Last Day Mockers

2 Peter 3:1-18 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 11

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Peter has spent a whole chapter on false teachers, and now he names them again by a different word. In chapter two they were teachers who "secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1). In chapter three they are mockers, and Peter tells us what they mock: the promise of the Lord's coming.

That has been the target all along. Peter put the prophetic word in front of his readers as "a light that shines in a dark place" (1:19), warned that false teachers would rise up among them, and now he says the day is coming when men will stand up and ask where that promise has gone. This chapter is his answer, and the answer turns out to be on the first page of the Bible.

I. Another Reminder

> "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." (2 Pet. 3:1-2)

This is the third time Peter has said he's writing to remind them. Back in chapter one: "I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (1:12), and, "I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease" (1:15). A man who knows his death is near keeps circling back to one subject.

So what does he want them to recall? Two things, and they're the same thing twice: "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets," and "the commandment of us, the apostles." The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, saying the same thing. And notice the adjective: *holy* prophets. Peter has just finished writing about the other kind, the "false prophets among the people" of chapter two (2:1). He wants his readers' minds full of what the true ones said.

What did they say? Peter has already told us. He set his own eyewitness account against "cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:16). That's the subject. The Lord is coming, and a kingdom comes with Him.

II. Where Is the Promise of His Coming?

> "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 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 creation.'" (2 Pet. 3:3-4)

"Knowing this first." Peter used that same phrase a few verses earlier about prophecy (1:20). He uses it for what his readers must have straight before anything else.

Now listen to what these men actually say, because there are two parts to it. First a question: "Where is the promise of His coming?" Then the reason they ask it: "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." The question is about timing. The argument under it is that nothing has ever interrupted the world's ordinary course, so nothing will. He hasn't come, time keeps passing, the generation that was promised has died off, and the world goes on exactly as it always has.

That isn't a denial that He said He would come. It's a sneer at how long it's taking.

Paul warned the same regions about the same thing. "The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). And writing to Thessalonica about this very subject, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him," he told them not to be "soon shaken in mind or troubled... as though the day of Christ had come" (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Two apostles, the same warning, and the warning is about the Lord's coming every time.

III. Which Flood?

> "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. 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. 3:5-7)

"They willfully forget." The older wording is "willingly ignorant," and it's the better picture. These men aren't missing a fact. They're holding their position with the fact in plain view.

What fact? A world that perished in water. And this is where we have to read carefully, because most people take verse 6 to be Noah's flood. Peter gives three signposts, and all three point somewhere else.

"By the word of God." That's how Peter says the heavens were and how the earth came out of the water. Go to Genesis 1 and that's the refrain: "Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters'" (Gen. 1:6), and then, "Then God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so" (1:9). The dry land came out of the water because God spoke. Now go to Noah's flood and look for that. You won't find it. "The waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased" (Gen. 8:3), and months later "the waters were dried up from the earth" (8:13). The water went down over time while Noah waited. No word was spoken to bring the earth out of it.

"From the beginning of creation." That's the mockers' own frame, and Peter answers them inside it. Genesis 1:1 is the only place in Scripture that says "In the beginning."

"The heavens." Peter names the heavens along with the earth, both in verse 5 and in verse 7. Noah's flood was a judgment on the earth and on the men living on it. It did nothing to the heavens.

So Peter is taking them back to the beginning, and what he says happened there is that a world perished. Genesis says it this way: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was [became] without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:1-2). Isaiah is the lock on it. God "did not create it in vain" (Isa. 45:18), and Isaiah's word for "in vain" is the same word Genesis uses for "without form." The condition Genesis 1:2 describes is not how God made it, so something happened in between. Ezekiel names the cause. Speaking to one he calls "the anointed cherub" (Ezek. 28:14), God says, "You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities" (28:18).

Then six days of God's work bring order out of that ruin, every day of it by His spoken word. That's the world we live in, and Peter says it is "preserved by the same word" and "reserved for fire."

Do you see what that does to the mockers' argument? Their whole case is that nothing has ever interrupted the world's course. Peter says the first page of Scripture records an interruption so complete that the earth had to be brought back out of the water, and the present order is already scheduled for another one.

IV. One Day as a Thousand Years

> "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)

Verse 8 is usually quoted as though Peter were saying time means nothing to God. Read it where it sits and that can't be it. Peter has just named a past destruction (v. 6) and a future one (v. 7), and then he gives his readers a figure for the time between them. The mockers asked a question about timing. Peter hands his readers a measure.

A measure of what? Count the days he's just been talking about. Genesis 1 has six of them, and then: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:2-3). Six days of work on a ruined creation, then a day of rest. Put Peter's measure on that pattern and you have six thousand years of work and a thousand-year rest at the end of it.

And the seventh day was never left behind in Genesis. God made it a sign for Israel, a day they could not work on under penalty of death, set in front of them every week of their lives. Hebrews says what it was pointing at:

> "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.... For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'.... There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." (Heb. 4:1, 4, 9)

Hebrews reaches back to the seventh day of Genesis 2 and says the rest it pictured is still out ahead. Israel had a picture of it in the land, and the first generation out of Egypt never got there: "to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:18-19). Hebrews holds that up as a warning to Christians about a rest that is still unentered, and tells them, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:11).

So where is the promise of His coming? It is on the first two pages of the Bible, in six days of work and a seventh of rest. That is why Peter can say, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise." He isn't running late. He is working to a schedule that was published at the beginning, and the time His patience is buying is time for men to repent.

V. The Day of the Lord

> "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." (2 Pet. 3:10)

Read that verse slowly and it raises a question. How does one day arrive quietly, like a thief, and also end with the heavens passing away and the earth burned up? Those are two very different events, and both are inside the same day.

They fit the moment you take verse 8 seriously. The day of the Lord is a thousand years long. It has a beginning and it has an end, and Peter names both.

It *begins* as a thief. Jesus used the same figure: "if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:43-44). Paul used it too, and then drew a line through his readers: "you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.... But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day.... Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:2, 4-6). A thief surprises the man who is asleep. Paul says Christians don't have to be among them. And lest anyone think only the world can be caught out, Jesus said this to a church: "if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (Rev. 3:3).

It *ends* with the dissolution Peter describes, and the prophets had already described it. "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed" (Ps. 102:25-26). "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll" (Isa. 34:4). John saw it at the far end of the thousand years: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them" (Rev. 20:11). And then: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

A thief at the front of it, a world dissolved at the back of it, and a thousand years in between. That's the day Peter says is coming on schedule.

VI. The Day of God

> "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. 3:11-13)

Notice that Peter has changed names. Verse 10 was "the day of the Lord." Verse 12 is "the day of God." They are not the same thing. The day of the Lord is the thousand years, the seventh day, the rest. What Peter calls the day of God lies on the other side of that dissolution, and it is a new order altogether: "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

And here the measure Peter gave us runs out. A day as a thousand years governed the seven days of Genesis. Scripture doesn't extend it past the seventh, and it says very little about the length of what follows. Peter calls it a day because it is God's own, not because anyone has counted it.

What he does tell us is how to live in the meantime, and his answer is a question put to his readers: "what manner of persons ought you to be?" Two things, he says. Be marked by "holy conduct and godliness." And be "looking for and hastening" that day. Those are the words of men leaning forward. Paul used the same posture: "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

VII. His Longsuffering Is Salvation

> "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are 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. 3:14-16)

"Be found by Him." That's a man being looked over when the Lord arrives, and Peter wants them found "without spot and blameless." Hold that next to what he called the false teachers: "They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you" (2:13). Two ways to be found at His coming, and Peter has now described both.

Then: "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." Which salvation? These are people who already have "like precious faith" with the apostles (1:1). Peter isn't telling saved men that God's patience will get them saved. He's talking about the salvation this whole letter and the one before it have been driving at, "the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9), the abundant entrance into the coming kingdom he held out in chapter one (1:11). The time the Lord is taking is not evidence that His promise failed. It's the room He's giving His people to grow up into what He's holding for them.

Peter adds that Paul wrote the same things to them, which tells us these Christians had both apostles' teaching in hand. He also admits some of it is "hard to understand." Then look who gets

into trouble with it: "untaught and unstable people twist [it] to their own destruction." *Untaught*, so they never grew. *Unstable*, the same word he used for the people the false teachers go after, "enticing unstable souls" (2:14). And "destruction" is the word that has run through both chapters, the loss of what was held out to them.

> "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Pet. 3:17-18)

That follows straight on. If untaught and unstable men twist the Scriptures to their own loss, then the safeguard is to be neither. "Beware lest you also fall" is the warning; "but grow" is the remedy. And it's the same remedy Peter opened the letter with: "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge" (1:5). The last word of his last letter is *grow*.

Applying "Last Day Mockers"

The mockers in this chapter don't argue that Jesus never promised to come. They argue that He's taking too long, and they build that on the claim that the world has always gone on just as it goes on now. Peter answers them from Genesis. A world perished at the beginning, God brought this one up out of the water by His word in six days and rested on the seventh, and that pattern is the schedule. He is not slack. He is on time, and the time He is taking is for repentance.

So the answer to a man who mocks the Lord's coming is not a better argument about the headlines. It's Scripture, read from the beginning, line upon line. And the answer for us is what Peter says it is: be the kind of people who are looking for that day and hastening it, found by Him in peace, without spot, neither untaught nor unstable. Don't fall from your own steadfastness. Grow.

Looking Ahead

With verse 18 Peter's pen stops. But he said something in this last paragraph that we passed over, and it deserves a message of its own: "our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul wrote to these same people about these same things, Peter says, and about them in every letter he wrote. Next time we'll go and see whether that holds up.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.