

Most People Don't Get It

In many of the stories in the Bible God sends a message and the majority of the people who hear the message do not heed the message. Before we look at various examples from the Bible to illustrate this point, it is important to understand that the main motivation for God when he sends a message to us is his supreme love for us. The apostle John wrote, "God is love"¹. The prophet Jeremiah put it like this:

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."²

Jeremiah is often called "the weeping prophet". Through Jeremiah God was warning Israel of the coming destruction of Jerusalem because they turned away from the love of God. Jesus Christ laments over the city in this passage:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"³

God's message of love went unheeded by the vast majority. Most people don't get it. This pattern is often repeated in the Bible. Let's first look at three examples from the Old Testament. Genesis chapter six, everyone is familiar with the story of the flood.

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth-- men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air-- for I am grieved that I have made them."

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.⁴

God instructs Noah how to build an ark to escape the coming destruction. It took many years for Noah to build the ark but he was only able to convince his immediate family the flood was coming.

... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,⁵

In this next passage the apostle Peter uses the flood and also Sodom and Gomorrah as examples to make the point that God is able to protect those he chooses from the destruction that results from evil behavior.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;

if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men

¹ 1 John 4:16

² Jeremiah 31:3

³ Matthew 23:37-39

⁴ Genesis 6:5-8

⁵ 1 Peter 3:20

(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.⁶

Before destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah God pays a visit to Abraham and tells him what he is about to do. Notice this conversation between God and Abraham:

Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?

Far be it from you to do such a thing-- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,

what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.⁷

Why did Abraham stop at ten? Did he think: surely there must be at least ten righteous people there? Was he too afraid to trouble God further? We don't know. What we do know though is that there were indeed not ten righteous people in those cities. God went ahead and destroyed them. Another example is Israel in the desert. God chose Moses to rescue Israel from slavery in Egypt and lead them into the land he promised to them. God instructed Moses to take a census after they escaped from Egypt.

All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel's army were counted according to their families.

The total number was 603,550.⁸

Because they were always turning away from God in their unbelief God had them wander in the desert forty years. How many of that initial 603,550 actually entered Canaan?

"How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites.

So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say:

In this desert your bodies will fall-- every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

⁶ 2 Peter 2:4-9

⁷ Genesis 18:23-33

⁸ Numbers 1:45-46

Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.⁹

So of the more than 600,00 that left Egypt only two made it out of the desert. When Moses sent spies to scout out the land of Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb returned to the camp with a report that they could conquer the land with God's help. The other ten spies complained that they were "like grasshoppers" in comparison to the Canaanites. Because of their show of faith, Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the land at the end of their years of wandering in the wilderness. In the New Testament the writer to the Hebrews uses this episode as an example to encourage followers of Christ to greater faithfulness.

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert,

where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.

That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'

So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?

And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?

And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.¹⁰

Let's say you are one of the typical people living in Noah's time. Your beliefs are similar to your neighbors. We see from our study today that you and your neighbor's lives are not in agreement with God. How about the average citizen in Sodom, or Israel in the desert? Even though Israel saw God do spectacular miracles for them, they still fell prey to unbelief. How about today? Just because you are very much like your friends, family or neighbors does not mean you are doing right. History from God's point of view shows most people going astray with disastrous results. These stories are told to us so that we can learn a lesson. We must pay specific attention to following God or we too will face a similar fate. The apostle Paul writes:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

They all ate the same spiritual food

and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

⁹ Numbers 14:27-30

¹⁰ Hebrews 3:7-19

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.¹¹

We have been looking at examples from the Old Testament where the prevailing popular attitude was not in agreement with God's point of view. In the following passage Jesus Christ criticizes the cities that did not accept his teaching.

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."¹²

"more bearable for Sodom..." Jesus makes a very clear connection and unfavorable comparison between the communities that did not accept his teaching and the Old Testament examples we have been looking at. Just as in the previous examples most did not accept the teaching of Jesus. He also makes a connection to a future "day of judgment". Jesus continues on that theme here:

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything.

Remember Lot's wife!

Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.

Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."¹³

Most people did not pay attention to God's message in the examples we looked at from the Old Testament. Jesus Christ directs our attention to these examples to encourage us to be prepared for a similar future event. The date of which cannot be predicted. Therefore you should live your life paying attention to God's instructions so you will be prepared.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."¹⁴

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:1-6

¹² Matthew 11:20-26

¹³ Luke 17:26-35

Most people don't get it. Just as it was in the past, most people today are not paying attention to God's instructions. The apostle Paul writes here to people who are preparing themselves by following the teachings of Jesus Christ. He tells them to encourage one another.

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.¹⁵

The apostle Peter encourages believers to continue in their efforts to be faithful despite opposition from scoffers. He encourages believers to live in agreement with God's choices and to strive to grow in knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ. Get it?

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives

as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

¹⁴ Matthew 24:42-44

¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.¹⁶

AUTHOR: James Rattazzi **DATE:** July 2003



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¹⁶ 2 Peter 3:1-18