

2 Peter 3 Exegetical Notes

1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2 That ye 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 Saviour:

Peter's purpose for writing the believers to whom this letter is written is given again in these two verses, it is to stir up their minds by way of remembrance. As believers, we need to constantly be reminded of the same basic truths over and over again, because we so easily forget. One of the reasons Christ instituted the Lord's supper was so that we would remember his death until he comes.

What were the believers to be reminded of? It was the words spoken by the apostles and Christ. In other words, it was the truths as found in the New Testament, the doctrine of the New Covenant. Doctrine is scoffed at today as being irrelevant. In fact, one man wrote a doctoral dissertation about John MacArthur, one of the best Bible preachers in America today, and his conclusion was that MacArthur was Biblical, but not relevant. In other words, merely preaching the truths of the Bible is not relevant, one must have their sermons peppered with pop-psychology or stories in order to reach our world.

3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

Peter warns about the coming scoffers who will come someday and deny the intervention of God in the world. We have that today with the modern faith of evolution and uniformitarianism. If there is anything ridiculed today, it is the idea that God created the heavens and the earth, and that at one point in history he intervened in the form of a global flood that covered the entire world.

Interestingly enough, Peter hits at the real reason men deny creation and the flood. It is because they walk according to their own lusts. In others words, if they acknowledge the fact that a transcendent God created the universe, then there are moral and ethical ramifications to deal with that they do not want to face. By removing God from their mind and making the universe a mindless collection of atoms with no purpose, they then can live their lives anyway they please since there is no higher standard to which they are accountable. In fact, one well-known evolutionist stated that he had to believe in evolution since he refused to believe in God. It didn't matter to him whether evolution was right or not, all that mattered was that he wanted to live his life without a transcendent God to who he would be ultimately accountable.

Verse four is as concise a statement regarding uniformitarianism as one will find. The basic tenet of uniformitarianism is that the universe has evolved slowly through billions of years to the point that it is at now. This means that there have been no singular points of creation or catastrophes that have shaped our world.

Two Diametrically Opposed World Views

Creationism and Catastrophism - God created the heavens and the earth and at one time he intervened catastrophically in the global flood of Genesis 6.

Evolution and Uniformitarianism - Everything continues today as it has since the beginning of the world. There have been no major catastrophes, and the idea of a world-wide flood is myth and fiction.

5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

Far from being scientific, men refuse to look at the evidence around them and see that it is the result of a universal flood and the act of God's creation. Even a brief look at the evolutionary system proves that it is scientifically impossible. Systems break down and tend to disorder, not increase in complexity spontaneously into living organisms. The rock strata throughout the world is best explained by a universal flood, not a uniformitarian approach to sedimentation. Evolution hinges on millions of missing links, not just one "monkey-man" that will forever prove the theory.

The bottom line is that men are willingly ignorant of the world around them. They see the same evidence as believers, but refuse to believe in the power of a transcendent and all-powerful God that created the universe.

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

God once destroyed the earth with a flood, but someday he will destroy it with fire. The energy contained in an atom is almost incomprehensible to men. For example, the energy of a molecule of air at room temperature is about 40 ev (electron volts). The energy contained in the annihilation of a single electron is approximately 500,000 electron volts. If the molecules in the air were excited to that energy, the temperature of the room would be millions of degrees.

Someday, God will remove his restraining hand from the atoms in the universe, and when he does, everything will go up in a blaze of fire.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

If there is any verse that has been raped in the prophetic sections of the Bible, it is this one. Time and time again this verse is used to equate days in prophetic literature with one thousand years, thus coming up with some kind of mathematical formula. Using this theory, human history has been divided up into 7,000 years, the Millineum being the last 1,000 years. Others have tried to prove that the time, times, and half a time of Daniel is 3,500 years, thus bring human history to an end sometime around the year 3,000.

The point Peter is making with this statement is not that God equates days with years, but that since God exists above and beyond time, as far as his eternal character is concerned one day is equivalent to a thousand years. What may appear to be slow from man's perspective is only a day as far as God is concerned. In other words, time is meaningless to God as he is not bound by the progression of days and years as man is.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Why is Peter's point about the timelessness of God important. It is because we may be tempted to think that God has forgotten about man, or that he is taking too much time to fulfill his promises. After all, the message of the scoffer is that God hasn't intervened in the past, what makes us think he will intervene in the future?

The real reason God appears to be taking his time is that he is giving men time to repent. If God would have moved in final judgment in the year A.D. 1000, then none of us would have ever existed. God is not slack regarding his promise because he is procrastinating or dragging his foot, rather he is given men time to repent of their sins. He does not desire that men perish, but that all men would be saved.

Two Words for "Will"

Thelema - the will of determination. This word is used to indicate the effectual will of God, something that he will do in spite of any obstacle.

Boulomai - the will of wishing. This word is used to indicate a desire or wish. It is not determinative. This is the word used in 2 Peter 3:9.

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

As mentioned above, there is coming a day in which God will remove his restraining hand from the universe, and when he does it will go back into the nothingness from which it came with a great fire. When this happens, the earth and everything in it will be dissolved. The words used for "elements" is *stoichia* which refers to the elementary building blocks of something. When God removes his hand, all matter will be turned into energy with a blinding flash, and the universe as we know it will cease to exist.

The Day of the Lord vs. the Day of Christ

Some believe that the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ are the same. The use of the word "day" refers to a time in which God deals directly with man. Thus the idea of the Day of the Lord would be that this is a time in which God deals with men in some way. Comparing its use throughout the Old Testament and New Testament one finds that the Day of the Lord is a time of judgment upon the wicked just prior to Christ's second coming (Joel, Zephaniah, Zechariah) (although there have been historical Days of the Lord cf. Isaiah 13-14). The Day of Christ, then, would refer to a time in which Christ deals with men in some way. Comparing the use of this phrase leads us to believe that the Day of Christ is that time in which Christ judges us at the *bema* seat as to our eternal reward (Philippians 2:16, 1:10, 1 Corinthians 3).

Marvin Rosenthal And The Day of the Lord

- 1. The Pre-Wrath position (Rosenthal)**
 - a. The Day of the Lord is a technical term which refers to a period in which God pours out his wrath on unregenerate men.**

- b. **The Day of the Lord starts during the last half of Daniel's 70th Week and ends with the Second Coming of Christ.**
 - c. **The church is raptured immediately prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, which would place the rapture 3/4 of the way through Daniel's 70th Week.**
- 2. The Pre-Tribulational Position (Walvoord et. al.)**
- a. **The Day of the Lord is a general phrase used to describe a period in which God deals directly with man.**
 - b. **The eschatological Day of the Lord includes the Tribulation and the Millennium (2 Peter 3). Additionally, there have been past Days of the Lord, one such being the time God poured out his wrath on Babylon (Isaiah 13-14).**
 - b. **The church is raptured prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, which includes all of the seven years of the Tribulational period.**

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Since the earth and everything in it will be burned up, how should we as believers live? This is a rhetorical question asked by Peter with the implied answer that we should live with eternity in view. It is a sad thing to realize that many times believers pursue worldly pleasures and material wealth, all of which will one day go back to the nothing from where it came. Only that which is eternal will remain.

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Instead of focusing on that which is temporary, we should focus on that which is eternal. We do not seek a city down here, but we seek a city in which dwells perfect righteousness. One of the reasons God destroys this universe is that it is tainted with sin. Originally God created it perfect, but sin ruined his creation and as a result he will not redeem this universe, but recreate it.

Because of this, we need to be diligent to be godly and holy people. Someday we will be ultimately and completely sanctified, but until that time we need to pursue godliness in our own lives so that we would not be ashamed when we face God.

15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

These two verses are of immense comfort to any student of the Bible. Peter states that the writings of Paul are hard to understand, to which any serious student of the word would say a hearty “amen!” Peter further points out that many have twisted those things that Paul wrote thus producing their own destruction. It is very necessary to be careful to rightly divide the word so as to avoid this pitfall.

Four Principles for Biblical Interpretation

1. The literal principle

When we go to the Bible, assume that God is speaking to us in normal language just like we would understand one another in life. We understand that figures of speech exist, but we interpret them as figures of speech and do not spiritualize or allegorize them away.

2. The historical principles

When the Scripture was written it was understood by the people. We must go back and resurrect the historical context and understanding to find out what the actual meaning of the passage is.

3. The grammatical principle

One needs to look at the original languages and the syntax of the sentences.

4. The synthesis principle

Scripture is its own interpreter. Always interpret a given passage in the Bible in light of the rest of Scripture.

However, Peter's point is that the longsuffering of God exists not to delay his program, but to provide greater opportunities for people to come to salvation. Think about it. What would have happened if Christ had returned the day before you became a Christian? What would have happened to you? God's delay is evidence of this love for the sinner, not his procrastination.

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Peter closes his letter with a warning to continue growing in the knowledge of the word and the knowledge of Christ. It is very easy to be drawn away into error if one is not careful. Just having the facts in one's head is not sufficient, one must be constantly reminded of the truth again and again so that the counterfeit will be easily spotted.