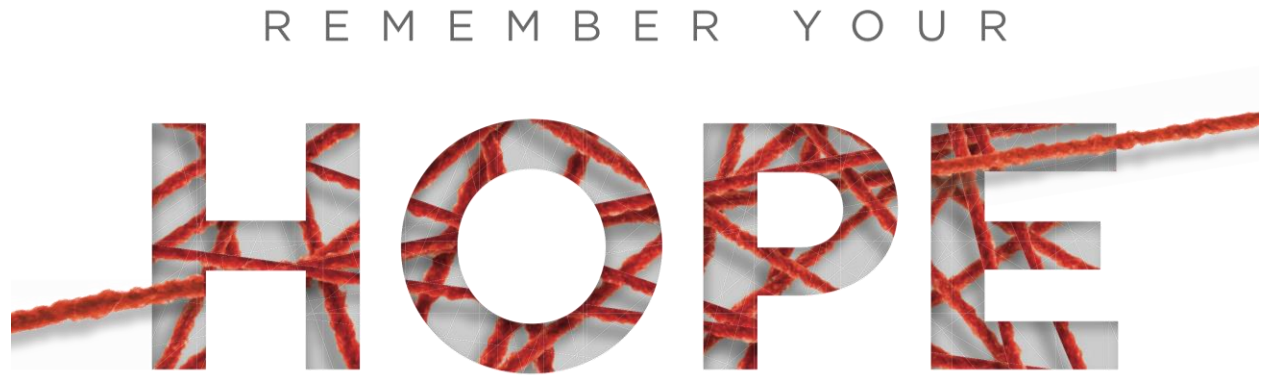


Lesson 3: 2 Peter 2:1-11

Hook



Main Point: Throughout the Scriptures, God judges the wicked but rescues the righteous.

In 2009, off the coast of Somalia, a group of four Somali pirates hijacked an American cargo ship, the *Maersk Alabama*, in the Indian Ocean. The *Alabama's* crew were unarmed, and most of the crew were able to retreat to the fortified steering room. The captain, Robert Phillips, was taken captive and was forced onto one of the *Alabama's* lifeboats with the pirates because their own ship had overturned. The pirates tried to ransom Phillips for \$2 million. Navy SEAL Team 6 was sent, and they were able to rescue Phillips, and the pirates were dealt with.ⁱ

Life throws many curveballs, and bad things can happen to good people. Sometimes, it can appear as though the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. Phillips was held for days, and some bad things can last for moments, weeks, years or a lifetime, but we have hope. The Lord is aware of everything that is going on, He is *with* the righteous, and the wicked *will be* judged and punished. There is hope. In the final days of judgment, the righteous will be with God for eternity, and those who never accepted Him, the unrighteous, will be punished for the rest of eternity.

Q: What promises in Scripture does the Lord give that enable us to have hope that He will rescue the righteous?

Q: In what ways can we remind ourselves of this hope in times of difficulty?

2 Peter 2:1–11

Main Point: Throughout the Scriptures, God judges the wicked, but rescues the righteous.

Text Summary: Peter continues his argument that the false teachers are wrong in denying the Second Coming of Jesus. In this passage, Peter defends the theological truth that there will be a Day of Judgment for the wicked. Because God did not spare the fallen angels or the ancient world in the days of Noah or Sodom and Gomorrah, He will not spare the wicked in the final days of judgment. But He will rescue the godly and punish the wicked.

Read 2 Peter 2:1–3.

Talking Point 1: There are false prophets in every generation.

Q: How do we know there will be false prophets in every generation?

Q: What kinds of false teachings do false prophets tend to spread and why? What is their goal in spreading these types of teachings?

With the “but” that introduces verse 1, Peter continued his argument from chapter 1 and referred to the time of the Old Testament prophets (1:19–21). Just as false prophets arose in every generation of the Old Testament, so will false prophets arise among you (2:1). We have seen it in every generation since. Note that Peter said “among you” (2:1) – not out there in the world, not among the Greek philosophers or the pagan sects, but within the Church.

The same is true in our generation. False teaching can easily creep into our own local church if we aren’t careful. Jesus told us that the wheat and the tares grow together in His kingdom. Remember the parable of the weeds? God planted wheat in His field, but Satan sneaked in and planted tares among them. To keep from damaging the wheat by trying to pull out the tares, He left the tares there and will separate them at the harvest, when He cuts them both down (Matthew 13:24–30). So now, on this side of heaven, we have tares – unbelievers and false prophets – growing among the wheat in God’s field, the world. The tares can even be found in the church – possibly sitting in the pew next to us, even trying to stir up trouble and dissension among us.ⁱⁱ The late Warren Wiersbe, a pastor and prolific author wrote, “Satan has a false gospel (Galatians 1:6–9) preached by false ministers (2 Corinthians 11:12–13), producing false Christians (2 Corinthians 11:26).” Wiersbe goes so far as to say this happens in every church: “Satan plants his counterfeits *wherever* God plants true believers (Matthew 13:38).”ⁱⁱⁱ This is why the title of Wiersbe’s *Be Alert*, a commentary on 2 Peter, 2–3 John and Jude is so appropriate.

Just as Jesus described the Enemy sneaking in at night and secretly planting tares in God’s field, Peter described these false teachers “secretly” bringing in destructive heresies. This is one reason they are so dangerous, because they sneak in and deceive people in the Church. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that they come like a wolf in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15).

These false teachers didn't portray themselves as opponents of Christianity; they distorted true Christianity based on their own ideas, not on the Word of God.^{iv} The NIV calls their teaching "fabricated stories" (2:3), and the CSB uses the phrase "made-up stories" (2:3). These are not just harmless fairy tales, though, they are "destructive heresies" (2:1). Their stories are dangerous and can destroy both the faith of the people who believe them as well as the unity of the Church.

Peter says these false teachers are motivated by two things – sensuality (2:2) and greed (2:3) – sex and money. How often have we seen these two things destroy a church? Peter wrote that many believers will follow their sensuality and "the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2:2). "The way" was the early church's terminology for Christianity. When we do not live by God's rules for sexual purity and follow our desires instead, we profane what is sacred, blaspheme the truth, and bring shame to Christianity itself.^v We see this happen in our world today, too, don't we? Every time a Christian leader has an affair, the reputation of the Church is tainted, and people are turned away from the truth of the Gospel because they don't see its being lived out in the lives of the people who profess it. Author Brennan Manning wrote, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and then walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."^{vi}

These false teachers were also motivated by greed. They exploited people for financial gain (2:3). We have seen this happen in our world today, too, many times over. How often do we hear about religious leaders who have been fleecing people for years? In the Old Testament, God had sharp words of judgment for leaders who used their flocks for their own gain rather than caring for them like a loving shepherd (Ezekiel 34).

These false teachers even "[deny] the Master who bought them" (2:1). We have been "bought with a price," (1 Corinthians 6:20) and a costly one – Christ's death. In his first letter, Peter wrote that we are redeemed not with perishable things like gold and silver, but with the precious, imperishable blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:19). So we no longer belong to ourselves; we belong to Christ. "Denying their Master" doesn't mean an overt verbal denial. These people claimed to be Christians, and their false teaching was sneaky and secretive. They denied His authority in their lives, as their "Master," by their actions, by their lifestyle of greed and sensuality.^{vii} Their actions revealed who they really served – themselves. A person who is truly made new with a heart that is truly changed will live differently – in a way that reflects Christ, not the passions of the flesh. As Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:15–20).

By using the word "blasphemed," Peter emphasized the severity of what they were doing. Blasphemy was a huge deal in the ancient world; the penalty for it was death (Leviticus 24:10–23). What these false teachers were doing deserved severe punishment.^{viii} The word used here for "sensuality" is a very strong word for sexual immorality, meaning wantonness or licentiousness, conduct shocking to public decency. It describes the attitude of those who follow their own sexual appetite with no concern for the judgment of either man or God.^{ix} So

Peter emphasized several times that these false teachers, who were causing destruction, would be met with destruction themselves in the Day of Judgment (2:1, 3). But God's punishment isn't unjust; they have brought it upon themselves (2:1). Whether they believe it or not, God will judge them for their sin. Peter doesn't say this to condemn them; he says it to warn them. Don't listen to these false teachers, listen to the truth of God's Word!

Q: Why would people confess to be Christians, but then live in sensuality and greed?

Q: How can we protect ourselves and our churches from the infiltration of false teachers? What safeguards can we put in place?

Q: What should we do if we see false teachers creeping into our churches?

Read 2 Peter 2:4–11

Talking Point 2: God will destroy the wicked but save the righteous.

Q: How does this analysis of God punishing the wicked relate to what Peter has discussed in the letter so far?

In defense of his statement that God will punish false teachers, Peter gave several examples of people and angels God punished in the Old Testament. All of this is evidence for his original thesis statement from chapter 1 (last week's lesson), that the Second Coming *would* happen, that Christ *would* return on the Day of Judgment (1:16–21; 3:3–10). This is the main thrust of the whole letter, this warning about the day of judgment. False teachers had been telling the people that Christ was not coming back, so they didn't have to worry about judgment (3:4). False teachers of every generation have said something similar, whether teaching universalism – that everyone goes to heaven no matter what they believe or do in this life – or teaching simply that there is no hell.

In fact, in our culture, the most recent statistics say that more Americans are choosing not to believe in hell at all, even Christians. As of 2016, while almost three-quarters of Americans believe in heaven, only about three-fifths of Americans believe in hell, even among religious people.^x Of course, no one *wants* to believe in eternal punishment. It's a whole lot more pleasant to imagine everyone going to eternal bliss. But what if hell is real? Wouldn't it be a whole lot better to know it's real so we can avoid it rather than just hoping it's not true? Peter's message is that hell is very real; there are a lot of people in it; and if we don't take our faith seriously, we could end up there, too. To defend his theological position, Peter used three notorious examples of sin and God's wrath from the Old Testament.

Fallen Angels: Peter references the sin of angels who fell into great wickedness (Genesis 6:1–4). Peter described these angels as “committed . . . to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment” (2:4).

Noah: This story is more familiar to us because it is in Genesis. Peter reminded them that, except for Noah and his family, God destroyed the entire world for their godlessness (2:5). The hearts of the people were filled with evil (Genesis 6:5).

Sodom and Gomorrah: Again, this story can be found in Genesis, but Peter added some details about Lot's frame of mind that are not found in the Old Testament – that Lot was “greatly distressed” by the wickedness of the people, that his righteous soul was “tormented” by living among them and seeing their “lawless deeds” day after day (2:7–8). As He did in the days of Noah, God destroyed the entire city of Sodom and Gomorrah, rescuing only Lot and his family because of Lot's righteousness.

Peter's conclusion is clearly stated in verses 9–10: God rescues the godly from trials and keeps the unrighteous under punishment until the Day of Judgment, especially those who defy authority and indulge in lustful passions as these false teachers were doing. Peter's point is abundantly clear – hell is real, and false teachers and those who follow them are going there, but God will save the righteous from eternal punishment. In each of these stories, the ratio of wicked people to righteous can feel overwhelming. Only one family is saved while the rest are destroyed. But Jesus said the gate that leads to life is narrow and few find it (Matthew 7:13–14).

This isn't because God is mean or exclusive. God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter made it clear that these men had brought destruction upon themselves (2:1). This is a warning. The gate that leads to destruction is wide and most people go that way (Matthew 7:13). Some people will be surprised when they aren't allowed to enter heaven, because Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you.” Jesus said these people may have done a lot of religious deeds, even “mighty works” in His name but did not do the will of His Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21–23), meaning they didn't live according to His law; they didn't submit to His authority as Master. Like these false teachers, they may have said they were Christians, but they denied Him with their lifestyle. This is what Peter warns his audience against. Do not follow these false teachers; follow God's Word! Hell is real, and you don't want to go there.

Q: Why don't a lot of churches talk about hell and judgment?

Q: How can we be honest with people, warning them about the reality of hell without making it seem like we're just trying to scare them into accepting Jesus?

True salvation will show itself in a changed life and a changed heart, with the Fruit of the Spirit growing in your life (James 2:17). We learned in lesson 10 that Peter wanted those who were truly saved to be assured of their salvation, but here we learn that he was also warning those who might be following false teaching to make sure they were really saved. Being a Christian isn't about just praying a prayer; it's about following Jesus with your life.

Q: How can we warn people who may be in this exact situation – people who claim they are Christians, but don't really know Jesus?

Q: How can we be confident in our own salvation?

Re-read 2 Peter 2:9–10.

Talking Point 3: God keeps the unrighteous under punishment until the Day of Judgment.

Q: What do these verses tell us about what happens to people between the time they die and the final judgment?

This is a small point, but one that is interesting to note when talking about heaven and hell. There are a lot of different theories about the end-times, and here Peter gives us a small clue that explains some of it. The Bible describes a final Day of Judgment when Jesus will separate the sheep, who will go off to eternal life, from the goats, who will go off to eternal punishment. As we noted in the last lesson, the final Judgment Day is the day that ushers in that final kingdom of God – the new heavens and the new earth. This kingdom is where we will live with Jesus for all eternity, what most of us think of as “heaven.” But what happens to people who die before that day? Do they jump immediately to the final Judgment Day since they are no longer bound by linear time? Do they go to a “pre-heaven” or a “pre-hell” until Judgment Day? Do they wait around in limbo until Judgment Day? These types of questions are what caused the Catholic Church to create the doctrine of purgatory.

Peter didn't address heaven here, but he did speak of a kind of “temporary hell” where the unrighteous are kept under punishment until the Day of Judgment (2:9). When he talked about the fallen angels, he described their place as a gloomy darkness where they were chained until the Judgment. Best-selling author Randy Alcorn postulates the same situation with heaven, which he calls “present heaven” (or “intermediate heaven”) and “future heaven.” The future heaven is that final kingdom which God has yet to create – the new heavens and the new earth. But in the meantime, until the final Day of Judgment, believers don't wait in purgatory or float around in space or go to a kind of cosmic cryogenics chamber. They go to a present heaven, where God's people are in Christ's presence, free of sin and suffering and enjoying great happiness.^{xi}

On this side of heaven, we may never know the details of how all of this works, and Alcorn's theory is just one among many. But Peter does make it clear that God has the wicked under punishment until the Day of Judgment. They are kept in gloomy darkness waiting to be judged, when they will be sent to the eternal punishment. We don't really need to know the details, but we *can* trust that God is in control and that God *will* punish the wicked. They aren't being released or let off with a warning or a slap on the wrist. They will be held in chains in punishment until the final Judgment and then go to hell for all eternity. This is not a pleasant image, but it's the truth! Our charge is simple – warn people about hell. Not because you are being judgmental or hateful, but because you love them. Because you don't want them to go there and suffer eternal judgment. In his epistle, Jude described our mission as saving people by

“snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 1:23). This was Peter’s final word to the people he so loved, and it should be our mission as well.

Q: Why is it so hard for us to talk to people about hell?

Q: Think about the people you know who don’t know Jesus at all and the people who claim to be Christians, but you aren’t sure where their heart is. Is God calling you to share Peter’s warnings about hell with someone?

Took

The story of the *Alabama* and its captain, Robert Phillips, was made into the movie, *Captain Phillips*. A lot of our movies and shows today depict good triumphing over evil despite times when it seems that evil has won. In a similar way, things in our lives often leave us feeling that the wicked are prevailing. However, we know that one day, on Judgment Day, we will all have to give an account, and the wicked will be judged. We can have hope because the Lord says that vengeance is mine, I will repay (Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19). He is a just and good God who loves His children.

Q: Why do you think the vast majority of movies depict the good side winning?

Q: How does the theme of good overcoming evil relate with the Gospel message?

CHALLENGES:

THINK: Know the truth of God's Word. Are you familiar enough with Scripture to recognize false prophets and teachers? The best way to spot false teaching is to know correct teaching. Make it a point to spend time in God's Word every day.

PRAY: For unsaved friends and family. Pray for their salvation, that the Holy Spirit will speak to them and open their hearts to the truth of God's Word. Pray for God to give you the right words to talk to them about following Jesus with their lives.

Give thanks to God for your salvation.

ACT: Share Peter's warnings. As hard as it may be, we need to share Peter's warnings about hell with our unsaved family and friends. We may have to work on *how*, to say it in a way that doesn't drive them further away, but we have to say something. As much as they may not want to hear it, it is the most loving thing we can do.

ⁱ "Amazing Rescues" *History*, Aug 22, 2018- <https://www.history.com/news/amazing-rescues>

ⁱⁱ Colin Smith, "7 Traits of False Teachers" *The Gospel Coalition*, Mar 18, 2013 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-traits-of-false-teachers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Alert: 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude: Beware of the Religious Imposters* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 87 (emphasis added).

^{iv} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

^v Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

^{vi} Brennan Manning, audio found before the song "What if I Stumble?" on DC Talk's 1995 album, *Jesus Freak*

^{vii} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

^{viii} Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

^{ix} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

^x <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx> - 71% in heaven; 64% in hell

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/10/most-americans-believe-in-heaven-and-hell/> - 72% in heaven; 58% in hell

^{xi} Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004).