

## **SCOFFING AT THE SCOFFERS<sup>i</sup>**

*Peter 3:1-10 <sup>1</sup> This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, <sup>4</sup> and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' For since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation. <sup>5</sup> For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world at that time was destroyed, being deluged with water. <sup>7</sup> But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> 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 found out."*

Peter dealt with the character and conduct of the false teachers in chapter 2, and now he directs his attention to their false teaching. Peter affirmed the certainty of Christ's return in glory (2 Peter 1:16ff), a truth that the false teachers questioned and denied. They were scoffing at the very idea Christ would return, the world would be judged, and the glorious kingdom would be established.

How important is it for Christians to understand God's truth? We are surrounded by scoffers today who refuse to take the Bible seriously when it talks about the return of Jesus and the coming judgment. In this regard, Peter focused on three important facts about God and the promise of Christ's return.

1. **GOD'S WORD IS TRUE** (3:1-4) It is certainly possible to have a pure and sincere mind and still have poor memory. This becomes vividly clear as one ages. In this letter, Peter wanted to awaken and arouse his readers (cf. 2 Peter 1:12-15). Unfortunately, it is easy for Christians to grow accustomed to God's truth and need *reminders*. When we become complacent and begin to take God's Word for granted, we need to be aroused lest our enemy finds us asleep and vulnerable to his tactics.

New believers must be taught the Word and firmly established in the faith. Older Christians must be regularly reminded about the importance and abiding relevance of

biblical doctrine. The preaching of God's Word must awaken us to live godly lives and to faithfully share the Gospel to reach the lost (cf. Romans 13:11-14).

It is important to remember that the what the Bible teaches about *the day of the Lord* was not invented by the apostles. Both the prophets of old, as well Jesus Himself, taught this great eschatological truth (2 Peter 3:2). When the scoffers denied "the power and coming" of Jesus, they were denying the truth of Old Testament prophets, the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, and the writings of the apostles. One cannot pick and choose texts when teaching from God's Word without destroying the validity of the whole!

As far back as the days of Enoch, God warned that judgment was coming (Jude 14-15). Many of the Hebrew prophets announced the "*day of the Lord*" and warned that the world would be judged (Isaiah 2:10ff; 13:6ff; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1; Joel; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah; Zechariah 12:1ff).

Jesus taught about this "*day*" in His sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24-24). Paul wrote about it in 1 Thessalonians 5 and in 2 Thessalonians 1-2. The apostle John described this terrible day in Revelation 6-19. In short, it will be a time when God's wrath is poured out on the nations, and when Satan will be free to vent his anger and malice on this world. It will conclude with the return of Jesus Christ in glory and victory!

In this regard, it is important to distinguish the various "*days*" mentioned in the Bible:

- "*The day of the Lord*" is that day of judgment which climaxes with the return of Jesus to the earth.
- "*The day of God*" (2 Peter 3:12) is the period when God's people enjoy the new heavens and the new earth—when all evil has been judged (1 Corinthians 15:28).
- "*The day of Christ*" relates to the coming of Christ for His church (1 Corinthians 1:7-9; Philippians 1:10; 2:16).

Modern prophetic views tend to fall into three categories:

- Those who believe that the church will be raptured, "*caught up together,*" before *the day of the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff).
- Those who see this event taking place in the middle of *the day of the Lord*, so that the church experiences the first half of the tribulation.
- Those who believe that the church will be raptured when the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation.

Not only does God's Word predict *the day of the Lord*, but it also predicts the appearance of the very scoffers who deny God's Word. Therefore, we should not be surprised at the presence of these scoffers (cf. Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3).

Why do these false teachers scoff? Because that want to continue living as they please in their sinfulness without accountability or condemnation . Peter made it clear that false teachers cultivate "*the lust of uncleanness*" (2 Peter 2:10) and allure weak people by means of "*the lusts of the flesh*" (v. 18). If our lifestyle contradicts the Word of God, we must either change our lifestyle or change the Word of God. False believers choose to change God's Word (or its meaning), so they scoff as the doctrines of judgment and the coming of the Lord.

What is their argument to invalidate God's Word? The uniformity of the world. They argue that nothing cataclysmic has happened in the past, so there is not reason to believe it will happen in the future." They rely upon a scientific approach by examining evidence, applying reason, and drawing conclusions. The fact that they willfully ignore much evidence (*e.g., the flood*) does not seem to make a difference.

Of course, the scientific approach works well with classical physics that relates to the material universe, but quantum physics and the theory of relativity introduce concepts that revolutionize the study about how the world functions at the atomic level.

Every scientific theory is based upon certain assumptions, usually involving what is called a "*closed system*." In many cases, scientists cannot control all the factors involved in their experiments. One such factor is the possible intervention of God. All scientific theories exclude the presence and will of God as a factor in their conclusions. Of course, the Creator God can always intercede in His creation to do anything He wills at any time.

In that regard, the Word of God is "*a light that shines in a dark place*" (2 Peter 1:19). We can trust His Word no matter what scoffers may claim. God's day of judgment will come upon this world, and Jesus Christ shall return to establish His glorious kingdom.

## 2. **GOD'S WORK IS CONSISTENT** (3:5-7)

How did Peter refute the argument of the false scoffers? They argued that "God does not interrupt the operation of His stable creation! Therefore, the promise of Christ's coming is not true!"

Peter reminded them about what God has done in the past to prove that His work is consistent throughout the ages. Peter simply presented the evidence that the false

teachers deliberately ignored. It is always interesting how non-believers will be selective in deliberately refusing to consider certain evidence.

Peter cited two historical events to prove his point: the work of God at creation (2 Peter 3:5) and the flood in Noah's day (v. 6).

God created the heavens and the earth by His word. The phrase, "*and God said,*" occurs nine times in Genesis 1. Not only was creation made by God's Word, but it stood fast (Psalm 33:9)—was kept together by God's Word (2 Peter 3:5).

Peter's argument is that the same God who created the world by His word can also intervene in His world and do whatever He wishes to do! His Word is all powerful!

The second event that Peter cited was Noah's flood (2 Peter 3:6). He had previously referred to the flood as an illustration of God's judgment (2 Peter 2:5)—so, there was no need to go into greater detail. The flood was a cataclysmic event!<sup>1</sup>

The people living on earth had never seen rain nor the fountains of the deep open. These never-before-seen events were used by God to destroy His creation. God has the power to "break in" to His creation at any time He chooses to accomplish His will. He can send rain or fire from heaven, as He chooses.

Having established the fact that God has interrupted His creation in the past, Peter applied the application in 2 Peter 3:7. The same WORD that created and sustains this world is presently holding it together, being preserved and reserved for the future day of judgment. Of course, God promised no more world-destroying floods (Genesis 9:8ff). The next judgment is fire!

In fact, we have discovered the "*fire energy*" that is available to destroy the World—it's called atomic energy! Established in 1947 after the use of the atom bomb to end World War II, the *Doomsday Clock* has been used to measure the time until the world will be destroyed. The Clock's original setting in 1947 was seven minutes to midnight. It has since been set backward eight times and forward 19 times. The farthest time from midnight was 17 minutes in 1991, and the closest is 85 seconds in 2026.

The world seems to teeter on the brink of atomic destruction, but Peter seems to indicate that man will NOT destroy the world by his sinful abuse of atomic energy, or any other man-initiated source. It is God Himself who will "push the button" at the right time to burn up the old creation and all the works of sinful man to usher in the new heavens and earth and to reign in glory!

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the English word, cataclysm come from the Greek word translated "overflowed."

Everything in God's creation was good! Man's sin turned God's *good creation* into a *groaning creation* (Romans 8:18ff). God cursed the ground because of man's sin. Since that time mankind has been polluting, corrupting, and destroying God's creation. God will eventually stop the process by destroying this world.

Peter proved his point—God can intervene in the course of history as He wills. He has done so in the past, and He will do it again!

Of course, the scoffers had their retort: "*Then why the delay?*"

### 3. **GOD'S WILL IS MERCIFUL** (3:8-10)

Peter, again, exposed the ignorance of the scoffers. *They were ignorant of God's character.* They were considering God as if He were made in their image and not vice versa! They were ignoring the fact that God is eternal, without beginning nor ending! God dwells in eternity. Eternity is not just extended time. Rather, it is existence beyond and apart from time.

At the same time, man is *immortal*—he has a beginning but no ending. Humans will live forever in either heaven or hell!

Peter was probably referring to Psalm 90:4: "*For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.*" Since a thousand years are as one day to the Lord, we cannot accuse Him of delayed fulfillment in His promises. From God's perspective, the universe is only a few days old! When we study the works of God, we can see that He is never in a hurry, though He may seldom be early, He is never late! While God works in time, He is not limited by time!

The scoffers did not understand the eternity of God, nor did they understand His mercy. So, why the delay in Christ's return? He delays because He is longsuffering and desires to give sinners the opportunity to be saved (2 Peter 3:15). God's delay is an indication that He has a plan for this world and that He is working His plan.

As Peter indicated, God is "*not willing that any should perish*" (2 Peter 3:9). In his first letter to Timothy, Paul affirms that God *wants all men be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4). God shows His mercy to all even though not all will be saved (Romans 11:32).

This is the only place that Peter uses the word "*repentance.*" "*To repent*" means to change one's mind AND direction. It is not "*regret,*" nor is it "*remorse,*" it is a change of mind and heart that results in appropriate action. If a person repents and honestly changes his mind about Jesus, he will turn to Jesus, trust Him, and be saved (cf. Acts 20:21).

As we see from Peter's arguments, the evidence is irrefutable:

- He demonstrated that the scoffers rejected historical and biblical evidence so that they could continue in their sins and disbelief.
- He pointed out that God had intervened in history and has the power to do it again, even today.
- He showed that the scoffers held a very low view of God's character thinking that He delayed keeping His promises just as fallible men do.
- He explained how God does not live in the realm of human time and that His seeming delay only gives more time for sinners to repent and be saved.

**Peter then reaffirmed the certainty of the coming of the day of the Lord, which will be unexpected, as a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2ff).**

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<sup>i</sup> *Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Alert (2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude): Beware of the Religious Impostors (The BE Series Commentary) David C Cook. Kindle Edition.*