



## 2 Peter Chapter Three

### Summary of Chapter Three

Peter opens the chapter by confirming this is his second letter to this intended readership, which leads most commentators to accept that he is writing again to those in Asia Minor. This is later supported when he reveals that Paul too had written to them, which he certainly did to churches in Asia and Galatia.

He warns them that, as the church age draws to its close and the Day of Judgement approaches, then there will be an increase in the numbers of people who will oppose the Gospel truth and bring disparagement upon its message. But just as God once almost wiped out mankind in the flood, so too will he refine the earth by fire, in order to bring those who have been tested finally into the Kingdom of Christ.

Peter reminds us that we should not judge the time that we wait for Christ's return to be in anyway slow or a delay, for God does not measure time as we do, and for him it is no time at all between all the events in salvation history. We are to wait with patient endurance: <<*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*>> (Revelation 6:9-10).

When the end finally does come it will be at a time when many are not expecting it, like a thief in the night. This will bring about the destruction of the earth as we know it, to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth, creation not merely restored, but brought to its final perfection.

Peter's parting words are to warn them to guard once more against those who would entice them away from the truth, encouraging them to grow in the grace of God through the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of all.

## V. 2 Peter 3:1-13 - The Day of the Lord

Peter turns his attention to explaining the Lord's promised return, and specifically to an apparent debate concerning the timing of the return. Peter had been a key figure during Jesus' ministry on earth. Although there was no hierarchy in the apostolic group, Jesus had selected Peter, John and James as a core grouping who were with him at key events, such as his Transfiguration and the raising of Jairus' daughter to life.

If we consider this group to be first among equals then Peter should be seen as first among equals for the whole group, as he was often the key spokesman for the whole group, such as identifying Jesus as the Christ and explaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Thus we can be assured that what he says here concerning the return of the Lord is accurate as he had many discussions on this subject with the Lord, several of which are recorded in Scripture for us.

### V.a 2 Peter 3:1-7 - Scoffers challenge the truth of Scripture concerning the coming of the Lord

Peter now makes mention that this is his second letter to them, and just as in the first one, he is arousing their clear thinking faculties by way of reminding them of things they already know to be the truth.

Peter offers a biblical perspective on the sceptics who attempt to create doubt concerning the Lord's return; an historic event that will occur.

**<sup>1</sup> Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.**

#### 2 Peter 3:1

Peter mentions that this is the second letter he has written to this particular audience. It is all but certain that 1 Peter was the earlier letter in view here. Peter calls his readers dear friends or beloved, Greek agapētos, demonstrating his deep concern for them as he reminds them of the Lord's return.

On the importance of reminders Peter writes: <<*So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things*>> (2 Peter 1:12-15). Paul offered the Roman church similar advice: <<*I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me*>> (Romans 15:15).

Stimulate you to wholesome thinking. In an era when some church leaders call people to more action in church ministries, it is interesting that Peter calls on his readership, and by association believers today, to give more thought to the teachings of the Word and their response in terms of lifestyle choices. If a

believer's faith is strong, and they are committed in that faith, then there will be an outworking of that faith in terms of works.

<sup>2</sup> I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

## 2 Peter 3:2

**Recall.** Peter wants the church to remember what the holy prophets had predicted in the Scriptures, and what the apostles had handed down as the commandment of the Lord. This would strengthen their faith. Moses was one such prophet they should heed: <<*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him*>> (Deuteronomy 18:15), clearly a reference to a Messiah that would come more than 1,000 years after Moses gave this instruction, showing that time is no marker in the history of salvation.

Peter had given similar advice before in Jerusalem, based on this very Scripture: <<*For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'* "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways">> (Acts 3:22-26).

The prediction Peter especially had in mind was the Second Coming: <<*Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true*>> (John 21:20-24). John, of course, did not live to see the Second Coming, but did once again encounter his Lord in old age, who handed him his Revelation of things that were yet to come, making that book trustworthy prophecy for the NT era.

**The command given by our Lord.** Jesus gave his apostles numerous commands that they were to pass on, many of which are recorded for us in Scripture, such as: <<*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:19-20). We know that not all that Jesus commanded and did has been recorded for us: <<*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole*

*world would not have room for the books that would be written*>> (John 21:25), but we have more than enough revealed to us in order to live an effective and fruitful life, pleasing to God.

<sup>3</sup> **First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.**

### 2 Peter 3:3

You must understand is a clear apostolic command and not just a suggestion that believers should live in hope, for the promises of God are sure and can be relied on to come to fruition at the appropriate time. Peter had issued a similar command earlier: <<*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation*>> (2 Peter 1:20).

The last days will feature scoffers who mock according to their own evil desires. Their desire to live in sin with impunity and a lust for material or political gain drives them to deride biblical truth and those who hold on to it. Sadly, there are those that will listen to these scoffers: <<*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron*>> (1 Timothy 4:1-2), confirmed by the Lord's brother: <<*They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires"*>> (Jude 18).

Throughout the church age there have always been such people but Peter foresees that as the Day draws near there will be a significant increase to those who oppose and mock the work of the church. Peter understands, as do the rest of the NT authors, that the last days have already arrived, supporting an amillennial viewpoint of end times theology.

The last days are not just in the distant future but were inaugurated at Pentecost: <<*These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come*>> (1 Corinthians 10:11), <<*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days*>> (2 Timothy 3:1), <<*but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*>> (Hebrews 1:2), and: <<*Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days*>> (James 5:3), and will continue until Christ's return.

They are the last days in that the coming of the Messiah, long predicted in the OT, has now occurred. His saving death and resurrection have been accomplished, and now the work of the Holy Spirit in building the church is a key event in the history of salvation that needs to occur before Christ returns. Most rabbis believed that the Spirit had ceased speaking through human prophets with the last of the OT prophets, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

<sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." <sup>5</sup> But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's

word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

## 2 Peter 3:4-6

Scoffers (v.3) will call into question the biblical promise of the Lord's coming, Greek parousia. They scoff at the promise of the Lord's return, arguing that because everything has remained the same since creation, God will not intervene in the world. The prophets had foreseen such people: <<*to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it"*>> (Isaiah 5:19), and: <<*Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: 'The days go by and every vision comes to nothing'?*>> (Ezekiel 12:22). Jesus had spoken of them as well: <<*But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time'*>> (Matthew 24:48), for: <<*It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed*>> (Luke 17:30).

What so many of them fail to grasp is that, although Christ's Second Coming is the culmination of salvation history, all the key events have now happened. The world is certainly not as it once was when there appeared to be no hope for anyone. As each generation passes there is more opportunity for those living to turn to God.

All that the scoffers are portraying is that this time span is also allowing so many more to reject him: <<*When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong*>> (Ecclesiastes 8:11), and they can be sure that: <<*God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them – men who never change their ways and have no fear of God*>> (Psalm 55:19). That is a fault of theirs and not of God's plan or its timing.

They deliberately forget. Such an attitude is itself a sin and shows a depraved mind that Paul speaks of: <<*the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so*>> (Romans 8:7). In essence, they are choosing to forget God in order to become the lord of their own lives, as Bildad had said to Job: <<*Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless*>> (Job 8:13).

Fathers, the plural of Greek patēr, is a reference to the OT patriarchs, since this term is never used in the NT to refer to first-generation Christians. But these scoffers deliberately forget, that is, overlook or consciously and wilfully ignore the fact that God did intervene when he created the heavens and the earth with God's Word, refer to Genesis 1:3-31. The psalmist confirms this: <<*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth*>> (Psalm 33:6), as does the writer to the Hebrews: <<*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*>> (Hebrews 11:3), and also when he judged the earth with water and it was destroyed, see Genesis Chapters 6-9.

God in fact intervenes in his creation whenever he desires, as is evidenced numerous times in both the OT and NT. Peter cites two obvious occasions of God's

intervention, namely, when God acted at creation to form the earth, out of water and by water: <<And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day. And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good>> (Genesis 1:6-10), and also when he acted decisively in history, destroying the earth by means of the flood in the days of Noah: <<For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished – birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days>> (Genesis 7:17-24).

The world was deluged and destroyed. Although the scoffers may not have understood just how much the world had changed in their generation with the death and resurrection of Christ through their ignorance of who he was, as Paul writes: <<None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory>> (1 Corinthians 2:8), they surely could not have missed the fact that God had brought this terrible, if just, judgement on the world that could have destroyed mankind forever, had God deemed it to be so. That he had chosen not to do so should have alerted the scoffers to the fact that God had other plans for them, which he had revealed to them through Jesus. Their ignorance of any of this does not make them innocent, and they still remain culpable for their decisions and actions.

<sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

### 2 Peter 3:7

By the same word, the powerful Word of God that creates and sends judgment, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, when the ungodly will also be judged. The day of reckoning is coming for scoffers, and their place is reserved for them, as they are tested in the fire: <<All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross; therefore I love your statutes>> (Psalm 119:119), and: <<Remove the dross from the silver, and out comes material for the silversmith>> (Proverbs 25:4). History will not go on forever; the end is coming.

The day of judgment. Believers need not fear this day, indeed: <<*They will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth*>> (Psalm 96:13), although: <<*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Destruction of ungodly men. The prophets offer little comfort for those who have chosen to go their own way in this life: <<*For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord*>> (Isaiah 66:16), and: <<*“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them”*>> (Malachi 4:1).

#### V.b 2 Peter 3:8-10 - The Lord’s patience determines the timing of his return

Despite the urgency of Peter’s warning, he wants his readers to know that God acts outside of time as we calculate it, as he is not bound by any of the constraints that we are. The Lord’s perspective on time is different from that of humans. It is not that God is slow in fulfilling his promise, but rather that he is patient.

**<sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

#### 2 Peter 3:8-9

Dear friends introduces a new section. Peter explains that the delay of the Second Coming is not a long time from God’s perspective, that is, with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day, which was also noted by Moses: <<*For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night*>> (Psalm 90:4). It is also the period, symbolic at least, that Satan will spend in prison before his final attempt to usurp God: <<*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time*>> (Revelation 20:1-3).

Peter is not saying that one of God’s days is equal to 1,000 years in our time, supporting a day-age theory put forward by some for the creation account. What Peter is alluding to is that God lives outside of time. For him there is no past, present or future, everything is laid out before him, the whole of eternity past and to come - for God, everything just is!

Peter then explains further that the supposed delay is also because God is patient, as Paul confirms: <<*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness,*

*tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?>> (Romans 2:4); and he has not quickly brought the present period of history to an end because he does not wish anyone to perish: <<*In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost*>> (Matthew 18:14), and: <<*This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*>> (1 Timothy 2:3-4).*

However, we should not conclude that not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance means that no one will perish, as the majority will still turn their backs on God, choose their own way in life and face the eternal consequences of their actions, as Jesus confirms: <<*If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down*>> (Luke 13:9), and: <<*If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned*>> (John 15:6).

Although Christians long for Christ's return and the defeat of all evil, as long as the present period of history lasts, an opportunity remains for people to turn to God in faith, something believers should also desire for others if they truly love their neighbour.

God exercises patience so as to give men time to see the outworking of their wicked acts and come to their senses in true repentance. This takes time, generations in fact, for the wicked culmination of mankind's sin will take time to play out completely on a global scale and towards all the human family. By comparison, we as individuals are impatient, wanting to see the promised results in our own life time.

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

## 2 Peter 3:10

Despite the telling in advance by thousands of years of this coming Day of Judgement on all mankind, written down for us in the Scriptures, that day of reckoning will still come upon us at a time when we are not expecting it. People will not see it coming, but will only realise its presence when it comes, just as a theft is only realised when it is discovered, by observing the things that are now missing. However, the manner of the event will not be missed when it does come: <<*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The Day of the Lord. God's judgment will not be delayed forever. When Christ returns it will be sudden, without warning, like the strike of a thief. God's timings for major events have been set and he keeps to them as we saw with the Exodus from Egypt: <<*At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt*>> (Exodus 12:41). They are known only by himself: <<*He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority"*>> (Acts 1:7).

There is no way for anyone to escape this Day of Judgement before Christ, but people have the choice of what the outcome will be: *<<Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galilæans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galilæans were worse sinners than all the other Galilæans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish”>>* (Luke 13:1-5).

The heavens will disappear with a roar. This may be symbolic language or the physical reality of the atmospheric gases being burned up; either way, this will be a cataclysmic event: *<<In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded>>* (Psalm 102:25-26), *<<He also says, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end”>>* (Hebrews 1:10-12), and: *<<The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place>>* (Revelation 6:14), and the heavenly bodies or the elements, i.e. stars, planets, etc. will be destroyed by fire or burned up and dissolved.

There will be no place to hide: *<<Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!>>* (Revelation 6:15-16), for the earth and every person’s works on the earth will be laid bare, or exposed to God’s judgment, the Greek term *heurethēsetai*, literally ‘will be found’, a divine passive meaning ‘found by God’, alluding to the intense scrutiny that God will bring on that day.

Destroyed by fire. Some translations read ‘will be burned up’, Greek *katakaēsetai*, because some Greek manuscripts have this wording instead of Greek *heurethēsetai*. But the earliest and most reliable manuscripts have ‘will be found’, indicating with this reading that the annihilation of the earth is not taught in this passage.

Scholars have debated whether the NT speaks of an annihilation of the present cosmos and the creation of a new universe, or whether it indicates the transformation of the present cosmos, including the earth. The latter seems more likely in light of:

1. The preferred reading of this passage.
2. The words of Paul: *<<I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice,*

*but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently>> (Romans 8:18-25).*

3. There are many OT prophecies about the renewal of the earth.
4. Christ's resurrection body being in continuity with his earthly body; and
5. The fact that Christ's resurrection body is a pattern for the resurrection bodies of Christians, see 1 Corinthians 15:12-58.

God seems always to renew not destroy, but it seems he will recreate parts of his creation that are marred by sin. Whatever the reality turns out to be there are some things we can be certain of, including: *<<He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:14), and Jesus promises: <<Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away>> (Mark 13:31).*

**Let us just reflect on the difference between Jesus First and Second Comings:** *<<And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests">> (Luke 2:8-14). Compared with: <<For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18), and God's final OT prophetic warning given some 400 years before Jesus' birth: <<"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty. "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all*

Israel. “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse”>> (Malachi 4:1-6). Something that is not revealed to us is the fate of the other living creatures created by God, over which we have shown such poor stewardship and which became cursed because of our disobedience through Adam, although God blamed the Devil: <<So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life>> (Genesis 3:14). As a result: <<We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time>> (Romans 8:22).

#### V.c 2 Peter 3:11-13 - Living effectively in view of the Lord’s return

Peter concludes his treatment of the Lord’s return by turning the discussion once again to Christian lifestyle. The Second Coming should be a motivation to live a holy life that includes love of neighbour and a sharing of the Gospel through the way they live their lives.

**<sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives**

#### 2 Peter 3:11

The people of God ought to live in holiness and godliness, that is, to live holy and godly lives to avoid the punishment coming to the ungodly and to devote themselves to things that will last beyond the judgment that is to come.

**<sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.**

#### 2 Peter 3:12

Speed its coming, the Greek term *speudō*, which means ‘hurry by extra effort’, indicates that, by living holy lives, Christians can actually affect the time of the Lord’s return, i.e. look forward to the day of God.

That does not mean, of course, that the Lord has not foreknown and foreordained when Jesus will return, as Jesus had himself stated: <<**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**>> (Matthew 24:36), and Paul confirms this is his understanding too: <<**For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead**>> (Acts 17:31). But when God set that day, he also ordained that it would happen after all of his purposes for saving believers and building his kingdom in this present age had been accomplished, and those purposes are being accomplished when he works through his human agents to bring them about. Therefore, from a human perspective, when Christians share the Gospel with others, and pray: <<**your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**>> (Matthew 6:10),

and advance the Kingdom of God in other ways, they do speed the fulfilment of God's purposes, including Christ's return.

The destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat represents a summary statement of what was discussed in vv.8-10.

**<sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.**

### 2 Peter 3:13

This may raise two points for consideration:

1. What true Christians are looking for: a new heaven and a new earth, in which a great deal more of the wisdom, power and goodness of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will be clearly discerned than we are able to discover in what we now see and know; for in these new heavens and earth, where we shall be freed from the vanity we are currently subject to, and the sin we are polluted with, only righteousness shall dwell; this is to be the habitation of such righteous people as to the true righteousness of God, and are free from the power and pollution of sin; all the wicked shall be cast into hell; only those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, shall be admitted to dwell in this holy place.
2. What is the ground and foundation of this expectation and hope – the promise of God. To look for anything which God has not promised is presumption; but if our expectations are according to the promise, both as to the things we look for, and the time and way of their being brought about, we cannot be disappointed; for God is faithful and it is he who has promised.

The hope of Christians ultimately depends though not on their works, see comments on v.12, but on God's promise. Their hope is not in the destruction of the wicked and their works, even though that is a necessary part of God's final judgment. It is not something a believer should relish or rejoice in, but be truly saddened by, whether those people are loved ones or strangers to them.

Their hope is in the promise that God will bring about a new heaven and a new earth: <<*Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind*>> (Isaiah 65:17), and: <<*As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,*” declares the Lord, *“so will your name and descendants endure”*>> (Isaiah 66:22), and John's description in Revelation 21:1-22:5, which will be the eternal abode of the righteous.

New could mean newly created but probably means renewed or made new. However, John writes: <<*He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true”*>> (Revelation 21:5). Also see comments made on v.10.

The home of righteousness. The Lord is preparing an eternal dwelling for all those who were called to follow him by faith and have remained true to that faith: <<*In*

*my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you>> (John 14:2).*

## **VI. 2 Peter 3:14-18 - Concluding Exhortations**

To obtain the final reward, believers must live a godly life and resist the sexual permissiveness and other temptations offered by false teachers. This is a final summary of what Peter had spoken of earlier: *<<For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ>> (2 Peter 1:5-11).*

### **VI.a 2 Peter 3:14 - Concerning diligence**

Peter calls his readers dear friends or beloved for the third of four times in this chapter, see v.1, v.8, and v.17. In light of the Lord's return, Christians are to be diligent so as to be found without spot or blemish, that is, doctrinally and morally pure, thereby receiving the full reward of eternal life. This is in stark contrast to the spiritual condition of the wicked: *<<Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud">> (2 Peter 2:22).*

<sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

### **2 Peter 3:14**

Since this is the very hope of true believers and they are looking forward to and awaiting these glorious things, they should do their utmost to become approved of God. There are many others who have been looking forward to similar events, such as the prophetess Anna in the temple when Jesus was being dedicated to God: *<<Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem>> (Luke 2:38),* and the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the hopes of Abraham: *<<For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God>> (Hebrews 11:10).*

Believers want to be found spotless and unblemished, as the lover found his beloved to be: *<<All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you>> (Song 4:7),* blameless in his sight, and according to his high standards - not according to the standards of the world they live in, for it is God alone who will be their judge. Moses once said: *<<You must be blameless before the Lord your*

**God>>** (Deuteronomy 18:13), which can only be achieved through the Cross of Christ - the standard that was set is extremely high!

Disciples of Christ must love peace and actively pursue it towards all others, otherwise they could never fit into that glorious system of things if they did not love peace. Paul writes of this as well: <<**Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you**>> (2 Corinthians 13:11). Ultimately though, we must be at peace in our relationship with God that can only come through faith and absolute trust in him.

#### VI.b 2 Peter 3:15-16 - Concerning the distortion of Paul's teaching

The delay of Christ's return should be reckoned as his patience leading people to salvation: <<**Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?**>> (Romans 2:4).

The apostle Paul also wrote to these same readers at some point prior to the composition of Second Peter, and apparently the false teachers of Chapter Two used a twisted version of Paul's Gospel of freedom: <<**They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him**>> (2 Peter 2:19), <<**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires**>> (Romans 8:1-5), and: <<**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love**>> (Galatians 5:1-6), to entice some of them into sin.

<sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

## 2 Peter 3:15

Our dear brother Paul. This greeting is not so much brother as with a fellow Christian: <<*I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:27), or even to a fellow evangelist: <<*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother*>> (Colossians 1:1), but the text here is to a fellow apostle, showing the clear acceptance of Paul's status with those who served with Christ and were chosen by him during his earthly ministry. It also shows concordance in their message. Following the Jerusalem Council, James had written to the churches and had referred to Paul as a dear friend: <<*So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Acts 15:25-26).

There had been a time where the relationship between Paul and Peter had been strained: <<*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*>> (Galatians 2:11-14). This passage clearly indicates they had been reconciled in terms of respect and indeed brotherly love.

Paul also wrote you. As stated earlier, Paul also wrote to Peter's readership. Peter had written his first letter to Asia Minor: <<*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*>> (1 Peter 1:1), see the image.



The map indicates all the countries mentioned by Peter

Wisdom that God gave him. Peter acknowledges that Paul has been divinely chosen and instructed by God for the work he has been entrusted to do. He had long ago accepted his ministry to the Gentiles: <<**James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews**>> (Galatians 2:9).

We have the letters that Paul wrote to the Galatians, and also to the Ephesians and Colossians in Asia. It is possible that he may have written to others but there is no historical record to support this. However, it is known that letters like Paul's and Peter's were copied and passed on to other churches. For example: <<**I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis**>> (Colossians 4:13), both of which are in Asia and probably had the Colossian letter read to them. This is supported by: <<**After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea**>> (Colossians 4:16), also supporting the theory that there are further letters lost to us.

<sup>16</sup> He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

## 2 Peter 3:16

In all his letters shows awareness of some kind of collection of Paul's letters, with the number unspecified here. It is known that at least two letters that Paul wrote to Corinth have been lost to us and there may be many more.

Some things that are hard to understand does not say that everything in Paul's letters is incomprehensible, nor does it say that anything is impossible to understand, but it does imply that correctly interpreting some hard passages of Scripture requires much effort and God-given wisdom; discernment that comes through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The ignorant and unstable twist Paul's teachings as they do the other Scriptures, implying that Paul's writings were also considered Scripture in NT times, on the same level of divine authority as the OT Scripture.

The Greek term graphē, here translated Scriptures, occurs 51 times in the NT, and every time it refers to the canonical OT Scripture, and not to any other writings, except that here and: <<**For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages"**>> (1 Timothy 5:18), some NT writings are also included. The first passage is from Deuteronomy 25:4, but the second is from Luke 10:7, although it does bear similarities to: <<**Do not defraud your neighbour or rob him. "Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight"**>> (Leviticus 19:13), and: <<**Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin**>> (Deuteronomy 24:15). Most scholars accept that this indicates that NT books written or authorised by Christ's apostles were recognised, at a very early date, to be God's Word.

## VI.c 2 Peter 3:17-18 - Concerning the proper response to Paul's teaching

Peter concludes his final letter with a solemn warning of the corrupting influences that will be all around them. They are to make every effort to understand the teachings that he and Paul have given them, and apply Gospel truth to their lives. He ends with a positive blessing.

**<sup>17</sup> Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.**

### 2 Peter 3:17

This is the fourth use of dear friends by Peter in this chapter. Others too are greeted in this way. For example, James writes to the church in Antioch and beyond on behalf of the church in Jerusalem, as recently noted: <<*We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Acts 15:24-26), Paul writing to the Corinthians uses the term: <<*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say*>> (1 Corinthians 10:14-15), and to those in Philippi: <<*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*>> (Philippians 2:12), and the writer to the Hebrews addresses them the same way: <<*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation*>> (Hebrews 6:9).

Already know this. The readers now know, if they did not know previously, that the false teachers are distorting Paul's teaching. Paul advocates neither sin nor lawlessness, so they should take care not to be carried away by the false teaching, even if it appeals to Paul as the authority.

Be on your guard. Many believers in Peter's day and throughout the ages have been at risk of falling into the trap offered by false teachers and others who pervert the Word of God. These are people who either have not taken heed of the Word and are not fully grounded in it, have not grasped its true meaning in relation to their own life-style choices, or are seduced by the glamour the world portrays to them, saying that modern ways of living are acceptable with those who wish to serve God also, e.g. living with a partner, same-sex relationships, gluttony, drunkenness, self-indulgence and status seeking. David once wrote: <<*I hate double-minded men, but I love your law*>> (Psalm 119:113). All believers are susceptible to the lures of this world as proclaimed by false teachers because they make it all sound so reasonable but there is still a lot of fun and enjoyment to be had by living a life in Christ - the key difference is our eternal destiny.

Secure position. True disciples of Christ have nothing to fear as their eternal future is assured by the promises of God. What they need to guard against is not being drawn away from their faith by those who twist the Word of God for their own gain or through their own lack of understanding. Paul too warns do this: <<*But*

*I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ>> (2 Corinthians 11:3), but offers reassurance as well: <<Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain>> (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

## 2 Peter 3:18

As previously noted, they should not lose their own stability by following after a false interpretation of Paul, who advocates: <<*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ*>> (Ephesians 4:15). Rather, they should cultivate stability through Christian growth, especially growing in Christ's grace, Greek charis, which means favour, especially unmerited favour; and knowledge, the Greek term gnōsis.

Peter had earlier instructed his readership to add grace upon grace: <<*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love*>> (2 Peter 1:5-7). He now challenges them to grow in the grace, to maximise their potential through those graces given to them by the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ goes way beyond knowing about him as Paul explains: <<*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*>> (Philippians 3:10).

## Epilogue

It is believed that Peter was martyred shortly after writing this letter. As a Jew in Rome he was crucified as was his Lord. Peter may be lost in the mists of history as a man but his legacy will remain from generation to generation for all those who choose to come to Christ in faith, just as he had. He went from being a man who was in awe of and frightened by the power of Jesus: <<*When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*>> (Luke 5:8), then: <<*Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"*>> (Mark 10:28), and to one: <<*But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death"*>> (Luke 22:33), which he did without complaint as we can see from this final letter.

He was and is one of the great men of faith for us all to admire and be thankful to God for their faithfulness to him, and his faithfulness to them and us.

To him be the power and glory forever and ever. Amen.