

2 Peter 3

Exhortation To A Holy Walk

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

With this chapter as well, some exegetes question if there is a connection with the preceding chapters. They answer this in the negative since they are of the opinion that it is impossible for the scoffers (in chapter 3) and the false teachers (in chapter 2) to be the same persons. One exegete thinks the letter originally consisted only of chapters 1 and 3, and that chapter 2 was placed in between at a later date. However, there is no reason to accept this: it is pure speculation. On the contrary, it is obvious that people who lead an ungodly life and who hold to a false doctrine (as described in chapter 2) do not believe in the coming judgment day of the Lord. Therefore, they scoff at the believers' expectation about the future. There is no real difference between the scoffers of chapter 3 and the false teachers of chapter 2. To encourage the believers to whom the apostle writes this letter, to stimulate them to persevere and to remain faithful to the prophetic Word, and to warn them about ungodly teachings (of which the early symptoms are already appearing), he finds it necessary to throw light on the denial of the judgment day. This denial is the consequence of the ungodly doctrine of those depicted in the previous chapter. Believers ought to abhor the doctrine and lifestyle of those who scoff at the Day of the Lord, and they should bear in mind how certainly the Lord God will publicly judge those people on the Last Day when this world shall be destroyed by fire. They should observe his long-suffering by the apparent delay of Christ's return. God does this in order to give his Son, as Mediator of his people and Head of the church, the opportunity to bring all whom the Father has given him to the church, and in this way to present to the Father his Bride without spot or blemish. Yes, let them keep themselves undefiled by the world separated from the deceivers who, like murderers, lie in wait for the church and for its member and who wish to corrupt and to destroy everything through deception.

MAIN THOUGHTS

This chapter consists of three parts.

In verses 1-7, Peter warns the readers (after having explained, in the first two verses, the reason why he has written to them twice) to be on guard against deceiving wandering spirits who scoff at the promise of Christ's second coming, pointing to the flood which destroyed the first world in judgment.

In verses 8-13, the apostle reminds them of the long-suffering of the Lord who acts according to his own timetable in working out his great plan of salvation, and who will come and purify the present world by fire.

In verses 14-18, he summons the faithful to live a holy life in zealous faithfulness, and to firmly trust the long-suffering of God for their salvation. The apostle makes the Lord's return central even though many have distorted his words. If believers are to grow in grace, they must keep themselves removed from all deception and apostasy.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verses 1 and 2

This is the "second letter"; the first one precedes this one in Scripture — see question 1.

"Wholesome" means "not misty", "transparent", therefore, "pure". "Thinking" refers to the disposition of the heart. See note on 2 Peter 1:13 concerning "reminders". Verse 2 states what the readers must be reminded about the Word of the prophets, and the commandment which the apostles have stressed on behalf of their Lord and Saviour. These prophetic and apostolic words are related to what Peter says later about Christ's return.

Verses 3 and 4

"In the last days" is a set expression for the dispensation of the New Covenant, which is the last covenant. The Saviour himself has already announced this (cf. Matthew 24:11,12; Luke 17:26 ff.; 18:8); and Paul also has predicted this (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1 ff.; 2 Timothy 3:1 ff.; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 5). "Scoffers" are people to whom scoffing has become second nature, as also appears from the addition: "following their own evil desires," indicating their life of sin. In verse 4 the contents of this scoffing are indicated; those persons ask, unabashed, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" that is, "Where is it? When is it going to be fulfilled?" — [see question 2](#).¹ "Ancestors" refers to the previous generation, the first generation of believers, the people who knew the Saviour while he was on earth. This question in the continuation of verse 4 is asked in contempt and motivated by appearances: the world remains unchanged.

Verses 5 and 6

"They deliberately forget". This indicates that they should know better, but they consciously make themselves blind to the truth. Their ignorance is voluntary. They should know that since the beginning, everything did not remain the same with God's creation. There, indeed, has come about a different world (cf. Genesis 7:11; 8:2). Existing "out of water and by water" indicates that water had such a dominating place in creation that destruction by a flood was possible. By using the phrase "was deluged", the apostle points out that the world had already been destroyed once by a terrible, judgmental disaster. That should show the scoffers the absurdity of their position.

Verse 7

"The present heavens and earth" refers to the world as it has been since the Flood. "By the same word" indicates that God's Word, no matter what the content is always fulfilled. "Reserved" is translated in the Dutch as "kept as a treasure", an image that indicates that, just as a treasure is carefully stored away until it is needed, so the world is being kept till the judgment by fire which will produce the destruction of the second world and of the ungodly. What difference does it make to God whether he uses water or fire as the instrument of judgment?

Verse 8

With reference to Psalm 90:4, this verse shows the greatness of God and insignificance of man. Our division of time may not be applied to him.

Verse 9

"Slow" means "tardy", "late". When Peter writes "some" he is probably thinking about believers who have permitted themselves to become influenced by the scoffing of the ungodly. God is "patient" in postponing his punishment. (cf. Matthew 18:26, 29) The Greek uses a verb for "not wishing" which indicates it is connected with deliberation, therefore meaning that he in his counsel decided. "Everyone" refers back to "you", meaning the church, the gathering of those who believe in Christ — [see question 3](#).

¹ The Greek word is *parousia*, literally, "presence" and also "appearance". In the East in those days it was the set expression for a visit paid by a king. On such occasions special coins were made.

Verse 10

To the phrase "like a thief", the words "in the night" have been added to some manuscripts, probably because it had become a set expression by then. They are not found in this text (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2) — [see question 4](#). There will be a "roar", like the rumbling of thunder. "Disappear" means to fall apart completely. "Elements" are component materials or elemental substances of the universe. Think about the progress in the science of splitting atoms! God can do at once, to the full extent and on a large scale, what man accomplishes only partially, even after much research. The earth is mentioned separately because it is the abode of the human race. It appears that the original wording for "everything in it will be laid bare" is "...will be exposed", that is, "brought to light" for punishment. Peter undoubtedly refers to the works of the ungodly here.

Verses 11 and 12

These two verses contain the calling to a holy walk. A total judgment of fire is awaiting the sinful world. "Live" refers to lifestyle; "godly lives", in the sense of "piety", refers to the principle of life. "Speed" — [see question 4](#) — (in connection with v. 9) must mean doing your utmost, exerting yourself in eager anticipation, being ever ready to receive the royal visit of Christ (cf. this to the feverish exertion of a town as it prepares to receive the Queen or the Royal family for a visit). "Melt" means completely dissolved.

Verse 13

It appears from this verse that the judgment by fire described here will not annihilate but will purify. "His promise" is to renew the universe (cf. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). "New" means renovated. To understand "new heaven" see the reference to Isaiah 30:26; Zechariah 14:6-7; for "new earth", see the reference to Revelation 21:1. "Righteousness" is that which is real and pure before the LORD (cf. Psalm 85:11-14).

Verse 14

With this verse the final exhortation begins and summarizes the contents of the letter. "To be found" refers to God's judgment.

Verse 15

The patience of God is "salvation", not "slowness", as the scoffers think. The "continuation" of the "prolonging" of time must be a strong stimulus for the believers to live in active sanctification — [see question 5](#). "Dear brother Paul" indicates the understanding between the two apostles — [see question 6](#).

Verse 16

Concerning "all his letters" — [see question 7](#). "Ignorant" refers to the lack of discretion and clear insight into the truth of God. "Unstable" means not founded on the truth. To "distort" is bestowing a meaning on something that it does not have.

Verses 17 and 18

In these verses "salvation" is worked out further. "Be forewarned" means to take heed, to "be on your guard". "The lawless" are violators of the law. "Secure position" is used correctly in my opinion, because it is not a matter of a quality contained by believers, but rather of the foundation of the truth, in the one, firm gospel of Christ. "Grow" therefore must mean spiritual growth. Verse 18a corresponds with chapter 1:2.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think about the opinion of some exegetes that the apostle refers to a lost letter in verse 1 and not to the book of 1 Peter?
2. Do you agree with the opinion that verses 3 and 4 indicate that this letter was not written by Peter, but in the second century?
3.
 - a) What is the error of "universalism"? (That is, the doctrine that Christ died for all people.)
 - b) Which heretics adhere to this teaching?
 - c) Which chapter of the Canons of Dort is written against this error?
 - d) Why is it unscriptural that the work of our Saviour is split into two parts, namely, atonement but no application?
4. Does the symbol of the "thief in the night" mean the same for the believers as for the ungodly (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5)?
5. Thinking about the discussion of verse 15, can we say that salvation is a concept about the hereafter?
6. On the basis of verses 15 and 16, is it correct to deny that Peter is the writer of this letter?
7. Which letters are referred to in verse 16?

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