

SECOND PETER

Lesson 9

Mockers of the Second Advent

2 Peter 3:1-9

I often hear people say, “You don’t really believe that Christ is coming back to this earth do you? That would be a supernatural event and today only the ignorant believe in the supernatural. We live in a closed system, and this world has been evolving for millions of years. There is no Second Coming of Christ; in fact, there is no basis at all for the superstitious belief of Christianity.” This type of thinking is prevalent today and it was prevalent in the first century, for anti-supernaturalists have been both inside and outside the church since it’s beginning.

In his second epistle Peter refutes false teachers in his day who were denying many of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, one being the Second Advent of Christ. The implication in this passage is that as we move closer to the end times (latter days) there will be more and more denial of the return of Christ to this earth, especially within the professing Christian church.

Even today there are multiple thousands of people who go to church and repeat “Thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer or quote the Apostles’ Creed which says, “He will come to judge the living and the dead,” but most of them do not believe Christ is coming again. For them it is just the mouthing of ritual and clinging to tradition. They deny the Second Advent and the judgment of men, which will accompany it.

The Bible teaches the Second Advent and evangelical, Bible-believing Christians have held to the Second Coming of Christ since the church began. Every true Christian waits patiently and longingly for this event, for no one knows the day or the hour Christ will appear again. For sure, the Apostle Peter believed in the Second Advent, and in this third chapter of Second Peter he tears into the false teachers who were denying it.

CHALLENGE TO SCRIPTURE (3: 1-2)

“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder.”

Peter moves from heretics to encouraging the faithful. With a real pastor’s heart, he calls the Christian readers “beloved.” He uses the term four times in this chapter, verses 1, 8, 14 and 17. Peter understood that saints need to be encouraged, for it is difficult to persevere in a world that is anti-Christian and anti-supernatural.

Peter writes this second letter to remind his readers of truths they already knew from the Old Testament, from Christ’s teaching and from his previous letter. Christians have to be reminded over and over again of truths they have already heard, for the tendency of the human mind is to forget. This is why it is perfectly all right to preach a sermon or a series of sermons over again to the same audience because we must be challenged to remember (and practice) the truth we already know.

“that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.”

Peter links together the message of the prophets (Old Testament), of Christ and the Apostles. The Old and New Testaments agree that there is one message about God, His kingdom and His way of salvation. True Christians are those who have submitted themselves to the Bible, and we cannot call ourselves Christian unless we are willing to submit to it.

From time to time all Christians have problems with Scripture. There are areas of the Bible that we may not understand and theological issues we may struggle with and never solve to our satisfaction, but the Bible is still our authority. We are not free to call ourselves Christians and then live as we please. We simply do not have that liberty, for we are submitted to the Word of God as our only rule of faith and practice.

The specific areas of Scripture Peter is talking about in this context are the Old and New Testament revelations on the Second Coming of Christ and the events surrounding it. His emphasis is on the Second Coming and the kingdom.

From earliest times, Christians have believed that Christ would come and establish a kingdom on the earth where He will rule and reign with the church over a future, earthly Messianic kingdom. In theological terms, this is called premillennialism, and it was the dominant view of eschatology (prophecy) in the second century and was held by such great men as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr.

Premillennialism is the belief that the Lord Jesus will come before the earthly kingdom (usually believed to be one thousand years), to set up His kingdom and execute judgment upon those who are opposed to the God of heaven. At His Second Advent Christ will establish this earthly kingdom by His own sovereign power and will reign over the inhabitants of the earth, both Israel and the Gentiles.

There are other viewpoints on Christ’s return and kingdom that have merit, but when considered in light of the Old and New Testaments, the evidence, in my opinion, favors premillennialism. One of these is amillennialism, which holds to the Second Advent of Christ but denies an earthly kingdom. For them, Christ’s coming ushers in the eternal state, (the new heaven and new earth). Another viewpoint is postmillennialism whose proponents are a vanishing breed. They believe that through the preaching of the gospel of Christ the church will bring in the millennium; the world will become more Christianized and then Christ will return ushering in the eternal state.

One of the basic reasons I am a premillennialist is that the Old Testament does teach that Messiah will establish an earthly kingdom. I realize that the New Testament says very little about an earthly kingdom, but there is a reason for this. The Lord Jesus and the Apostles had the Old Testament as their Bible. They assumed the earthly kingdom would be established with Israel at the center of this kingdom.

“And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth’” (Acts 1:6-8).

The Lord Jesus and the Apostles did not regard the Old Testament as an out-of-date book; therefore, an earthly kingdom established by Messiah was basic to their thinking. However, during the time of Israel's rejection of Messiah, which began at the First Advent of Christ, and Israel's acceptance of Messiah, which will take place at the Second Advent, God is dealing with the church, which is spiritual Israel.

The kingdom for the church is a spiritual kingdom. If we are at all serious about taking the Old Testament literally, then there will be an earthly, Messianic kingdom that will be set up after the Second Advent of our Lord. Then the promises of the Old Testament to Jews and Gentiles will be fulfilled.

CHARGE OF THE MOCKERS (3:3-4)

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking”

These mockers will scoff, deride, reproach and ridicule the whole idea of a cataclysmic, supernatural event like the Second Coming of Christ. They will laugh at the idea of judgment and the end of the world as we now know it. This mocking will take place during a period called the “last days.” Peter is not thinking only of some far off time or a period immediately prior to the coming of Jesus Christ (although this is included). Biblically speaking the “last days” began with the First Advent of Christ and will continue through the Second Advent.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1-2).

As we move toward the end of the last days, we can expect more and more apostasy within the professing church, which parallels what the Apostles were facing in the first century. The issues faced by the first century will also be the issues faced by the twentieth or twenty-first centuries (if the Lord tarries). The only difference will be that in the latter days the apostasy will be much worse. Greater numbers of people who call themselves Christian will deny the Second Coming of Christ as we near the end time.

“following after their own lusts”

These mockers will not pursue a life of holiness because they do not believe the Bible. They deny the Second Advent and so deny a judgment. If there is no judgment, then there is no reason to pursue holiness. Peter has described these false teachers as “sensual” (2:18). They are materialists and think of life in terms of what they can touch, taste, feel, hear and see. They live for the here and now—eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. They are anti-supernaturalists, having no contact with or interest in spiritual things.

“and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’”

Much time had lapsed since the promise of Messiah's coming. Thousands of years had passed since the Old Testament predictions and at least a generation since Christ and the Apostles declared the Second Advent. Many of the Apostles had passed off the scene and still Christ had not returned. The false teachers insinuated that God's promise was unreliable, that the passage of so much time without the event taking place showed it never would. He had not come and the scoffers concluded He would not. Peter's answer is in verses 8 and 9. There is a definite reason why Christ has not come back yet and why He may not return for a long while.

“For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”

This sounds like our modern-day objections. The mockers argued that since creation, nature has not changed; things move along as they always have; the world is forever stable. We live in a closed naturalistic universe governed by chance where law is uniform, miracle is impossible and the supernatural inconceivable.

This is nothing more than uniformitarianism which is the basis of all humanistic, atheistic evolution. The return of Christ would be a catastrophic, supernatural event. The mockers reasoned that the Second Advent was a foolish dream of religious fanatics, not worthy of the serious thought of men of enlightenment and culture.

Isn't it amazing how relevant the Word of God is for our day? Two thousand years ago Peter described the denial of the Second Advent by mockers in the twentieth century church. Peter was not only able to anticipate the humanistic theory of evolution but also to give the reason for it. The Bible is a contemporary book.

COMMON ERRORS OF THE MOCKERS (3: 5-7)

“For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water.”

Peter answers this second objection first—that all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation. From history he shows that there have been divine acts where God intervened in the normal course of things. Nature has not always been uniform. The mockers' first error was a failure to recognize creation. Peter's point is that God created this world, an extremely cataclysmic event.

The words “escape their notice” should be translated “they are willfully ignorant.” They know the facts about creation but because this deals with God and the supernatural, they purposefully neglect those facts. The perfectly ordered universe with its billions of stars and planets should tell us that this is a created cosmos; it did not happen by chance. But mockers deny the supernatural and the existence of a personal God so they choose to ignore the facts.

A butcher went to hear a college professor teach on the theory of evolution. The professor explained the world by the big bang theory (which just happened by chance millions of years ago) and man as the product of spontaneous generation. The professor laughed at the whole idea of a personal God and creation. Being a simple man (not

educated into atheism as was the professor), the butcher said, “If I took my meat grinder and broke it into fifty pieces and put them in a box, that box could be continually shaken for the next five million years and the parts would never fall together to make another meat grinder.” The butcher looked at an ordered universe and knew there had to be a Creator.

“through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.”

Peter goes back to the Flood, another definite time when God intervened supernaturally into nature. God used the Flood to destroy a whole apostate race and only Noah and his family (eight people in all) escaped. This was a cataclysmic judgment on a wicked race. The Flood came when men were mocking God and not expecting it, and the Second Advent will come when again men are mocking God and not expecting it.

Humanists, atheists and anti-supernaturalists stay willfully ignorant about a universal flood. In spite of abundant evidence, naturalists choose to ignore the facts. Accepting the facts would necessitate accepting the supernatural, and this they refuse to do because their premise excludes the supernatural. A universal flood is in almost every account of culture in the ancient world, their written tradition making reference to such an event. This clear evidence is ignored by intelligent men because they start with the presupposition that the supernatural is impossible.

“But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

The mockers also failed to recognize future judgment. The same word of God which created the world and sent the Flood will also send the Lord Jesus Christ back to this earth in His Second Advent to judge ungodly men and women. A future cataclysmic event will be the destruction of the world by fire. As surely as God created the world and intervened with the Flood to destroy an apostate race, He will intervene again and send His Son Jesus Christ back to this earth to reward the saints and judge the ungodly. Those who have believed in Christ shall be saved and rewarded. Those who have rejected Christ shall be judged and eternally destroyed away from the presence of God forever.

CAUSE FOR THE LORD’S DELAY (3:8-9)

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Here Peter answers the question, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Why was there a delay in the first century and why has there been a delay for almost two thousand years? Peter points to the relativity of time from God’s perspective. What man regards as a long time is like a mere day in God’s reckoning. His clock does not operate on the same basis as ours. It is not dependent upon the rotation of the earth and its orbit around the sun.

God is the eternal now. He is past, present and future. He knows the end from the beginning; all is present with Him, including the imminent end of all things. It is nothing

for God to reckon a thousand years as one day. So, by His eternal clock, the promise of Christ's coming is just as certain as if it were made the day before yesterday. We can be sure it is fresh in His mind.

It is amazing to think that Christ had said just two days ago, "I will come again and receive you to Myself." We simply cannot think like God. Time is no issue for Him; His clock is determined by the redemptive process, not by time and space.

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness"

This concerns the Second Advent, not salvation. The return of Jesus Christ to this earth is right on schedule according to God's sovereign plan.

"but is patient toward you"

Who is the object of God's patience here? The "you" are the "beloved," the saints, the believers in Christ to whom Peter is writing. The context demands this interpretation so we can be assured that God's patient longsuffering here has something to do with Christians, not non-Christians.

"not wishing (willing) for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

This phrase is probably the most misused and abused verse in the entire Bible. As soon as one declares that there are some who are elect and some who are not elect, almost automatically someone will quote 2 Peter 3:9: "*God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*"

There are four interpretations, but in my opinion, only two fit the context:

Universalism. If this verse is taken literally and one refers it to the sovereign will of God, then it teaches that all men will ultimately be saved. If God sovereignly wills that none shall perish, then none will perish, all will be saved. The Greek word *boulomai* means "wishing" in only a few cases, and in most cases means "a planned purpose" or "a sovereign will." If this verse refers to salvation and the "any" and "all" refer to mankind in general, then it teaches universalism, for it would be God's sovereign will that not one human being perish and that every person come to repentance.

Since the "you" in the verse is a definite reference to Christians, this interpretation does not fit the context. At least six times in this letter Peter mentions eternal judgment for false teachers and/or their followers (2:1, 3; 3:6-7, 9, 16), so Peter would be contradicting himself. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, declares eternal judgment of the lost.

Desire of God. Many Bible scholars make a distinction between the emotional will and the sovereign will of God. They would say that it is not God's emotional desire that any should perish but in His hidden plan, some do. God does not want (wish) any to perish and He wants (wishes) all to be saved, for God is ready to show His mercy to all.

“who (God our Savior) desires all to come to the knowledge of the truth” (men to be saved and Tim. 2:4).

“For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all” (Rom.1:32).

The word for wishing is *boulomai*, meaning “a planned purpose” and refers to God’s sovereign will. It is difficult to translate this “desire” or “wish” even though the NASB does so. In context, the “you” refers to Christians, not non-Christians. It is difficult to make a distinction between God’s sovereign will and emotional desire, for the Bible seems to indicate that all of God’s desires do come to pass. *“And what His soul desires, that He does” (Job 23:13).*

Repentance for Christians in Error. The context is about false teachers who were denying the promise of the Second Coming. Apparently, some weak Christians were beginning to accept this teaching. It is possible that this verse may not refer to salvation at all but to being recovered from doctrinal error. God is patient toward Christians who have fallen into error and it is not His sovereign will that any Christians perish by falling into such error but rather that they repent of the error.

This fits the context very well, but there are objections. The word “perish” seems to indicate salvation, for the general context speaks many times of eternal destruction for false teachers and their followers and the word “repentance” is generally used in the Bible in a salvation context.

Elect of God. The “you” and “any” and “all” refer in context to the elect of God, the total community of true believers who will believe before the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. The whole context is addressed to the “beloved.” It could be translated, “But (God) is patient toward you Christians, not sovereignly purposing that any of you Christians should perish but that all of you Christians should come to repentance.”

It is God’s sovereign will or determined purpose to save all the elect of the church before the Lord returns. This explanation fits the context both grammatically and theologically. Peter wrote this section to be an encouragement to the saints, and what could be a greater encouragement than to know God has a plan and all of His elect will be saved?

Let us not miss the argument of this passage: Christ’s return is delayed while God’s plan of gathering all His elect before the Second Advent is taking place. Does the delay indicate that God is frustrated, defeated and discouraged because for thousands of years men have been rejecting Christ? No, He is delaying the Second Advent until the last elect one is saved; then the trumpet will sound for the Second Coming of Christ. (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

“Come” in this verse literally means, “to make room, space or time for; to have opportunity.” God is delaying the Second Advent giving opportunity for the elect to be

saved. Who are the elect? Only God knows, but as far as we are concerned they are all those who respond to Jesus Christ by faith for salvation. That is why we preach, teach, evangelize, pray, depend on the Holy Spirit and offer the gospel to every person. Our task is to preach the gospel and win men to Christ, and we must leave the election of individuals to God.

A woman came to Charles Haddon Spurgeon and said, “Why preach the gospel to everyone if God has an elect people which will be saved?” Spurgeon quickly answered, “If God made the elect with a yellow stripe painted down their back, then I would stop preaching the gospel and go lift shirt tails!”

CONCLUSION

There are several things God wants us Christians to learn from this portion of Scripture. First, we prove and demonstrate the reality of our salvation by our willingness to be submissive to Scripture. Second, anti-supernaturalism, humanism and evolution are not unique to our generation (although these things may be with us on a wider scale today) for Peter fought these philosophies in the first century. Third, as we move towards the Second Advent, we can expect more and more false teaching within the church and we must resist it. Fourth, Christ’s Second Advent is coming and we Christians are to watch, wait and work, for the time seems to be drawing near. Fifth, from the human perspective, we can hasten the coming of the Lord in His Second Advent, for every person we lead to Christ is another elect one in God’s kingdom. When the last elect one is brought in, then Christ will return for His church.

If you are not yet a Christian, Peter warns you, and I warn you, that judgment is coming. Six times in this letter it says that those who do not believe in Christ will perish and face eternal destruction (2:1, 3; 3:6, 7, 9, 16). Why will you perish? Because you are a sinner and have no Savior.

If a thousand years is as one day to the Lord, then sins you committed three, five, ten, twenty or fifty years ago are just as open to God as if they happened yesterday. Time makes no difference in the guilt of sin before God. Time erases no guilt, but Jesus Christ erases all the guilt of those who repent and receive Christ as Lord and Savior. Christ died for sinners and any sinner who will come to Him will be forgiven and saved.

Perhaps you are saying, “How can I know I’m among the elect?” You can settle that issue forever by coming to Christ in simple faith. Change your mind about Christ; believe He died for your sins; bow to Him as your God, and you shall be saved. Then, and only then, will you know you are among God’s elect.