

SECOND PETER

Lesson 10

Consummation of the World

2 Peter 3:10-13

Modern-day secular scientists, headed by such prophets of doom as Dr. Paul Ehrlich, professor of biology at Stanford University, have been declaring for years that the world is headed for some cataclysmic event that may signal the end of the world. They say that the end of the world could come by atomic war. They predict that there will be massive famines because of our inability to feed billions of people on this globe due to the never-ending population explosion and lack of water.

These secular scientists speak of the complete loss of ocean fisheries because of extreme fishing pressure. Marine pollution and the destruction of estuaries could also lead to global famine. Dr. Ehrlich suggests that men are going to be so desperate for food that governments will tamper with the weather patterns in order to get a higher yield of food and that this tampering may endanger the human race. Lastly, they speak of the rapid destruction of the ozone layer due to advanced technology. If this layer goes, the human race is doomed.

It is true that all these things may happen to the human race and to the physical world, but none of them will bring the consummation (end) of the world. Man will never destroy the world as we now know it, but someday God will destroy it. The means He will use is fire. Whatever else 2 Peter 3:10-13 may tell us, we know that it does teach that one day this world will be consumed by scorching fire (3:7). God created this world and He will destroy it. It will be burned up in order that the Lord may create or recreate new heavens and a new earth.

COMING OF THE DAY OF THE LORD (3: 10a)**“But”**

This answers the question raised by the false teachers who denied and mocked the whole idea of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, who will return bodily and visibly to this world to establish His kingdom. These scoffers asked the question, *“Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation”* 21 Pet. 3:4).

Peter answered this question by showing that the world has not always gone on without cataclysmic interventions of God. The creation itself and the world-wide flood that destroyed the human race, except for Noah and his seven family members, were such interventions. Peter then stated that the next world-wide judgment will be by fire at which time all the ungodly (unbelievers from Adam to the end), shall be judged. It seems that this will be the Great White Throne Judgment.

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were

judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:11-15).

According to the chronology of the Book of Revelation, the Great White Throne Judgment occurs before the creating of the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21-22) and after the Second Advent of Christ (Rev. 19) and the establishing of the earthly millennial kingdom (Rev. 20). Then Peter tells why God has delayed the Second Advent of Jesus Christ to this earth. He has a plan to save His elect; therefore, He is longsuffering towards Christians (the total community of the elect, the total body of Christ), not sovereignly willing that any of the elect should perish but that all the elect should come to repentance.

Aren't you glad that the Lord didn't come back one hundred years ago? If he had, you would not have been saved. He has delayed His coming until the last elect one is saved. The elect of God are all who trust in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Our task as Christians is to preach the gospel to all and invite all to receive Christ, leaving the election of individuals to salvation to God.

“the day of the Lord will come like a thief”

The “day of the Lord” in this context must be the Second Advent, for it answers the question, “Where is the promise of His coming?” The long delay in Christ's coming should not make men careless or lull them into a false security, for the Second Advent will come like a thief.

Peter mentions some events that accompany the second coming of Christ. In the Old Testament the Day of the Lord is the term used for the Second Advent.(Isa. 2:12; 13:6; Amos 5:18; Mal. 4:5). It is described as a day of visitation (Isa. 10:3), a day of wrath (Ezek. 7:14), a day of war (Joel 3:9-14) and a day of judgment (Zeph. 1:2-18).

With the Second Advent, of which no man knows the day or the hour, comes a series of events which will ultimately consummate in the destruction of the world by fire. The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. It will be sudden, unexpected and disastrous to this world which will be completely caught off guard. Our Lord Jesus taught this same truth.

“Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matt. 24:42-44).

There is a special blessing for the Christian who is constantly waiting for Christ, observing the signs that Christ told his followers to look for. *“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame” (Rev. 16:15).* In fact, the true church at the end time will be waiting and watching for Christ. The true church will not be surprised for they will be diligently looking for the Lord's return.

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief” (1 Thess. 5:2-4).

The church knows neither the day nor the hour, but they will be able to sense the general time and will not be taken by surprise when Christ returns.

CONSUMING OF THE WORLD BY FIRE (3: 10b)

“in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”

Students of prophecy have disagreed over when the world will be destroyed, not over the fact that it will be destroyed. The timing is the issue, and it is a major disagreement between amillennial and premillennial scholars. At face value, the chronology of 2 Peter 3:10-13 seems to support the idea that Christ will come back, judge the world, reward the saints and then destroy the world. There is obviously no reference to a thousand-year earthly kingdom, observe the amils, and if Peter had any knowledge of an earthly millennium, it is remarkable that he did not mention it here.

This Scripture is a very strong argument for the amillennial position, but there are some answers that a premillennialist can give to explain why a millennium is not mentioned here. First, while 2 Peter gives an apparent chronology, so does Revelation, which is the last word on prophetic things. Revelation 19:11-16 refers to Christ’s Second Advent.

“And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS’” (Rev. 19:11-16)

Then Revelation 20 speaks of a thousand years where Satan is bound and the saints reign with Christ:

“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded

because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:1-4).

Then in Revelation 21 and 22 the vision of the new heavens and the new earth is set forth. *“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea” (Rev. 21:1).*

Second, the Day of the Lord is the Second Advent and this event begins a whole series or complex of events in a cosmic perspective—the rapture of the church, the resurrection of the just, the judgment of the nations, the establishment of an earthly kingdom, the resurrection of the unjust, the Great White Throne Judgment and the casting of all the lost into the lake of fire.

Chronology in prophecy often skips over many events. For instance, in the Old Testament a passage may have a prophetic reference to both the First and Second Advents of Christ, but no mention of any events in between. Other prophetic passages make mention of the other events. Peter did not have to mention the millennium in the passage we are dealing with to believe in it.

Third, prophecy often does not cover every event but rather certain events are given special emphasis to make a point. Peter was talking about the world being consumed by fire which should cause Christians to want to live godly lives in light of this knowledge, being in contrast to the ungodly lives of false teachers. He did not mention the millennium because it had no relevance to the issue of holiness that he was pursuing.

Fourth, time is of no concern to God. A gap of a thousand years between the Day of the Lord and the final destruction of the world by fire is no issue for Him, for a thousand years is as one day in His sight.

Fifth, in this context about the Second Advent and future things, Peter acknowledges Paul’s writings, saying they were difficult to grasp. Yet who would argue with the fact that Paul sees a future for physical, regenerated Israel? This certainly implies a future for Israel in an earthly kingdom.

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERED WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’” (Rom. 11:25-27)

Sixth, in this passage Peter does not mention the resurrection of the just and unjust (John 5), but this does not mean that he did not believe in them. Nor does he mention the millennium here, since it was not germane to his argument for holiness of life.

With all these arguments, 2 Peter 3 is a very difficult passage for any premillennialist to handle. Surely there will be many passages that will remain obscure to us until we get closer to the end time.

We could surmise from his description of how the earth will be destroyed that Peter knew something about atomic theory. Undoubtedly he did not, but he was guided in such a way by the Holy Spirit to pick words and concepts that would be relevant to men during the

last days. He says “the elements shall be destroyed.” The word “elements” means “primary” or “basic” and could literally refer to the basic nuclear structure of the universe. The word “destroyed” means “to separate something into component parts.”

Now I am not a scientist, but it seems that what Peter is describing is that the molecular bonds are going to be loosed, so that the whole universe will be separated into its smallest particles. This in turn will cause an intense heat and the earth will melt. This would be an appropriate description of atomic fission and its release of energy.

Twice this passage speaks of intense heat. We know that the atomic bomb can generate heat to two trillion degrees centigrade. What will it be like when God, by a word from His mouth, alters the molecular makeup so as to cause great atomic explosions!

This verse also says that “the heavens shall pass away with a roar” and we know that an atomic blast brings an air front like a hurricane and can blow down secured objects ten miles away.

Again we see how relevant the Bible is to our contemporary scene. Only inspired Scripture could make truth written two thousand years ago relevant to the twentieth century scientific mind.

The world is going to come to an end one day. It may not appear to be true on the face of things. It may look like history is grinding its way relentlessly on, that nothing ever changes, but the fact is a time is coming when God will destroy the world. The earth and its works (the world as we see it, touch it, feel it, taste it, hear it, the empirical world, the sensual world) will be burned up. Everything that is connected with this world and is a part of its works, everything that most people put their minds and their money on, is going to go up in flames.

CHARGE TO HOLINESS IN LIGHT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD (3:11)

“Since all things are to be destroyed in this way”

This kind of fiery judgment speaks to the Christian of God’s attributes of holiness, righteousness and wrath. Since He is a holy God, what should we Christians be like? Like God who is holy!

“what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness”

Realizing that the Lord’s return is the first step in the ultimate destruction of the world should cause the Christian to want to live a life separated unto God, one filled with worship of God. The moral imperative follows the eschatological indicative—conviction about prophetic matters leads to a proper godly conduct. Everything in this world, with the exception of our godly character, is going to be burned up. God is interested in people rather than things. His concern is for what we are, not what we do. He is not so keen on our activity; He is keen about the quality of our lives, the character we reveal, the spiritual qualities we are acquiring right now. What matters to Him is that we be Christ-like, conducting ourselves in holiness.

This verse clearly tells us that prophecy is not merely to excite our curiosity about the future but is designed to lead us to a life of holiness and piety. Those who look for the coming of Jesus Christ are being purified.

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, if (when) He should appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

This is why we should stress the prophetic word in our Bible study and preaching, for rightly taught prophecy leads to holiness of life. Never fall for the Devil’s lie that prophecy is only for thrill seekers and those with curious minds. No, prophecy is for God’s people, for interest in the Second Coming and events surrounding the Day of the Lord will spur us on to godliness. Without the realization of Christ’s coming again, we have no assurance that the world is going anywhere; therefore, there is nothing left to live for. Only the Christian has an assurance that the world had a beginning and will have an ending, God being the author of both.

William Barclay gives three superb examples from heathen tombs of what happens when men reject the teleological view of history, the belief that creation has a goal, a climax, which is one of the main themes of the doctrine of the Second Advent. They are led to hedonism: *“I was nothing; I am nothing; so thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry.”* They are led to apathy: *“Once I had no existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me.”* They are finally led to despair: *“Charidas, what is below? Deep darkness. But what of the paths upward? All a lie ... Then we are lost.”*

CHALLENGE TO LOOK FOR AND WORK UNTIL THE DAY OF THE LORD (3:12)

“looking for”

The Christian is constantly looking for the return of Christ and for the end of the world. These are not events we dread; we look forward to them because when they come to pass we shall be safe in the arms of Jesus. The Christian does not fear the future because He knows the God who holds the future!

“and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat.”

Some scholars believe the Day of God refers only to the last event on the prophetic calendar, the destruction of the present heavens and earth. But it appears that the Day of God and the Day of the Lord are the same in this context. Both refer to the Second Advent of Christ, which will set up an eschatological complex of events that are viewed from a cosmic perspective.

Peter’s point is that Christians can hasten the Second Advent. How can we do this? The context of this passage tells us that we do this by witnessing and telling people about Christ. God has an elect people whom He will save, and when the last of these is in the body of Christ, then He will return (3:9).

The Lord Jesus taught us that the gospel must be preached to all nations before He comes back. *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:14).* As we share Christ and as men respond by faith to Him, the elect are being saved. When the last one is saved,

then Christ will return. Each person we lead to Christ or help lead to Him, through prayer or the giving of money for world evangelism, is bringing the coming of the Lord Jesus closer.

A basic reason we are to work, and work, and work at evangelism is that this hastens the day Jesus shall return. Each man, woman, boy or girl we lead to Christ brings the return of Christ closer. Every Christian should be waiting, watching and working for the Day of the Lord to come. The realization of Christ's coming should spur the Christian to holiness of life, godly worship and service in evangelism. Does the study of prophecy do this for you? If not, you have missed the real purpose of prophecy.

CELESTIAL HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN (3: 13)

“But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

The Christian ultimately looks forward to new heavens and a new earth where perfect righteousness will dwell. This is heaven, the New Jerusalem, the celestial city, which will be the eternal abode of God's people forever.

Heaven is too wonderful for words to describe. The clearest picture of it is found in the Book of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’ And He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.’” (Rev. 21:1-8).

Bible scholars have disagreed over whether the new heavens and new earth will be a renovation of the present earth and heavens or an annihilation of these and a completely new creation. We will not have the answer to this question until the time it occurs, but it really makes very little difference for however God chooses to make a new earth and heavens, they will be perfect.

CONCLUSION

What lessons does God have for Christians from this portion of Scripture? First, we should never think that we can dogmatically lay out all the details of prophecy on a chart.

There is still an element of mystery, and we could be wrong. After all, we know that no one got all the details straight on the first advent, so we can be sure that no one will on the second.

Second, we must remember that people are more important than things. We tend to slip into the habit of thinking that the physical world is more enduring than its inhabitants. People are more important and more enduring than things.

Third, a belief in the Second Coming and the events surrounding it should change our perspective about life. It ought to change our attitude toward our clothes, our furniture, our houses, our buildings, our land, our cars, our bank accounts, and all the things that we invest our time, money, and thought in. We should not become preoccupied with these things because someday they are going to be burned up.

Fourth, in our unstable and perishable universe, the only stable and imperishable factor is human character. A man's character is the only thing he can take out of this life with him, therefore, building Christian character should be a person's number one priority in life.

Fifth, the task of the Christian, in light of the Second Advent, is to wait patiently, watch diligently, and work faithfully. He does this by being involved in the evangelization of the world.

If the Lord returns soon, are you ready to meet Him? When He comes, will He be your Savior or Judge? Those who have bowed to Christ as Lord and received Him as Savior will be saved. Those who have rejected Him and spurned His message of salvation shall be judged. Whether Christ is your Savior or Judge will determine whether you spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Choose this day to make Christ your Savior and you shall be with Him for all eternity!