around.

None of that was God taking things away from Lot. Sodom was judged, and Lot's life was invested in Sodom. His righteousness is why he came out alive; it was never a guarantee over what he had built in a place God had marked for burning.

Paul describes the same kind of loss at the judgment of a Christian's work: "the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

And Jesus used Lot to speak about His own coming: "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.... Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:28-30, 32).

VII. Their Judgment Is Not Idle

Jude closes his examples with a prophecy older than the flood: "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him'" (Jude 14-15).

"Spoken against Him." That's what these men do. They speak against the Lord's coming, the prophetic word Peter told his readers to heed (2 Pet. 1:19), and they'll answer for it when He

comes. Peter had already said so: the Lord knows how "to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 2:9).

Peter's readers didn't have to wonder whether these men were saved. Peter told them: "the Lord who bought them" (2:1). What they had to see was what God thinks of a man He bought who leaves the place He gave him, and who leads others out of it with him. Every example in these two letters answers that.

Applying "The Judgment of False Teachers"

Angels left their domain. A world left what it was made for. Cities went after strange flesh. A redeemed people the Lord had brought out of Egypt turned back at the border of the land (Jude 5). And a worshiper, a prophet for hire, and a Levite each took what God had given him and turned it to his own account, taking others down with him. Every one of them abandoned a calling, and every one is set forth "as an example" (2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).

The false teachers are men the Lord bought, given the work of leading His people in the way of righteousness, and they leave it. They are the ones these examples were written for. But Lot is in the chapter too, a righteous man who chose his place with his eyes and lost everything he built there. Know your calling and keep it. And remember Lot's wife.

Looking Ahead

Next, Peter turns to chapter three and to what the false teachers mock: "scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'" (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.