

PROPHECY'S POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE BELIEVER'S WALK

(2 PETER 3:3-15)

Introduction

We live in a day in which many spiritual leaders routinely challenge the relevancy of Bible prophecy to the life of the church in general and the Christian in particular. 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. This presentation is devoted to briefly sharing this section of Scripture.

However, we must initially answer the inquiry, "How does this section of prophetic Scripture (2 Pet. 3:3-15) fit into the overall tenor of the Epistle of Second Peter? The general thrust of Peter's second epistle is to issue a divinely inspired warning concerning the soon arrival of false teachers. The *purpose* of the letter is to build up its readers in the faith so that they will be insulated from the persuasiveness of the coming

false teachers. The *message* of the letter is that Christians should pursue “spiritual *growth* so they can combat *apostasy* as they look forward to the *Lord’s return*.”¹

To this end, the Book of Second Peter contains *three* main sections. Each section is its own complete chapter. *First*, Peter exhorts his readers on the path of Christian maturity (1:1-21). Such an exhortation is necessary since false teachers prey on the immature and unstable (2 Pet. 2:14). Thus, the greater the spiritual maturity of Peter’s audience, the more they will be able to withstand the false teachers’ coming onslaught. *Second*, Peter functions as a kind of Paul Revere in warning about the advent of the false teachers just as the famous American patriot warned, “The British are coming.” Here, he describes their characteristics and condemns these coming false teachers (2:1-22). *Third*, Peter refutes the uniformitarian doctrine that the false teachers will introduce and expresses confidence in Christ’s return (3:1-18). The contents of this presentation will be drawn from Peter’s final chapter.

The Doctrine of the 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). Peter then identifies the specific doctrine that the coming false teachers will lay siege upon. They will say, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4a). In other words, they will attack the doctrine of the Second Advent. Although other prophetic Scripture anticipates that other cardinal Christian doctrines will be denied in the

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel, “2 Peter,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and John F. Walvoord (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 2:862.

last days (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:16-17; 4:3-4; Jude 4), Peter here focuses on the denial of the Second Advent.

Sadly, according to Peter's predictions, the doctrine of the Second Advent will come under assault in the last days despite its biblical orientation. After all, the doctrine of the Second Coming is not only mentioned in all of the orthodox creeds and confessions of Christendom, but it is also replete throughout Scripture, including the oldest book in the Bible. Job 19:25 says, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last *He will take His stand on the earth*" (italics added).

Sadly, the area of biblical prophecy came under sharp attack within Christendom not long after the close of the Apostolic Age. Note the strong words of Eusebius concerning Papias, who was a literalist in terms of prophetic interpretation:

Papias . . . says that there will be a millennium after the resurrections of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth. I suppose that he got these notions by a perverse reading of the apostolic accounts, not realizing that they had spoken mystically and symbolically. For he was a man of very little intelligence, as is clear from his books. But he is responsible for the fact that so many Christian writers after him held the same opinion, relying on his antiquity, for instance Irenaeus and whoever else appears to have held the same views.²

In the fourth century, Augustine heaped similar derision upon other early literal eschatological interpreters:

And this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual, and consequent on the presence of God; for I myself, too, once held this opinion. But, as they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. They who do believe them are called by the spiritual Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians.³

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.12-13.

³ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans., Marcus Dods (NY: Random House, 1950), Book XX, chap. 7, p. 719.

Yet, despite its biblical veracity, the field of biblical eschatology continues to be very much under assault today, even from within professing Christendom. For example, one of Christendom's most vibrant and traditional denominations, The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), recently removed premillennialism from its statement of faith on the grounds that such a doctrine represents a "non-essential" matter:

The denomination drops end times doctrine from its statement of faith in a move to 'major on the majors' and 'minor on the minors.' The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) changed its position on end times theology, voting this summer to drop the word 'premillennial' from the denomination's statement of faith...Premillennialism has been a 'denominational distinctive' for the EFCA, according to the document, but shouldn't be overemphasized.⁴

Moreover, Social Justice pastor Mark Dever goes so far as to claim that stating one's eschatological millennial convictions on a church website is tantamount to sin. Notice the following remarks made by Dever in a recent sermon on Revelation 20.

I think that millennial views need not be among those doctrines that divide us. . . . I am suggesting that what you believe about the millennium — how you interpret these thousand years — is not something that is necessary for us to agree upon in order to have a congregation together. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed in John 17:21 that we Christians might be one. Of course, all true Christians are one in that we have His Spirit, we share His Spirit, and we desire to live out that unity. But that unity is supposed to be evident as a testimony to the world around us. Therefore, I conclude that we should end our co-operations together with other Christians...only with the greatest of care, lest we rend the body of Christ for whose unity He has prayed and given Himself. *Therefore, I conclude that it is sin to divide the body of Christ — to divide the body that He prayed would be united.* Therefore, for us to conclude that we must agree upon a certain view of alcohol, or a certain view of schooling, or a certain view of meat sacrificed to idols, or *a certain view of the millennium*, in order to have fellowship together is, I think, not only unnecessary for the body of Christ, but *it is therefore both unwarranted and therefore condemned by scripture.* So, if you're a pastor and you're listening to me, *you understand me correctly if you think I'm saying you are in sin if you lead your congregation to have a statement of faith that requires*

⁴ Daniel Sillman, "EFCA Now Considers Premillennialism a Non-Essential," *Christianity Today* August 23, 2019. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/august/efca-drops-premillennialism-evangelical-free-church-teds.html>

a particular millennial view. I do not understand why that has to be a matter of uniformity in order to have Christian unity in a local congregation (italics added).⁵

Of course, such obfuscation of the premillennial doctrine would have come as a great surprise to early church father Justin Martyr (A.D. 100 -165). In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, he declared, “But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others.”⁶

Yet, in spite of Bible prophecy’s importance, Peter, in his final letter, not only predicted such an attack on this doctrine in the last days, but also explained how to respond to the attack. 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.

The Method of the False Teachers

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.

⁵ Justin Taylor, “Dever: ‘You Are in Sin if You Lead Your Congregation to have a Statement of Faith that Requires a Particular Millennial View,’” online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/dever-you-are-in-sin-if-you-lead-your/>, July 14 2009, accessed May 28, 2019.

⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80.

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 tend to shy away from ideas or concepts that we know will heap 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.”

Sadly, in today’s evangelical world such derision is routinely heaped on those whose ministries seek to emphasize prophecy through the lens of the dispensational, pretribulational, premillennial theological system. Tony Campolo, for example, labels dispensational premillennialism as a “Johnny-come-lately theology.”⁷ Campolo’s Social Justice colleague, John Piper, is far more strident in his tone when critiquing those whom he disagrees with eschatologically:

For two generations, perhaps, we have failed to study prophecy with anything like the rigor that it deserves. We have been so afraid of being viewed as one of those Zionist, right-wing, antichrist-sniffing, culture-denying, alarmist left-overs from the Scofield prophecy conference era that we give hardly any energy to putting the prophetic pieces together - at least not in public.⁸

One also notices the same tone of derision in Jim Wallis’ critique of dispensational premillennialists:

It’s all too easy to make fun of the extreme examples of prophecy belief that we encounter on bumper stickers and best-seller lists. When people talk breathlessly of the dangers of Universal Product Codes and automated teller machines as signs of the impending Tribulation, giggles and headshaking are hard to repress...when we ridicule apocalyptic interpretations of bar codes and the European Common Market, we are...properly rejecting an interpretive method that suggests a correspondence between biblical events and symbols, and our own lives. Ought

⁷ Tony Campolo, cited in Paul R. Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed: Volume 2: The Rise of Christian Palestinianism* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel, 2018), 129-30.

⁸ John Piper, message preached at the 2015 Gospel Coalition National Conference. *Ibid.*, 331.

Revelation to be included within the family of Christian texts, or should it be thrown on the fire of apocalyptic excesses?⁹

Also notice the ridicule that Wallis employs to deflect criticism for his participation in a dinner where the then United Nations Head, Ban Ki-Moon, was featured as the keynote speaker. In an article on the event entitled, “Dinner with the Antichrist,” Wallis writes:

Last night, the supposed Antichrist [Ban Ki-Moon] was listening to gospel music, speaking of his own faith, quoting Scripture, celebrating a new alliance with “the evangelical church” on the critical issues of poverty and global warming, and bringing the conservative Christian crowd to its feet in smiling agreement with the U.N. Secretary’s agenda. Indeed, leader after Christian leader insisted this was a biblical agenda.”¹⁰

In his best-selling book, *A Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren employs a similar tone of derision against those he deems as overly preoccupied with the subject of Bible prophecy:

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, “The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!” If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. Speculating on the exact timing of Christ’s return is futile, because Jesus said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Since Jesus said He didn’t know the day or hour, why should you try to figure it out? What we do know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it.” Jesus said, “The Good News about God’s kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come.” If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. It is easy to get distracted and sidetracked from your mission because Satan would rather have you do anything besides sharing your faith. He will let you do all kinds of good things as long as you don’t take anyone to heaven with you. But the moment you become serious about your mission, expect the Devil to throw all kinds of diversions at you. When that happens, remember the words of Jesus: “Anyone

⁹ Jim Wallis, cited in Mary Danielsen, *What You Need to Know About Jim Wallis and the Social-Justice "Gospel"* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2014), 13.

¹⁰ Jim Wallis, cited in *ibid.*, 15.

who lets himself be distracted from the work I plan for him is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”¹¹

Thus, using the strawman form of argumentation, Warren castigates his eschatological opponents as being interested in non-Christ-like pursuits, apathetic about personal evangelism, date setters, distracted and unserious about their life’s mission, influenced by Satan, and ultimately unfit for God’s Kingdom!

As much as those referenced above decry biblical eschatology, they are, in fact, the very fulfilment of it. The Apostle Peter predicted that in the last days those resorting to ridicule would arise from within, seeking to discredit Bible prophecy. “Know this first of all, that in the last days *mockers* will come with their *mocking*, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘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” (italics added, 2 Pet. 3:3-4). It is as if Peter was describing the very prophetic mockers of today. 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.

The Motive of the False Teachers

Even before providing this refutation, Peter explains the false teachers’ motives for denying Christ’s return. Here, Peter furnishes the *two* primary methods of these last days scoffers. *First*, Peter notes that these false teachers 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

¹¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 285-86.

doctrine of the Second Coming since the idea of Christ's return is automatically associated with the notions of accountability and judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). 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. In other words, a tendency to demote the Second Advent is in actuality a window into the heart of one's true spiritual condition.

Second, Peter explains that these last days false teachers will have capitulated to a man-made philosophy (Col. 2:8) or 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 uniformitarian viewpoint, what transpired in the unobservable past and will transpire in the unobservable future is determined by the patterns of the observable present. In other words, because no miraculous divine interventions are observable today, then neither was there a miraculous beginning to the cosmos, nor will a future miraculous intervention of God take place via the Second Coming. Therefore, 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. We can offer the following definition and description of uniformitarianism:

Uniformitarianism, in geology, the doctrine suggesting that Earth's geologic processes acted in the same manner and with essentially the same intensity in the past as they do in the present and that such uniformity is sufficient to account for all geologic change. This principle is fundamental to geologic thinking and underlies the whole development of the science of geology...When William Whewell, a University of Cambridge scholar, introduced the term in 1832, the prevailing view (called catastrophism) was that Earth had originated through supernatural means and had been affected by a series of catastrophic events such as the biblical Flood. In contrast to catastrophism, uniformitarianism postulates

that phenomena displayed in rocks may be entirely accounted for by geologic processes that continue to operate—in other words, the present is the key to the past.¹²

It is interesting to note how Peter was able to see, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the identical philosophical doctrine that has pervaded much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fortunately, Peter not only predicted the advent of this uniformitarian doctrine, but he also provided a four-fold refutation to it even before its predicted arrival. This rebuttal then becomes the apostle's focus in the subsequent verses.

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).¹³ *First*, Peter appeals to history (3:5-7) by reminding his readers that God has twice miraculously intervened in history through Creation (3:5) and then in judgment through the Flood (3:6-7). The phrase “out of water and by water,” in verse 5, 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). By surfacing these events from early Genesis, Peter notes the undeniable nexus between one's understanding of *protology* (the doctrine of beginnings) and one's *eschatology* (the doctrine of the end). Such a nexus comes as no surprise to diligent Bible students due to numerous parallel themes or common denominators running through both the Books of Genesis and Revelation. Of this phenomenon, Henry Morris observes, “The Book of Revelation is the sequel to the Book of Genesis, the two books together bounding all history and bounding all of God's revelations to mankind. They constitute the alpha and omega of God's written Word, the Book of Beginnings, and the Book of

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/science/uniformitarianism>

¹³ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 140-52.

Unveilings.”¹⁴ Jesus also frequently connected the sudden catastrophic historical events in early Genesis to the manner in which end time events would transpire (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:27-30).

Second Peter 3:5-7 says:

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.

Although denied by many, the plain sense interpretation of Scripture yields a six, twenty-four-hour day understanding of the Creation week, a recent date of Creation, and the reality of a global Flood. Note the following quote from noted liberal James Barr through his intellectually honest analysis of early Genesis:

Probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience. (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story (c) Noah’s Flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguish human and animal life except for those in the ark. Or, to put it negatively, the apologetic arguments which suppose the “days” of creation to be long eras of time, the figures of years not to be chronological, and the Flood to be a merely local Mesopotamian Flood, are not taken seriously by any such professors, as far as I know.¹⁵

Yet, in verse 5, Peter predicted that these obvious biblical truths of Creation and Flood would be denied in the last days. In fact, Peter uses the present active participle from the verb *thelō* to show that these false teachers willfully suppress these truths of

¹⁴ Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1983), 14.

¹⁵ Letter from Professor James Barr to David C.C. Watson of the UK, dated 23 April 1984. Cited in Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of "Progressive Creationism" (Billions of Years), as Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* updated and expanded ed. (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2014), 134-35.

Creation (cf. Rom. 1:18ff) and Flood. Sadly, not only is willful unsubmission to a literal understanding of doctrine prevalent among the unsaved world, but such thinking has also become prominent within the professing evangelical church. Note the words of William Lane Craig, who is counted today among Christianity's most gifted apologists.

...I've seen a comparable statistic that says that over 50% of evangelical pastors think that the world is less than ten thousand years old. Now, when you think about that...that is just hugely embarrassing; that over half of our ministers really believe that the universe is only around ten thousand years old. This is just scientifically nonsense, and yet this is the view that the majority of our pastors hold. It's really quite shocking when you think about it.¹⁶

Of course, when Lane pontificates in this manner he is not defending Christianity but is actually dismantling the foundation upon which Christianity rests (Gen. 1–11; Ps. 11:3). Such a mindset, found even within the ranks of evangelicalism's best and brightest, certainly represents an outworking of Peter's prophecy that biblical truths related to early Genesis, such as Creation and Flood, would be denied in the last days.

The reason for this willful suppression relates to the idea that these historical truths are perpetual reminders of God's intervention into His creation and mankind's accountability to its Creator. Thus, according to the *LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, "Peter accuses such scoffers of ignoring the biblical account of the original Creation (Gen. 1), when the earth was formed out of water and by water."¹⁷ Furthermore, as explained by scientist Charles Clough, "The most catastrophic judgment ever to befall mankind is the Flood of Noah's day which radically altered the planet, and which is used in Scripture to illustrate God's end-time judgments (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27)."¹⁸ Peter's point is

¹⁶ See William Lane Craig, "Dr. Craig on Collins vs Dawkins on Design of Universe," January 20, 2013, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/reasonable-faith-podcast/dr-craig-on-collins-vs-dawkins-on-design-of-universe/>.

¹⁷ Tim LaHaye, ed. *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2001), 1471.

¹⁸ Charles Clough, "God's Pattern of Judgment," in *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, ed. Tim LaHaye (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2001), 1470.

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? In other words, if God can miraculously set the universe in motion through Creation and miraculously judged His Creation through the Flood, it is not too difficult for God to miraculously end all things through His bodily return. Unfortunately, the last days false teachers will have intentionally ignored this important history lesson.

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. Watching the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California has been used to illustrate these differing perspectives on time. For example, if you watch the parade from Colorado Boulevard you can observe the parade floats passing one by one. However, watching the parade on television yields a different point of view. Through the aerial shot taken from a helicopter you can see the entire parade from the very first parade float to the very last one. The Colorado Boulevard view is analogous to man’s time bound perspective. On the other hand, the aerial view represents God’s timeless point of view. 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 hand 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.

Because God withholds judgment so as to give all of mankind ample opportunity “to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9), what then shall we make of the numerous biblical commands for the lost to repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9)? Much confusion revolves around this term “repentance” since it sounds similar to the English word “penance.” Thus, many unfortunately believe that “repentance” here must refer to some kind of human work or “penance” that is necessary for the lost sinner to be justified before God.

Such confusion is compounded by the fact that the Roman Catholic English translation of the Scripture, known as the *Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition*, substitutes the word “penance” for the word “repentance” in the biblical text. Thus, such a translation causes Second Peter 3:9 to be read as follows: “The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to *penance*” (italics added). However, does the word “repentance” actually mean “penance” in *Koine* Greek, which was the language of the New Testament?

The Greek word translated “repent” is *metanoēō*. It is a compound word in that it comes from two Greek words, *meta* and *noeō*. *Meta* means “change,” as in metamorphosis or metastasize. *Noeō* means “to perceive.” From the Greek word *noeō* we

get the English word “notion,” which refers to an idea emanating from the mind. Thus, repent or *metanoēō* means to change one's mind about Christ rather than to change one's behavior in order to come to Christ. In this sense, repentance is a synonym for faith. In other words, when someone believes or trusts in Christ for salvation, they have automatically repented or changed their minds about Jesus. This definition represents the Chaferian understanding of the biblical word “repentance”:

[A] serious Arminian error respecting this doctrine occurs when repentance is added to faith or believing as a condition of salvation. It is true that repentance can very well be required as a condition of salvation, but then only because the change of mind which...has been involved when turning from every other confidence to the one needful trust in Christ. Such turning about, of course, cannot be achieved without a change of mind. This vital newness of mind is a part of believing, after all, and therefore it may be and is used as a synonym for believing at times (cf. Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance nevertheless cannot be added to believing as a condition of salvation, because upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only (cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31). Similarly, the Gospel by John, which was written that men might believe and believing have life through Christ's name (John 20:31), does not once use the word repentance. In like manner, the Epistle to the Romans, written to formulate the complete statement of salvation by grace alone, does not use the term repentance in relation to salvation.¹⁹

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)

¹⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948; reprint, [8 vols. in 4], Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 7:265-66.

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.

Excursus on the Eternal State: Renovation or Ex Nihilo New Creation?

Although not the primary subject of this presentation, since Peter here speaks of the dissolution of the old heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12) to be replaced by the new heavens and earth, a few passing remarks must be made concerning the debate among evangelical interpreters as to whether the new heavens and new earth spoken of here (2 Pet. 3:13) and in Revelation 21–22 represent a mere renovation of the existing world or an *ex-nihilo* new creation entirely.

While some today argue the new heaven and earth are simply a renovation of the present heavens and earth,²⁰ it is better to see them as a new creation entirely. In other words, the new heaven and earth will be *ex-nihilo* (something out of nothing) brand new creation. Therefore, the new heaven and earth will be similar to God's creation of the original heavens and earth as recorded in Genesis chapter one. Several reasons make this contention tenable.²¹ Unlike the present creation which is contaminated by sin (Rom. 8:20–22) that even extends into the Messianic Kingdom (Zech. 14:16–18; Isa. 65:20;

²⁰ Michael J. Svigel, "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition — Will God Annihilate the World and Re-Create It Ex Nihilo," *Biblioteca Sacra* 171, (2014): 401-17.

²¹ Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Revelation," 199–200, accessed January 22, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

Rev. 20:7–10), the new creation will be completely free of sin and its influence (Rev. 21:4). Moreover, Peter’s description of the final destruction of the present heavens and earth by fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10–11, 13) seems incompatible with a renovation perspective. Many other areas of Scripture similarly speak of the complete destruction of the present world (Matt. 24:35; 1 Cor. 7:31; Heb. 1:10–12; 1 John 2:17).

In fact, Jesus frequently analogizes the eternity of His Word to the temporary nature of the present order. For example, in Matthew 5:18, Jesus said, “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Similarly, in Matthew 24:35, Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” Such a juxtaposition loses its rhetorical impact if, after all, the present order will not really disappear but rather will only be renovated into another form.

Also, the topography and geography of the coming new heavens and earth is described differently than the present heavens and earth. While the seas (Gen. 1:9–10) constitute close to seventy-five percent of the earth’s surface, no sea will be present in the new world (Rev. 21:1b). Although the luminaries such as the sun, moon, and stars are a part of our world (Gen. 1:14–19), such luminaries will be absent from the new world (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). Although the notion of a renovated earth may fit the transition from the present world into the earthly Messianic Kingdom, it seems incompatible with the transition from the Messianic Kingdom into the eternal state.

Some maintain that the verb translated “passed away” (*aperchomai*) in John’s description of the passing away of the present world does not convey total eradication. Revelation 21:1 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.” However, this identical Greek word is used a few verses later in Revelation 21:4 in a context that speaks of complete elimination. Revelation 21:4 says, “and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have

passed away.” “Passed away” in Revelation 21:4 means total elimination since it is speaking of sin and its consequences (tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain). If “passed away” means total elimination in Revelation 21:4, then why should not John’s use of the identical word a few verses earlier also not convey this same meaning.²²

Others note that Peter exemplifies the destruction of the world through Noah’s Flood as a paradigm for how God will destroy the present earth (2 Peter 3:6, 10–13). Thus, they argue that just as the transition from the prediluvian to the post-Flood world involved a renovated earth, then the transition from the Millennial Kingdom into the eternal state will also involve a renovated rather than a completely new earth. They base their argument on 2 Peter 3:6, “through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.” If such terminology does not mean eradication of the earth, then neither should it carry this meaning in Revelation 21:1a. However, Peter was not speaking of the Flood’s impact upon the earth. Rather, he was explaining that the Flood destroyed all of humanity (except the eight on the ark). The Greek word *kosmos* translated “world” can sometimes refer to humanity (John 3:16) rather than to the physical earth.

Interestingly, rather than the eternal state (Rev. 21–22), it is actually the details concerning the preceding Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-10) that seem more compatible with a renovationist perspective. After all, prophetic Scripture indicates that luminaries (Isa. 30:26; Rev. 21:23; 22:5), Temple sacrifices (Ezek. 43:13-20; Rev. 21:22), death (Isa. 65:20; Rev. 21:4), Satanic activity (Rev. 20:7, 10), and rebellion (Zech. 14:16-18; Rev. 20:8-9; 21:27) will exist in the Millennial Kingdom rather than the eternal state. In sum, while the Messianic Kingdom will take place on the present earth, the eternal kingdom will involve a completely new earth.

²² Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2012), 233.

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." Concerning the practicality of eschatology, J. Dwight Pentecost observes:

A short time ago, I took occasion to go through the New Testament to mark each reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and to observe the use made of that teaching about His coming. I was struck anew with the fact that almost without exception, when the coming of Christ is mentioned in the New Testament, it is followed by an exhortation to godliness and holy living.²³

Eschatology is a subject of tremendous practicality as far as the mind of God is concerned. This assertion can be demonstrated simply by observing how much of God's Word is devoted to the subject. Non-dispensationalist J. Barton Payne observed that roughly twenty-seven percent, well over one-quarter of the Bible, was eschatological at the time it was written.²⁴

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). The nexus between a knowledge of Christ's return and personal holiness is also found in other New Testament passages. For example, First John 2:28 says, "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Based upon the disclosure of God's end time program, since all things will be destroyed by fire, we naturally begin to live for the only

²³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today: The Middle East Crisis and the Future of the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 20.

²⁴ J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 674-75.

two things that will last: the Word of God (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35) and the souls of people (Eccles. 3:11; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46).

A wrongly prioritized earthly existence can be analogized to an ice sculptor who works feverishly to create a beautiful sculpture out of a block of ice. Yet, his efforts produce only a temporary impact since it is just a matter of time before his ice creation is melted by the afternoon heat. What a tragedy it is to spend one's entire life climbing the ladder of success only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. 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 such priorities in the present. Thus, because of a proper understanding of eschatology, we will be spared from the folly of spending our brief lifespans (Ps. 103:15-16; Jas. 4:14) living for things that will not stand the test of time.

Second, prophecy gives us hope by reminding us that there is a better world coming. The inculcation of eschatological hope is indeed a dominant theme of prophetic Scripture (1 Thess. 4:18; Titus 2:13). 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 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). Interestingly, the word translated "hasten" here comes from the Greek verb *speudō*, from which we get the word "speed." How can we "hasten" or "speed" up the coming of the Lord? If God postpones judgment so that as many people as possible can be made right with Him before judgment falls (2 Pet. 3:9), the more we

spread the gospel consequently giving more people an opportunity to be saved, the faster the end time scenario can transpire. When viewed in this manner, a knowledge of prophecy 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.

Conclusion

This presentation has sought to highlight prophecy's practicality through an exposition of Second Peter 3:3-15. Not only has Peter warned about the coming false teachers attack on the doctrine of the Second Advent, but he also provided, well in advance, the motivation for this doctrinal attack (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The Apostle has also emphasized a four-fold rebuttal to neutralize this attack (2 Pet. 3:5-10), and, in the process, he has also explained the practical implications of Bible prophecy (2 Pet. 3:11-15). In sum, 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.

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