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MINISTRIES

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Confirm Your Calling: The Day of the Lord Will Come (2 Peter 3:1-13)

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 2 Peter. In this teaching, we will be going through 2 Peter 3:1-13, where Peter assures his readers that the day of the Lord will come and instructs them on how they should live in light of this reality.

But before we look at this section of Scripture, here’s a summary of what we discussed last time.

1. Peter warns his readers about false teachers who were bringing in “destructive heresies,” including denying the reality of future judgment and promoting a lawless lifestyle.
2. Peter points out that these false teachers were arrogant, blasphemous, greedy, and sexually immoral. These false teachers were deliberately targeting “unstable” and vulnerable believers in the community, attempting to lead them away from the path of righteousness.
3. Peter sternly rebukes these false teachers and announces that their rebelliousness and lawless lifestyles will lead to destruction.

As we arrive in chapter 3, Peter directly confronts the claim of the false teachers that the Messiah’s Second Coming is just a “cleverly devised myth” (cf. 2 Peter 1:16). He starts by explaining why he wrote his letter and issues a warning about scoffers (2 Peter 3:1-4). He then moves to discussing the topics of creation, the flood, and the impending destruction of the current heavens and earth (2 Peter 3:5-10). Finally, he instructs believers on how they are to live as they await the new heavens and new earth (2 Peter 3:11-13). Let’s dive in:

2 Peter 3:1-2

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Here, Peter refers to his epistle as his “second letter,” which may imply that he considers 1 Peter to be

his first letter and that he is writing to the same audience—that is, the communities in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1). In any case, Peter’s hope is to help his readers “remember.” This echoes what he expressed in chapter 1:

2 Peter 1:14-15

I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Peter recognizes that he will be dying soon, and he wants to spend his final moments reminding his readers of the truths they’ve learned. What are the specific truths he wants his readers to remember? He wants them to remember “the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.” The predictions of the holy prophets refer to the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah’s return and the coming judgment (2 Peter 2:19-2:10a). The “commandment of the Lord” passed on through the apostles refers to the righteous lifestyle that the Messiah demands of his followers. We know from Matthew’s Gospel that Yeshua commanded his followers to live righteously in accordance with his interpretation of the Torah (Matthew 5:17-20), and that he instructed his apostles to pass on this commandment to their disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Also, just a few verses earlier, Peter uses the word “commandment” interchangeably with “the way of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:21). As we discussed last time, the “way of righteousness” is an expression taken from the Old Testament. To walk in the “way of righteousness” means to live in obedience to the Torah (e.g., Psalm 1). So, Peter wrote this epistle to remind his readers that the Messiah is coming again and that they should live righteously according to the Torah that the Messiah taught.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 3:3-4

knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

Why is Peter so determined to remind his readers about the Messiah’s Second Coming? Because, as we just read, there are false teachers among them who scoff at this foundational truth. And the rejection of this truth has devastating consequences. As we’ve been discussing throughout this series, the false teachers’ denial of the Messiah’s Second Coming goes hand-in-hand with their lawlessness. They are “following their own sinful desires.” They reasoned that if the Messiah’s glorious return, accompanied by judgment, is merely a myth, then what purpose is there in striving to live holy lives? Why not abandon God’s law and live how you want since it won’t make a difference in the end anyway? That was what these false teachers were promoting. So, it was very important to address this serious error.

Peter mentions that these scoffers “will come in the last days.” He uses the future tense, just as he did in the previous chapter when he spoke about how there “will be” false teachers who bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1-4). Yeshua also spoke about false teachers leading many astray in the last days (Matthew 24:11), and it’s possible that Peter has this prophecy from Yeshua in mind here. While these statements certainly have a future application as we near the end of the age, Peter seems to think that the “last days” have already started in his time. In the Book of Acts, Peter quotes Joel’s prophecy about the Spirit being poured out in the “last days” and declares that this prophecy was already being fulfilled during the events of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Similarly, here, Peter seems to view the prophecies about false teachers arising in the “last days” as being fulfilled in the false teachers who had infiltrated the

communities he is writing to. The apostle John also associates the appearance of false teachers in his time with the last days:

1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

So, technically, we have been living in the “last days” since the first century. But the end of the age is still in our future, as we will see. Peter goes on to describe how the false teachers scoff at the notion of the Second Coming: “They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

The false teachers were casting doubt upon the promise of the Messiah’s return because, from their perspective, nothing has changed since the beginning of creation, and so there is no reason to think that anything *would* change or that the world would ever come to an end. In other words, since the beginning of creation, God has never intervened in the world, so there is no reason to expect he will do so in the future.

As we’ve discussed in previous teachings, Peter has been countering the false teachers’ claims in two ways. First, he appealed to his experience at the mountain of transfiguration. He saw what Yeshua will look like in the future kingdom and heard a voice from heaven confirm that Yeshua is the Messianic king who will come in power and glory at the end of the age (2 Peter 1:17-18). Second, Peter appealed to Scripture, which speaks of the Messiah’s return and how God will rescue the righteous and destroy the wicked (2 Peter 1:19-2:10). Now, in the verses that follow, Peter refutes the false teachers’ argument by highlighting its internal inconsistency. Let’s see:

2 Peter 3:5-7

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Here, Peter notes that the false teachers are simply wrong when they argue that God has not intervened in creation. The very “beginning of creation” itself is an act of divine intervention! The creation used to not exist, and God intervened to bring the creation into existence. Moreover, the fact that “all things are continuing as they were” is, again, proof of God’s intervention. The world used to be “[without form and void](#).” But God intervened—God’s spirit moved on the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2), and God brought the earth out of the waters (Genesis 1:6-10). God later used these same waters to destroy the world in the days of Noah. Once again, this is proof of God’s intervention. Consequently, it is entirely reasonable to trust the promise that God will intervene in the future. Just as the world was destroyed during Noah’s time, it will be destroyed again—except this time by fire.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 3:8-9

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach

repentance.

Here, Peter reassures his readers that the Lord will fulfill his promise. He *will* return, even though it seems to be taking longer than expected. Peter wants to emphasize that the apparent delay in the Messiah's coming should not be taken as evidence that he will never return. But it still raises the question of why it is taking so long. After all, in his first letter, Peter himself declares that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). So, how can we make sense of this delay? Peter addresses this question by making two key points.

First, God perceives time differently than we do: "[with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.](#)" Here, Peter is alluding to Psalm 90:4:

Psalm 90:4

[For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.](#)

In this verse, the Psalmist highlights God's timeless existence in contrast to the brief duration of human life (Psalm 90:3). He compares a thousand years to two things: it's like yesterday that has passed, and it's like "a watch in the night," which was a division of the twelve-hour period of the night, approximately four hours long (Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies* (Boston, MA: Brill, 1996), 1-3).

So, to God, a thousand years is like a single day or like four hours. That doesn't seem very long, does it? The point of both these analogies is simply that God's time is different from our own time. What appears to be a lengthy period of time from our perspective is merely a fleeting moment from God's perspective. Peter is making the same point. Even though it seems to be taking a long time for God to fulfill his promise, that doesn't mean he won't fulfill it. What seems long to us is not long to him. Therefore, we shouldn't be discouraged. God is not bound by time or affected by it the way we are. He isn't going to miss his opportunity. We can count on him to fulfill his promise.

Peter also gives a second reason why there seems to be a delay: God is being patient toward mankind, giving all the chance to repent and avoid destruction. God does not want anyone to perish; he wishes that everyone should turn to him and live. Peter's statement is reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel's plea that Israel would turn from their wicked ways:

Ezekiel 33:11

[Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD \[YHWH\], I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?](#)

After explaining why the Lord's return seems delayed, Peter goes on to declare that the day of the Lord nevertheless *will* come. Here is what he says:

2 Peter 3:10

[But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.](#)

So, Peter says the day of the Lord will come, and it will be "like a thief." Yeshua and Paul use this same imagery when speaking of the Messiah's return and the end of the age (Matthew 24:43; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). The point is that Yeshua's return will be sudden and surprising, particularly for unbelievers (1

Thessalonians 5:4). In the first century, the timing of Messiah's return was not known and could not yet be known. This does not mean that it could never be known in the future. Scripture gives reason to expect that God's people will recognize the approaching time before Messiah returns. Believers must therefore remain watchful and faithfully continue the work of their Master (Matthew 24:45–51; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6).

When the day of the Lord comes, Peter says that the heavens will pass away, heavenly bodies will be burned up, and the earth and the works done on it will be exposed. In other words, the entire created universe as we know it will be destroyed. In Matthew, Yeshua also said that the heavens and earth will “pass away” (Matthew 5:18) and uses the same Greek verb that Peter uses here to describe the heavens passing away (παρέρχομαι). Yeshua said that nothing will pass away from the Law until heaven and earth pass away. In other words, nothing will pass away from the Law until the end of the world as we know it. In Revelation, John also connects the passing away of heaven and earth with the end of the present age and says that a new heavens and new earth will replace the present heavens and earth:

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

As we see, Peter echoes John in saying that a new heavens and new earth will replace the present heavens and earth after they pass away. The fact that heaven and earth passing away is associated with the end of the world has significant implications for how we should understand the ongoing relevance of the Torah, the Law of Moses. Again, in Matthew 5:18, Yeshua said that nothing from the Law would pass away until heaven and earth pass away. Thus, all the Law remains in effect until the end of the world as we know it. Since the world as we know it still exists, the Law remains in effect. And since the Law remains in effect, it ought to be followed. That's why, in Matthew 5:19, Yeshua urged his followers to do and teach even the least of the commandments of the Law. Similarly, Peter urges his readers to lead holy lives as they await the end of the age:

2 Peter 3:11-13

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

So, as they wait for the promise of the Lord's coming to be fulfilled, Peter encourages his readers to lead lives characterized by “holiness and godliness.” The false teachers' denial of the Second Coming leads to a life of lawlessness; the believers' affirmation of the Second Coming ought to lead to a life of holiness. This exhortation to pursue holiness is reminiscent of what Peter wrote in his first epistle:

1 Peter 1:13-16

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, **you also be holy in all your conduct**, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Here, the “revelation” of Yeshua the Messiah refers to the Messiah's return (1 Peter 1:7). Like in 2 Peter

3:11, Peter urges his readers to be holy as they await the Messiah's return. Significantly, Peter cites the Law of Moses as the foundation for his call to holiness. He says, "[since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'](#)" This quotation comes from the book of Leviticus in a context where Moses is giving various laws regarding how God's people are to live (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26). These laws include things keeping the Sabbath, honoring one's parents, avoiding idolatry, loving your neighbor, and even avoiding eating meat from unclean animals (Leviticus 11; 19:3-4, 16-18). So, Peter's concept of holy conduct is based on how the Torah defines holy conduct. The whole Bible teaches that followers of the Messiah ought to be following the laws given in the Torah. Even the least of these commandments remain in force until the end of the age (Matthew 5:18-19).

Peter goes on to say that our holy conduct is "[hastening the coming of the day of God.](#)" The term "hastening" (σπεύδω) literally means "speeding up." We see this term used in Luke 19:5, where Zacchaeus "hurried" down from the tree to meet Yeshua. It also appears in Acts 20:16, where Luke describes Paul as "hastening" to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost.

The notion that believers somehow accelerate the coming of the kingdom through their holy conduct is a common theme in Scripture and Jewish tradition. For instance, Zechariah declared that the arrival of the Messianic kingdom was dependent upon the people's obedience (Zechariah 6:15). This theme is picked up in later Jewish and Christian literature. Some rabbis taught that God would expedite the fulfillment of his promises if Israel repented (y. Taanit 1:1). Other rabbis taught that giving charity and caring for the poor "advances the redemption" (b. Bava Batra 10a). 2 Clement, a late first-century or early second-century Christian writing, teaches that God's kingdom will come when believers repent and do good works (2 Clement 12:6). In the Book of Acts, Peter himself states that God will send the Messiah when the people repent:

Acts 3:19-20

[Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus \[Yeshua\].](#)

So, according to Peter, one reason that the Lord's return is delayed is that God is waiting for people to repent. Therefore, if we want the Lord to return faster, we should focus on repenting, calling on others to repent, and being holy in all our conduct.

Now, this teaching from Peter might appear to contradict other biblical teachings. For instance, Scripture elsewhere speaks about the Father setting the times for end-time events (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6-7). Doesn't that conflict with the idea that our actions will influence when the Lord returns? Not necessarily. It just means that God, when determining the timing of these events, took into account human actions. God foreknew what people will do and planned accordingly. So, God still has control over history, but this does not diminish the role that humans play in his plan. As Thomas Schreiner writes:

God's sovereignty over history must never cancel out the call to live godly lives and the teaching that our prayers and godliness can speed his coming. We must not fall prey to rationalism that either squeezes out divine sovereignty or ignores human responsibility. Both of these must be held in tension, and here the accent falls on what human beings do to hasten the day of God. God uses means to accomplish his purposes.

—Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003),

Another apparent contradiction is that Scripture seems to teach that the world will actually get worse and more sinful before the Messiah returns. For instance, Yeshua said that “lawlessness will be increased” in the end days (Matthew 24:12). Doesn’t that conflict with Peter’s message that holiness and godliness hasten the Lord’s return? Again, not necessarily. Two verses after Yeshua said that lawlessness will be increased, he said that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). So, it seems that lawlessness increasing is not the whole story. The gospel is also increasing. As the world grows darker, there is a light that shines in the midst of the darkness. As the darkness intensifies, so does the light.

Moving on, after restating that the present creation will be destroyed by fire, Peter concludes our section of Scripture by announcing that “[we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth](#),” which will replace the present creation in the future. Peter draws from Isaiah 65 and 66. Unlike the present creation, which will pass away, the new heavens and new earth will remain forever:

Isaiah 65:17

[For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.](#)

Isaiah 66:22-23

[For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD \[YHWH\], so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD \[YHWH\].](#)

As we mentioned earlier, in the Book of Revelation, John also picks up on this theme in Isaiah of a new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1). God will establish this new creation after the present creation passes away. According to what we just read in Isaiah 66:23, we will still be observing the Sabbath in this new creation. So, the Sabbath day is apparently *not* one of the iotas or dots that will pass from the Law when heaven and earth pass away—it will remain in place for all eternity.

What *will* change in the new heavens and new earth? The only change to the Law that Scripture explicitly mentions is the absence of an earthly temple service (Revelation 21:3, 22). From this, we can infer that the laws concerning the Levitical priestly service will not apply in the future New Creation, which seems to be what the author of Hebrews is getting at. This makes sense in light of the fact that there will be no sin or death in the New Creation (Revelation 21:4). The earthly sacrificial system exists because we are sinful and mortal, which are features of the present fallen age. Once the present age comes to an end and we enter the age to come—the new heavens and new earth—the earthly sacrificial system will “vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13). People will no longer sin, and will no longer die, so there won’t be a need for it anymore.

However, according to the author of Hebrews, the present age, symbolized by the tabernacle, is “[still standing](#)” (Hebrews 8:8-9). Hence, “[there are priests who offer gifts according to the law](#)” (Hebrews 8:4). Once again, nothing from the Law will pass away until the end of the present age. Scripture is consistent on this point. Now, sacrifices are not being offered currently, but the laws concerning sacrifices have not been done away with. Our present situation is comparable to when God’s people were in exile in Babylon and the temple was destroyed the first time. For more on this, see our teachings “[The Law of Moses: All or Nothing?](#)” and “[Animal Sacrifices in Light of the Messiah](#).”

So, Peter admonishes his readers to “remember” the prophecies and the commandments of Scripture and not to be discouraged by scoffers. The day of the Lord will come, even if it seems to be taking longer than expected or hoped for. God is waiting for us to repent. But rest assured: the present creation will be destroyed, and God will establish a new creation where righteousness dwells. Therefore, as we wait for this promise to be fulfilled, we live as members of this future kingdom. We live lives characterized by holiness and godliness.

Scoffers

Peter wrote that scoffers, driven by their own sinful desires, ridicule the promise of the Messiah’s return. They cast doubt upon God’s word and try to lead others astray (2 Peter 2:13). As believers, we may encounter similar opposition from those who ridicule the truth of God’s word today. There are many today who tell us that God’s word can be ignored, and that he will never judge the world. Some go so far as to say that God doesn’t even exist. These people scoff at anyone who takes the word of God seriously.

However, there is no reason that we should feel intimidated by such critics. After all, the truth is on our side, and we can answer their objections thoughtfully and respectfully (1 Peter 3:15). As Peter demonstrated in his dealings with the scoffers in his day, critics of the faith often overlook key points that undermine their own assertions. The scoffers in Peter’s day claimed that God hasn’t intervened in creation, overlooking the fact that the very existence of creation itself, which they assume, testifies to the fact that God *has* intervened. Modern scoffers make similar self-defeating objections.

For example, some argue that God cannot exist because there is evil in the world. A God that is both powerful and good would never allow things like rape and murder to go on. He would step in and put a stop to that kind of thing. But he doesn’t, which indicates that God doesn’t exist, or so the argument goes. However, just like the arguments of the scoffers in Peter’s time, this argument defeats itself. When these atheists say that there is “evil” in the world, they mean that there is true evil, behavior that is truly wrong. They don’t mean that there are things in the world that they just personally dislike.

A person may not like sauerkraut, for instance, but they would never say that the existence of sauerkraut is proof that there is no God. That is simply a personal preference, not an objective evil. Murder and rape, on the other hand, are truly evil—they are not just things that an atheist personally dislikes. But if murder and rape *are* truly evil, then there must be a higher power, a higher being who determines what is good and what is evil. Good and evil cannot be based on the preferences of individual humans—that would make things like sauerkraut just as “evil” as murder, depending upon each person’s own preferences. In order for there to be true evil in the world, there must be a God who determines what is good and what is evil. Therefore, the existence of evil cannot disprove the existence of God. In fact, the existence of evil is evidence *in favor of* the existence of God! Thus, this argument from the scoffer refutes itself. And as a side note, unlike the scoffer, believers have a solution to the problem of evil. We believe the Messiah will return and fix the world—which is itself a refutation of the problem of evil.

So, like the objections raised by the scoffers in Peter’s time, the objections put forth by modern scoffers collapse under scrutiny. Don’t be discouraged. View any opposition from scoffers as an opportunity to dismantle their flawed arguments in love, helping them see their errors and strengthening your own faith at the same time.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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