

THE STUDY OF 1 & 2 PETER
2 PETER 3:1-13
NOTES

JESUS CHRIST IS COMING BACK!

Throughout the centuries, the reality of that promise has formed the crux of Christian expectation. It is the church's blessed hope (Titus 2:11-14), her utmost longing (Rom.8:23), and the great crowning point of salvation history (Matt. 25:31-46). A time of redemption for believers (Eph. 4:30) and a time of judgment for God's enemies (2 Thess. 2:1-12). It also marks the inauguration of Christ's earthy kingdom (Rev. 20:6), during which the saints will reign with Him in holiness (2 Tim. 2:12). The hope of bodily resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-18), spiritual reward and a righteous world system (Isa. 9:6-7) are all tied to Jesus' return. It is no wonder, then, that the early church found tremendous comfort in the second coming. After all, the readers of this epistle had already endured much persecution from outside the church. Now they were experiencing internal turmoil from false teachers. They longed for the return of their Savior—the Judge who would make all things right.

In the second chapter of this letter Peter has given us a graphic description of the sexual licentiousness, the love of money, and the rejection of authority by which the false teachers were denying the Master who bought them, Jesus Christ. He warns the churches vividly that if they are enticed out of the way of righteousness and abandon their obedience to Christ, it will be worse for them in the final judgment than if they had never known the way. It is a very sobering word for people who sit under gospel preaching but refuse to give themselves wholly to the Savior.

In chapter 3 Peter returns in part to the theme of chapter 1, namely, that God has given his people precious and very great promises, so that if we hold them in front of us and trust them, we will have power to resist temptation and remain in the way of righteousness. You can see in verses 13–14 the connection between the *hope* which the promises inspire and the *power* for godliness which this hope gives. *"According to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace."* Confident

expectation of a new world of righteousness empowers us to live for peace and purity in this world.

The devil also recognized how important this doctrine is to the church. When Christians live in anticipation of Christ's promised return, they demonstrate spiritual zeal and enthusiasm, recognizing that they will soon give an account to their Master (Rom. 13:11). As the apostle John wrote, "*it is a purifying hope*" (1 John 3:3). But, when believers forget about the second coming and begin focusing instead on the things of this world, they become absorbed in the temporal and grow apathetic and cold toward the eternal. Satan knows that if he can get the church to discount the importance of Christ's return, or even completely deny its reality, he can remove a very significant source of Christian hope and motivation. To that end the devil continually places skeptics and false teachers within the church, men who reject, minimize or alter Jesus' promise. These cynics who plague Christians today, were also around in Peter's time.

In our passage today, Peter responds directly to the false teachers' attacks. First, he considers the incorrect arguments they made against the second coming. Second, he answers those allegations, providing counter arguments which support Christ's return. Finally, he concludes by assuring his readers that, no matter what the heretics say, God's future judgment is certain.

IMMORALITY

The passage of time soon threatened the church's sense of expectancy. Some of the Christians to whom Peter wrote were beginning to doubt if Jesus was even coming back at all. They worried that their hope was not as sure as they had first believed.

The false teachers were quick to capitalize on such fears—planting seeds of further doubt and nurturing apocalyptic anxiety. As a first line of defense, Peter exhorted his readers to "***know this first of all.***" Peter's primary goal was to warn his readers about the false teachers' tactics—namely, that they were purposefully denying the return of Christ in order to indulge their own sinful exploits without facing consequences.

Immorality is the real reason that false teachers deny the second coming. "***...in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own***

lusts.” The word **following after** is a form of the verb *poreuomai*, which literally means “travel” or “go.” It denotes a course of conduct or long-term behavior. For false teachers, their lifestyles focus on **their own lusts** and sensuality. Thus they deny Christ’s return because they hate the thought of divine retribution. They want the freedom to pursue all kinds of lustful pleasures without any fear of future punishment.

Aldous Huxley, the famous atheist of the last century, once admitted that his rejection of Christianity stemmed from his desire to sin. He wrote:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had not; and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning for this world is not concerned exclusively with the problem of pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to.... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political. The liberation we desired was simultaneously a liberation from a certain political and economic system and a liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom."

This means that when you’re sharing the gospel, you should not be intimidated by a Ph.D. who argues in favor of evolution or who cites arguments from the latest popular atheist. Don’t panic if someone says, “I don’t believe in the Bible because of its contradictions.” You can give philosophic arguments for the existence of God or scientific arguments against evolution all day long, but even if you were to convince the unbeliever intellectually, you have not dealt with his main problem. His main problem is that he loves his sin and he stands guilty before the holy Judge of the universe.

Yes, you can have good answers to these intellectual questions... but they are usually not the real issue. You can ask the person raising the objection, “*Are you saying that if I can give reasonable answers to these questions, you will repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Savior and Lord?*” Invariably, the answer will be, “*Well, I have other objections, too.*” The objections are smokescreens to hide the fact that unbelievers love their sin.

UNIFORMITARIANISM

The taunting question ***“Where is the promise of His coming?”*** introduced a denial of the Lord’s return based on a re-interpretation of history. To support their misguided view, the false teachers claimed that, ***“ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”***

The heretics argument was simple. If everything ***“continues just as it was from the beginning of creation”*** (meaning that the universe is a divinely created but closed, naturalistic system of cause and effect), then divine intervention—including the return of Christ—must be ruled out.

In modern times, that view is known as uniformitarianism. Contending that the present is the key to the past, uniformitarianism asserts that the only natural processes that have ever operated in the past are the same processes at work today. It categorically denies divine intervention throughout world history, most notably opposing both six-day creation and the global flood.

Uniformitarianism was first proposed near the beginning of the nineteenth century by two British geologists, James Hutton and his best-known disciple, Charles Lyell. Lyell’s work *Principles of Geology* was an explicit rejection of creation and flood-based explanations for geological formulations. Lyell insisted that all the features of earth’s geology must be explainable by natural, rather than supernatural, processes. He regarded all biblical or supernatural explanations as inherently unscientific and therefore false. In other words, he began with the presupposition that Scripture itself is untrue. And his work essentially canonized atheistic naturalism as the basis for "scientific" research.

Lyell’s uniformitarian theory was enormously influential on other scientists of his age. (Darwin even took a copy of Lyell’s work with him when he sailed on the *Beagle* in 1831.) And from the first publication of Lyell’s work until today, the hypothesis that the earth is ages old has dominated secular science. The theory of evolution itself was the predictable and nearly immediate result of Lyell’s uniformitarian hypothesis.

CREATION

“For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the work of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 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.” (3:5-7)

The New Testament writers often appealed to Old Testament history to make a point, as did Jesus on several occasions. It is not surprising that Peter would do the same. In this case he used the Old Testament history to further defend the second coming.

When the false teachers maintained their uniformitarian view of history, they ignored historical facts. The words, ***“escapes their notice”*** actually carries a more negative connotation, expressed better by the King James version *“willingly are ignorant of.”* The facts did not elude these mockers, but rather they purposefully shut their eyes to the truth. They willfully ignored the historical evidence choosing to disregard the biblical accounts of divine retribution. Because they loved their sin, wanting to live as they pleased they made a conscious choice not to consider the final consequences.

As a result of their choice of blindness, the false teachers discounted two monumental events in history that disprove their uniformitarian views. The Creation story and the Flood.

FLOOD

A little bit of research will reveal that the fossil record is impossible to explain by any uniformitarian scheme. For a living creature to become fossilized (rather than to decay and turn to dust—Job 34:15), it must be buried immediately under a great weight of sediment. Apart from a catastrophic deluge on a scale unlike any observed in recent history, how can we explain the existence of massive fossil beds (such as the Karoo formation fossil field in Africa, which is thought to hold eight hundred billion vertebrate fossils)? Natural sedimentation over several ages cannot explain how so many fossils came to be concentrated in one place. And every inhabited continent contains large fossil beds where millions of fossilized

species are found together in large concentrations, as if all these creatures were destroyed and buried together by massive flooding. Fossils of sea creatures are even found on many of the world's highest mountain tops. How do uniformitarians explain such phenomena? The only way they can: They constantly increase their estimate of the age of the earth.

Douglas F. Kelly writes:

“The uniformitarian assumption that millions of years of geological work (extrapolating from present, slow, natural processes) would be required to explain structures such as the American Grand Canyon for instance, is called into serious question by the explosion of Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington on the 18 of May 1980. Massive energy equivalent to 20 million tons of TNT destroyed 400 square kilometers of forest in six minutes, changing the face of the mountain and digging out depths of earth and rock, leaving formations not unlike parts of the larger Grand Canyon. Recent studies of the Mount St. Helens phenomenon indicate that if attempts were made to date these structures (which were formed in 1980) on the basis of uniformitarian theory, millions of years of formation time would be necessarily postulated.”

SCRIPTURE

In refuting the blasphemous allegations presented by the false teachers, Peter relied on four primary sources—Scripture, History, Eternity and the Character of God.

Peter's first reminder concerns the truth of Old Testament Scripture, **“the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets”**. Throughout the Old Testament, **“the prophets”** continually predict God's eschatological judgement. For example, Isaiah proclaims:

For behold, the LORD will come in fire and His chariots like the whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For the LORD will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the LORD will be many. Isa.66:15-16

And the prophet Malachi echoes this theme, announcing:

For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts. Mal. 4:1-3

From Isaiah to Malachi—from the beginning of the Old Testament prophets to the end—the theme of God’s final wrath (often called “the day of the Lord”) is clearly spoken of.

JUDGMENT

“By His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire.” (3:7)

The present heavens and earth is not like the one the people experienced before Noah. It’s the one that has been environmentally devastated by God, the present heavens and earth by His Word are being reserved not for watery destruction but for fire. This is the post-flood. We’re living in the second earth system, the second biosphere. It was by His Word that He brought the first system into existence, and it was by His Word that He destroyed that system. And the present heaven and earth by His Word are being reserved for a future destruction by fire for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

In Genesis 9:11, 15, God promised to never again destroy the earth by means of a universal flood. But that does not mean that He will never again enact global judgment. While the pre-Flood world system was drowned by water, the present world system will be consumed by flames. That future judgment, as with the Flood, will come by the power and authority of ***“His word.”***

Just as the abundant presence of water facilitated the Flood, so the pervasiveness of fire makes a future inferno credible. For example, the galaxies consist of billions of burning stars. Even the earth’s core contains a huge volume of molten rock that may be as hot as 12,400 degrees Fahrenheit. Only a ten-mile-thick crust

separates us from earth's blazing interior. More significantly, the entire creation, because of its basic atomic structure, is a potential nuclear bomb.

Peter's warning, then, is clear: God has "**kept**" the universe "**for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**" Just as in Noah's time, that final day of judgment will be for ungodly men and not for believers.

ETERNITY

"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." (3:8)

In Psalm 90:4 Moses declared, "*For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.*" Peter's paraphrase from that psalm encouraged his readers to "**not let this one fact escape their notice**"—that God's perspective on time is much different from humanity's (Ps. 102:12). The amount of earthly time that passes is of no consequence from God's timeless perspective. A moment is no different from an eon, and eons pass like moments to the eternal God.

What may seem like a long time to believers, "**like a thousand years,**" is actually short, "**like one day,**" in God's sight. In context, Peter is contending that, while Christ's return may seem far off to human beings, it is imminent from God's perspective. Finite people must not confine an infinite God to their time schedule. The Lord Jesus Christ will return at the exact moment determined by God.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Peter's support for the second coming culminated in an appeal to the character of God. "**The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness.**" Peter is generally saying: The reason Christ's return is not immediate is because God is patient with sinners. Any waiting is attributable only to God's gracious longsuffering. It is not that He is indifferent, powerless or distracted, but just the opposite. "**But is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**" Because He is merciful and forbearing, He delays so that the elect sinners might come to repentance.

If the kingdom had been finished a hundred years ago, none of us would have made it in. God is not going to complete that kingdom unless or until every last one of His elect is brought into it. There is not a problem here concerning God's sovereignty, but there is a testimony to the grace and mercy of it.

DEFINITIONS

IN THE LAST DAYS (v.3)

The time of the New Covenant.

The entire time period from Christ's first coming to His second coming.

SECOND COMING

Jesus returns at the end of tribulation.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (v.10)

Term of judgment.

The Final Events; It occurs at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus comes at the end of the battle of Armageddon. Then He sets up His thousand-year kingdom. At the end of that thousand years, the second component of the day of the Lord comes in which the wicked will be judged on earth and this world system will end in its present form.

References:

John Macarthur

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