

II Peter 3—Destruction of the Universe or Destruction of Jerusalem?

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This chapter offers a brief study of II Peter 3. Although for many years the author, along with most Bible students now, believed this chapter dealt with a final advent of Christ at the end of time, he now believes it deals with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus in AD 70. This, however, does not make his position right, but he hopes you will at least examine this position to see if it doesn't deal with the text more accurately than his previously held, and the more popular, position.

Introduction to II Peter

II Peter is, of course, the second of two books written by the apostle Peter shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. Scholars generally date the books about 66-67 A.D. The theme of I Peter is hope, i.e., it was written to instill hope in Christians who were undergoing severe Jewish persecution in those years. The theme of II Peter is knowledge, the knowledge to combat certain false teachers of the time. II Peter 1 deals with the importance of knowledge, II Peter 2 with the character of the false teachers, and II Peter 3 with the character of their false teaching. The false teachers were denying the coming of Christ, and it is about this coming we now concern ourselves. Was Jesus coming in the person of the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70, as he foretold in Matthew 24, or was he coming at the end of time?

Actually, the Bible nowhere uses the expression “end of time.” The closest passage might be Dan. 12.4, which the only the NASV mistakenly translates as “the end of time.” The ASV translates it as “the time of the end,” as do the KJV, NIV, and the NKJV, among others. The expressions “time of the end” and “the end of time” reflect two vastly different concepts. One supposes the end of time itself, and the other speaks of the time of “the end,” the end of the age.

In Daniel's context, the age ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple.

II Peter 3 is a more detailed account of the imminent judgment Peter had already touched upon in I Pet. 4.7-19. In the context of I Peter, Peter said, "the end of all things is at hand," (verse 7). He spoke of "the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you," (verse 12). He spoke of the "revelation of his (Jesus') glory," (verse 13). This corresponds to Jesus telling his disciples in Mt. 16.27-28 that he would be coming in glory and for judgment *while some of them were still alive*:

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Peter's context from I Peter also corresponds to Mt. 24.30, where Jesus had described the destruction of Jerusalem as a coming in glory, which would occur in that generation (Mt. 24.34). As part of that same discourse, Matthew 25 also portrays the judgment to take place in Jesus' generation (See our essay on The Olivet Discourse for detailed treatment of Matthew 25). Peter also said, "for the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God," (verse 17). In verse 18 he asked, "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" In verse 19 he said, "Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator." Thus, I Peter deals with an imminent judgment that would seriously affect the children of God. II Peter occurs in this same context of imminent judgment. Does it deal with the same judgment as I Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, or does it deal with a totally new subject, an advent of Christ at "the end of time?" Does it describe the end of the Mosaic Covenant, as discussed in Matthew 24, or does it describe the end of the planet and astronomical heavens, as we so often hear it portrayed? We want to investigate the answers to these questions.

Brief Commentary on II Peter 3

We now give a brief verse-by-verse commentary on this chapter.

Verse 1: “This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance;”

This verse shows how we know this is the second letter. Peter stated the purpose: to stir up their minds, to keep their thinking on the right track. Since he was *reminding* his first century readers (not us) of the Lord’s imminent coming, II Peter was written to the same disciples. Consider that had you and I been among those first century disciples, we wouldn’t have viewed our Lord’s imminent coming in judgment nearly as casually as if we thought it was at least twenty centuries in the future as is popularly believed. We would have been as watchful and eager as they were.

Then Peter proceeded to admonish Christians to study:

Verse 2: “that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles:”

Here Peter commanded Christians to be serious students of the holy prophets—the Old Testament, as well as the teaching of the apostles—the New Testament. If someone now denied that Christians should study the teaching of the apostles, the commandment of the Lord and Saviour, we would surely take issue. Do we argue as vigorously if someone says Christians today don’t need to study seriously the holy prophets who spoke before? Usually not, hence our problems with interpreting much of the New Testament—we don’t know nearly enough about the Old Testament! In verse 8, Peter quoted Ps. 90.4; in verse 13, he quoted from Isaiah concerning the new heavens and new earth. Without familiarity with these Old Testament prophets, we’re not the caliber of Christians to whom this letter was written originally. That makes us apt to fall for just about any interpretation offered to us.

Peter made three great statements about a Christian’s relation to the Old Testament. In I Pet. 1.12, he implied the Old Testament was written more for us than for the Old Testament people themselves. In II Pet. 1.19 he commanded Christians to study it, and here in II Pet. 3.2, he again commanded Christians to study the Old Testament. This lack of in-depth understanding of the holy prophets is probably one important way we don’t imitate New Testament Christians. Thus, our ignorance makes it easy for us to jump to false conclusions that the Christians of Peter’s day wouldn’t have embraced.

The Old Testament prophets taught many times about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. In one of the most amazing chapters of the Bible, Deuteronomy 32, Moses foretells Israel's final end. Malachi spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapters 3 and 4. John the Baptist did in Mt. 3.10-11. Peter spoke of it as the fulfillment of Joel's last days prophecy in the first gospel sermon (Ac. 2.17-21). Thus, the coming of the Lord of which Peter spoke may easily be seen to be the Lord's coming spoken of by Jesus in his generation (Mt. 24.34), i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem discussed by the Old Testament prophets.

Peter then warned of false teachers coming in the last days:

Verse 3: "knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts,"

What does "last days" mean? Many times, we hear it applied to the entire period of time beginning at the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ until "the end of time." In Ac. 2.17, Peter said that what happened on Pentecost was what Joel wrote about when he wrote about the last days. Have we now had about two thousand years of last days, i.e., the time of the Messiah's rule, or were these the last days of the Mosaic Covenant?

This is even more easily seen when we realize that the age of Christ has no last days. Jesus' disciples, including even modern Jews, recognized two ages, the Mosaic age, and the age to come, i.e., the age of the Messiah. Jesus even spoke of "this age" and "the age to come" (Mt. 12.31-32, Mk. 10.29-31, Lk. 20.34-35).

Though we many times think "the end" Paul spoke of refers to the end of the Christian age; in reality, *the Christian age has no end*. For example, in Isa. 9.6-7, Isaiah prophesied the endlessness of the Messiah's rule:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be *no end to the increase of His government* or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Likewise, in Lk. 1.31-33, Gabriel told Mary of the endlessness of the Messiah's reign:

And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and *he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Thus, the term "end of the age" in Jesus' teaching never referred to the end of the Christian age, which has no end. Instead, it foretold the end of the Mosaic age. Similarly, the term "last days" never refers to the last days of the Christian age; again, because the Christian age has no end; it has no last days. However, the last days of the Mosaic age certainly did exist. Jesus spoke of it here, and all the Jews understood, that it was the end of the Mosaic age.

Hebrews 9.26 used the same expression, when the writer said:

...else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the *end of the ages* [emphasis mine—SGD] hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

First, the expression "at the end of the ages," which referred to the first coming of Christ, comes from the same Greek expression used in Mt. 24.3. It means, literally, "the consummation of the age." Christ was offered at his first coming as the completion or consummation of the plan of God through all the ages to redeem humanity.

Second, Paul used the same expression in I Cor. 10.11. He spoke of the value of the Old Testament scriptures to New Testament Christians:

Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

Thus, the last days spoken of in the New Testament are the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, i.e., the time from the coming of John the Baptist to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. For example, see I Pet. 1.20 where God's son was manifested in the flesh in the last days. He wasn't manifested after his rule began, but in the last

days of the Mosaic Covenant. In Heb. 1.2, Jesus fully and finally spoke in the last days. Again, this is not after Pentecost, but in the last days of the Mosaic Covenant. In Isa. 2.2 and Dan. 2.28-45, prophets said the kingdom of the Messiah would begin in the last days and during the Roman Empire. This is easily seen to be the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the two thousand years since Pentecost. *The last days of the Mosaic age aren't longer than the Mosaic age itself!* In Heb. 9.16, 26, Christ's blood was to ratify the New Covenant in the last days. This is the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the time following Pentecost. In Joel 2.28 and Ac. 2.17, the Spirit was to be poured out in the last days, i.e., during the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not throughout the Messiah's rule since Pentecost. Peter warned of the false teachers of his day, whose character he had just described in II Peter 2. In Dan. 9.24-27, 12.4, 13, Mt. 24.3, 13f, and Ac. 2.19-21, we see that the last days were when Jerusalem was to fall totally. Thus, the last days are the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the unending age of the Messiah's reign since Pentecost.

Peter said that in the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, the time when he was writing this very letter, that mockers would come. A mocker plays like children, or trifles with something, as opposed to engaging in serious argument or debate. Peter continued with an example of the mockery:

Verse 4: “and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”

These men were Jewish scoffers, their fathers were the Jewish fathers. Christ had promised an imminent return in Mt. 10.23, 16.28, 26.64, and Lk. 21.27-33 in which he would judge Israel and destroy Jerusalem. He said this coming would come to pass in that generation, Mt. 24.34. Stephen confirmed this coming, Ac. 6.4 (“we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place”), and so did the author of Hebrews in 10.37 (“For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry”). Even James in Jas. 5.7-11 taught it (“coming,” verse 7, “at hand,” verse 8, “the judge standeth before the doors,” verse 9, so “be patient and wait for the lord's coming,” (verse 7).

If first century disciples weren't expecting an imminent return of Christ, why would they be mocked about a delay of thirty-five years? Why would they be mocked about a return at least twenty centuries

in the future, as most view Christ's return? These Jewish scoffers now said, "It's been thirty-five years since Jesus made the promise. Jesus preached it; the apostles did; we've been preaching this; we've been waiting; and things keep going right on. Since he hasn't come in thirty-five years, *he won't come!*" These men were not looking for something far off, the way we many times use the passage, but for something in their generation.

In Mt. 24.5, 10, Jesus forewarned of false prophets who would arise and lead many believers astray, plainly foretelling an apostasy in his generation. In Mt. 24.11, he foretold that the majority of believers would apostatize. These scoffers in II Peter 3 are some of those Jesus had warned of. Also in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described the evil of these men when, in the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants, Jesus said in Mt. 24.48-51:

48 But if that *evil servant* shall say in his heart, My lord *tarrieth*; 49 and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; 50 the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, 51 and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the *hypocrites*: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Notice that Jesus pronounced the servant who said he master was tarrying, when Jesus promised he would not (Heb. 10.37 – "for in a very very little while he that cometh shall come, and will not tarry...") as an evil servant.

Thus, Jesus says that such a servant is not only evil, but he's a hypocrite! He claims to be a faithful servant, but he specifically denies his master's teaching. The word hypocrite means a play actor—he's playing the part of a faithful servant, he's not a real one.

If Jesus spoke of false teachers and brethren who said he delayed the judgment of Matthew 24 as evil and hypocritical when they upheld a thirty-five year delay, what in the world would he think of futurists of our day who claim he has delayed fulfillment for 2000+ years?

Peter next showed the fallacy of their position:

Verse 5: "For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God;"

This verse illustrates the free will of man. These men exercised free will by working and striving to forget. They were willing to forget the heavens and earth from of old which were to pass away. Notice: this is the heavens and earth that existed before the flood of Noah's day.

Verse 6: “by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:”

The old world perished by the same means by which God created it—by God's word. Notice that the world that then perished, the old heavens and earth was not the globe and sky. They were still there as Peter wrote, but he spoke of the old world order. Likewise, the planet and stars Peter lived on and under were the same planet and stars Noah lived on and under. Accordingly, the earth and heavens that passed away were not the planet and stars, but the corrupt pre-flood order or world. The planet and stars Peter lived on and under are the same planet and stars we live on and under. Consequently, the earth and heavens that are about to pass away in II Peter 3 are not the planet and stars, but the religious order Peter was living under, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant.

Old Heavens and Earth vs. New Heavens and Earth

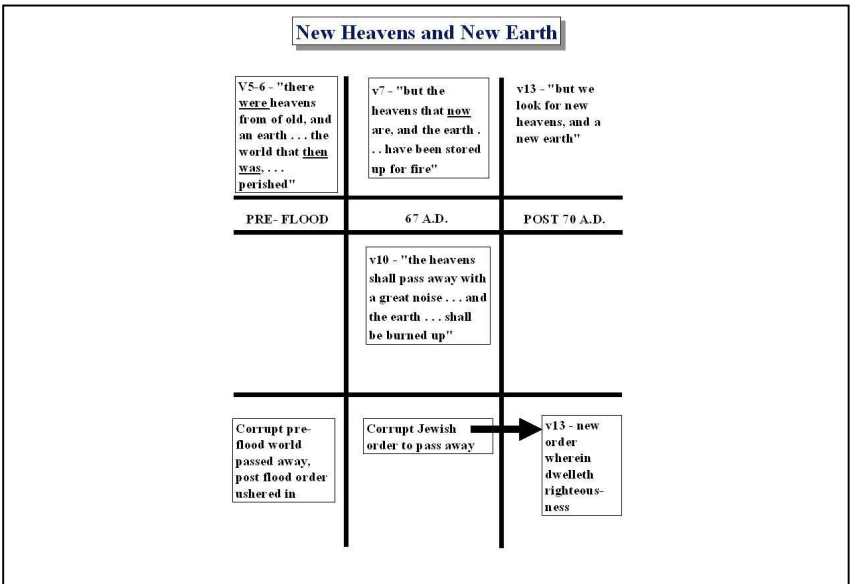
Old Testament writers used the passing of an old heavens and earth and the coming in of a new heavens and earth to speak of the passing away of one social order and the bringing in of another.

For instance, notice Isa. 51.15-16:

But I am the Lord thy God that divided the sea,
whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is His name.
And I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have
covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand, that I may
plant the *heavens*, and lay the foundations of the
earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art My people.

Notice that as God spoke of the creation of the nation of Israel, he divided the Red Sea, and put his words in their mouths by giving them the Mosaic Covenant. This was so “that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth.” He couldn’t have been speaking of the planet and stars, because they had already been created. This heavens and earth was created when they became his people, at Sinai.

A similar use of heaven and earth is found in Lev. 26.19-20, where, at Sinai, God warned them of the consequences if they disobeyed him: “And I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make *your sky* like iron and *your earth* like bronze. And your strength shall be spent uselessly; for your land shall not yield its pro-



duce and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.”

Likewise, sky and earth are not *the* planet and stars, but Israel’s sky and earth. When they disobeyed God, the planet and stars didn’t turn to bronze and iron, but their world order was judged. Their condition became much harder, more difficult.

Flavius Josephus, a priest, then a Jewish General who fought and was defeated by the Roman Emperor Vespasian, then a historian, referred to the Mosaic system as Israel’s heavens and earth, especially in reference to the tabernacle or temple:

Now the room within those pillars was the most holy place; but the rest of the room was the tabernacle,

which was open for the priests. However, this proportion of the measures of the tabernacle proved to be *an imitation of the system of the world*; for that third part thereof which was within the four pillars, to which the priests were not admitted, is, as it were, *a heaven*, peculiar to God. (*Antiquities of the Jews*: Book III, Chapter 6, Section 4.)

Speaking of the veil at the holy of holies, Josephus says:

This veil was very ornamental, and embroidered with all sorts of flowers which *the earth* produces; and there were interwoven into it all sorts of variety that might be an ornament, excepting the forms of animals. (*Antiquities of the Jews*: Book III, Chapter 7, Section 7.)

Similarly, in Isa. 34.1-4, Isaiah used the expression of Edom's world. For Edom, the old heavens and earth passed away, and a new world came in when Edom was destroyed. In Isa. 51.4-7, Isaiah said the same of Israel. God took away the order with which they were familiar, and brought in a new one, restored, purified Israel. In Isa. 65.16-17, physical Israel would pass away, and a new order beyond the first coming of Christ, the Messiah's rule over Christians, would come. Haggai 2.6f contains the same language, which Heb. 12.27 quotes as fulfilled in the late 60s when Hebrews was written—the same time II Peter was written! II Peter 3.1-14 depicts the same change of order. Revelation 21 depicts the passing of the old order of Christians persecuted to the new order of Christians enthroned as described in Revelation 21-22, the reward of the martyrs.

The judgment in Noah's day was typical of the judgment on Jerusalem in the first century. Both were escapable judgments. Jesus even paralleled the two judgments, Mt. 24.37ff. Both judgments destroyed the wicked, and delivered the righteous. Both were worldwide events, for Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem when it fell, because the city was besieged at the time of the Passover (Josephus, *Wars*, 6, 9, 3.)

Peter continued by saying:

Verse 7: “but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

When Peter spoke of the heavens and earth that “are” to him in 66-67 AD, he lived on the same globe and under the same sky as Noah, as we do. He spoke of the old order of The Mosaic Covenant. The three “heaven and earth” systems of which Peter spoke are illustrated in the chart below.

Malachi foretold that Jerusalem was stored up for fire (chapters 3-4), as did John the Baptist (Mt. 3.10-11), and Jesus (Matthew 24-25). God would not use a flood to destroy the order of Peter’s day. It would be burned up with unquenchable fire.

That the old order of The Mosaic Covenant was stored up for fire meant its national overthrow. In Isa. 33.14, speaking of the destruction of Assyria by Babylon, God used terms like “consuming fire” and “everlasting burning.” In Jer. 4.4, God spoke of the destruction of Israel when he said she would “burn with none to quench it,” i.e., unquenchable fire. Amos 5.6 describes the destruction of Israel by Assyria in the same terms. See also Isa. 66.24, where Isaiah described the church victorious over its enemies in the same terms.

Thus, fire was to be the Jews’ fate, as Peter described it. It was so preached in the first gospel sermon in Ac. 2.17ff, when Peter quoted from Joel: “blood, fire, and columns of smoke.” John the Baptist spoke of it (Mt. 3.10-11). Jesus himself said, “I came to bring fire on the earth (land),” Lk. 12.49. James 5.3 and I Thes. 2.16 say the same thing. Last, the fiery fate of Sodom was also a type of Jerusalem’s fate, Lk. 17.29f. History confirms that Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

This was the day of judgment for Israel. Peter had so spoken of it in his first epistle, I Pet. 4.12-17. In Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus said this judgment would take place while some of his apostles were still alive. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem as a day of judgment, Mt. 25.32. (Read a detailed discussion of Matthew 24-25 in Chapter 32, “The Olivet Discourse.”)

Verse 8: “But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

When Peter said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, he didn’t say you can substitute one thousand years for one day wherever you want to. One might say one day equals one thousand years. Consequently, two days equal two thousand years, and 365 days equal 365,000 years. Therefore, one year equals 365,000

years, which also equals one day! You can't have it both ways, literally. Peter spoke as the Psalmist in Ps. 90.4, when he said:

For a thousand years in thy sight are like yesterday
when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.

A watch in the night was generally three hours. The psalmist said one thousand years to God is like three hours, i.e., God doesn't view time as we do. If I borrow twenty dollars from you, and after thirty-five years, I still haven't paid you back, you would probably write the debt off. Peter said these false teachers had better not do that with the promise is Christ's coming in their generation. Peter told why in the next verse:

Verse 9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Peter explained that the reason Christ hadn't come and destroyed Jerusalem was not because God was slack, i.e., he was not loitering around, or “goofing off.” He hadn't forgotten his promise. The reason Christ hadn't come was because he's longsuffering.

Paul, in Rom. 2.4, said that the longsuffering of God works repentance. If God destroyed us immediately when we sinned, none of us would be alive. If He waited five minutes after we sinned to destroy us, we still wouldn't be alive. We want longer, unless of course, someone sins against us, then perhaps we don't want so long! Why does God wait at all? He wants people to change their minds, not because He forgot.

Peter said that God didn't want any to perish. This is the same perishing of which Jesus spoke in Lk. 13.3, “Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish.” There, he warned the Jews of his day: “He will avenge them speedily.”

Verse 10: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

Peter said the day of the Lord *would* come. The false teachers were wrong; it would come. The Old Testament, with the exception of the sabbath day, uses the term “day of the Lord” nearly exclusively of national judgment. In Isa. 13.6-9, Babylon received “destruc-

tion from the Almighty” on such a day. In Ezk. 30.3, 10 Egypt did. In Joel 1.15, Israel was to see just such a day, just twenty years off. In Joel 2.1, Israel was to see a day of the Lord, the very one of which John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter spoke. In Obadiah 1.5, Edom was to see such a day. In Zeph. 1.14f, Judah would see “the great day of the Lord,” when Babylon destroyed her in 586 B.C. So was the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem a “day of the Lord,” as Peter said in Ac. 2.17ff (cf. Joel 2.31f, 3.14-17), and our Lord himself in Mt. 24.27, 30.

Saying that the day of the Lord would “come as a thief,” Peter recognized thieves don’t send cards saying, “I plan to be in your neighborhood at 10:00 p.m. Tuesday night. Please have everything ready.” Though we don’t know when the next thief is coming, that doesn’t mean we can’t have everything ready! The thief’s coming will not be by invitation or announcement. Peter said the Lord’s coming would not be by invitation or announcement, either. Jesus gave the same warning about the destruction of Jerusalem in Mt. 24.43 and Lk. 21.34-36. Lk. 21.34-36

When Peter said the heavens would pass away, he used language common in the Old Testament to speak of the overthrow of political powers. In Isa. 14.12f, the fall of the ruler of Babylon was spoken of as a falling star. In Isa. 13.10, 13, 19, Isaiah used such language to describe the fall of Babylon; in Isa. 34.4, the fall of Edom. In Isa. 51.6, the nation of Israel would so fall. In Joel 3.16, the fall of Jerusalem after the Messiah was foretold in such words. Peter said it would be so with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter had said the same thing in Ac. 2.19ff, when he quoted Joel 2.28-32 in the first gospel sermon. Haggai used the same language in Hag. 2.6, *quoted in Heb. 12.26-28 to speak of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem*. Jesus used the same language in Mt. 24.39-42 and Lk. 21.26, 11.

When Peter said “the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” we quickly think of the atomic elements, and that Peter spoke of the conflagration of our whole universe. The word *elements* is given for the Greek word *stoicheion*, which occurs seven times in the New Testament. In Heb. 5.12 it stands for the rudiments of the law, as seen in Heb. 6.4-6. In Gal. 4.3, it depicts the rudiments of the world, for those under the Law of Moses, the rudiments of the Mosaic Covenant. In Gal. 4.9, it represents the weak and beggarly rudiments, identified as the days, months, seasons, and years of the Mosaic Covenant. In Col. 2.20, it denotes the rudiments of the world, possibly Gnostic borrowing from Judaism. In none of these passages does

anyone think of atomic elements. Then Peter used it in II Pet. 3.10, 12, where the idea comes nearly automatically to mind. No, it's the rudimentary principles of the Mosaic Covenant again, the priesthood, the temple, it's sacrifices, the city of Jerusalem, and the genealogies. All were swept away in the destruction, which was imminently to occur.

Peter said they would be dissolved. Dissolved here comes from *luo*, used in Eph. 2.14, "*broken down* the middle wall" between Jews and Gentiles, again speaking of the destruction of the Mosaic Covenant's constraints between Jews and Gentiles. It's also the word used in I Jn. 3.8, where John said that Christ was "manifested to *destroy* the works of the devil."

When Peter said the earth (that then was) and the works (that were therein) were to be burned up, he spoke of the same refining of Israel that John the Baptist had announced in Mt. 3.10-12, the burning up of the chaff. Malachi foretold this refining process in Mal. 3.2-5, 4.1-6. "Earth" here may also be "land." See, for example, Lk. 21.23, 26 where the same term means the land of Israel.

Next Peter turned his attention to the lessons that could be learned from the heavens and earth passing away:

Verse 11: "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness,"

Peter here spoke of the dissolving (literally, tearing up, breaking down) of these things, i.e, the earth and the works that then were. The message was: *Bet prepared!* He asked, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He used a word that literally means "of what country should you be?" We might ask this same question in this way, "If the United States is about to wipe out Cuba, of what country should you be?" Not Cuba! Likewise, the Jews to whom Peter wrote had better not be of physical Israel, of Judaism, for God would destroy it.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews mentioned the faithful father of the Jews, who were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Paul also reminded Christians in Phil. 3.20 that "our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the manner of person Peter said they ought to be in all holy living and godliness. In other words, both their actions and their attitudes should be prepared. Peter continued his admonition:

Verse 12: “looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”

This “looking for and earnestly desiring the day of God” is the same as Jesus’ exhortations to watchfulness in Mt. 24.44ff. The day of God has to be the destruction of Jerusalem rather than a final advent for two reasons: First, they couldn’t look for a final advent of Christ, for there are no signs given of a final advent at the end of time. Second, the final advent wasn’t near in Peter’s day! However, Peter’s audience could look for the destruction of Jerusalem, for Jesus had given signs, Mt. 24.3-15, 32-45 and Lk. 12.56, 21.28. In Heb. 10.25, the author of Hebrews also said his Jewish readers could see the day drawing nigh!

Peter then mentioned that the heavens being on fire would be dissolved. These were the old heavens of Peter’s day, the old heavens and earth, the old order. Peter said it would be on fire, and be dissolved. These were expressions similar to those already used to describe the change from the old order to the new, like Edom and physical Israel in the Old Testament.

Peter then described the new order which would replace the old which was about to pass away:

Verse 13: “But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

This new heavens and new earth were not a new planet and skies, any more than the new heavens and earth after Noah were a new planet and skies. Peter spoke of the new order of things after the destruction of Jerusalem, the victorious church having weathered Jewish persecution, victorious Christians withstanding potential eradication by Jews.

This new heavens and earth had been prophesied in Isa. 65.17:

For behold, I create a *new* heavens and earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create *Jerusalem* (the new Jerusalem of Heb. 12.22) as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

Hebrews 12.22 tells us this new Jerusalem was the New Testament church victorious. Isaiah 66.22 also spoke of new Jerusalem,

telling of the days of the work of the apostles, Ac. 3.18-24. Peter told Christians of his day to look for this new order, not implying that Christ did not yet rule, but that his rule had not been completely confirmed by the destruction of the old order. Thus, in Dan. 7.18, 22, under persecution in the Roman Empire, Christians were in the kingdom before the enemy was destroyed, but when the enemy was finally destroyed, then they fully possessed a vindicated kingdom. It was not only prophesied that the kingdom was unshakable, but also that it would be proven.

Peter then made the application to the lives of his readers:

Verse 14: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight.”

Again, these instructions could not refer to an advent of Christ at an end of time the Bible never speaks of, for there was nothing pertaining to that event that first-century Christians could “look for.” However, in Matthew 24-25, with its parallel passages, as well as in I Peter, many instructions to watchfulness had been given concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

Peter continued the application to the lives of his readers:

Verse 15: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you;”

The imminent judgment Peter spoke of was indeed written of by Paul. For example, in Rom. 2.6 Paul warned of a “day of wrath” coming on the Jews of his day. In Rom. 13.11-12, he said, “The day is at hand,” when speaking of their imminent judgment. In I Corinthians, Paul warned of a coming judgment on Jews in 1.7, 3.15, 4.5, 5.5, 7.29-31, and 10.11. In Phil. 4.5, Paul warned, “The Lord is at hand.” Modernists oftentimes think Paul (and even Jesus) were mistaken about how imminent Jesus’ coming in judgment was. No, the modernists are mistaken. John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Peter all warned of a coming conflagration which would wipe out the Jewish religion for its apostasy. Peter affirmed that he wasn’t teaching anything that Paul hadn’t taught already.

Peter then commented on the quality of Paul’s teaching:

Verse 16: “as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which

the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

We can take heart from this comment. If the apostle Peter thought Paul’s writing contained some difficulties, we ought not to be surprised if some of them seem difficult to us.

Peter concluded with exhortations to faithfulness in view of the coming imminent judgment on the Jewish nation:

Verse 17: “Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness.”

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

Conclusion

As we’ve seen, the purpose of Peter’s words in this chapter was to warn faithful people of his time concerning the approaching physical judgment so they could escape it. Eusebius, a third-century historian, wrote of the early Jerusalem church:

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation given to men of approved piety therefore before the war removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. (Pamphilus Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, translated by C. F. Cruse [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1869], lib. 3, chapter 6.)

So, in a siege of Jerusalem where 1.1 million Jews perished and another 2.5 million were taken into slavery, not one faithful individual who heeded the warnings of John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul and Peter perished.

Thus, both the harmony of Old Testament passages with the New Testament and history, indicate that II Peter 3 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. To use these passages to teach about the destruction of the universe at the end of time is to rip them out of their

context, not only in Jesus' and Paul's teaching, but also the whole Bible.

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