

The Flood last time; the Fire next time (Part One)

Six things you need to know about Christ's return from 2 Peter 3

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- 1 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,
- 2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles.
- 3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts,
- 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."
- 5 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,
- 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.
- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (**2 Pet 3:1-9**).

The great central theme of end-time Bible prophecy is the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the consummation of the present age. We therefore need to keep in mind when we study Bible prophecy that every prophetic text has certain commands, warnings, and instructions which accompany the prophecy. It is not an exaggeration therefore to say that the evidence that we believe God's prophetic Word is our whole-hearted obedience to the commands joined to it. In the anticipation of someday seeing the Lord 'face to face' Paul urges believers to continue in 'faith, hope and love' (**1 Cor 13:13**). And, one of the most reliable marks of the believer's hope is preparation for, and a constant readiness for Christ's return.

Second Peter chapter three gives us six 'readiness commands' for our Lord's return:

"REMEMBER" what our Lord said in the synoptic Gospels about His return (**vv. 1-2**) (see **Mt 24, Lu 17; 21**, etc.). "KNOW" for certain that mockers will abound in the last days who scoff at the idea of Christ's second coming (**vv. 3-7**). "TAKE NOTICE" of God's reason for the apparent delay of Christ's return (**vv. 9-10**). "LOOK FOR" the Day of the Lord with eagerness and anticipation (**vv. 10-13**). "BE DILIGENT" in your pursuit of personal holiness so that you may be ready for the Day of the Lord (**vv. 14-16**). "BE ON GUARD" against the danger posed by the growing number of mockers in the last days (**vv. 16-18**). "GROW" in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (**v. 18**).

The book of Second Peter was written out of pastoral concern for the spiritual safety of the Apostle's readers. Peter writes to warn us of the doctrinal error of the false teachers while emphasizing that we must avoid immorality and be intent on living blameless lives in view of the blessed inheritance reserved for the righteous. Chapter two is a powerful deterrent to sin, for the Apostle states with absolute certainty the coming judgment of evil doers, as well as the certainty of the rescue of the godly. Peter undergirds the inviolate nature of this truth with historic examples from the Old Testament in which God demonstrated "perfect discrimination" between the righteous and the

wicked. Our subtitle, *six things you need to know about Christ's return*, is drawn from the key points of chapter three, and forms our working outline. The first thing you need to know about His return is:

1.) The certainty of Christ's return will be scoffed at the in last days (vv. 1-4).

Vv. 1-2 – “Stirring up your sincere mind . . .” has to do with putting his readers into remembrance of what they already knew. The context here is the “commandment of the Lord and Savior”—for Christ announced the certainty of His second coming and the need to be ready (**Mt 24:36-44; Mk 13:32-37; Luke 12:35-40**). Jesus also warned that false teachers would multiply exponentially as His return drew near—**Mt 7:15; 24:4-5, 11, 48-51**). By reflecting upon what Christ had taught about His return, Peter's readers knew that in times of instability false prophets would proliferate, offering their heretical ‘answers’ to people's hunger for security and safety (**Mt 24; Lu 21**). Also, his readers knew that true believers would be hated and would be persecuted (**Mt 24:9; Mk 13:13**). His readers also knew that Christ's return would not be a private appearing, but would be an invasive spectacular public demonstration of divine power, glory, and wrath (**Mt 24:23-31; 26:64; Mk 13:26ff.**). In addition they knew that the timing of Christ's return is not to be based upon signs and appearances, therefore, they must be ready and continually alert at all times (**Lu 17:20-36**).

How appropriate for our day, for the aim of these reminders is to urge believers to hold fast to their first beliefs in the face of the rising tide and pressure from false teaching. We ought to take note of the O.T. references to the Messiah's coming to which Peter alludes in **1:19ff., 3:2**. For, in regard to Christ's return, the recipients of Peter's epistle are to attend to both the O.T. announcements Christ's coming, and to the promises of His coming in the apostolic Gospels.

Vv. 3-4 – With the words, “**Know this first of all**”—Peter warns about the certainty of the arrival of false teachers (as the end of the age draws near, there will be an abundance of mockers). Their skepticism about the bodily return of Christ will rise to a crescendo of mockery in the “last days” (‘last days’ is the period that will close the present age). Do we not see this today? For, every educational, political center in the Western world holds to a Darwinian, or naturalistic view of reality which completely derides the existence of the supernatural and the kingship of Christ.

The mockers have a scornful disregard for the sacred things of God. And what is of vital importance in **v. 3** is that they (the false teachers) “follow after their own lusts.” In other words, they are controlled by these lusts—this connects them to the false teachers of 2 Peter chapter two who are also animated by their lusts. Peter exposes their licentious conduct and self-willed opposition to God's moral law. Their error is not just a random mistaken handling of God's Word—no, they have a hidden agenda which drives their scoffing.

These scoffers have chosen a worldview which ‘frees up’ the expression their sinful passions. *They have a very clear vested interest in denying the bodily return of Christ, therefore, they hold to a life view which permits the full expression of their lusts* (their sensual, immoral behavior). “Following their lusts” and scoffing are companion sins. They indulge in their lusts, and then desecrate the sacred things of God by their heretical teachings. “They are like beasts to be destroyed” according to **Jude verse 10**.

It is no coincidence that mockers hold to a worldview of permissiveness. For, this is the worldview behind today's moral revolution with its abortion on demand, acceptance of euthanasia and eugenics, no consequence sex, and the removal of religious freedom in the interest of erotic freedom.

Those who indulge their lusts have historically mocked any incentive to live noble pure holy lives conducted under the sovereign eye of our Lord, with a view to His approval. Mockers always “hearten” evil doers, and “dishearten” the righteous (**Ezek 13:22**). We reiterate, mocking the sacred truths of God is lust-driven—one cannot love God’s truth, and then serve sin at the same time.

V. 4 – The scoffers have an axe to grind, saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” This is their taunting reaction to the clear teaching of the Bible on the bodily return of Christ. “The promise of His coming” is Christ’s own promise (**Mt 10:23; 16:28; 24:3, 32-36; Mk 9:1; Acts 1:11**)!

This scoffing is reminiscent of so many today who advocate a “another Jesus and a different gospel” (2 Cor 11:4), and not the Christ of Scripture. Many of them will concede that a “higher power” exists, and they will own that Jesus was a good teacher of love, and even that Christ may have ‘returned’ mystically, or spiritually in the good deeds of the church, or in secret visitations. But they will not affirm that Christ is coming back publicly and bodily to judge the world.

“For (Grk. *gar*) ever since the fathers fell asleep,” shows that the skepticism of the false teachers can use the language of reason, though the reason for the skepticism is neither logical nor scriptural. They postulate that since the “fathers fell asleep” all moves ahead in continuity (‘sleep’ being a euphemism for death, and the ‘fathers’ here are the Genesis patriarchs of the O.T.).

In their mockery, the false teachers formulate their argument against Christ’s bodily return by using religious language. They base their claim that Christ will not return bodily upon the belief that “all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” The use of “all things” (comprehensive *panta*, Grk.) denotes the entire observable cosmic system—i.e. the established laws of nature. Thus, they postulate that those laws maintain the uniformity of all things, and thereby deny that the living and abiding Word of God upholds all things (see **Heb 1:3**).

Their assertion of the uniformity of nature is stated as if it is irrefutable, clear, demonstrable knowledge. There is no place in their system for a cataclysmic upheaval such as the orthodox teaching of the glorious return of Christ. Their position implies that they reject any view of divine intervention in judgment. Thus, they assert a *uniformitarian* worldview—a ‘tranquil’ earth history free from catastrophism. The past, in their minds being one of continuity, they claim is the key to the future (a future uninterrupted by divine judgment). But, as we shall see, their view of the past is highly redacted, for in actuality the past is the history of global divine judgment.

When men scoff at the bodily return of Christ, they are willfully ignorant of the four universal judgments of God in human history: 1) the fall, 2) the Genesis flood, 3) the cross, and 4) The Day of the Lord (yet future). God has woven into earth history, and human history, and the testimony of the Scriptures the irrefutable testimony of His global judgments. But the first three judgments which have taken place already will pale in comparison to the cataclysmic scope of the coming Day of the Lord, for this event will be cosmic in its impact.

2.) The deniers of Christ’s return are willfully ignorant of Noah’s flood (vv. 5-7).

Vv. 5-7 -- Peter exposes the fallacy of the mockers’ claim. Their self-willed reading of the past is false as well as their rejection of Christ’s return. They willfully set aside God’s testimony in deliberate ignorance. They do not wish to have their self-directed lives disturbed with the theme of coming judgment. Thus, when they assert that the world continues without great convulsion from the beginning, they do so by the deliberate exclusion of evidence. For, Scripture records the inconceivably

massive extent of the global catastrophe known as the Genesis flood. A true reading of the past shows a cataclysmic destruction by water. (Note Ken Ham’s description of the contents of sedimentary rock due to the deluge: ‘billions of dead things buried in water born sediment all over the face of the earth.’)

V. 5 -- In the period before the flood the world had continuity, equilibrium, and creative order.

Peter harkens back to the record of creation week in Genesis one when he says “the earth was formed out of water and by water” (v. 5)—this is a summary of the first two days of creation week in **Genesis 1:2-10**. The firmament, where birds fly, was put in place to separate the waters above from the waters below (**Gen 1:7-8**). This agrees with two sources of water in the flood—“the floodgates of the sky and the fountains of the deep,” (**Gen 7:11**).

The formation and existence of the creation “by the Word of God” stresses that the world came into being not by the chaos of random spontaneous expansion of matter (the big bang), but by the fiat, divine act of God’s Word. The role of God’s Word is repeated in the Genesis creation account.

As mentioned before, the false teachers held to the self-sufficiency and immutability of the natural order (philosophic naturalism being the prevalent view today). By contrast, creation is “God’s Book” so to speak (**Ps 19**). The earth and the heavens declare His wisdom, power, and divine attributes (**Rom 1:18-20**). Therefore to deny God’s relationship to what He has made as Creator, Owner, Upholder, Ruler, Judge, and Restorer—is to deny that history is ‘His story’. It is to deny that history is the drama of redemption and that all things consist by Him. And, it is to deny that imminent catastrophic judgment will accompany Christ’s bodily return.

The flood destroyed the world under the direction of God’s Word (Ps 29:10). Let’s debunk another misconception, namely the error that Bible prophecy can tell us when to get really serious about what is to come by giving us God’s calendar and sequence of events. NOT SO! Those who are delaying repentance in their misguided hope for ample warnings and signs of the times will be swept away in an instant when Christ returns (**2 Thess 1:6-10**).

Today’s mockers resemble Noah’s hearers, Lot’s neighbors, Amos’ congregation, and Moses’ Egyptian opponents—they all took a ‘wait n’ see’ attitude. But it is manifested historically by the judgments suffered by these hearers that sight and sense will fail to warn when God’s Word has been discounted. Noah was warned of “things not yet seen” (**Heb 11:7**). For, Noah and his contemporaries had never seen fault lines rupture with lava, steam, ash, and condensation nuclei soaring miles skyward to produce torrential rain.

Our Lord highlights the suddenness of judgment which took place in the Noahic flood and the destruction of Sodom. Therefore, the behavior of mockers is a paradigm for end-time judgment, for mockers look at the apparent stability of nature, and then take no heed to the Word of God (**Lu 17:22-30**). In both cases above (the flood and Sodom), the warnings issued by God’s spokesmen were greeted with scoffing and were dismissed as irrelevant. ‘Wait-n-see’ has been the eternal ruin of millions. In spite of persistent warnings, Noah’s neighbors and the citizens of Sodom continued to ‘build, plant, plan, and marry’ right up until they were destroyed. How sobering that these unbelievers did not allow the Word of God to interrupt their daily routines and rhythms of life.

Peter gives us an abbreviated outline of history by describing three “Worlds” (2 Peter 3:6-7):

- *The World that then was (pre-flood)*
- *The Present Heavens and Earth (post-flood)*
- *The New Heavens and Earth (the future eternal state)*

Vv. 5-7 – Of vital important to our text are these three designations above: the world that then was (*pre-flood*), the present heavens and earth (*post-flood*), and the new heavens and the new earth (*following the millennium*). The “world that then was” (*pre-flood*) perished being completely inundated with water. The existing order and equilibrium of the antediluvian world was broken up, and radically changed. The inhabitants (except for eight) perished. That first world was radically altered (Genesis 2:5-15; 7:11** tells us how the pre-flood world differed from our present world).**

The mockers willfully deny God’s acts in history. The flood changed not only the topography of the earth but also the heavens (the atmosphere). The protective vapor canopy above the firmament collapsed. Radiation and cosmic rays accelerated human aging. Global weather became more influenced by the seasons. Ocean currents, the jet streams, the latitudes made for greater climate extremes than before the flood when the earth was forested from pole to pole and universally temperate—we have temperate zones today, but also vast desert expanses and rainforests and polar ice caps. These radical changes are not traceable to natural law, but to the direct touch of the hand of God.

Scripture requires that believers view the flood of Noah as a paradigm for future global judgment, “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (**Lu 17:26-27**).

One global cataclysmic judgment establishes that there may (will) also be another. The present heavens and earth are not permanent and immutable in their present form—“but by (the same) His Word are reserved (stored up) for fire and the destruction of ungodly men” (**3:7**). God has determined a future cataclysm which will bring a determined end to the present cosmic system. The world and the cosmos are dependent upon the omnipotent Word of God (**Col 1:17**). They await a cataclysm by fire. Christ’s coming will be in fiery judgment (**2 Thess 1:7-9ff.**).

Peter’s picture of coming judgment is not confined to the earth, but includes the heavens as well. (Note the O.T. figure of judgment by fire—**Is 66:15; Dan 7:9-10; Mic 1:4; Mal 4:1.**) The present cosmic order is reserved against the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ‘Reserved’ here means that the earth is under God’s continuing care until final consummation and purging. In passages such as **Haggai 2:6** and **Hebrews 12:25-29**, this massive upheaval and overturning of the present order is described ‘shaking everything that can be shaken’ (a judgment affecting the universe in scope). Only the Kingdom of God will survive this shaking (**Heb 12:28**).

God has not pulled back to let history take its own course. Any notion of deism is refuted by our text. God’s controlling hand and His moral government rules over all—therefore the judgment of the ungodly is certain (**2 Pet 2:4, 9, 17; 3:7**). Yet, fallen man in his insolence and arrogance speaks and behaves as if he has actually broken free of God’s moral government, but such is not the case. “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them” (**Ps 2:4; Rom 2:1-9; 6:16, 23; Gal 3:22**). The “ungodly” are those who live without reverence for God—without fear of God—who do not “tremble at His Word”—but instead doubt, mock, and hold in suspicion what God has said. Scripture declares that their punishment will be everlasting torment and death. They will not go out of existence; there will be no extinction or annihilation of impenitent reprobates. Jesus described their response to the wrath they will experience as ‘weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth’ (**Mt 22:13**).

3.) The apparent delay of Christ’s return is a vital part of God’s plan (vv. 8-9).

Vv. 8-9 – Now Peter gives much needed instruction to his readers in regards to Christ’s apparent delay in returning. His readers had been properly taught to live with the expectation of Christ’s return. Now his readers must not do what the mockers are doing—they must not misinterpret the apparent delay. Instead they must be obedient and mindful of Peter’s teaching by acting upon it.

Peter explains that it is crucial that we understand God’s relation to time (Ps 90:4; Job 38:12). God stands outside of time. He created time, but He is not subject to it. He interacts with time, but He lives in eternity. The Lord uses time redemptively—that is to accomplish the salvation of all of His people. The timing of Christ’s return has not failed in view of God’s relation to time.

God’s relation to time invalidates the objection of the skeptics. For God’s use of time cannot be conformed to finite viewpoints and schedules. For, the scoffer’s proposition is that the length of the ‘delay’ proves He is not returning. God may do in a brief time what we imagine would take eons (i.e. He created the universe in only six days), or God may do in a millennium what we think should be done in a day (i.e. the long anticipated incarnation of the Son of God had to wait 1000 years after David’s messianic prophecies). The intensive nature of creation week and the focused and magnified nature of the atonement of Jesus Christ are prime examples of what God can do in a relatively short time span. Thus, what is sobering is that the Day of the Lord will be utterly intense—the entire cosmos changing in a relatively brief amount of time.

“God is not slack concerning His promises”—but is patient. He is not holding back on the fulfillment of His promise of Christ’s return. The reason for the delay (it appears like a long delay from our perspective) is that those whom God is saving are the product of God’s longsuffering and merciful patience. Peter says “patient toward you (us-ward)” (v. 9). If God had stepped into history to judge ungodliness decisively, each one of us (prior to our moment of salvation) would have been swept away. I think of the many believers I love dearly. Where they would be eternally if Christ had come back 20, 30, 40, or even 50 years ago? Where would I be?

The theme of the Lord’s patience and longsuffering is central to Peter’s whole refutation of the scoffers’ assertion. For, God’s longsuffering is intended to bring us to repentance, not to make us scoff at the prospect of decisive retribution being imminent. “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). God’s disposition toward the human race is that men and women would repent and have life in Christ. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:32). God’s goodness revealed in His patience is intended to lead men to repentance so as to embrace the gospel command (Acts 17:30). Because of His longsuffering, the doors of mercy are yet open. God is yet giving room for repentance. At Christ’s return it will be too late.

Mockers misuse and abuse the patience of God. “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation” (Rom 2:5-8). Scoffers wantonly waste the precious time to repent that God is granting. They interpret divine patience and the apparent delay with presumption—assuming that they are safe from God’s wrath. But, they sit on a sandy foundation that will end in eternal ruin (Mt 7:24-27).

Mockers do not fear God, and as a consequence, they deny that God is as good as His Word. They do not give a thought to the truth that God has annexed His holy Name to the fulfillment of His Word. “And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have

magnified Your word according to all Your name” (Ps 138:2b). God will invade human history in the vindication of His Word—God will glorify His Word over the slain bodies of sinners. “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images” (Is 42:8).

Every man will have his appointment with Christ—for the Lord Jesus Christ is the God-appointed Judge of every man (Jn 5:21-29). Christ is King of the human race and He is Lord of the cosmos (Ps 2; Col 1:15-21). Those who have not bowed the knee to Him in this life—recognizing His rightful rule over all—will bow the knee to Him in final acknowledgement that He is Lord (Phil 2:9-11; Heb 9:27). Those who do not flee to Him as Savior now will face Him as Judge then. The great question is: have you seen your sin as ruinous? Have you discovered that your sins will sink you beneath God’s eternal wrath if you do not have Christ as your Merciful Redeemer?

How are we to make spiritually dead, darkened, enslaved sinners sensible of their severe dilemma? *First*, it must begin with a declaration and unfolding of the character of God. The Almighty God of the universe is not like us. He is altogether other—that is what the word “holy” means when associated with God’s Name. Sinners err when they make God in their own image and imagine He does things the way they would do them.

Next we must take away what the sinner thinks he has. More than 95% of Americans think that they have a very good chance at heaven. How filled with self-deception this is. Christ described the road to eternal life as narrow with few individuals on it (Mt 7:13-14). He has told us what the gate to the narrow way of life looks like. It is a gate of repentance and faith and enslavement to Christ.

Third, we must explain the gospel very clearly. Unbelievers need to hear how God makes sinners right with Himself—the gospel declares precisely how God gives the lost right-standing with Himself. The gospel tells us why exactly Jesus came to earth and took on mortal flesh (Heb 2:9-18).

Fourth, we must explain to sinners that no one comes to the Father but through Christ. We must answer the question as many times as needed until the unbeliever understands—sinners come to God by coming to Christ. Sinners come with empty hands; throwing themselves upon His mercy and merits. They must come in faith and repentance. Faith renounces all possible ways of God accepting and receiving the sinner except through a crucified and risen Substitute.

The tragic blindness of unbelievers is ironic in a way, for the very substance that powers their cars, homes, and industries—fossil fuels, was formed during the Genesis flood. In their denial of the reality Noah’s flood, they attribute the formation of these massive reserves of energy to natural causes alone, and not to the global deluge decreed by Almighty God. This author is indebted to the excellent research done by the late Dr. Henry Morris. For, Dr. Morris often told his students that every earthquake, hailstorm, volcano, and hurricane ought to remind us that since the Genesis flood, the earth has never recovered its pre-flood equilibrium. (This is also an argument for the necessity of the new heavens and earth, for Isaiah 51:6 tells us that the earth is slowly wearing out like a garment.)

The Apostle Peter’s prophecy of scoffing concerning Christ’s return is being fulfilled now. Skepticism has gone mainstream in the media, the academy and popular culture. Husband, how will you guard your wife amidst this plague of scoffing? Father, how will you protect your children from the pull of this raging current of scoffing? The warnings of Second Peter are meant for us; for those who deny the global judgment which took place during the Genesis flood will also deny the judgment to come during the Day of the Lord. This all goes back to the central theme of the holiness and justice of God; for the flood is a startling reminder of the disastrous nature of sin. In Part Two of this series, we will examine the remainder of 2 Peter 3—discovering how the new heavens and earth will arrive, and how to be prepared for that Day.