

## **NOT YOUR DAD'S END TIMES STUDY**

### **Session 5 - II Peter 3:1-13**

As with all of our studies of the clear passages of the New Testament dealing with the end times, this one is no exception. It is critical to understand the purpose of Peter's writing in order to know what truths we can expect to pull from this passage. Like the others, the scope of what Peter is saying is limited to a certain teaching he was discussing with his readers. In this case, he was addressing a group of people who he called mockers or scoffers (depending upon your translation). While these people may or may not have been actual teachers (false), there seemed to be a general false teaching that was circulating concerning the second coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord. In a way this teaching was the opposite of the Thessalonian problem. In Thessalonika, the believers were afraid that Christ has returned already and that they had missed out on His second coming. Here, Peter is arguing against people who were teaching that Christ would never be coming back and that the second coming was hogwash. Peter's goal is to bring people back to the truth.

#### **I. Why did Peter write this letter?**

##### **[II Peter 3:1-2]**

Q: What does Peter say is his goal in writing this letter? *(to remind them of the words spoken by God through faithful others)*

Peter wants to remind them by way of stirring up their sincere mind. The word "sincere" is a compound word that means to "judge by sunlight". In other words, he's going to remind them of what the end times will be like by shining the light of truth on his words and the words of those who are scoffing at Christ's second coming. He wants his readers to remember the truth of what they were taught by the apostles. One of the things to keep in mind is that this is a reminder. The readers already knew the truth, they had just become confused due to the introduction of the false belief. This is a constant warning to us that we should carefully test the teachings we expose ourselves to. If they are inconsistent with what we have been taught by faithful teachers, then we need to disregard that teaching.

#### **II. What was the wrong teaching and how do we know it's wrong?**

##### **[II Peter 3:3-9]**

A. Those who were pushing the wrong teaching were referred to as "mockers" or in some translations "scoffers".

1. The word "mocker" means "one who trifles with something" or "one who plays with something like a child plays with it". In other words, Peter accusing those who are teaching this error of being like children - they are piddling with the truth. They aren't taking it seriously. In general Biblical terms "mocker" is the opposite of "righteous". A mocker in Scripture who is generally a false teacher who plays with the Word of God rather than handles it rightly and accurately. Like a child playing with a power tool, all that's going to happen is bad

for him and others.

2. Those who are mockers of the truth are merely doing so to follow their own lusts. In other words they follow after the carnal desires of their flesh as opposed to faith in Christ. Their teaching which attempts to eliminate the second coming, as we'll see, is an attempt by them to justify their wicked and worldly lifestyle.

B. Then Peter lays out their false teaching plainly.

Q: What importance does Peter place on the fact mockers will arise in the last days? *(v.3 - it's of first or primary importance. So, in Peter's mind, in this case, the thing to be remembered about the last days is the rise of mockers who will deny the second coming of Christ.)*

Q: During our study of the clear passages of the end times, what has been the most discussed sign of the end times? *(false teachers and the apostasy. We've seen it in Matthew, we saw it at work in I & II Thessalonians, and we saw it in II Timothy 3 - so in other words, while some look to current events, they need to be looking out for false teachers and people's hearts growing cold to righteousness)*

Q: What was the content of the false teaching? *(v.4 - Christ hasn't come back yet and won't)*

1. The mockers use their personal experience as the guideline for their belief that Christ won't return. Everything seems to be continuing the same as it has since creation. "Fathers" is probably the Old Testament saints here. So since history is still going along just as it has always gone along, this is evidence that Christ won't come back.

2. To this Peter gives four arguments/objections in refutation.

a. #1 (vv. 5-7) - God created the world initially from His word and was given shape by water. (Genesis 1:6-7). Peter is not saying that the world's primary ingredient was water but merely that the form of the world was originally that given to it by water.

1) v.5 - The very first phrase in the NASB says, "for when they maintain this". The literal translation is "for this escapes them being willing". The word "willing" or "deliberate" (NIV) is the real key to translating the clause properly. It means that these people are deliberately or willingly maintaining their opinion against the truth. They are choosing to ignore the truth because it doesn't line up with their wicked ways which they refuse to repent from.

2) The original earth was later destroyed by water in the flood. Now we know that the earth itself was not destroyed but those plants and animals on the surface of the earth that couldn't survive being submerged for a year and ten days (Genesis 7:11, 8:14).

Q: In God's second act of judgment, what will be God's agent of destruction? *(v.7 - It will not be water but fire. Notice that the common denominator of both judgments is God's Word. His Word and water brought the first judgment and His Word and fire will bring the second one.)*

Q: What will be the purpose of God's judgment by fire? *(v. 7 - it will be for destroying ungodly men. In this way it will be like the first judgment and it also now links this passage with our passage in Matthew 24 and I & II Thessalonians. We know this because Peter is using the phrase "the day of the Lord". He's speaking of the world-wide judgment based upon God's*

Word. (II Thess. 1:7 flaming fire)).

3) There is an important question this argument doesn't tell us and that is WHEN this will take place. It gives us no reference as to this happening before, during or after the Millennium. (Matthew 3:11-12 suggests before while Revelation 20-21 suggest afterwards.) All we know from this is that this final judgment will happen and the active agent of destruction of the world will be fire.

4) In other words, Peter's first argument against the false teaching that Christ isn't returning is that God's Word is clear that He is returning for judgment, similar but far more intense and complete than His judgment in the flood.

b. #2 -(v. 8) - The mockers missed God's perspective on time.

1) God is eternal while man isn't. Because we have such a shortened existence compared to God's, humans tend to be impatient. One of the attributes of God's love is patience (or literally long suffering).

2) "Don't let this one fact escape your notice". This is the same word (without the negative modifier) that is used in v.5 of the mockers. They intentionally forget this truth while Peter is imploring his readers to remember this one fact about God's nature. Due to what we know about God, we aren't to let the propaganda of the lost influence our thinking or beliefs.

3) This truth is an echo of Psalm 90:4. One day in the Lord's perspective is as a thousand years in our perspective. This is figurative/poetic language. It is a big mistake to attempt to make this literal in that one day of God's = one thousand years upon the earth. The language is saying it's similar but it doesn't say they are exactly equal. A day, in the Lord's perspective, is a very long time, in human terms, calculated best in historical terms.

4) In other words, the mockers miss out on who God is. They are missing the boat when it comes to His view on time and history. To the Lord, all of human history is but a few days of His time. One would not expect a great deal of change in but a few days.

c. #3 - (v.9) - The mockers also err by not recognizing another of God's attributes.

Q: According to v.9 - what is the reason for God's delay in bring the day of the Lord to pass? (He is patient and merciful not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.)

1) This perceived slowness of the Lord's second coming is not influenced by His inability to return when He desires/wills it to happen nor is it influenced by any slowness in His nature. It is purely for the benefit of sinful mankind - giving them a chance to repent and come to know Him.

Q: Who does God want to come to repentance? (v.9 - *God's desire is for everyone to come to repentance and not perish in the judgment to come. The "you" is best seen as "mankind" - not the believers he's addressing.*)

[I Timothy 2:3-4] - Notice the word "desire". God has desires. It is what He'd like to see happen. However, it is different from His will, which is absolute and will happen by His power. While God desires everyone to be saved, we know that not everyone will be saved - this is proof of freedom of choice given to mankind.

3) The longer God delays this second coming, the more people will have opportunities for repentance and thus miss out on judgment but be saved. This is His mercy in action.

d. #4 - (v.10) - No one knows when the exact day of the Lord will be. It will come as a surprise.

1) In this verse, the actual phrase “day of the Lord” is used.

2) The “thief” is similar to what Jesus and Paul both used to describe this day. A thief comes when no one is suspecting he’ll come.

3) the heavens and earth will both be destroyed by fire.

a) The heavens will not be able to withstand the coming of the Lord. “Roar” this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. It’s onomatopoeic in that the word describes the sound. It is the noise made by something swiftly passing through the air - a whizzing sound. The intensity of the heat will burn away the heavens (like the stars, moons, planets, etc).

b) The earth will likewise be destroyed by fire. Unlike the first judgment which was a flood of water, this judgment will burn up the entire earth and everything on it. The picture given by Peter is similar to that given by John in Revelation in two places. **[Revelation 6:14 & 20:11]**

4) Since no one knows when the Lord will return, it’s an error in doctrine to say that Jesus won’t return at all. His coming is going to be a surprise. This is the last of his four arguments against the mocker’s taunts of Christ not returning or God not bringing a final judgment upon mankind.

Then Peter quickly shifts focus from reminding his readers about the truth, which they already knew, to challenging them to live appropriately since this is how the world will truly end.

### **III. How should a believer live in the end times?**

#### **[II Peter 3:11-13]**

A. The impending disintegration of the universe becomes the grounds for a personal challenge to all believers. Since this is how things are going to be, how should you be? Peter gives a hint at the answer in his question: live in God’s holiness and godliness. It is essential to live apart from the world and its evil while remaining dedicated to God in your heart and actions.

1. To live a holy life requires living in expectation of that future day when God will bring judgment to the wicked.

a) The question is how can Christians hasten this day? Probably Peter has prayer and preaching the gospel in mind here but we don’t know for sure since it isn’t spelled out directly in this passage. The word “hastening” can also be translated “earnestly desiring”.

b) The elements here are the building blocks or solid matter which the universe is built with. These things are going to melt. Peter reinforces the idea that this isn’t going to be an average or ordinary wild fire but rather something so intense that it melts or turns to liquid everything in the universe.

2. v.13 -the promise - back to God’s Word. This promises of the second coming will fulfill God’s promises of a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells. It won’t be the same heaven and earth but rather a new one. There will be nothing impure about the new

heaven or earth.

**[Isaiah 65:17-25]**

Important note concerning Old Testament prophecy. It's difficult, if not impossible, to establish a time line of events based upon the Old Testament prophesies. When I was growing up in west Texas and we'd go visit my relatives in New Mexico, it was common to look down the highway and see a mountain range in the distance that spanned the entire horizon. After several hours of driving though, we could find ourselves in the middle of two mountain ranges. What appeared from a distance as one mountain range was in reality two (or more) mountain ranges. From the center position we could clearly see the range behind us and the one still in front of us and know that they are distinct from one another. This is the same with looking at Old Testament prophecy. The prophets would see the future as God laid it out for them but often what they saw as one event was actually a string of events separated by a great deal of time and history. It is only now that we are between the events they prophesied that we can see clearly what was already fulfilled and what is yet to be fulfilled. The New Testament shows is what illuminates the difference, making clear what is yet to be fulfilled. So, all this to say, as we read the Isaiah account, it's important to realize that everything was future to Isaiah yet we don't know whether it is one event or two (or more) that he was seeing in his vision of the future. We have to pick it apart in light of the New Testament to get an idea of where these prophecies actually fall.

**[Revelation 21:1, 8, 27]**

3. This promise is the key. The day of the Lord is just one more promise God made to His children that He will keep in His time. So in this passage we see the Jesus is coming again and that this judgment will come with fire and with this judgment will also come a new heaven and earth that is characterized by righteousness alone. **II Corinthians 5:21** plainly says that those who are saved, are the righteousness of God. We will be the ones who will inherit this new heaven and new earth. This is all based upon the work of Christ and His love for us.

Clear Teachings from this Passage

1. There will be mockers/false teachers during the end times teaching that Jesus will not return.
2. Jesus is returning and His coming will be a surprise.
3. When Jesus returns, intense fire will accompany Him so that the current heavens and earth will melt due to the heat. God's target for this judgment will be the unrighteous.
4. God shows His great love, mercy and compassion through His patience in not bringing this judgment yet.

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?