

PROPHECY MATTERS

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We live in a day in which many spiritual leaders routinely challenge the relevancy of Bible Prophecy. Many of the contemporary church's leaders will not teach on what the Bible reveals for the future because such teachings are considered divisive and impractical. In the minds of many, the field of Bible Prophecy is more related to "pie in the sky" notions that have no practical value to the believer's daily walk and life in the here and now. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. I was privileged to speak at a recent prophecy conference entitled "Prophecy Matters." I love this conference title because prophecy does indeed matter to the daily life of the child of God. Consequently, for my conference teaching session I decided to do an exposition of Second Peter 3:3-15, which, perhaps more than any other section of Scripture, clearly explains why prophecy does indeed matter and is quite important from the divine point of view. Please allow me to briefly share this section of Scripture with you.

The Doctrine, Method, and Motives of False Teachers

In Second Peter, the apostle equips his readers to withstand the coming onslaught of false teaching that he warns is on the horizon. Concerning false teachers, Peter predicts, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as *there will also be false teachers among you*, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Pet. 2:1; italics added). Thus, in the letter's final section (2 Pet. 3:3-15), Peter explains to his readers regarding how to respond to the specific doctrinal attack that these coming false teachers will introduce. In the process, Peter clarifies how important the subject of Bible Prophecy actually is.

Peter predicts that the false teachers will arise and ridicule the doctrine of the Second Advent by asking, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:3) Peter even identifies the tool that these false teaches will employ in their attempt to debunk the doctrine of the Second Advent, when he says, “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking.” The tool they will use will include sheer ridicule, which they will heap on any who hold tenaciously to the idea that Christ will one day return physically and bodily. Ridicule is far more of an effective tool than most realize. Since no one likes to be made the butt of jokes or made to feel that they are members of the “flat earth society,” we have a tendency to shy away from ideas or concepts that we know will bring upon us intense ridicule. Deterrence from an idea through ridicule is a strategy that has been used routinely against God’s prophets. Second Chronicles 36:16 says, “but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.” Thus, in the final section of his letter, Peter gives his readers the tools necessary for responding to this coming attack. He does this so that they will not be caught off guard by their arguments but rather will know how to refute them even before the false teachers arrive on the scene.

Even before providing this refutation, Peter explains the false teachers’ motives for denying Christ’s return. *First*, Peter notes that the false teacher will be controlled or dominated by their own lusts (3:3). He explains, “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts.” Peter’s point is that those dominated by the sinful nature have a natural aversion toward the doctrine of the Second Coming since the idea of Christ’s return is automatically associated with the notions of accountability and judgment. If someone is walking in their own lusts, the last doctrine they want to contemplate or consider is the doctrine of the Second Advent. Consequently, those walking in known sin tend to push any teaching related to Christ’s return out of their minds.

Second, Peter explains that these false teachers will have capitulated to a uniformitarian worldview. This is what Peter means when he notes that the false teachers will say, “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” (2 Pet. 3:4). According to this viewpoint, the unobservable past and future is determined by the observable present. Because no miraculous divine interventions are observable today, then neither will a future miraculous intervention of God take place via the Second Coming. In other words, you assume that the pattern of the present has always been uniform in the distant past and will remain uniform in the remote future. Uniformitarianism has become perhaps the dominant philosophy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In fact, it is the very notion that Darwinian evolution is built upon.

Four Refutations of False Teachers

Having exposed the doctrine, method, and motive of the coming false teachers, Peter next offers a *fourfold* refutation to such errant thinking (3:5-10).¹ *First*, Peter appeals to history (3:5-7) by reminding his readers that God has twice miraculously intervened in history through creation (3:5)² and then in judgment through the flood (3:6-7). These verses say:

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, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Peter uses the present active participle from the verb *thelō* to show that these false teachers willfully suppress these truths of creation (cf. Rom. 1:18ff) and flood. The reason for this willful suppression relates to the idea that these historical truths are perpetual reminders of God’s intervention in creation and mankind’s accountability to its creator. Peter’s point is that the same “word of God” (Gen. 1:3) that ushered in these two historical realities will also one day be issued again and a third miraculous intervention

will occur through Christ's return. After all, if God has already intervened miraculously twice in the past through both creation and the flood, how difficult will it be for God to do so a third time regarding the Second Advent?

Second, Peter appeals to Scripture: "But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Here, Peter alludes to Psalm 90:4 in order to show that God is outside of time and thus does not reckon time the same way man does. In other words, although man remains finite and time bound, God is infinite and timeless. For God, tomorrow is already today. Consequently, God has the capacity to reveal the end from the beginning (Isa. 48:3; Rom. 8:29; Jude 14). Thus, while it seems as if there has been an interminable delay in Christ's return from man's time bound perspective, it does not seem this way from God's timeless perspective.

Third, Peter appeals to God's character by explaining that God purposely delays His return to give as many as possible an opportunity to get right with Him before the eschatological judgment transpires. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God's postponement of judgment is consistent with His past actions. For example, God waited one hundred and twenty years before sending the global deluge, known as Noah's Flood (Gen 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:20). God also waited over four hundred years before eradicating the wicked Canaanites through the hands of his servant Joshua (Gen. 5:13, 16). God postpones judgment by first sending grace because He desires all to be saved (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 1 Tim. 2:4). Thus, the apparent delay in His return is actually a blessing in disguise.

Fourth, Peter appeals to divine promise by explaining that God is all-powerful and will fulfill His promise of returning in accordance with His divine schedule. Second Peter 3:10 says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, 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.” The “Day of the Lord” is a non-technical term depicting anytime God manifests Himself by intervening in history. In this context, it is used to describe His return and the dissolution of the universe. These events will take place most likely just before the final judgment of the unsaved (Rev. 20:11-15) and just prior to the inauguration of the Eternal State (Rev. 21:1). The repetition of “will” (NASB) in this context indicates that God has every intention of making good on His promise of destroying the present world and replacing it with a better and newer world (Isa. 65:17; Matt. 24:35; 1 Cor. 7:31; Heb. 1:10-12; 1 John 2:17). Thus, a delay in the events related to the return of Christ should not be misinterpreted as a denial of them. Despite the misinterpretation of the false teachers, postponement of these eschatological events should not be misunderstood as a cancellation of them. In sum, knowing this fourfold refutation in advance will help protect Peter’s readers from being swayed by the coming attacks that the false teachers will launch against the doctrine of the Second Coming.

Prophecy is Practical

Rejecting uniformitarianism and instead living in the hope of the Lord’s return has profound ethical implications for the believer (3:11-15a). Peter acknowledges the practical import of the doctrine of the Second Coming when in Second Peter 3:11a he says, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be...” Peter then enumerates the various ways this doctrine changes the believer’s life. *First*, the Second Coming motivates the believer toward personal holiness (3:11b, 14). Since all things will be destroyed by fire, we begin to live for the only two things that will last: the Word of God (Isa. 40:8) and the souls of people (Eccles. 3:11). In other words, a study of prophecy alerts us to eternal priorities, which in turn motivates us to reprioritize and realign our lives according to them in the present.

Second, prophecy gives us hope by reminding us that there is a better world coming. Peter describes this new world in Second Peter 3:13, which says, “But according

to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” Without the light of prophecy (2 Pet. 1:19), the only perspective that one is left with is this present world, which leads to hopelessness. *Third*, prophecy even stimulates the believer toward personal evangelism when he comprehends that his evangelistic activity can actually hasten the Lord’s return (Rom. 11:25). Second Peter 3:12 says, “looking for and *hastening* the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!” (italics added). How can we hasten the coming of the lord? If God postpones judgment so that as many people as possible can be made right with Him before judgement falls (2 Pet. 3:9), the more we spread the Gospel consequently giving more people an opportunity to be saved, the faster the end times scenario can transpire. When viewed in this manner, a knowledge of prophecy actually motivates personal evangelism.

Fourth, a knowledge of prophecy causes us to be patient with others. God was patient with us before we were saved (2 Pet. 3:9). In fact, God was so patient that He even brought Saul of Tarsus, a former murderer of Christians (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13; Phil. 3:6), to personal salvation and even allowed him to become a great advocate of Christianity and author of several canonical books as the spiritually born apostle Paul (2 Pet. 3:15). Thus, studying prophecy alerts us to God’s patience, which we should then emulate and extend toward others. Does prophecy matter? Yes! Second Peter 3:3-15 reveals how the study of Bible prophecy revolutionizes our perspectives and behavior in the present in profound, fundamental, and practical ways.

¹ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 140-52.

² The phrase “out of water and by water” may refer to God first forming the world out of water (Gen. 1:6-8) and then bringing the dry land out of the water (Gen. 1:9-10).