

## 2 Peter 3 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

The persecution Peter had *warned* about in his first letter has now come on the churches he writes this second letter to.

The result was that some were beginning to buckle under the pressure and were backing off their passion and fervency for Christ.

One of the realms this back-down was most obvious was in the area of *leadership* in the church.

The vacuum in strong leadership resulted in the rising of a lot of false teachers and wacky ideas.

So in Chapter 1, Peter calls his readers to return to a holy and passionate pursuit of Christ.

In Chapter 2, he warns them about the error, danger, and motivation of false teachers.

Now as he wraps it up in chapter 3, Peter is going to remind them that the end is coming and they need to live their lives in light of that end.

Now, nearly 2000 years have passed since Peter wrote this and here we are – Jesus Christ hasn't returned! The Day of the Lord hasn't commenced.

So, was Peter wrong?

Were Paul and John wrong in their expectation of the *imminent return* of Christ as well?

We'll conclude our study tonight with a look at that.

### CHAPTER 3

**<sup>1</sup>Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of which* I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),**

What Peter wrote here and in his first letter were not *new* ideas.

This wasn't something novel; this was all stuff they had already been taught.

But note that Peter is careful to *repeat* himself and to write *again* the things he knows are *crucial* to the faith.

Friends – searching the truths of the Christian faith is a pursuit that we could spend 24/7 on for a lifetime of 80 years and still only

scratch the surface of because the God who is the object of our faith is infinite and beyond exhausting.

And yet, the *power* of that truth is that is it so simple even a child can grasp it.

God is no respecter of persons – making salvation something that can only be attained by those with sufficient intellect.

IQ is no entrance requirement!

So while we could never plumb the depths of *all* truth, the most *important* truths, the ones that form the foundation and strength of it all are the things we need to be constantly reminded of.

Jesus knew this – and that’s why He instituted Communion.

“Do this, as often as you take it, IN REMEMBRANCE of Me,”  
He said.

The Sabbath day was celebrated every 7 days as a constant reminder that Israel was in covenant with God.

So a good part of the work of the Church and of pastors is to remind people of things they already know.

This constant reminding is necessary because we live in a world that seems to conspire to make us forget and to dull the edge of a sharp faith.

**<sup>2</sup>that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,**

Peter understands that the teaching of the apostles was in direct line with the words of the OT prophets!

This means Peter understood the teaching of the apostles to be *authoritative*, that’s why he calls it a “commandment” and on par with the scriptures.

A Jew like Peter viewed the words of the holy prophets as nothing less than the inspiration of the Spirit and the Word of God.

By constructing his words this way, Peter is putting the ministry of the apostles on par with the ministry of the OT prophets and giving their words the same authority and inspiration.

Now that Peter has linked the ministry of the NT apostles and OT prophets, he goes on to do a little prophesying himself . . .

**<sup>3</sup>knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days,**

## walking according to their own lusts,

It might be best to take this section as a whole, but then we'd miss some of the parts so let me break it down as we move through it. He begins by saying – “Knowing this first.”

By **first** he means in *order of importance*.

Peter is going to go on and describe the end of this age and the coming of the Day of the Lord.

But this is where it begins, with a forewarning that scoffers will come.

The NT makes it clear that the Last Days began with the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven.

They end when He comes again.

But even the Last Days will have some last days and it is these that Peter is referring to here.

As the last days wind down, scoffers will arise.

And they will order their lives by their lusts.

A scoffer is someone who treats *lightly* that which ought to be taken [\[1\]](#) *seriously*.

The people in Noah's day scoffed at the idea of a judgment.

The citizens of Sodom scoffed at the possibility of fire and brimstone destroying their city.

If you've tried at all to witness for Jesus Christ, you have no doubt met people who scoff at the idea of hell or a future day of judgment.

They scoff because they want to continue living in their sins.

If a person's lifestyle contradicts the Word of God, he or she must either change their lifestyle or change the Word of God.

The scoffers choose the latter, and mock the idea of judgment and the coming of the Lord.

**4 [they] say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”**

The questions they ask isn't sincere – it's part of their *mocking*.

It's like the men of Malachi's day who asked, “Where is the God of justice?” [2:7]

It's like the heathen who taunt the Psalmist by asking, “Where is

your God?” [42:3, 79:10]

They think the question itself reveals the utter foolishness of the thing they are poking fun at.

They follow up their taunt with the proof they are right and Jesus is not coming again in judgment.

“After all, look,” they say, “Since our ancestors died long ago, things have just gone on and on with no real change.”

What’s provocative about what Peter says here is that this is precisely the premise that modern geology is built on – that the key for understanding the *past* is by looking at the present. And the key to understanding the future is to look at the past.

*Uniformitarianism* is the idea that *all earth features* can be explained by the processes we see taking place today.

And since we see only minute changes to the surface of the earth, that means the earth took billions and billions of years to form.

Since that’s the way it has always been, they say, that’s the way it will always be.

This is the theory I learned and was pounded into my cranium when I took geology in College in 74 & 75.

But recent years have seen a growing camp within the field of geology that recognizes there are far too many earth structures that could not possibly have been formed by a gradual kind of uniformitarianism.

They could only be formed by rapid and dramatic catastrophe and violent earth upheavals.

But *catastrophism* is a minority school and the *uniformatarians* still rule the day.

Now, on a completely different score – Peter could be pointing to something else here as well.

He says that one of the marks of the last days will be that scoffers will come, specifically mocking the return of Christ.

Just last night I attended a debate at BIOLA about this very issue. Thomas Ice and Gary DeMar debated the doctrine of the return of Christ.

Ice, who will be speaking at our Fall Bible Conference, spoke for the Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulational position while DeMar

debated for the Preterist position.

Now, let me briefly explain *Preterism*.

The reason why I want to deal with this right now is because Preterism is growing rapidly as one of the schools of thought regarding Bible prophecy.

It was a view which had almost died out completely as few as just 20 years ago, but it has had a resurgence in the last 10 years that is remarkable.

Preterism comes from a word meaning, "*that which is past.*"

And the basic idea of preterism is that *all* Bible prophecy was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD.

*Full* preterist believe Jesus came again in 70 AD and that there is no future coming of Jesus to earth.

There is only a tiny handful of full preterists.

*Partial* preterists, which is the vast bulk of the movement, believe that *virtually* all prophecy regarding the Tribulation and the Second coming of Christ were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the only thing left to be fulfilled is the visible return of Jesus Christ at the very end – after the Church has converted the entire world and taken dominion of all of the institutions of society.

So, preterists believe all of Matthew 24 and almost the entire bulk of Revelation, everything except the last couple chapters, have already been fulfilled!

The reason I bring this up here is because preterists scoff and mock with great disdain those who hold to a Pre-Millennial and Pre-tribulational position.

Many of the leaders of preterism are angry and irate at the Left Behind Series and have made some extremely inappropriate comments about Tim LaHaye and others who are Pre-Millennial.

Gary DeMar's two books slamming Pre-Millennialism are titled, *Last Days Madness* and *End Times Fiction*.

Good grief; the very *titles* reveal Demar's utter disdain for the pre-mil position.

By the way – in my opinion, last night, while DeMar had the better debating style, Ice's content simply overwhelmed the Preterist

position and interpretation of scripture.

I find it absolutely shocking what preterists have to do to scripture to make it fit their mold and Ice did a good job of pointing this out last night.

**<sup>5</sup>For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, <sup>6</sup>by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water. <sup>7</sup>But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**

Peter says that the scoffers who will come in the last days will turn a blind eye to the fact that God has given ample evidence of His ability to *break into history directly*.

The scoffers want to deny the inevitability of God's judgment, because if they admitted it, then they would have to face their rejection of God honestly and they are loath to do that.

What they don't want to believe, they conveniently dismiss. And because they haven't seen God's judgment in their personal lifetimes, they dismiss it from *history* altogether.

But the evidence of God's judgment is clear.

Both the Bible and the earth bear evidence for the judgment of the Flood.

Peter starts off by saying something very much like what Paul says in Romans 1, that the existence of the earth and the heavens reveals the existence of God.

You can't have a creation without a Creator; there can be no design without a Designer.

And because there's a creation with such complex design, it all demands an overarching *purpose*.

This purpose means there is a *direction* to the creation – and direction demands an *end*, a *goal*.

Then Peter reminds his readers that when that intended direction is *threatened*, God will intervene and give a *course correction* – that's what the Flood was all about.

Now, Peter says, creation is moving swiftly toward its grand climax, it's culmination.

History is being wrapped up and moving toward the final judgment.

**8But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**

Peter writes to impress his readers with a sense of *urgency* about holy living.

He knows how the passage of days and weeks and months can blunt our sense of urgency.

When I recommitted to faith in Christ in the mid 70's, Bible prophecy was all the rage!

Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* had made a big splash and everyone was talking about the last days.

Because the subject was novel and so prevalent, an *expectancy* for the Return of Christ grew.

Then some foolish people started setting dates and said that Jesus would come back on this date or in that year.

The dates came and went, the projected years passed – and we were still here.

The result was that a lot of people got disillusioned and grew weary of the subject of prophecy.

Peter writes here to remind his readers that while the return of Christ is indeed imminent, that it could happen at any moment – we need to remember that God stands above time.

He is *eternal* and the passage of time does not effect Him as it does us.

He never runs *out of* time or gets bored because of *the passage of empty* time.

For God, one day for us is like a thousand years to Him – meaning He is able to accomplish all that needs to be accomplished without consideration to how much time it will take.

Probably all of us know what it means to wish we had more hours in a day.

We have some project that needs to be completed; some deadline that's approaching and we wish we had MORE TIME!

Because God dwells in eternity, He never runs out of time – He

is able to accomplish all that needs to be done without concern for running out of time.

In the same way, a thousands years to us, is like a day to God.

So though things seem to be moving along at a snail's pace and that nothing is happening, from God's perspective, it's all coming together perfectly and according to schedule.

Now Peter tells us why the years have rolled on and on and it seems like nothing is happening -

**9The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

After making it clear that judgment is indeed coming, Peter explains why it's seems like it's been delayed.

God is giving sinners a chance to repent and be saved!

That and only that is the reason why!

God is not weak, distracted, or absent; He is waiting!

He knows how terrible and thick His judgment is and that when it finally descends to wrap up this age, no one will escape it.

So He withholds judgment – He stays the fall of the heavenly gavel and offers sinners a chance to be saved.

The great mistake sinners make is that they think the delay is what's *normal*; that because they have not seen judgment in their lifetime, they never will.

It's precisely that kind of thinking that Peter is cautioning against here!

Some people might say that God's promise to wrap up history has been thwarted or set aside.

Some might even go so far as to say that the whole concept of God was for a pre-scientific society but that now that we understand the universe through the field of science, we no longer *need* God.

These thoughts are all the result of taking the delay of judgment for *granted* instead of using it as the space in which to *repent*!

Personally, I am so thankful that God has delayed judgment to at least



this day.

If He had come in the 70's when I was so spiritually immature I might have made it into heaven, as Jude says, by the skin of my teeth.

The passage of the years has meant the opportunity to mature and learn so much more about God and His ways.

It's also meant the salvation of many, many more.

Those of you who have come to faith in the last 10 years, 5 years, 3,2, 1 years – aren't you glad for the delay?

Aren't you thankful that God is longsuffering?

And if you're here tonight and you haven't received Christ – don't delay another moment!

Because God's delay is just that – A DELAY; a delay by it's very definition has an end.

God's judgment will fall on all those who are unrepentant.

So take advantage of the delay and come to faith in Christ – now!

Now Peter turns to write about the end, when the merciful delay is over and God's judgment falls

**10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,

Meaning it will come *abruptly* and *unexpected*.

*The Day of the Lord* is a technical and very important part of understanding Bible prophecy.

We don't have time tonight to go into a detailed study of The Day of the Lord so let me just give a brief definition.

*The Day of the Lord* refers to that point in history when God

finally moves to intervene directly and visibly in history. <sup>[2]</sup>

It's the DAY of the LORD because it's the time when God extends His hand to *demonstrate* His Lordship over *creation* and the *nations*.

His authority and power will be manifest in His sovereign intervention in bringing *judgment* on the nations, and in *over-ruling* of the laws of nature.

Let me use an illustration.

Fidel Castro has ruled for many years as the dictator of Cuba. =  
For Cuba, this is the *Day of Fidel*.

When did it begin?

Well, it began long before he took office.

The Day of Fidel began with the *Cuban revolution* and the deposing of the Cuban president.

It goes on now through his rule as dictator.

This is what the *Day of the Lord* is; it begins when God *starts to move directly* to intervene in the course of this present age and initiate the work of judgment.

Then it carries on into & through the age of Christ's 1000 year rule.

As I mentioned Sunday, in the Jewish mind, history was divided into two epochs or ages;

1) this present evil age, marked by the rebellion of mankind

2) the future glorious age, marked by Messiah's rule.

The Day of the Lord *begins* when God moves to bring in the future glorious age.

But this present age will not welcome the future age, it will resist and the tension that results will cause great trouble.

So the first stage of the Day of the Lord is called the *Tribulation*, a 7 year period in which God's judgment is measured out by *giving* the world what it's been asking for ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden – life without God!

It is only God's grace that has stayed the terrible result and consequence for mankind's rebellion against God.

But during the Tribulation, what makes it so horrifying is that God lets humanity experience the full result of rejecting Him and His grace.

Sin multiplies, death explodes, and nature itself convulses under the weight of the curse.

Then, at the very end of the Tribulation, when the human race is on the verge of being wiped out *because* of its sin and rebellion, God will intervene and Jesus will return visibly to wipe away sin and evil and set up His throne on earth.

He will then reign for a thousand years in perfect righteousness.

That too will be *the Day of the Lord* because it is truly HIS day, the day He reigns!

*The Day of the Lord* will conclude with the end of the 1000 years and dissolving of the heavens and Earth – which is what Peter

describes here.

**10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

**11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? **13** Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Since I covered these verses last Sunday I'll be more brief with them this evening.

The Day of the Lord culminates in the wiping away of the physical universe as we know it.

The physical creation will have served its purpose and will no longer be needed, so God will let it go and in one final nuclear explosion that involves all matter, it will melt down.

As we saw on Sunday, what's amazing is the terms Peter uses to describe this – these are simply the most accurate terms he could have picked to describe what we now know about the structure of matter and what happens to it when it breaks down.

But Peter's point here is that *since judgment is coming* and in the final judgment, the entire physical creation will pass away, how should we live?

What should be our measure of success?

How should we define our lives, by what standard?

Since the earth and all the works of man are going to be dissolved, we need to live for something transcendent, something eternal.

Peter says we ought to be the kind of people whose conduct is holy and godly.

We should pattern our lives after the nature and character of God and see ourselves as set apart from the mediocre and mundane to the special purposes of the Lord.

But then he adds something interesting in v. 12 –

**. . . looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God**

**. . .**

We can hasten the coming of the Day of the Lord *through* our conduct.

We do that by realizing it is the longsuffering of God that delays judgment.

He is not willing that any should perish, and so He waits for them to come to repentance.

If we would see the Day of the Lord come – then we can hasten it by being diligent to share the gospel with the lost, so that the last of those who are to be saved can be saved and the end can come.

Before we go on to v. 14, I have to say that last night at the debate, Ice asked DeMar what he thought vs. 10-12 spoke of.

You see, preterists believe the Day of the Lord is *past* – that it was totally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Here, Peter describes the Day of the Lord as ending with the complete dissolving of the heavens and earth and the arrival of a new heavens and earth.

DeMar said that vs. 10-12 were all fulfilled in 70 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans!

**14**Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; <sup>15</sup>and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

Several times now in this chapter Peter has called us to keep the end in view and to use it as a stimulus to holy living.

Judgment is coming. The things of this world will melt.

A whole new heavens and earth will come that will be free of the taint of sin and any trace of evil.

Again, last night, Ice asked DeMar what he does with the many passage in the NT like this that call us to holy lives because Jesus could come at any moment.

DeMar replied that he doesn't live a holy life *for that reason!*

I just about fell out of my chair because this passage and so many others exhort us to holiness and as it says here, to be without spot and blameless FOR THE VERY REASON that Jesus is coming again.

I almost jumped up and quoted 1 John 3:2-3.

**<sup>2</sup>Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

I think DeMar may have lost the whole debate with that one response to Ice's question.

In v. 15, Peter once again reminds us that though judgment is *coming*, the delay of judgment means the salvation of the lost.

Peter finds support for this in the writings and teaching of Paul, which you'll note at the end of v. 16, Peter considered scripture.

Paul, more than any other NT writer, explained the gospel and how the person and work of Christ provide salvation.

He made regular reference to the longsuffering of God and how it was only by God's mercy that we can be saved.

But then Peter marks the fact that some of what Paul writes is difficult to understand.

In our culture, we might consider that to be a bit of a put-down, but it was actually a form of compliment in that day.

It was a way of saying that something was so brilliant and complex that it took some real work to get at the truth of it.

And because it took hard work, the mentally and spiritually lazy ended up twisting Paul's writings and turning them into something other than truth.

Personally, I find it very comforting that Peter found some of Paul's letter hard to understand.

If an *Apostle* struggled with them, then I don't feel so bad.

**17**You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand,

Know what?

- 1) Judgment is certainly coming.
- 2) The delay of judgment means time for sinners to repent and be saved.

**beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; <sup>18</sup>but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.**

The delay of judgment means *space* for the lost to be saved, but what about the saved?

Here's the great threat that the delay of judgment means to us who are saved –

The passage of time might blunt our expectation of the end.

Our presence in the midst of this evil age might dull us to the reality of the passage of time.

In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses and his crew are sailing through the dangerous waters where the Sirens dwell.

They are beautiful mermaids whose song bewitches men and causes them to drive their ships onto the rocks where they are drowned.

Ulysses orders his men to put plugs in their ears, and then has them tie him to the ship's mast so that he cannot give in to the Sirens' song.

This way they are able to negotiate the dangerous sea and arrive safely on the other side.

This world is a dangerous sea filled with many sirens singing their bewitching and maddening melodies.

We must plug our ears and lash ourselves to the mast of Christ so that as we wait for Christ to return we are not seduced to make shipwreck of our lives.

We can lash ourselves to Christ by doing what Peter says here – growing in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Spiritual growth is not something that comes *automatically*, it is something we have to *pursue* and it takes concerted effort and diligence.

If you go to the nutrition store, you will find the shelves stocked with all kinds of pills that are called fat burners.

Many people think that all you have to do to get a six-pack is take the pills and suddenly you'll look like a cover model.

Sorry – ain't no way!

It takes serious hard work and lots of exercise to get into shape.

Spiritual maturity doesn't come in the form of a pill – it's an exercise program.

Yes grace is a gift – but it's a gift given in direct proportion to our knowledge of God and knowing God is a passionate pursuit that involves all we are.

## **CONCLUSION**

Peter bases his call to holiness on the expectation of Jesus soon return.

And yet, it's been nearly 2000 years since he wrote this and still Jesus hasn't come.

Were Peter and the other NT writers who expected Jesus to come again soon wrong?

Not at all!

You see, the fact of the matter is, Jesus *could have* come at any time.

Now, you might say – wait a minute – there are all kinds of prophecies that had to be fulfilled before Christ could come again and many of them weren't fulfilled until just recently.

True – but if Jesus had come in the past, God would have brought those prophecies to fulfillment in some way before He came.

Remember, a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day to God.

From the beginning it has been God's plan that *every age and generation* of Christians live with the sense of the immanency of Christ's return – so throughout history there have signs and evidences of the *possible* fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

God wants us to live with the expectation that Jesus could come during our lifetime – even more, that He could come *today*.

In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks of the evil servant whose failure is that he thinks his master has delayed his coming and so puts off faithfulness.

The good and faithful servant is the one who lives with the expectation of his or her master's arrival.

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[1] Wiersbe

[2] Many of the Hebrew prophets announced the Day of the Lord and warned that the world would be judged (Isa. 2:10-22; 13:6-16; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Joel; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph.; Zech. 12:1-14:3).

This period of judgment is also known as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) and the Tribulation.

Our Lord taught about this day of judgment in His sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24-25). Paul discussed it in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2. The Apostle John described this terrible day in Revelation 6-19. It will be a time when God's wrath will be poured out on the nations, and when Satan will be free to give vent to his anger and malice. It will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ in glory and victory.