

PROPHETIC WORDS DECLARE THE FUTURE

Chapter three was written to encourage the believers to stand firm in the trustworthiness of God's promises against the scoffers who denied them. Those who mock God's Word have been present since the days of Noah, but God has been long suffering toward them in order to allow them sufficient time for repentance - 3:9. Although the time when the day of the Lord will begin is uncertain, that fact is certain, and it is imminent - 3:10. The believer's hope is the promise of the new heaven and new earth - 3:13. Therefore, believers are to live a blameless life, beware of the wicked, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ - 3:14, 17, 18.

After challenging these believers to develop their spiritual lives by the infallible Word of God (chapter 1), Peter warned them of false teachers that will come in their churches (chapter 2), and now he warns them of skeptics that will scoff at them outside of their churches (chapter 3). Peter encouraged these believers to live godly lives in light of Christ's return in spite of those that lived contrary to them - 3:14.

This chapter is divided into four parts by a literary device that Peter used: notice his use of "beloved," in 3:1, 8, 14, and 17, which divide the chapter.

I. Scoffers' Ignorance — 3:1-7

3:1 — "Remembrance" - Peter stirred up the minds of the "beloved" to remember the truth they had learned from God so they would not be affected by the false statements of the scoffers against God's Word.

3:2 — "Be mindful of the words" - Peter exhorted the believers to remember the words of the holy prophets in the past and of the apostles in the present - cf. 3:15-16. He emphasized the continuity and authority of all Scripture which is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, that is, the Scriptures conform the believer into the likeness of Christ (2 Tim 3:16).

3:3 — "Last days" - A mistake is made when the last days is taken to refer only to the future days of the Tribulation. The last days began when Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven. All Christians have lived in the last days when scoffers mocked the prophetic message of Christ's return to earth. Peter reminds us that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord - 3:8.

"Walking after their own lusts" — Scoffers would come that would have the same basic character faults as the false teachers described in chapter two. Scoffers do not build up believers; they tear them down with their accusations.

3:4 — "Where is the promise of His coming?" - The scoffers took refuge in Christ's delay in returning as a sign that His promise was empty. They ignorantly claimed that nothing had changed since the beginning of creation - a form of uniformitarianism. This was the substance of their allegation. Peter answers their accusation with an example of how God's Word changed the course of nature with a flood. In the future His Word once again will change the heavens and the earth with fire - 3:5-7.

3:5 — "They are willingly ignorant" - They disregarded the facts of Scripture which argue against a stable universe. All things have not continued the same since the beginning of creation.

3:5-6 — "By the word of God" - God ordered a worldwide flood to destroy the ancient world. The people were so wicked that God broke the mold of natural events and

judged the world so that all the people perished that were not in the ark that Noah built - Gen 6.

3:7 — In the future the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire. (Notice that unsaved sinners also will have a fiery destiny - Lk 16:24).

II. Sovereign's Promise — 3:8-13

Now Peter encourages the "beloved" with the promise of the Lord, who controls all the events on earth, that He will come in His time.

3:8 — "Be not ignorant" - God's timetable is not reckoned by human means. "One day is with the Lord AS a thousand years, and a thousand years AS one day." Peter did not say a day with the Lord IS a thousand years. If that were so Jesus would still be in the grave. Nor did Peter say a thousand years IS one day with the Lord. He is simply saying the Lord rises above human limitations and what seems to be a long time for us is a short time for Him. He is in the "eternal present" - Ps 90:4.

3:9 — "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise" - The Lord's apparent delay is intentional. He is gracious and longsuffering to allow sinners enough time for repentance. He is not in a hurry to judge them and send them to Hell.

"Not willing that any should perish" - Peter's statement agrees with Paul's, "Who will have all men to be saved" - 1 Tim 2:4. The Lord's desire is to save all people. That is why Jesus paid for the sins of all people - 1 Jn 2:2. Since God is sovereign and can do whatever He wishes, why are the majority of sinners going to Hell? Why doesn't He save all of them, or at least the majority of them? The apparent answer is in God's use of His sovereignty. He uses His sovereignty to give sinners a choice to receive or reject His offer of salvation. Sinners are dead in their sins, that is, they are separated from Him and cannot connect with Him until He comes to them with His plan to save them from His wrath. As sovereign, He initiates the process by coming near to them with the good news of salvation, but they must do their part to be saved. They are told to seek Him while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near. The wicked are told to forsake their way and the unrighteous must forsake their thoughts. This means they must repent of their sins when they come to the Lord, then He will have mercy on them and abundantly pardon them - Isa 55:6-7. As ambassadors for Christ, Paul said that it is as though God is begging sinners through us to be reconciled to Him - 2 Cor 5:20. This shows that God has given sinners a decision to make. God has provided for their reconciliation, but they must choose to receive it.

3:10 — "The day of the Lord will come" - This is not a 24-hour day, but a lengthy period of time - cf 3:8. This is when the Lord will act in majestic fashion to accomplish His will with His creation. It is a day of wrath as well as a day of blessing. It begins with the Tribulation, includes the Millennial Kingdom and concludes with the great white throne judgment. This day will come as a thief in the night in the seven-year Tribulation; it will come with sudden destruction - 1 Thess 5:1-3; 2 Thess 2:1-8.

"The heavens shall pass away" — this event will happen after the Millennial Kingdom of Christ and before the great white throne judgment - Rev 20:11; the earth and man's works shall be burned up - cf 3:12).

"The elements shall melt with fervent heat" — The elements of the heavens and earth along with its works will melt - cf 3:12. Some say that it will be burned up and become a "bucket of ashes" and others say the elements will melt and be reformed to make the new heavens and new earth.

3:11 — "What manner ... ought ye to be" — This time of judgment will demonstrate holy wrath of God against rebellious and wicked sinners. Knowing what God will do to sinners, ought to stir Christians to live holy lives - 1 John 3:3.

3:13 — "His promise" - Christians look at the coming of Christ with an anticipation of His blessing in the new heavens and a new earth with righteousness. The unsaved look at the coming of Christ with fear in anticipation of His judgment: Hell and the Lake of Fire.

III. Sinner's Defilement — 3:14-16

3:14 — "Be diligent" - The "beloved" were exhorted to make every effort to keep themselves morally pure and at peace with the Lord, ignoring the empty doctrines of the false teachers and ignorant taunts of the scoffers.

3:15 — "Longsuffering of our Lord" - The purpose of the Lord's patience with sinners is for their salvation - cf 3:9.

"Beloved brother Paul" — Peter was rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11-14), but Peter understood that it was done for his own good (Prov 27:6). Peter loved Paul as a brother in the Lord.

3:16 — Paul wrote the same things about the future as Peter had written. Evidently the scoffers were using Paul's writings to support their opposition against Peter, but Peter corrects their erroneous conclusions.

"Wrest" — The "unlearned and unstable" teachers twisted Paul's writings to support their arguments against Peter, but in so doing, they brought about their own destruction.

"The other Scriptures" — Paul's writings were on the same level of authority as the other writings of Scripture.

IV. Savior's Grace — 3:17-18

3:17 — "Beware" - The "beloved" were exhorted to beware of the error of the scoffers ("lawless men") lest they become unstable in their faith. They could not lose their salvation, but they could lose their assurance of salvation and become unstable.

3:18 — "Grow in grace" - Peter's positive message to the believers was to develop their Christian lives with gifts to the poor and even to the unworthy. They were to give all diligence to add all the fruits of grace possible to their faith in Christ - cf 1:5-7.

"Knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" — Christians should be challenged always to grow spiritually to reach the goal of being like Christ - cf Phil 3:10-13.

"Be glory" — Christ is worthy of glory both now and forever because of what He has done to provide salvation for all sinners.