

# BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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## **2 PETER 2-3 FALSE TEACHERS'S FATE; CHRIST'S RETURN & JUDGMENT**

As we now conclude this wonderful epistle of 2 Peter, we will see how the rest is jam-packed with God's truths and vital information for all of us. In the last study, we covered some of 2 Peter 2 and now we will finish this epistle with Chapter 3.

As mentioned before, Peter, just as Jude in his epistle, is very concerned about their Church being infiltrated by false and corrupt teachers, which is their main theme. He reveals their tactics to deceive are based on attacking God's laws and using a false grace to have liberty to sin.

He says this in this verse: "While they promise them [the brethren] *liberty* [from keeping God's law], they themselves are slaves of corruption [or sin, by breaking God's commandments]; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." A modern version says, "They promise freedom, but they themselves are *slaves of sin and corruption*. For you are a slave to whatever controls you" (2 Peter 2:19, NLT).

He continues about them, "For if, after they [the false teachers] have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning." In other words, these are false brethren who apostatized from the faith.

He says about their fate, "For it would have been better for them not to have known *the way of righteousness*, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment [meaning God's commandments] delivered to them." Another version makes it clearer, "For it would have been better for them [the false teachers] to have had *no knowledge of the way of righteousness*, than to go back again *from the holy law which was given to them*, after having knowledge of it" (BBE). We see here the clear connection with going against God's laws, which is technically called *antinomianism* (a Greek term meaning "going against the law").

Peter adds, "But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Pet. 2:18-22). So, they lost what they had of their initial conversion.

By the way, we have here an indirect reference to *the teaching about the second resurrection*. If some are called and then fall away, it indicates there are some in this life who will not get to "know the way of righteousness" but still need an opportunity to know it to be spiritually judged.

Peter stresses it would have been *better* for those who apostatize or fell away from the "way of truth" (2 Pet. 2:2) to have never known it in this life. They will be strongly condemned while those who did not know the truths of God, while still being sinners, will receive a minor condemnation. As Christ taught, "But the servant who does not know his master's will and unwittingly does what is wrong will be punished less severely. For those who have received a greater revelation [of the truth] from their master are required a greater obedience. And those who have been entrusted with great responsibility will be held more responsible to their master" (Lk. 12:48, TPT).

We now begin with 2 Peter 3. He prophesies that, just as in his day, in the end time there will arise false leaders who scoff at the idea of Christ returning to the earth. Yet, he does end this epistle on a positive note with a look into the future and how God's wonderful master plan of salvation is going to be accomplished.

He begins: "Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 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, knowing this first: that *scoffers* will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Pet. 3:1-4).

This idea of denying Christ's return is quite prevalent today—even in traditional Christianity. Thanks to the Theory of Evolution, most philosophers, scientists and even many religious people now believe that everything will remain the same on this earth as in the past and that Christ's return is not real, but a myth. A Pew research in

2010 said 53% of U.S. Christians didn't believe that Christ will return (now, it's even worse!).

As Peter goes on to say, "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, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water" (2 Pet. 3:5-6).

They forget that in the past, God had to destroy all of mankind--except for one family--by means of a Flood. Now, few Christians believe in a global Flood that wiped out humanity and much of the animal life. According to a 2007 Barna survey, at least half or less of U.S. Catholics, atheists, agnostics, Northeast residents, upscale adults, the unchurched, and liberals don't believe a Flood occurred (in 2023, it's much more than in 2007).

While God has promised that mankind will never again die in that way, there is a future punishment that will include fire destruction.

As Peter reveals: "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" (2 Pet. 3:7).

He then mentions about the time of that future intervention and alludes to a 7,000 year plan, "But, 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. The 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" (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

Here, Peter reveals why God hasn't intervened yet in world affairs to bring about His kingdom. He is not through calling persons into the Church and giving them a chance to be part of that First Resurrection. We are blessed He is "longsuffering."

He then mentions that to God a thousand years of man is as one day to Him, and one day to God is as a thousand years for man. We know time is different for God than it is with us. He is eternal while we are finite. But Peter here is also alluding to the Millennial reign of Christ as being a thousand years, after man's rule on earth ends.

This same concept of the Millennium as a "Sabbath" rest is also suggested in Heb. 4:4-11, where we see that man's true rest will come with

Christ establishing His kingdom and the Sabbath is a symbol of those thousand years of Christ's reign, also described in Rev. 20:4-6.

So Paul uses an analogy of the Sabbath as a type of a Millennial rest for God's people. In Hebrews, he was telling of the Jewish Christians if they went back to Judaism, they wouldn't enter this new rest, which starts at the Millennium, just as the first generation of Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land. This principle is important to better understand 2 Peter 2:10.

As F. F. Bruce mentions, "The interpretation that was *widespread* in the early Church, according to which *the seventh day* of Gen. 2:2 is a *type of the seventh age of righteousness, which is to follow six ages of sin's dominions*. The identification of *the rest of God* in the Epistle to the Hebrews with a *coming millennium on earth* has, indeed, been ably defended..." (pgs. 74-75). In a footnote, he quotes the *Epistle of Barnabas* (around A.D. 70-120) to show this widespread belief. It says: "Pay attention...to the meaning of the words, 'He finished it in six days.' It means that in 6,000 years the Lord will bring every thing to completion...And He rested the seventh day.' This means when His Son comes and brings to an end the period of the Lawless One and judges the ungodly...then He will rest properly on the seventh day" (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1964, p. 74).

Thus, the doctrine that there are 6,000 years of human history (six days of creation equals 6,000 years, and the seventh day equals the 1,000 of Christ's reign) has some biblical basis--although it's not spelled out. We do not know exactly from biblical chronology when we would reach those 6,000 years (although, based on biblical chronology, from the time of Adam to today it comes out quite close). Yet, God has the final word on when Jesus will come (Mt. 24:36). He will have to give us more clarity, as it says in Amos 3:7, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."

So, Peter goes on to explain that at that time of the final judgment, man's works will be burned up and the earth will be purified. He says, "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. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 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? Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth *in which righteousness dwells*" (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

As *The JFB Commentary* explains: "But Day of the Lord" [in its broadest sense] comprehends *the whole series of events, beginning* with the pre-millennial advent [the coming of Christ], and *ending* with the destruction of the wicked..."

So, this will be the day of judgment for the incorrigibly wicked, as Peter says (2 Pet. 2:9). After this, the earth and the heavens around it will be burned up and purified.

John mentions the sequence of these events in Revelation 20: "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death*. And *anyone not found* written in the Book of Life *was cast into the lake of fire*. Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, *coming down out of heaven* from God [to where? To a new earth], prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Rev. 20:14 - 21:3).

That is when this prophecy will be fulfilled: "'You shall *trample the wicked*, for they shall be *ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this*,' says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 4:3).

Apparently, as a result of the incineration of the surface of the earth, where all the soil is burnt up (where so much blood was shed), the oceans are totally evaporated (where so many perished) and only the melted minerals remain. Nothing is left to remind God or the resurrected saints of the pain, death, wars and all of mankind's sins committed under the old order. Now a new and righteous order begins--starting totally purified!

As *Expositor's Commentary* brings out about the terms "new heavens" and a "new earth": "The Greek word for 'new' (*kaine*) means *new in quality, fresh, rather than recent* or [brand] *new in time* (*neos*) (TDNT, 3:447)... it is a *kaine* [or a renewed] heaven and earth and *not* a second heaven and earth. What makes the new heaven and earth 'new' is above all else the reality that now 'the dwelling of God is with men...They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God' (Rev. 21:3). The heaven and earth are new because of the presence of a new community of people who are loyal to God and the Lamb in contrast to the former earth in which a community of idolaters lived" (Note on Rev. 21:1).

Because of that coming fiery judgment, Peter exhorts us to live godly lives, so that our judgment ends up being a blessing and not a curse. He also warns us that several of Paul's epistles, which touch on these subjects, have "some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people *twist to their own destruction*, as they do *also the rest of the Scriptures*" (2 Pet. 3:16).

Obviously, these false teachers took advantage of some of the things Paul wrote about grace, faith, and the law to "twist" them, trying to convince the brethren that God's grace gives them license to sin and that the law of God has been done away.

Yet, Peter knows those brethren who are converted and anchored in God's holy laws will not be deceived. For that reason, he exhorts us to continue to grow "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Here are two aspects of God's laws that go together: (1) how to obtain grace -- by repentance, forgiveness and obedience; and (2) by knowledge, or a deeper understanding of God's laws and principles. As David explained, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my *meditation* all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me *wiser* than my enemies; For they are *ever* with me" (Psalm 119:97-98). This, he says, is what we should concentrate on.

Then Peter ends encouraging us and praising God with these words, "To *Him* be the *glory* both now and forever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:19).