



Sunday School Lesson for October 26, 2003.  
Released on October 23, 2003.

Study 2 Peter 3:3-18. Trust God's Promise  
Questions and answers below.

TIME: 64 B.C.  
PLACE: unknown

### **2 Peter 3:3-18**

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.

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:

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.

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

15 And account that the long-suffering 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.

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 steadfastness.

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.

## Lesson Background

Very plainly Jesus said He would come back. He said His coming would be announced by the failure of sun, moon, and stars. He said angels would gather Jesus' people from all over the world (Matthew 24:29-31). Jesus said also that He will judge the people of the world and separate those destined for a prepared kingdom from those destined for everlasting fire (25:31-46). If we believe Jesus, we had better give heed to His warning, "Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (25:13).

But as Peter writes his second and final letter in the mid-60s a.d., it's now been about thirty-five years since Jesus made His promise to return. Some fear that Jesus already has returned and that somehow they have missed it. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.) Others are becoming skeptical that Jesus will ever return.

But Peter has the solution to their skepticism. In last week's text he was emphatic in telling his readers that he was repeating things they already knew. He said that he was going to keep on repeating them as long as he lived on earth so his readers would remember those repeated teachings long after he was dead (2 Peter 1:12-15).

In the opening verses of chapter 3 he returns to that theme. He is stirring up his readers' minds "by way of remembrance": he is making sure that they will keep in mind the teaching of the inspired prophets and the apostles of Jesus (3:1,2). In the beginning of this week's text he explains why it is so necessary to keep that true teaching in mind. Scoffers are coming to make fun of the truth-indeed, they already abound. Christians must be ready to respond to them with "pure minds" (3:1).

According to the verse immediately preceding our printed text, Peter wanted to remind his readers of things that "were spoken before by the holy prophets, and . . . the apostles of the Lord." In other words, Peter was not communicating new truth to these saints but reminding them of what had previously been taught.

## Anticipating the Scoffers (2 Peter 3:3-7)

Like the first readers of this letter, we need to be prepared with the ancient truth taught by the prophets and apostles. Scoffers can cause a lot of damage if we're not alert to their activities and quick to respond. (See 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; and Jude 17-19.) We begin by anticipating the scoffers and their arguments. As the old saying goes, "Forewarned is forearmed!"

### 1. What does the term "last days" refer to (II Peter 3:3)?

The term "last days" appears five times in the New Testament (Acts, 2:17; II Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; II Pet. 3:3). While this phrase is frequently used to denote the end times, some passages seem to use "last days" to refer to the entire church age. For example, the book of Hebrews begins by stating that God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (1:2).

The scoffers who would come in the last days are not confined to that time immediately preceding the Second Coming. As seen in this passage, Peter and the early church had to deal with scoffers two thousand years ago.

## **2. What are some reasons why people might scoff at the idea of the Lord's return?**

There are many reasons why people might scoff at the idea of the Lord's return. First, there have been uninformed date setters, who have failed to heed the warning of Scripture concerning this practice (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7 I Thess. 5:1-2). Because of this, the unsaved may begin to scoff at the very idea of Christ's return.

Peter, however, singled out another reason scoffers abound. It is because they are following their own evil desires. If, in fact, there is a Second Coming and a final judgment of sinners before the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15), those outside of Christ will be eternally lost. Those living in an ungodly manner realize that if God's Word is true, they are in deep trouble. Rather than accept the truth of God's Word, they scoff at its teachings.

Evidently, the early Christians believed that Christ might return for the church at any moment. From the words of the angels at the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:11), we can understand why they even expected the Master to return during their lifetimes. In Thessalonica, some apparently believed that the Lord's return was so near that they had ceased working (II Thess. 3:10,11). Paul, however, pointed out that Jesus would not return until there was a "falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed" (II Thess. 2:3), who is usually identified with the beast of Revelation 13.

## **3. What specific question were the skeptics asking (v. 4)?**

Since several decades had passed and Christ had not yet returned, skeptics were asking, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (II Pet. 3:4). Apparently, Christians were being berated for proclaiming the Second Coming. Others have also faced such scoffing. Jeremiah's opponents asked, "Where is, the word of the Lord? let it come now" (Jer. 17:15): Likewise, evil men in Malachi's day asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17).

One reason the scoffers were confident in their assertion that Christ was not going to return had to do with the present order of things. From their perspective, everything in this world was continuing as it always had. Perhaps they had heard Christians speak of various cataclysmic events that were to occur before the end (Mark 13:7,8, 24-26). Since they had witnessed none of these things, they dismissed the whole concept of Christ's second advent.

## **4. How did Peter answer those who claimed that things have always been the same (v. 5)?**

Peter stated, the scoffers who rejected Christ's return, insisting that all things continued as they had from the beginning, were demonstrating a willful ignorance of God's past intervention in history. God's creation shows that all things are not as they have always been. God created the heavens and the earth by His spoken word. The "standing out of the water" in the description probably alludes to the dry land appearing out of the water (Gen. 1:9,10).

This creation perished in Noah's day when God judged the world with a universal flood (II Pet. 3:6). The divine interventions in the past prove that things have not continued and will not always continue as they are. To dismiss Christ's return on this basis is foolish.

## **5. What are some good techniques for Christians to use when witnessing to scoffers?**

Until they develop the wisdom to distinguish truth from error, perhaps it would be best for new Christians to avoid getting into prolonged discussions with a scoffer. Christians who tend to be argumentative should be taught to use a gentler approach. James gives a brief summary of one good way to respond: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). The prepared Christian can listen with courtesy to the scoffer. Good listening techniques earn the right to speak, providing the opening to share the message of Christ.

## **6. How will the world eventually be destroyed (v. 7)?**

Peter said that the present heavens and earth are likewise awaiting divine intervention in judgment. The same word that brought the great flood upon the earth now assures the destruction of the present order of things. When the world is destroyed the second time, though, it will not be with water but with fire. This will follow several other events associated with the second coming of Christ. Indeed, it will be a day of judgment, bringing the final destruction of ungodly men. Though some think they will escape this final great event, they shall not (I Thess. 5:3,4; Rev. 6:13-17).

### **Remembering the Truth (2 Peter 3:8-10)**

## **7. What does the comparison of a day with a thousand years imply for the way the Lord measures time (v. 8)?**

Since God does not measure time as we do, we should not be greatly concerned when events do not happen as quickly as we might expect. Those scoffing at the idea of the Second Coming needed to be reminded that God's timetable is different from ours (Ps. 90:4).

Though Peter was not speaking literally, the idea that one day with the Lord is like a thousand years reminds us that it is as if only two days have passed on God's calendar since Jesus was on earth.

The fact that we do not know God's timetable does not give credibility to claims that Jesus will not return. Our job is to live each day with our lives in order, ready to be called to be with Christ. The church must stress both God's timetable and the eventual return of Christ.

"He is not limited by time the way we are, nor does He measure it according to man's standards. When you study the works of God . . . you can see that He is never in a hurry, but He is never late" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor).

## **8. What is one major reason the Lord has not yet returned (v. 9)?**

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise" simply means that God always keeps His word. He kept His word by bringing judgment on the world in Noah's day; He will also keep His word concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though scoffers may think that the Lord is being slack (or slow) in keeping His promises, this is not true. The very fact that His timetable differs from ours should cause us to consider other reasons for His supposed delay in keeping His word.

Peter here identified God's longsuffering or patience, toward mankind as a primary reason for His decision not to bring immediate judgment upon sinners. As the psalmist asked, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Without God's patience, we would all be consumed by His wrath.

In spite of our sinfulness, God loves us and does not desire to see anyone perish. Even though Christ died for all (Rom. 11:32; II Cor. 5:14,15; I Tim. 2:4; Heb. 2:9), only those who respond to His grace will secure the benefits of His sacrificial death (John 3:16-18; 6:44; 10:27,28; 1 Tim. 4:10).

### **9. Does God want people to be lost? What is His desire?**

Since it is not God's will for any to be lost, His desire is "that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Literally, the word translated "repentance" means "to change the mind" and refers to a decision to turn from sin and turn to God. "The repentance to which men are called is more than sorrow, though it includes that. It is more than a change of mind, though it includes that .... it calls for a basic change of way" (Stagg, New Testament Theology, Broadman).

Throughout the book of Acts, it is clear that repentance was required of those who surrendered to Christ (2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Though some may preach a plan of salvation that does not include repentance, none can receive pardon without this change of heart.

### **10. What is meant by the expression "day of the Lord" (v. 10)?**

In this context the day of the Lord means the time of Jesus' second coming (v. 4). It is also the day of other tremendous events. A thief in the night comes when he is not expected, and so will the day of the Lord. The New Testament describes Jesus' return "as a thief" in several places (see Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2 ; Revelation 3:3; 16:15), so we must be ready.

"The day of the Lord," however, will not also depart unseen and unheard as a thief in the night does. On that day the people of earth "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). God's people will see the angels bringing them together to meet their Savior (24:31). Every person in the world will hear himself or herself pronounced blessed or cursed (25:34, 41). It is a day on which the Lord will bring about the end of the world and the universe that we know (Joel 2:10; Mark 13:24-27; Revelation 20:11). The heavens that we admire on a clear night shall pass away with a great noise.

### **Implementing the Truth ( 2 Peter 3:11-18 )**

In modern culture the question "So what?" usually is not a serious one. Often it is intended to imply that nothing important will come from what has been said or done. But in this case, "So what?" is a serious and important question since the answer points to eternal truth. This truth assures us that Jesus will come back according to His promise. The events He predicted in Matthew 24 and 25 will come to pass: the

gathering of His people and the judgment of all humanity. This future reality should cause us to live our lives in certain ways.

**11. How should believers in Christ carry themselves on a daily basis (vs. 11,12)?**

The very fact that the earth and everything on it will be dissolved is strong motivation to live a holy life. While physical and material needs are necessary, we must not invest only in the present. Those who have lived only for this world will discover that their investment was temporary. Laying up heavenly treasures assures us that we have kept things in proper perspective (Matt. 6:19-21; I Tim. 6:17-19).

We must remember that in the King James Version the word conversation does not mean "talk"; it means our whole way of life. Peter asks a rhetorical question, and the answer he expects is obvious. The way we live and act day by day should make it plain that we are God's people, holy, dedicated, set apart for His service. Godliness is reverence and awe before God, along with continual obedience to His teaching. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

We must be looking for the coming of Christ, but this does not mean passively doing nothing. The Greek word translated "hasting" in II Peter 3:12 means to "hasten," or "speed along," thus implying that we might in some way speed the return of Christ. However, the Greek word used here can also refer to an eager, active anticipation.

**12. What does the Bible say about life on the new earth (v. 13)?**

God's promise of new heavens and a new earth is seen in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 . John saw the new creation in a vision (Revelation 21:1), and he gives a marvelous description of the New Jerusalem that he saw "coming down from God out of heaven" (21:2). John goes on to say that there will be no death, sorrow, crying, or pain on the new earth (Rev. 21:4).

Unlike the present world, which is filled with wickedness, this new earth will be characterized by righteousness.

**13. What should we take account of according to verses 14, 15?**

Believers in Christ not only know that the end of the world is coming but actually look forward to it. This does not mean that we desire the destruction of the world but that we anticipate a better world awaiting us.

Since we are to live in that new creation where righteousness lives, we are to take care to be righteous here and now. Just as Christ was without spot and blameless (see 1 Peter 1:19), so are we to be. It is His blood that makes us so. When we see that our daily lives are not quite spotless, we are disappointed but not dismayed. Our hope remains sure; "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

**14. In what two areas did Peter encourage growth? Why is such growth important (vs. 17,18)?**

Since the redeemed are aware of God's judgment, they must be careful that they are not "led away with the error of the wicked" and fall into disobedience (v. 17). Instead, we are to grow in the knowledge of Jesus as we read about Him in the Bible, as we walk with Him day by day, and when we die to sin with Him. This was Paul's own earnest desire (Philippians 3:10, 11). Growth in knowledge enables spiritual progress that assures us we will not get sidetracked by Satan. We grow in grace when we increase our service in various ways (e.g., 2 Corinthians 8:7) and continually recognize how gracious God has been to us. This is true Christian growth!

**15. Why is it important for Christians to grow in grace as well as in knowledge?**

Knowledge by itself can lead to arrogance (see 1 Corinthians 8:1). An arrogant attitude won't win anyone to Christ. But when we grow in grace-which includes coming to grips with the depths of God's grace to us-we become more humble. This, in turn, results in our being more gracious to those around us. This demeanor, coupled with our Christian "knowledge," is what will allow us to win the most people to Christ.

**CONCLUSION**

**The Spot Remover**

Lets conclude this lesson with a long look at ourselves in the light of the ideal set forth in verse 14 of our text. Is the life we are living really "without spot, and blameless"? If a long look reveals a few spots in our way of life, let's apply the spot remover recommended in 1 John 1:9 (see next week's lesson). And let us do so with full trust in the One who always has kept His promises, and always will.

**PRAYER**

Forgive us, Father. We do confess the sins that spot our holiness and make us less than we want to be. And along with Your gracious forgiveness that makes us clean, please give us wisdom, strength, and courage to keep ourselves clean today and tomorrow and all through the week. In Jesus' name, amen.

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

All of God's promises are trustworthy. Are we?

**ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Each of us needs everyday cleansing. In next week's lesson we will see how such cleansing within comes only through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus. Study 1 John 1:1-3:10.

As a reminder: We will pause the Sunday school lessons for a three week vacation beginning November 2, - November 16, 2003. Your Sunday school lessons will resume via e-mail on Thursday, November 20, 2003 (Lesson 12 "Remain Loyal" Printed Text: 2 John 4-9; 3 John 3-12). Please keep us, as well as this ministry in your prayers.

Next week's lesson will be our last e-mail before vacation.

May the Lord continue to bless you!

Sincerely,  
Willie Ferrell  
Jesus Is All Ministries