

HOPE IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

Bible Background • 2 Peter 3

Printed Text • 2 Peter 3:1-15a | Devotional Reading • John 14:1-7

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND the significance of holy living; FEEL CONFIDENT that Christ will return for His Church; and ANTICIPATE the day when God will make all things new.

In Focus

Willie was looking out of the window when his mother, Falcia, arrived home. "Willie, what are you doing at the window?" she asked. Willie did not turn to look at her. He continued to stare out of the window as he replied, "I'm waiting for my daddy to come and take me to the ball game."

Falcia walked over to Willie. "Honey, did your daddy call today?"

"Yes, ma'am," mumbled Willie. "He said that he'd pick me up around 4 o'clock." Falcia walked away. It was already 5:30, and she did not have the heart to tell her son that his daddy probably was not coming. Falcia knew her former husband, Johnny, was not a man who kept his promises. He would simply not show up, then call a couple of weeks later with some lame excuse.

As Falcia walked to her room, she turned to look at Willie who was still staring out of the window. She knew her son was counting on his father to keep his promise. She prayed that Johnny would not let Willie down again.

A promise is a binding declaration between two or more people or institutions. Only God keeps every one of His promises. In this week's lesson, Peter confirms Christ's promise to return and to usher in the new heaven and new earth.

Keep in Mind

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Focal Verses

^{KJV} 2 Peter 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: 2 That ye 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 Saviour: 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 longsuffering 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 longsuffering of our Lord is salvation;

^{NLT} 2 Peter 3:1 This is my second letter to you, dear friends, and in both of them I have tried to stimulate your wholesome thinking and refresh your memory. 2 I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles. 3 Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. 4 They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." 5 They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. 6 Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. 7 And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. 8 But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. 9 The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. 11 Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, 12 looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. 13 But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. 14 And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. 15 And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved.

The People, Places, and Times

Day of the Lord. The Greek word is *parousia*. Theologians interpret this various ways, but it certainly is the time when Jesus returns whether in judgment for unbelievers or with everlasting joy for the followers of Christ.

Background

The apostle Peter wrote this text not only to warn Christians about false teachers but to exhort them to grow in their faith and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. One principle area of attack from false teachers was the return and future judgment of Christ. If there was no future judgment, then people were free to live as they chose. In the final chapter of his second epistle, Peter directly challenges this error.

He begins by admonishing the people to remember those things that he had taught them. It is important to remember the words proclaimed by anointed men and women of God. They challenge us to live holy lives, to use our gifts and talents for God, and to keep us from becoming complacent.

At-A-Glance

1. Believe God's Word (2 Peter 3:1-4)
2. Believe in God's Creation (vv. 5-9)
3. Believe God's Promise (vv. 10-13)
4. Be Spotless, Blameless, and at Peace with Him (vv. 14-15a)

In Depth

1. Believe God's Word (2 Peter 3:1-4)

Peter intended to "stir up" the people's memory (2 Peter 3:1). To "stir up" means "to fully awaken." The apostle suggests three areas where the people's memory needed awakening: the words of the holy prophets, the commandments of the apostles, and the commandments of Christ.

Peter realized that in these "last days" many people would question Christian beliefs in the Lord (3:3). These people would cause others to have doubts about the authority of God's Word. Peter called these unbelievers "scoffers" (v. 3). Scoffers are false teachers who mock the truth. The apostle had already warned the people that these scoffers would infiltrate the church with their "damnable heresies" (2:1). Some even went as far as denying the deity of Christ.

The "last days" refer to the period between the first and Second Coming of Christ. During this period, ungodly teachers will deny that Christ is coming back to execute judgment. "They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (3:4, NIV).

It is sad that people are deceived into believing Christ is not coming again. However, Peter's message is clear: Do not listen to these scoffers and do not follow them. God's Word is true and His promises are unailing.

2. Believe in God's Creation (vv. 5-9)

The scoffers do not believe the truth of God's Word. They portray God's truth as a moral fable. These false teachers purposely forget that God created the heavens and the earth. To refute their heresy, Peter reminds his readers of God's creative power. First he reminds them of how God, by His Word, rolled back the waters to create dry land (v. 5; Genesis 1:9-10). God used the same waters that He rolled back to destroy the old world in the days of Noah and his family (2 Peter 3:6). He did not spare the old world when His people disobeyed Him (2:5), and He will not spare the current world. God has already decided the world's fate and declared it through Christ and His apostles.

Scoffers need to be warned that God's Word is true. They think He has forgotten His creation, so they feel that they can live any way they choose. They fail to realize that God is being patient with us. Scoffers fail to understand that because His desire is to save and not destroy, God does not measure time according to human standards. "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (3:8, NIV). God can accomplish in one day what might take 1,000 years, and He may take a 1,000 years to accomplish His will in a day.

3. Believe God's Promise (vv. 10-13)

Peter emphatically declares, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (v. 10). According to Spiros Zodhiates—a Greek American Bible scholar and author—the "day of the Lord" represents the Second Coming of Christ and the occasion when God will actively intervene to punish sin. The term also refers to the time immediately before the creation of the new heaven and earth (*Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 710).

Peter says that on this day, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise" (v. 10). The Greek word translated "great noise" means "with a great crash." The apostle declares the earth will be burned up, and not only the earth, but all the "works that are therein." Everything that humanity has ever created, invented, or built will be utterly consumed in this "fervent heat."

4. Be Spotless, Blameless, and at Peace (vv. 14-15a)

The underlying theme of these verses is the second coming of the Lord. Whether our lives on earth are ended in death or whether we are alive when the Lord returns, we want to be found ready. To be found "without spot, and blameless" is to be fully like Jesus (v. 14). This thought should motivate us to examine every aspect of our lives and think about what we may be doing when we are suddenly taken to be with the Lord. The standard is perfection, but the Lord knows our weaknesses and frailties, and the blood of Christ covers all of our sins. So we have great peace as we look forward to His return. The only reason the Lord is delaying His return is to give more people the opportunity to be saved before He returns.

Search the Scriptures

1. What three things does Peter want to remind the people of (2 Peter 3:2-4)?
2. Why is the Lord delaying His coming and the execution of judgment on the world (v. 9)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some false teachings that are being spread in the church today? How do you know that these teachings are false?
2. If the "day of the Lord" is coming as a thief in the night, what characteristics can you identify in people's behavior or in institutional activities that suggest the Lord may be coming soon?

Lesson in Our Society

Many people in our society live according to a "bumper sticker" mentality. Some believe they should "live fast, die young, and make a beautiful corpse." Others believe that "the person who dies with the most toys wins." These people live for immediate pleasure and are not concerned with the consequences. They believe they will somehow escape the consequences of their actions today and in the hereafter. They are either ignorant of or flatly deny the return of Christ and God's judgment of the rebellious. How does society perpetuate the idea of living just for the now?

Make It Happen

Read the following Scripture texts. Identify the statements said to be the will of God: 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; 2 Peter 3:9. Decide to obey God's will in these matters until Jesus comes.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

2 Peter 3:1-15a

1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

"Epistle" (Gk. *epistole*, **ep-is-tol-AY**) is another word for "letter." The author identifies himself in 2 Peter 1:1 as "Simon Peter"—the fisherman turned disciple of Jesus. Peter is notable for both his fearless proclamation of Christ as Messiah (Matthew 16:16) and his cowardly denial of Christ on the night of His crucifixion (26:69-75). In Peter's second epistle, he addresses the recipients as "beloved" (Gk. *agapetos*, **ag-ap-ay-TOS**), a term of affection used by every author of the New Testament epistles. It is impossible to know for sure if 1 Peter was the earlier epistle; many scholars speculate that there was at least one more letter that was lost to history.

Peter writes to “stir up” (Gk. *diegeiro*, **dee-eg-I-ro**)—a word that means, “to arouse completely.” In chapter 1, he made it clear that he knows he will die soon—implying that this is the last letter these Christians will receive from him (1:14). His purpose is to make sure that the recipients do not forget the things he had taught them (1:15) or become lazy in their walk with Christ (1:10). In 3:1, “pure” (Gk. *heilikrines*, **i-lik-ree-NACE**), means “pertaining to being sincere, without hidden motives or pretense.”

2 That ye 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 Saviour:

“Be mindful” (Gk. *mnaomai*, **MNAH-om-ahee**), means “recall, remember.” The words of the apostles and prophets were first mentioned in chapter 1. The reader should understand the words of the prophets to be the Old Testament and the words of the apostles to be the New Testament. From the time when the New Testament documents were written, they were considered as divinely inspired as the Old Testament books.

“Apostles” (Gk. *apostolos*, **ap-OS-tol-os**) means “messengers, envoys.” The Greek reads literally “your apostles”—which likely means some of the apostles had ministered personally to the recipients of this letter.

Although there are many notable commandments in the New Testament, the “commandment of us the apostles” is the command to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 16:31) and live the holy life that Jesus requires (2 Peter 2:21). Most modern translations see the commandment as that which Jesus gave “through your apostles” (for example, see IV, NLT, and AMP).

3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

The last days (end times) started with the first coming of Jesus (Hebrews 1:2), which initiated all of the events that had to happen for the end to come. The Greek text for 2 Peter 3:3 reads literally “scoffing scoffers will come.” The repetition of the word is a way of adding emphasis. A “scoffer” is one who ridicules, mocks, or makes fun of others. “Lusts” (Gk. *epithumia*, **ep-ee-thoo-MEE-ah**) in this context is “strong desires for something forbidden.” “Walking after” could also be translated “walking according to.” These scoffers discard God’s revelation of the correct path through His Word and instead chart a path based on their desires.

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.

“Where is the promise of his coming?” is a literal translation of the Greek; it may also be translated “Where is His promised coming?” The word “coming” (Gk. *parousia*, **par-oo-SEE-ah**) may also be translated “appearing” and is used frequently in the New Testament to refer to Christ’s return (see Matthew 24:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

The argument advanced by these scoffers is that “all things continue as they were”—nothing has changed “since the fathers fell asleep” (2 Peter 3:4). The “fathers” are probably the Old Testament patriarchs. To the scoffers, the thought of the world as we know it ending is laughable.

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:

Because the scoffers refer to the earth’s beginning, Peter’s response to their argument also goes back to the beginning. He accuses them of being “willingly . . . ignorant.” The Greek text here is difficult to translate, but a word-for-word rendering reads something like “it escapes them willingly.” The scoffers, then, deliberately fail to note that before the days of creation, the world was covered with water (Genesis 1:2). The land on which we live came out of water by God’s Word alone (1:9).

The world, then, “overflowed with water” and “perished” (2 Peter 3:6). This is a clear reference to Noah’s time in which the world flooded within 40 days. Peter’s point here is this: It took only God’s word to create the earth, and it took only another word from Him for that same earth to be destroyed.

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.

“Kept in store” (Gk. *thesaurizo*, **thay-sow-RID-zo**) means “gathered up, stored up.” The Greek text makes it clear that “fire” is the reason it has been stored. Peter will expound upon this concept in verse 10.

“Against” here means “for” or “unto.” The burning by fire will not occur until the Day of Judgment. On that day, Christ will judge all people dead and living (1 Peter 4:5). Christians can face that day with confidence because judgment will mean vindication for the righteous (1 John 4:17)—and Christians, by faith, have the righteousness of Christ applied to their account (Romans 4:24). But Peter here focuses on the fate of the wicked. In 2 Peter 3:7, “perdition” (Gk. *apoleia*, **ap-O-li-a**) means “destruction, annihilation, ruin.” “Ungodly” (*asebes*, **as-eb-ACE**) means “impious, destitute of reverential awe toward God.” The ungodly will receive the full measure of God’s righteous wrath for their failure to honor Him as God (Romans 2:5). We have God’s Word on this truth.

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.

“Be not ignorant” is the same Greek word as in the phrase “willingly . . . ignorant” in verse 5. Peter instructs Christians to not make the same mistake as unbelievers who choose to neglect God’s truth.

Peter alludes to Psalms 90:4: “A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday.” The Scriptures teach that God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Job 36:26; Isaiah 40:28)—having no beginning and no end (Psalms 90:2; 1 John 2:13; Revelation 1:4). The brevity of our lifespan colors our concept of time. The Scriptures compare the human lifespan to dust and grass, which blows away and withers (Psalms 103:14-16; Isaiah 40:6-7).

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

The problem is not with God but with some people’s finite, foolish perception. They forget that God is infinitely greater than they are. In their delusion, they conclude that God is too slow.

Peter goes on to reveal that the reason Jesus has not yet returned is because God is “longsuffering” (Gk. *makrothumeo*, **mak-roth-oo-MEH-o**). *Makrothumeo* means “to bear up under provocation without complaining, be patient.” Ironically, those who accuse God of being late are themselves proving His patience. A harsh, vindictive god would soon lose patience with such insolence, but the God of heaven and earth does not change His mind, and He continues according to His plan. His delay, if we must call it that, is for the sake of those He came to save. God’s desire is that none should “perish” (Gk. *apollumi*, **ap-OL-loo-mee**). *Apollumi* means “to be ruined or lost”—a reference to eternal, spiritual death. The Scriptures repeatedly reveal God’s kindness toward the lost and His concern even for His enemies.

“Come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9) is the alternative to perishing—repentance, therefore, is the way to life. “Repentance” (Gk. *metanoia*, **met-AN-oy-ah**) is “a change of mind, a turning around.” The message of the Gospel is that all sinful people must repent—turn from their sin to God (Acts 26:20)—and put their full faith in Jesus to save them (Romans 10:9).

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.

The “day of the Lord” is one of the Bible’s many ways of referring to the day of Christ’s Second Coming. It is also referred to as “the Day of Judgment” or simply “the Day.” In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord is portrayed as a day of wrath and destruction for the wicked and the enemies of Israel (Joel 1:15; Isaiah 13:6, 9). The New Testament also speaks of judgment on that day (Romans 2:5), and emphasizes that it will be a day of vindication, deliverance, and victory for the people of God (1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Peter describes an unprecedented devastation that will happen on the day of the Lord. He lists three kinds: the heavens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting, and the earth burning up (along with the works thereon). Other passages in both the Old and New Testaments refer to the “passing away” of the created universe (see Matthew 24:35; Revelation 21:1), but Peter’s account here is perhaps the most vivid in all of Scripture.

In 2 Peter 3:10, the Greek verb phrase that describes “the elements shall melt with fervent heat” could be translated literally as “the elements being burned up will be dissolved.” The “elements” (Gk. *stoicheion*, **stoy-KHI-on**) could refer to either the material building blocks of the physical universe or the heavenly bodies.

The best, most accurate Greek manuscripts do not contain the verb “burned up”; instead, we find the verb *heurisko* (**hyoo-RIS-ko**), which means “find out, discover.” The most likely meaning of the final phrase of this verse is that the earth and everything done in it will be exposed and laid bare, after which God will transform the creation—a new heavens and earth.

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?

In verse 12, the verb “dissolved” (Gk. *luo*, **LOO-o**) is the same word used in verse 10 to describe the melting of the elements. It means “to loose, release, abolish, or destroy.” “All these things” means literally everything. Christians are to live in the awareness that everything we own or accumulate will someday pass away. The only things that will have eternal value are the things we did to serve the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). Furthermore, the Day of the Lord also means the revelation of all that has been done— good or evil (see comments on 2 Peter 3:10). “Hasting” (Gk. *spendo*, **SPYOO-do**) means “to desire earnestly, to cause something to happen or come into being by exercising special effort.” Jesus taught us that we can hasten His coming by praying for the coming of His kingdom (Matthew 6:10) and by spreading the Gospel to all people (24:14).

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The new heaven and new earth (promised in Isaiah 65:17) will be perfect because all traces and effects of sin will be wiped out. Satan and his demons will be thrown into hell and no unrighteous person will gain admittance to the new heaven and new earth (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8).

In 2 Peter 3:13, “dwelleth” (Gk. *katoikeo*, **kat-oy-KEH-o**) means “reside, inhabit.” It denotes permanent residency. Another Greek word (*paroikeo*, **par-oy-KEH-o**) is used in the New Testament to denote temporary residency (Luke 24:18; Hebrews 11:9). This world as we know it (under God’s curse and the contaminating impact of sin) is only our temporary home; the new heaven and new earth are our permanent home.

The Greek word *kainos* (**kahee-NOS**) is used here for “new.” *Kainos* is used in the New Testament to refer to newness that contrasts with the obsolete—the New Covenant, for example. The Greek word *neos* (**NEH-os**), on the other hand, is used to refer to something in the early stages of life—for instance “younger” people in 1 Peter 5:5. Peter’s choice of *kainos* is consistent with the message of the rest of the Scriptures: The new heaven and new earth will be a renewal, not a replacement, of God’s good creation.

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 longsuffering of our Lord is salvation;

Peter uses the Greek word for “look” (*prosdokao*, **pros-dok-AH-o**) once each in verses 12, 13, and 14. Whether the Lord returns first or we are taken to heaven when we die, we want to be ready to appear before Him. Although His blood covers every flaw we possess, we do not want to feel ashamed. Peter stresses again and again the connection between our belief and our behavior.

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Perdition. per-DIH-shun.

Scoffers. SCOF-fers.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY	Distressing Times Will Come	(<u>2 Timothy 3:1-9</u>)
TUESDAY	Warnings for False Prophets	(<u>Jeremiah 23:23-32</u>)
WEDNESDAY	Warnings for Rich Oppressors	(<u>James 5:1-6</u>)
THURSDAY	Return to the Lord	(<u>Hosea 14:1-7</u>)
FRIDAY	Teaching the Ways of God	(<u>Micah 4:1-5</u>)
SATURDAY	I Will Come Again	(<u>John 14:1-7</u>)
SUNDAY	The Promise of the Lord's Coming	(<u>2 Peter 3:3-15a</u>)