

## A Blast From the Past

## II Peter 2:6

We are in another election cycle with the upcoming midterms in November. We just had the primaries this past week and with elections comes all kinds of political rhetoric. Politicians have gone on the offense and defense. One candidate says one thing and his or her opponent will extract a statement taking it out of context for political gain and claim that their opponent said “(and you fill in the blank)”. Or they might have to backtrack a statement and say that they were misunderstood, what they meant to say or how it should have been phrased was “(again, you fill in the blank)”.

It’s easy to pull things out of context from the original statement. People do it with the Bible. To build a doctrine or belief system to live by they will lift a phrase and say the Bible says this. For example they might claim that –

The Bible says spoil the child

The Bible says steal

The Bible says lie

The Bible says commit adultery

The Bible says take the name of the Lord in vain

The Bible says covet your neighbor’s wife and possessions

Of course we know those are taken out of context because reading the whole passage gives an entirely different understanding and meaning to the passage.

The Bible actually says spare the rod, spoil the child

The Bible actually says you shall not steal

The Bible actually says you shall not lie

The Bible actually says you shall not commit adultery

The Bible actually says you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain

The Bible actually says you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or possessions

Many have come to believe that the Bible says “There is no God.”

Of course, again in the context of the passage it actually says something entirely different.

“The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”

Now people don’t necessarily have to come right out and say they don’t believe there is a God, their actions make it clear that they believe there is no God. Or if they do happen to believe there is a God, they believe that His Word doesn’t matter, He won’t do what He says, or can’t do what He says, or He doesn’t care about what’s going on down here on the third planet from the sun.

That was essentially the mindset of the people in Noah’s day. They either didn’t believe that God existed or didn’t care if God existed because it seemed quite obvious to them that when God said He would punish sin with death through a flood, death didn’t actually happen for a hundred years or so, so God must not really mean it or He His words are just idle threats.

How many of you have been shopping in the grocery store or trying to have a nice casual dinner at a family restaurant only to overhear a parent warn a misbehaving child that they’re going to count to three and if they don’t stop misbehaving a time out will be given the child only to have the child continue but receive no punishment from the highly exasperated and irritated parent? The child knows the parent won’t follow through.

That’s how some folks view God. He won’t do what He says. So they keep misbehaving. The people of Noah’s day must have had the same mentality. God won’t punish so let’s keep on misbehaving. That’s why it’s said of them “that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

But then we learned two weeks ago that God did keep His word and punishment came just as He said. To the people God won’t do it, because He hasn’t. But to God His longsuffering love and

mercy gave way to His wrath. How many of you know that God is longsuffering and loving? How many of you know that God is holy and will punish sin? Their heart would not change no matter how long He waited for them to repent and so God did what He said. The whole earth was destroyed.

God said in the garden, if you disobey, you'll die. That has never changed. How many of you believe that history repeats itself? Philosopher George Santayana has famously stated "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it."

My history professor in college used to say that history is cyclical, essentially saying the same thing that history will repeat itself. Just read through the Old Testament and you see that time and time again history repeated itself just among the nation of Israel. They would stray from following God. God would allow some kind of calamity as a form of judgment, they would repent, He would deliver them, for a while they would follow God, but then the cycle would be repeated all over again.

At the flood, God severely judged the entire world for their unwillingness to believe that He existed and rewarded those who seek Him. That is, all except Noah and his family. Out of the entire world population only 8 believed and were saved.

Following the flood, the earth began to heal and the population began to grow. A couple centuries and a few chapters later we find that they once again were disobedient to God. He had told them to go and populate the earth, but instead they congregated in the plain of Shinar. They began to build a tower. God judged them by confusing their language. Let's fast forward to Abraham and Lot. After traveling around a bit, they settled once again in the land of Canaan the place God promised as an inheritance to Abraham's descendants. The two had become quite wealthy and needed extra elbow space. Lot was given his pick of the land and chose the Jordan plain near the cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah, which reminded him of the rich, fertile lands in Egypt. History is about to repeat itself. The judgment of God is about to fall on that place. Scripture gives us a warning from past judgment, a warning about present judgment, and a warning about pending judgment. We begin in our text II Peter 2:6.

## I. A WARNING SIGN FROM PAST JUDGMENT

As I said about the other two examples of judgment given to us in verses 4 and 5 I want to repeat here. These serve as examples of the God's judgment that awaits those who are false teachers and the kind of judgment that awaits any who reject the truth of the Gospel. We read in verse 1 that what they believe and teach is to deny the Lord who bought them. These examples also serve as a warning. It's a shot across the bow essentially saying that if you don't follow God and trust Christ you too will be judged in the same way. You won't be instantly consumed by water as we saw with the flood or with fire as we will see today, but judgment awaits that person who rejects Christ.

Let's take a look at the place of judgment.

### A. The Place of Judgment

Our text tells us that the condemned cities were Sodom and Gomorrah. We also read in Jude 7 that it included the surrounding towns. They were located in the Jordan valley. These two towns seem to be the prominent places of trade and commerce in the area. Early archaeologists believed that they were in the northern part of the Dead Sea, but later excavation has them located in the southern part of the Dead Sea on a long fault line. Geologists believe there was major earthquake activity in the area during that time. They have also discovered large tar pit deposits. Unger's Bible Dictionary states that there is evidence suggesting that the destruction of these cities was due in large part to

geological activity where “the salt and free Sulphur of this area, now a region of oil and asphalt, were apparently mingled by an earthquake, causing a violent explosion. Carried up into the air red-hot, the exploding salt and Sulphur literally caused a rain of fire and brimstone over the whole plain.” While the Bible describes the miraculous nature of the event of their destruction, God can and does at times use natural events to bring about His plans and in this case the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Many scholars today believe that these cities are underneath the Dead Sea, completely destroyed by the rain of fire that fell on them.

The plains of the Jordan valley and specifically Sodom and Gomorrah with their surrounding cities were the place of this judgment. Next we see the plan for judgment.

## B. The Plan for Judgment

II Peter 2:6 says that their punishment will be by burning the cities to ashes.

Jude 7 says basically that what happened to them serves as an example of what will happen to those who will burn with eternal fire. So the insinuation from this verse is judgment by fire.

Ezekiel 16:50 says that God did away with them. Genesis 19:24 says that God rained down burning sulfur.

God has and will judge by fire.

I was helping my Dad one day do some welding on a car. He was doing the welding and I was using channel locks to hold the piece to the frame of the car on the driver’s side near the floor board. He paused to take a look at his weld and lowered the torch – on the back of my hand. That hurt – a lot.

A friend of mine was a volunteer firefighter. To practice fire procedures they were going to burn down a vacant house. I was invited to watch. The

fire was so hot, the spectators on the far side of the road got a rash from the intense heat.

God’s method of judgment on these cities was to burn them to the ground and reduce them to ash. Throughout Scripture fire used as a description of God’s judgment.

Isaiah 29:6 “From the LORD of hosts you will be punished with thunder and earthquake and loud noise, with whirlwind and tempest and the flame of a consuming fire.”

Isaiah 34:9 “Its streams will be turned into pitch, and its loose earth into brimstone, and its land will become burning pitch.”

Isaiah 66:16 “For the LORD will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the LORD will be many.”

Jeremiah 15:14 “Then I will cause your enemies to bring it into a land you do not know; for a fire has been kindled in My anger, It will burn upon you.”

Ezekiel 30:8 "And they will know that I am the LORD, when I set a fire in Egypt and all her helpers are broken.”

Ezekiel 38:22 "With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone.”

Ezekiel 28:18 "By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries. Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you; it has consumed you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you.”

Amos 7:4 “Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend with them by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land.”

2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12 “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up... looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”

Revelation 8:7 “The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”

God’s plan was a judgment by fire to consume them. The term used literally means to reduce to ashes or cover with ashes. But why? What was the purpose for judgement?

### C. The Purpose For Judgment

Now as we consider this point I want you to realize that I tread on a very difficult and sensitive topic. I realize that this is something that has touched many homes including those of our congregation. I also want you to take my words out of the way and just read God’s Word and see what it has to say. My words are fallible, God’s Word is not.

I also realize that there are risks here.

There is the risk of my being misunderstood.

There is the risk of my being rejected.

There is the risk of my being labeled.

There may come a day in our country, like already in Canada, where there is the risk that what I say will be considered hate speech.

There is the risk you won’t agree with me.

Our text says that Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of what will happen to the ungodly.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary describes their actions as intolerable wickedness. God had seen enough.

In Jude 7 we read that they were judged because they had given themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion the term referring to homosexuality.

Genesis 19 details the explicit nature of their sin. The chapter relates how two angels of God came to Sodom and were going to spend the night in the town square but Lot insisted they come under the hospitality and protection of his roof. It goes on to say that at night all the men, young and old alike, came to Lot’s home, banged on the door demanding that he turn the two men over so that they could essentially gang rape them through a homosexual act. They didn’t know the two men were angels in human form.

John MacArthur describes this sin as equally shocking as that of the sin in Genesis 6. “They perverted God’s intended design for them by soliciting sexual favors from His holy messengers. ‘Gross immorality’ translates a compound word which suggests that their homosexual behavior and attempted fornication was especially deviant from the God-ordained design for human sexuality.”

Let me add here that God’s design for sexual intimacy was to be between a man and a woman who were husband and wife. Genesis 2:24-25 is God’s design for marriage and nowhere else in Scripture is that altered.

The law as given in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 make it clear that what these men were attempting to do was a detestable act in God’s eyes. In other words, God hates it. It’s an abomination. It was considered a capital offense and those who engaged in it were to be put to death. Now there are those today who will say that it only applied to those living under the Old Testament Law. And since Jesus never said anything against it, it must be permissible under New Testament grace. To that I

would say that Jesus was very clear about marriage. In Mark 7 a question came to Jesus about divorce. His answer in verse 7 stresses what marriage was to be from the beginning as He refers to Genesis 2. If His words seem ambiguous let's consider another passage that makes the matter of Genesis 19 clear. Romans 1:18-32

This topic is very volatile even amongst the church. But I want to pause here and take a breath. Because what we have just talked about is very sobering. God brought judgment on two cities for their homosexual behavior. Unfortunately the evangelical church wants to camp on that one aspect of their immoral character as the reason God brought judgment and fail to miss other Scripture that is just as condemning. But the fact of the matter is that what should be more sobering is that God's judgment, God's eternal judgment is very sobering and it's not just because of one type of sin. God's judgment will be against all sin.

Here's what we tend to forget. We forget that all sin is reprehensible to God. We forget that all sin is rebellion against a holy God. We forget that we have all sinned. We want to point a judgmental finger at the sin of others and call on God to judge them all the while failing to remember that our sin is just as reprehensible.

We tend to believe that our sin, if we even acknowledge it isn't as bad as that one. But that's our standard not God's.

We read in Romans 3:23 that we are all sinners and according to 6:23 that all sin incurs God's wrath and His punishment.

Before we get all too high and mighty let's read a passage that should take us off the pedestal of self-righteousness and put us in our proper place before a holy God.

Proverbs 6:16-19

Okay maybe we can knock off a couple of those things. We haven't shed innocent blood or devised

wicked schemes or even rushed to do evil. But how about those others mentioned?

Haughty or proud eyes

A lying tongue, even just a little seemingly innocent white lie

Have we ever been a false witness?

Have we ever caused dissension?

My point is this: It's possible to get so focused on the sins of others or the sin of what was happening in Genesis 19 as the reason God should judge them and totally miss our own wheel barrel of sin.

I believe that Peter's point isn't to isolate one particular sin as the reason Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned and received punishment, although I think Genesis 19 is clear the kind of sin it was and the reason those cities were judged. Peter's point was to show that sin if left unrepented of will incur the wrath of God and receive His judgment. It will be both final and eternal. Genesis 18-19 tell us that God came down Himself, even though He knows all things and is everywhere, in order to see how great the sin was in those cities.

Again, we can't single out one sin as being more detestable than others because when we read all of Leviticus 18 and 20 we see that homosexuality is just one of the many sins that God is opposed to. Those chapters speak about all kinds of heterosexual sins that are outside the covenant of marriage as well as bestiality and idolatry. We also read in Deuteronomy 14:3 and Malachi 2:11 that eating unclean food or marrying an unbeliever (in the OT someone outside Israel) was considered detestable to God.

And while the death penalty in the Old Testament was assigned to homosexual behavior, it was also to be the punishment for those who committed murder, adultery, and those who cursed or repeatedly disobeyed their parents.

In Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus puts into perspective

what is really most egregious. Reading from the Message Jesus says: "Next Jesus let fly on the cities where He had worked the hardest but whose people had responded the least, shrugging their shoulders and going their own way. 'Doom to you, Chorazin! Doom, Bethsaida! If Tyre and Sidon had seen half of the powerful miracles you have seen, they would have been on their knees in a minute. At Judgment Day they'll get off easy compared to you. And Capernaum! With all your peacock strutting, you are going to end up in the abyss. If the people of Sodom had had your chances, the city would still be around. At Judgment Day they'll get off easy compared to you.'" "

Jesus had performed some tremendous miracles in those cities and they still rejected Him. Essentially He is saying that rejecting Him was a far worse sin than what Sodom committed. But we could also say that their sin was in reality a rejection of the Lord, because all sin is rebellion against Him.

And then returning back to Romans 1, homosexuality is not an isolated sin. At the end of the chapter it is included along with idolatry, fornication, greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, hating God, insolence, arrogance, boasting, disobeying parents, insensitivity, unfaithfulness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness.

God condemns all sin equally.

Now as I said earlier, I could spend a lot of time on this topic and there is more to research and discuss. I want to emphasize that Peter's point in chapter 2 is to highlight that God will bring judgment as evidenced by the examples of the past. There isn't any one particular sin that will bring punishment more than another, all sin does equally. We need to take a look at our own heart and repent. This warning is for us to ask if we have rejected God and turn to Him for salvation in order to avoid the judgment that will come to those who continue to reject Him.

The past serves as a warning sign of judgment. The present also serves as a warning sign of judgment.

## II. A WARNING SIGN ABOUT PRESENT JUDGEMENT

When hurricane Katrina devastated the region of New Orleans we heard pastors jump on board the judgment band wagon and talk about God's punishment on them because of certain sins.

When 9/11 happened and several thousand people lost their lives to terrorist attacks, pastors got on the judgmental bandwagon and blamed greed.

I'm sure there are pastors who are blaming the sins of Hollywood for the deadly fires in California. Can and does God use disasters like this to bring judgment? Yes He can, does and will. Yet we shouldn't be so quick to claim we understand the mind and will of God in any particular situation to emphatically state that it is God's punishment of sin. People want to assign the judgment of God on every little thing that happens. That's what Job's friends believed. He must have done something wrong to incur that kind of personal nightmare.

The disciples thought the same thing when they saw a blind man and asked Jesus who sinned resulting in his being born blind. Jesus said that no one had sinned, not the parents and not the man. He was born blind so that God's glory could be seen.

All that said, we can say that what is happening today in the present are warning signs of God's judgement. So while we shouldn't look with such condemning eyes at every bad thing as God's hand of judgment it may be that God's hand is on that person or nation because of sin and make sure we too aren't rejecting God but instead obeying Him. I remember being about 11 or 12 when Dad marched my brother upstairs so that he could introduce the board of education to the seat of

knowledge. I sat in the living room hearing what was going on upstairs all the while thinking “I’ll never be bad again. I’ll never be bad again.”

Perhaps that’s the warning for us in the present as we consider the judgments that took place in the past. It should serve as a warning to those who still reject God that He will bring judgment for their continued rejection and that they should repent.

Unfortunately history is repetitive and we need to see it as a warning sign that judgment is pending.

### III. A WARNING SIGN ABOUT PENDING JUDGMENT

Just because God seems to be delaying judgment now doesn’t mean it won’t happen in the future.

Scripture is very clear that there is a pending judgment that will occur in the future.

Matthew 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

John 3:16 is obvious that those who don’t believe or have faith in the Lord will not be saved but will perish.

John 3:36 says that anyone who rejects the son will not see life.

John 5:24 says that if you hear and do not believe you stand condemned.

Revelation 20:11-15 is about pending judgment culminating in the Great White Judgment. Those whose names are not found written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire, a place of eternal judgement for their rejection of God and His gift of salvation through Christ.

Warning signs serve as a means to alter or change direction in order to avoid something devastating that may happen. Past judgments serve as an example of what will happen to those who refuse to

heed the warnings. We considered the warning of the flood and the rescue of Noah and his family last week. Next we’ll consider the rescue of Lot from a similar peril, but we also see that judgment came to those who had rejected God as evidenced by open and blatant immorality.

These warnings are ours to heed as well. They should encourage us, even persuade us, to avoid such eternal destruction when the means of our salvation is so readily available. My prayer is that all of you have made a decision to follow Christ, trusting Him as your Savior. If not, today is the day to hear His voice and believe on Him for eternal life. Don’t play with the judgment of fire by waiting. Heed the warning signs today and become a part of God’s forever family.

Thom Rainer writes that “death came into the world with the sin of man. Eternal life came into the world with the death and resurrection of Jesus.”

It doesn’t really matter what you believe about the cause of Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction. What is clear is that they were judged and completely destroyed. Their judgment was final and eternal as will be the same for any who turn their back on God. They serve as a warning. The choice we make now will determine whether we receive God’s paradise or God’s punishment, God’s rescue or God’s retribution. He’s given the warning. What will be your decision?

He is asking us to choose wisely.