WHEN GOD JUDGES  
2 Peter 2:4-10

Introduction:

Some people see two Gods revealed in the Bible. In the Old Testament they see a God of judgment who rains destruction upon those who offend Him. In the New Testament they see a God of love revealed in Jesus Christ who knows nothing of judgment. In most cases they like the New Testament version of God rather than the Old Testament. However, such a division in the revelation of God will not stand up to a careful study of the Bible. There is only one God revealed in the Bible. He is both the God of judgment and the God of love. Whichever part of His nature is expressed depends upon the circumstances which confront Him.

Our text demonstrates this. The chief Apostle of Jesus Christ, Simon Peter, cites the Old Testament expressions of the divine judgment to predict what is going to happen to New Testament sinners. If men act like men did in those days, they can rightfully expect that God will act today like He did then. He has not changed in His attitude toward sin in any way. We can learn some important things about the judgment of God from this passage. Consider some of them with me.

I. WHEN GOD JUDGES, HIS JUDGMENT IS UNSPARING.

In warning the false teachers, and those who would follow them, Peter reminds them of this quality in the divine judgment. He writes, "whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." This is a clear reference to the certainty of their judgment at the hand of God. And then to support this, he turns to the Old Testament where the "unsparing" quality of the divine judgment has been demonstrated. "For if God spared not the angels that sinned." This reminds us of an important spiritual truth. The only way we can know for sure what God is like is for God to reveal Himself. God has chosen to reveal Himself in His acts and in His words. These Old Testament acts of God are recorded for us so that we can know what kind of God He is. We can know that He is unsparing in His Judgment.

The three examples cited by Peter are quite impressive. Each of them may be intended to present a different aspect of this unsparing quality of the divine judgment.

God is unsparing regardless of the position of the sinner. The angels occupied a high and lofty position. As the special ministers of God, they had special access to His presence. Yet when they sinned, God did not spare them. But rather their judgment fell upon them at once.

What was the sin of the angels? Peter does not tell us. Some believe that Peter was influenced by the views that were current among the Jews at that time. According to some of the writings in the Apocryphal literature of the time, the sin of the angels involved cohabiting with women. They understood the references to the "sons of God" in Genesis six to be reference to angels coming down to earth and having sexual relations with women. They forsook the role God had assigned them, and took up another role. This may be true, but there is not a lot of Biblical evidence for it.

Others have understood the sin of the angels to be the sin of pride which was committed in heaven. They followed Lucifer, or Satan, who had been a chief angel of God, in his rebellion against God. This is surely true of the original fall of a company of angels.

But the truth set forth by Peter does not depend upon the nature of their sin, but is rather an affirmation concerning the judgment of God. The truth that needs to sober us is that even an angel of God cannot escape the judgment of God if he enters into sin. Your position will be no protection. You may have occupied a high and important position in the work of God, but that will make no difference. You will not be spared because of who you are.
God is unsparing regardless of the popularity of the sin. "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." There is no safety in numbers. In acts of civil disobedience sometimes people are spared because of the numbers that are involved. The government just cannot send everyone to jail. This was used in destroying this country's commitment to the prohibition of alcohol, and is being used in our day to try to change the drug laws of the land. If enough people do it, the government will change. But God is not like that. The numbers involved will not effect the judgment of God.

In the day of Noah only eight people were not involved. It was literally true that everyone was doing it. Yet God did not spare those who had sinned. Rather he destroyed the whole world with a baptism of judgment. He buried the world in a watery grave.

Has the devil been using this old line on you? Has he been telling you that it must be alright since so many people are doing it? Has that been the basis of your moral decisions? Have you justified the violations of your conscience on that basis? Friend, you need to be mindful of this! Your being a part of a large number of sinners will make absolutely no difference to God. His judgment does not spare because the whole world becomes committed to the sin.

God is unsparing regardless of the prosperity of the sinners. "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly." The thing that attracted Lot to Sodom and Gomorrah was their prosperity. They had all of the outward signs of the good life. Those of us who equate material prosperity with God's approval need to remember these two cities. But in the midst of their prosperity they had no place for God. They became a very indulgent people. They became so corrupt in their lifestyle that they finally gave themselves to the sexual pleasures that still bear their name unto this very day. What was the sin of Sodom? Peter does not tell us. He simply says that they are an example of what happens to those who live "ungodly." This means simply that they have no place or regard for God in their lives. Their sexual perversion evidently began with this. But the truth we need to see is that their prosperity could not buy off the judgment of God. The judgment of God will be known wherever sin occurs.

This word "spared not" occurs in two other interesting places in the New Testament. Paul used it twice in the Roman letter. In Romans 8:32 he tells us that "God spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all." When the sin of the world was placed on Jesus the Son of God, God's judgment fell on Him. If God did not spare His own son, he will not spare you. The other reference is in Romans 11:21 where we are told that God did not spare the natural branches. When His own people became a sinful and wayward people, He did not spare them. Put it down! When God judges, His judgment is unsparing. You will not escape.

II. WHEN GOD JUDGES, HIS JUDGMENT IS PROGRESSIVE.

This is a very helpful passage in gaining an understanding of the process of the divine judgment. It is better understood as a process rather than as just an isolated act. In each case there are at least three steps involved in the process of judgment.

The judgment of God begins with physical destruction. I am not sure what that step may have involved in the case of the angels, but it clearly involved death on the part of the world and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It involved the loss of position at least on the part of the angels. They were "cast down." But it is a serious mistake to think that physical death is the end of the judgment of God. This is just step one in the on-going process.

The second step involves spiritual confinement. Of the angels we read, "but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into the chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." The word translated "hell" in this verse is the word used by the Greeks in their mythology. It was used of the deepest depths of hell. It was hell as a place of punishment and imprisonment.
The expression translated "chains of darkness" is probably better translated "pits of darkness." Our word "silo" comes from this Greek word translated "pits." But this is just not the plight of the angels who sin. Peter adds as he summarizes this passage, "But the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of Judgment to be punished." Ungodly men who die find themselves "kept" in a place of confinement, where they are now undergoing a terrible experience of judgment, waiting for the final day of judgment. The ungodly do not wait until the final judgment to begin to receive the recompense of their deeds. They are receiving it right now.

But this whole process will be climaxed in a terrible day of judgment in which the wicked dead will stand before God personally to give an account of their lives. On that day God will have before Him a complete record of every wicked deed and word that has come from their lives. He will also have a complete record of what the influence of their lives has produced in terms of wickedness. There before the eyes of a wondering universe they will hear Him say, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you." Each will be cast into the final lake of fire, the bottomless pit, to spend an eternity with the devil and his followers, receiving for eternity the wages for their sins.

Modern man has accepted the idea that God is love, and that God will not judge men. The emphasis of this passage throughout is upon responsibility for what happens to him. Peter begins by telling us that they "Bring upon themselves swift destruction." All that God does is give man the right to choose the wrong road, to follow false teachers. Those who follow God's way will not do so because there were no other alternatives. Rather they will do so because they have deliberately said "yes" to the overtures of God toward them.

Others among us have bought the idea that death is the end of man. Their view of man does not include any life beyond death. I can not conclusively prove to you that there is life beyond death, 'but we do have the convincing resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and His witness to the life that is out there. Have you ever considered the consequences of your guessing wrong on this matter? Just suppose that you are wrong. Just suppose two seconds after you die you find yourself in a place of terrible torment as the Bible describes it. What then? It will be too late to make any changes.

The clear witness of Scripture is that there is a terrible, eternal judgment after death. All sin and ungodliness leads to this certain confrontation with holy God. God knows how to handle the whole matter.

Conclusion:

Is there a way to escape judgment? Yes! Both Noah and Lot found the way out. God knows how to protect those who put their trust in Him. He becomes their hiding place when the storm of wrath breaks. When God judges the world, will you have a hiding place?