

Shrugging Off Scoffers (Part One)

2 Peter 3:3-10

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Given 27-Jun-15; Sermon #1274

Are your thoughts and words those of a scoffer? As the character of the last days, Scripture uses the words scoffer to typify an attitude. What are the personal qualifications of the scoffer? A scoffer certainly does not have a very commendable character, being a combination of pride and malice. He does it mischievously with an attitude of perverse self-gratification. His annoyance is actually quite detrimental, it is also ignorant and combative.

The opposite of the scoffer's attitude is that the more we desire true knowledge the humbler our sense of wanting more becomes. Yet the deeper we dive into any subject the greater the challenges we are faced with. In contrast, in his ignorance, the scoffer does not face those challenges, he just does not have the same opportunities we do to grow.

But over and above the ingredients of pride and condescension and persistent foolishness, the mockers of II Peter 3 are branded with immorality and wickedness, to walk after their own lusts. Surely there can be no greater impudence than that the scoffer would dare to point out superficial discrepancies by being sharp tongued to others.

The scoffer snidely asks, "Where is the promise of His coming?" The delaying of performance, the postponing of an event, is not an indication that it will not happen. With Almighty God everything, however distant it may seem, is actually present and His plan is up to date.

Now first, the apostle Peter denies the opinion that all things continue as they were since the creation, and secondly, he denies the consequence drawn from it. Although all things do continue, it does not automatically mean that they will always do so.

The appearance of an increase of scoffers in the world is itself a strong indication of the approach of the last days. It is also a warning that these scoffers do not have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

Jude 17-19 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own

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ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

In Jude 18, the Greek word is rendered “mockers.” The word means: those who deride, reproach, or ridicule. There is usually in the word the idea of contempt and malignity toward an object. Here the sense seems to be that they would treat with derision or contempt the predictions respecting the return of the Savior and of the end of the world.

There have always been scoffers in the world, but Jude is referring to a problem of them in the church. It is likely that this is a reference to a particular or definite kind of people, a type who would hold strong opinions and who would urge plausible objections against the fulfillment of the predictions about the end of the world. Those are the points to which Peter specifically refers to here, so it must have been an issue in the church at that time.

It did not require much inspiration to foresee that there would be scoffers in the general sense because they have always been plentiful in every age. The focus is evidently on a specific kind of people, critical people, who would ridicule the doctrine that Jesus Christ would return, that there would be a day of judgment, and that the world would be consumed by fire, and so on.

Jude 19 is very clear that these mockers do not have the Holy Spirit and this means that any scoffers or mockers in the church would be classified as tares. Scoffing may be a sign or warning that one does not have God's Holy Spirit abiding in him, a dismal condition for the scoffer.

Now Peter dealt with the character and conduct of the apostates in II Peter 2, then in chapter 3 he deals with their false teachings. Peter affirmed the certainty of Christ's coming in glory in II Peter 1:16, a truth that the apostates questioned and denied. In fact they were scoffing at the very idea of the return of the Lord, the judgment of the world, and the establishment of a glorious Kingdom.

Today we are surrounded by scoffers everywhere, people who refuse to take the Bible seriously when it speaks about Christ return, and the certainty of judgment. We see it especially in mainstream Christianity where they teach their traditions rather than from Scripture.

In II Peter 3:1-10, Peter admonished us to understand three simple important facts about God and the promise of Christ's coming. The first important fact is that God's

Word is true.

II Peter 3:1-4 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder) [speaking to the church of course], that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Now it is possible to have a pure and sincere mind and yet have a bad memory. Peter wrote this second letter primarily to awaken and arouse you and me. It is easy for us to become accustomed to God's truth. Eutychus went to sleep listening to Paul preach. Maybe he had a good reason, granted, sometimes there are valid reasons, but if he fell asleep because he was just bored or just used to the subject, then he had a problem.

Our heavenly Father sacrificed so that we might have the truth of the Word and the freedom to practice it, but too often we take this for granted and we become complacent, especially if you have been in the church for decades. The church needs to be aroused regularly lest the enemy find us asleep and take advantage of our spiritual lethargy.

Now because God's Word is true, we must pay attention to it and take its message seriously. We are intellectually aware of that but we have to remember that from the heart. The newly converted must be taught the Word and establish themselves in the doctrines of the faith. Because new Christians are the apostate teacher's primary targets, we have to be careful and make sure that they are will fed.

Older Christians, as well, must also be reminded of the importance of Bible doctrine and, in particular, the doctrines that relate to the return of Jesus Christ. Prophetic teaching must not lull us to sleep, rather it must awaken us to live godly lives and to give a true witness of God's truth. Now we will read Romans 13.

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and

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lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

What the Bible teaches about the Day the Lord was not invented by the apostles. The prophets taught it and so did Jesus Christ. Peter emphasized the unity of the Word of God showing that everyone, the prophets, Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the writers of Scripture all spoke the same thing.

When the scoffers denied the power in the coming of Jesus Christ they were denying the truth of the prophetic books, the teaching of Jesus in the gospels, and the writing of the apostles. The Scriptures cannot be cut apart without ruining the whole inspired written Word of God.

As far back as the days of the Enoch, God warned that the judgment was coming (Jude 14-15). Many of the Israelite prophets announced the Day of the Lord and warned that the world would be judged. This period of judgment is also known as the last part of the time of Jacob's trouble and the tribulation.

Jeremiah 30:7 Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.

Jesus Christ taught about this day of judgment in His sermon on the Mount of Olives. Paul discussed it in I and II Thessalonians. The apostle John described this terrible day in the revelation of Jesus Christ. It will be a time when God's wrath will be poured out on the nations following when Satan will be released to vent his anger and malice. It will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ in glory and victory.

Now let me carefully distinguish the various days mentioned in the Bible. The Day of the Lord is that day of judgment that climaxes with the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The day of God, in II Peter 3:12, is the period when God's people enjoy the new heavens and the new earth, when all evil has been judged.

Not only does the Word of God predict the coming of the Day of the Lord but it also predicts the appearance of the very scoffers who deny that word. Their presence is proof that the word they deny is the true Word of God and we should not be surprised at the presence of these apostate mockers who come into the greater churches of God and are among us as savage wolves, not sparing the flock.

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I Timothy 4:1-2 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

A scoffer is someone who treats lightly that which should be taken seriously. The people in Noah's day scoffed at the idea of a judgment. The citizens of Sodom scoffed at the possibility of fire and brimstone destroying their sinful city.

If you have tried at all to witness for Jesus Christ and God the Father, you have no doubt met people who scoff at the idea of a future day of judgment for this world. Why did these apostates scoff? Because they want to continue living in their sins and it has totally blinded them. In II Peter 2, Peter made it clear that false teachers:

II Peter 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries. . .

II Peter 2:18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.

The lusts of the flesh are not only the things we usually think of, such as sexual sins or false doctrines, it is also anything that entices us away from God's truth, whether it be words, thoughts, or some specific physical item.

If your lifestyle contradicts the Word of God you must either change your lifestyle or change the Word of God. The apostates choose the latter approach, so they scoff at the doctrines of judgment and at the coming of the Lord.

Now what is their argument? The uniformity of the world, today they call it globalism. They argue that nothing totally cataclysmic has happened in the past, so there is no reason to believe that it will happen in the future. They take a scientific approach by examining evidence, applying human reasoning, and drawing a conclusion, and the fact that they willfully ignore a good deal of evidence does not seem to disturb them in the least.

They are willfully ignorant and choose to destroy the evidence, whether it be physical or

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spiritual. The scientific approach works admirably in matters that relate to the material universe, but you cannot take Bible prophecy into a laboratory and treat it as though it were another hypothesis. For that matter, the so-called “laws of science” are really only educated conclusions based on a limited number of experiences, experiments, and tests.

These laws are generalizations and are always subject to change because no scientist can perform an infinite number of experiments to prove his claim, nor can he completely control all the factors involved in the experiments and in his own thinking. The Word of God is still always reliable and we can always trust it above all else.

II Peter 1:19-21 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

No matter what the scoffers claim, God's day of judgment will come on the world, and Jesus Christ shall return to establish God's glorious Kingdom.

Now the second important fact about God and the promise of Christ coming that Peter mentions is that God's work is consistent. God is consistently moving us toward the conclusion of His plan of salvation, however things do not continue as they always have because God intervenes in the events of this world and especially in the lives of His saints.

II Peter 3:3-7 Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

How did Peter refute the foolish argument of the apostate’s scoffers? “God doesn’t interrupt the operation of His stable creation,” they argued, “the promise of Christ

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coming isn't true." All Peter did was remind them of what God had done in the past and thus proved that His work is consistent throughout the ages. Peter simply presented evidence that the false teachers deliberately ignored.

It is amazing how so called "thinkers" that is, scientists, liberal theologians, and philosophers and even archaeologists, will be selective and deliberately refuse to consider certain data.

In II Peter 3:5-6, Peter cited two events in history to prove his point. The work of God at creation, and the Flood in Noah's day. God created the heavens and the earth by His word, and the phrase, "and God said" occurs nine times in Genesis 1 to emphasize that He did it with His power and that He is sovereign.

Psalm 33:9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Not only was creation made by the Word of God but it was held together by the same word. Regarding II Peter 3:5, the subtle meaning is that concerning the creation, they willfully overlook and forget that the heavens came into existence from ancient times by the Word of God and that God caused the land to be constituted of water. The scoffers however argue, "How could the earth be constituted by means of water?"

Barnes Notes has an interesting explanation of Peter's meaning in verse 5:

He [Peter] doubtless has reference to the account given in Genesis 1: of the creation of the earth, in which water performed so important a part. The thought in his mind seems to have been that water entered materially into the formation of the earth, and that in its very origin there existed the means by which it was destroyed afterward.

The word which is rendered "standing" should rather be rendered "consisting of," or "constituted of," and the meaning is that the creation of the earth was the result of the divine agency acting on the mass of elements which in Genesis is called "waters." (Genesis 1:2, 6-7, 9) There was at first a vast fluid, an immense unformed collection of materials, called "waters," and from that the earth arose.

The point of time, therefore, in which Peter looks at the earth here is not

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when the mountains, and continents, and islands, seem to be standing partly out of the water and partly in the water, but when there was a vast mass of materials called “waters” from which the earth was formed.

The phrase “out of the water” is from the Greek word *exhudatos* which refers to the origin of the earth. It was formed from, or out of, that mass. The phrase “in the water” *di'hudatos* more properly means through or by. It does not mean that the earth stood in the water in the sense that it was partly submerged; but it means not only that the earth arose from that mass that is called “water” in Genesis 1, but that that mass called “water” was in fact the grand material out of which the earth was formed.

It was through or by means of that vast mass of mingled elements that the earth was made as it was. Everything arose out of that chaotic mass; through that, or by means of that, all things were formed, and from the fact that the earth was thus formed out of the water, or that water entered so essentially into its formation, there existed causes which ultimately resulted in the deluge.

Now what he is saying there is that God, from the very beginning, created into the earth the means to be able to both create it with all the water needed and all the elements it needed, but also inherently put within that the means for there to be able to be a flood later.

God seems to have already anticipated what was going to happen and designed into the elements of the earth the means to be able to take care of it in that way later. God is consistent all the way through, He knows what He is doing.

Peter's argument is obvious, the same God who created the world by His Word can also intervene in His world and do whatever He wishes to do. It is His Word that made it and that holds it together. His Word is all-powerful.

The second event that Peter cited was Noah's flood in II Peter 3:6. He had already referred to the Flood as an illustration of divine judgment in II Peter 2:5, so there was no need to go into detail. The Flood was a cataclysmic event. In fact, the Greek word translated overflowed or flooded is from the same root that gives us our English word cataclysm.

The people living on earth had never seen such a tremendous rainstorm or the

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fountains of the deep broken up, but these events did happen just the same. There are scientists that could have argued, as scoffers argued at Peter's time saying, "everything goes on as it did from the beginning. Life is uniform so nothing unusual can happen." But it did happen despite what the scientists believed.

God has the power to break in at any time to accomplish His will and He can send rain from heaven or fire from heaven.

Psalm 115:3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Now having established the fact that God has, in the past, interrupted the course of history, Peter was then ready for his application in II Peter 2:7. The same word that created and sustains the world is now holding it together stored with fire being preserved and reserved for that future day of judgment.

Moses, in Genesis 9:17-18, records that God promised that there would be no more floods to destroy the world. The next judgment will be a judgment of fire.

The phrase, "reserved for fire" in the New King James and the NIV translations is more properly translated in the *English Standard Version* as "stored up for fire," implying that God has already stored up the capability within the earth and within the heavens to bring that judgment of fire at the end time.

Miniscule man believes that he can thwart God's plan. Modern atomic and nuclear science has revealed that the elements that make up the world are stored with power and there is enough atomic energy in a glass of water to run a huge ocean liner. Mankind has discovered this great power and as a result the world seems to teeter on the brink of scientific destruction.

However it is God who controls events, it is He who brings judgment, and it is He who will destroy the world, not man. God will prevent it before man has that opportunity. Everything in God's original creation was good, it is man sin that has turned a good creation into a groaning creation.

Romans 8:18-22 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will

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be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Now God could not permit sinful people to live in a perfect environment so He had to curse the ground because of Satan's influence on them. Since that time, man has been busy polluting and destroying God's creation. For years it appeared that this exploitation would not cause too much trouble, but now we are changing our minds as we see the full extent of the pollution involved.

The balance of nature has been upset, valuable resources have been wasted and civilization is facing a crisis, and the prophets of doom today are not only preachers and evangelists, but also sociologists, ecologists, and scientists. Think of the movies that are being shown. Is the future being shown as something to be desired?

Peter proved his point that God is able to intervene in the course of history, He did it in the past and He is able to do it again.

The Day of the Lord that was promised by the prophets and the apostles, as well as by Jesus Christ, will come just as surely as the Flood came in Noah's day and the fire and the brimstone that came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

But the scoffers had their argument ready, "then why the delay?" The promise of God's coming and the judgment of the world has been around for centuries and it is yet to be fulfilled. Has God changed His mind? This leads to Peter's third fact, that God's will is merciful.

II Peter 3:8-9 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

We should be thanking God on a regular basis that He is so patient and long suffering with, not only those of us in God's church, but also the world as a whole.

Once again Peter exposed the ignorance of the scoffers. Not only were they ignorant of what God had done in the past, as mentioned in verse 5, but they were also ignorant of

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what God was like. They were making God in their own image and ignoring the fact that God is eternal and omnipotent.

Man is mortal, he has a beginning and he has an ending, but God is eternal without beginning or ending and He dwells in eternity. Eternity is not just extended time but rather it is existence above and apart from time. Eternal life is an excellent and a superb quality of life not directly related to time. Peter was referring to Psalm 90:4, where it says:

Psalm 90:4 For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.

Since a thousand years are as one day to the Lord, we can not accuse Him of delayed fulfillment of His promises. In God's sight the whole universe is only a few days old, He is not limited by time the way that we are. God creates time when He needs it for the fulfillment of His plan.

God could have created the entire universe in an instant, yet He preferred to do it over a period of six days. He could have delivered Israel from Egypt in a moment, yet He preferred to invest eighty years in training Moses. He could have sent the Savior much sooner, but He waited, as Galatians 4:4 tells us:

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

God works in time but is not limited by it. He can accomplish in one day what it would take others a millennium to accomplish. He waits to work, but once He begins to work He gets things done, it is all according to His plan.

The scoffers did not understand God's eternity nor did they understand His mercy. Why was God delaying the return of Christ and the coming of the Day of the Lord? It was not because He was unable to act or unwilling to act, it was not tardy or off schedule. Nobody on earth has the right to decide when God must act. God is sovereign in all things and does not need prodding or even council from sinful man.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become

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His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

God delays the coming of Christ and the great day of fiery judgment because He is long suffering and wants to give sinners the opportunity to be saved according to His perfect will.

II Peter 3:15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.

Without His longsuffering there would be a lot less people saved. God's delay is actually an indication that He has a plan for this world and that He is working out His plan and there should be no question in anybody's mind whether God wants sinners to be saved.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

That should be so encouraging to us. I Timothy 2:4 also affirms that Jesus Christ desires for all mankind to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. These verses assure us that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and that He shows His mercy to all even though not all will be saved. We know that the beast and false prophet will not be.

Now it is worthy to note that God revealed the same long suffering in the years before the Flood. He saw the violence and wickedness of mankind and could have judged the world immediately, yet He held back His wrath and instead sent Noah as the preacher of righteousness.

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah God patiently waited while Abraham interceded for the cities and He would have spared them if He had found ten righteous people in Sodom. If God is not long suffering toward sinners, then why did Peter write, "The Lord is long suffering toward us."?

Now who is meant by "us?" It is meant that God is long suffering to His own people, to

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the saints, to members of his church. Peter was using the word “us” in referring to the elective God.

I Peter 1:2 [The] elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied.

II Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.

Our task is to make our own call and election sure. The fact that God has His elect people is an encouragement to us to share the good news and to seek to lead others to Jesus and to the Kingdom of God.

II Peter 3:9 is the only place where Peter used the word repentance in either of his letters, but that does not minimize its importance. To repent simply means to change one's mind and overcome. It is not regret which usually means being sorry I got caught, nor is it of remorse which is a hopeless attitude that can lead to despair.

Repentance is a change of mind and results in action of the will and if the sinner honestly changes his mind about sin, he will turn from it. If he sincerely changes his mind about Jesus Christ, he will turn to Him, trust Him, and be saved. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is God's formula for salvation.

The word translated “come” at the end of verse 9, carries the meaning of “make room for.” It is translated as “contain” in John 2:6 and in John 21:25. The sinner needs to make room for repentance and his heart by putting aside his pride and meekly receiving the Word of God. Repentance is a gift from God, but the unbeliever must make room for the gift.

As you review Peter's arguments, you can see that his evidence is irrefutable. He pointed out that the scoffers willfully reject evidence in order that they might continue in their sins and scoffing. He proved from the Scriptures that God has intervened in past history and that He has the power to do it today.

Peter showed that the scoffers had a very low view of God's character because they thought He delayed in keeping His promises just as men do. So scoffers think of God as the way man is.

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Peter explained that God does not live in the realm of human time and that His so-called delay only gives more opportunity for sinners to repent and be saved. Throughout II Peter, Peter has been determined to defend the whole of God's Word from attack and he has consistently made the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets an inseparable combination of one complete work.

You immediately know if a person is a false teacher if he separates the Old Testament from the New Testament, shrugging it off saying that it has been done away with. Peter shows how the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets speak with a united voice as he combines the Old Testament promise of God's patience from Psalm 90, with the New Testament promise of Christ's return, but just prior to Christ's return is the Day of the Lord.

Having refuted their false claims Peter then reaffirms the certainty of the coming of the Day of the Lord. When will it come? Nobody knows because it will come to the world as a thief in the night. Jesus Christ used this phrase in Matthew 24:43 and also Luke 12:39. The apostle Paul also used that phrase in I Thessalonians 5, where he says:

I Thessalonians 5:2-4 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they [the world; the scoffers] say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

God's judgment will fall at a time when the world is feeling secure in its own destiny. A thief does not warn his victims that he is coming, but God promises to warn His church. Verse 4 shows the promise from God that we will know ahead of time, before it comes.

We do not know exactly when it will happen but we are told what will happen. "The heavens with a rushing voice will be dissolved and the elements being scorched will be dissolved and the earth also in the works in it will be burned up." Continuing on II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

The Day the Lord is also called the time of God's wrath and Peter is speaking of the New Testament doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ, but he is describing it in terms of the Old Testament doctrine of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord can be referring to the specific time or the time of the seventh seal which includes the seven trumpet plagues described in Revelation 16.

The term “a great noise” from the Greek word *rhoizedon* was commonly used by the people for the whirring of a bird's wings or the hissing of the snake. Its root means whizzing with a crash. The word “melt” here means: to disintegrate; to be dissolved. It carries the idea of something being broken down into its basic elements. It suggests that the heavens and earth are stored with fire and only God can release it.

The Day of the Lord is a conception which runs through the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

Joel 2:1-2 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations.

The world has been headed for destruction for thousands of years—since Adam and Eve first sinned—because of man's enmity toward God. The only way the world's process of physical progress and spiritual degeneration can change is by direct intervention by God, and as we know it requires a person being imparted with the Holy Spirit.

What did Jesus tell his disciples? Keep watch because you do not know what day your Lord will come. If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

Matthew 24:42-44 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

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This is the exact counterbalance to what Peter was just arguing, that God will be patient but He will come. Both the patience and the coming have been promised. There will be a day when God says, "There will be no more delay."

Revelation 10:5-6 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer,

That promised day will be an unwelcome shock to those who thought that it been postponed indefinitely. The false teachers believe that Jesus expected the Kingdom to come fully either in His lifetime or within a few months of His ascension.

These false teachers are like homeowners who casually leave doors and windows open. Peter calls this lackadaisical approach foolish. Jesus said He will come when people do not expect Him, not when they do. That day will be one of unrivaled cosmic destruction.

The pinnacle of God's intervention is called the Day of the Lord. It will come without warning and it will be a time when the earth will be shaken to its foundations and it is a time when the judgment and obliteration of man's rule on earth will come to an end, and for them it is a time of terror.

Isaiah 13:9-13 Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.

No doubt that Peter had in mind the Old Testament passages, such as Isaiah 13:10-11, when he wrote II Peter 3:10 in his epistle. This passage is especially emphatic that God will bring judgment, not sinful man. God says, "I will punish the world for its evil and the

wicked for their inequity.”

Man’s great works, all the things that man boasts about, will also be burned up. His great cities, his great buildings, his inventions, his achievements, will all be destroyed in a moment of time. When sinners stand before the throne of God they will have nothing to point to as evidence of their greatness, it will all be gone.

Joel 2:30-31 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

Our focus is on the hope of that day, not the destruction of that day. Biblical prophecies often seem obscure, and even if their meaning is clear, we cannot always be sure as to what period of history the words apply. To confuse matters further the Bible itself sometimes takes the prophecies in more than one way and they can be applied, in type, to a historical event, a current event, and some can even refer to a future Day of a Lord.

While recognizing this, we know nevertheless that many Old Testament prophecies are interpreted to us by the New Testament, so that whatever our questions may be with the other passages, these at least are certain. Of these clear passages none is more certain than Joel 2:28-32. It is a passage interpreted by the apostle Peter applying to the events at Pentecost as a type to come.

Joel 2:28-29 “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls.

After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles waited in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had told them to do. Luke writes in Acts 1,

Acts 1:4-5 And being assembled together with them, He [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise

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of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Now on Pentecost they were gathered together in one place when suddenly something happened. We will pick up the story here in Acts 2.

Acts 2:1-4 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

When the people of Jerusalem heard the sound they came together and Peter preached the first sermon of what we might call the “Christian era.” He denied that the disciples were intoxicated, which is what some were saying, and instead interpreted the event as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy.

Acts 2:17-21 ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

So we cannot interpret Joel 2:28-32 apart from Peter’s interpretation. We see four necessary things in his interpretation: 1) The need for this particular outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. 2) We see God’s inspired promise through Joel. 3) The fulfillment of the promise in Acts. 4) The result of that fulfillment—the imparting of the Holy Spirit into God’s people.

The roots of the promise are in Numbers 11:29, in the midst of a story about Moses. It was a tough time for Moses, to say the least. The people had been complaining of their

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wilderness diet of manna and Moses, perhaps in sheer physical weariness, was overcome with the burden of leading the people and dealing with their complaints. God sympathized with him and told him to select seventy of the elders of Israel and bring them with him to the tent of meeting. In verse 17, God promised:

Numbers 11:17 Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.

So these men received the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy. It was a sign to the people that they had received this gift and were therefore chosen by God to minister alongside Moses.

Two of these elders were not with the others at the tent of meeting, but the Spirit of God came on them as well and they also prophesied. This bothered some who were closest to Moses. Joshua, who had been Moses' close aid since youth, said "Moses, my lord stop them!" Moses' reply was the root of the promise found in Joel. In verses 27-29 he answered:

Numbers 11:27-29 And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!" Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

The incident shows that in this early period God's Spirit was not given to all His people in the way that it is now in His church. God was with His people, but His Spirit did not come on them or dwell on them, instead it was given to certain individuals for specific purposes.

In the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit was not a common gift of God to all His people. So when Moses said, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them," he was expressing a very real need and longing, and it was not until God had spoken to the people through Joel that there was even a promise of such universal blessing.

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God's promise through Joel is striking because it is the book's first mention of spiritual, rather than mere physical, blessing. It is understandable that material things are emphasized in Joel 2, for example "material blessing" in verse 19, and "national security" in verse 20, and "the restoration of lost years" in verse 25, because the locust plague was a material disaster and it formed the focal point and occasion of the prophecy. Still we are glad to find spiritual blessings too because we know, as Christ words in Mark 8 tell us:

Mark 8:36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

Joel's emphasis is on the universal nature of this gift because he shows that it is for all people as opposed to being for just some only. Joel spells this out in detail and will be for the young, the old, the strength of the nation, and servants, both men and women.

This is truly a significant thing because it is a way of saying that in the church age, which the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower, all would be servants of God, not merely special corps of workers. All members of God's church have God's Holy Spirit.

In the way of an example, remember if you will, how the Worldwide Church of God, under Mr. Armstrong, distinguished between members and coworkers. The designated members meant baptized members of God church. The designation coworkers meant that they contributed to and supported the church, but who are not baptized members.

Of course there will be different tasks to do and different gifts given to enable God's people to do them. Some will preach and teach. Men and women, young and old, slaves and free men, will not necessarily do the same work, but all will have work to do and will be indwelt by God's Holy Spirit so that the work can be done effectively.

The Spirit is to help each serve others. God first, then one another next. Church elders for example are instructed in I Peter 5 to:

I Peter 5:2-3 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

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The chief biblical example is Jesus Christ who, though the Lord of creation, nevertheless put on a servant's garment and performed a servant's job in washing His disciples' feet. Sadly, however, there is the willingness of some members to sit back and let the pastor do it, but this is not what Joel 2:28-32 envisions.

What is the true pattern? Ephesians 4:11-13 describes it well because, in pointing out that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, it is saying that the proper relationship of members to lay members, is service.

Pastors and elders are to equip the saints, that is assist them in train them to be what they should be and do the work that they should do. In this pattern of service we have to we have no lesser example, than that in Mark 10.

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Joel's prophecy was initially to be fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on all believers, all began to speak and witness to others. Notice how the church at this time is described in verses 44-47.

Acts 2:44-47 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

In each of eight cases, in which it is said that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, the consequence of that filling was a witness of Jesus Christ and God the Father. The first of these cases is Pentecost. In Acts 2:4-13 we are told that all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and that they at once began to witness, and Peter did so officially and very effectively.

The second case is Peter's being filled with the Holy Spirit just before he addressed the Sanhedrin on the occasion of his first arrest, described in Acts 4:8-12. He preached that salvation is through Jesus Christ only. The third case is the description of a gathering in which the believers, while praying, were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word

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of God boldly. We find that in Acts 4:31. The fourth case, which is found in Acts 6:3, says that deacons were chosen on the basis of their being full of the Spirit.

At first glance this seems to be an exception because nothing tells us that they then witnessed Christ. It is important to note that the verse does not describe them as being filled with the Spirit, but only says that they gave evidence of having been filled with the Spirit, past tense.

How was this known? The passage does not say how specifically, but it may well have been because they were already active as witnesses about Jesus Christ, His coming, and the coming of God's Kingdom.

Besides the account of the choice of these deacons, it is immediately followed by the story of the death of the deacon Stephen, which certainly contains an effective witness to the grace of God in Christ's ministry.

The fifth example of a person being filled with the spirit is Stephen himself, found the Acts 7, who:

Acts 7:55-56 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Now the sixth and seventh examples of a person being filled with the Spirit is that of Barnabas and Paul, who is specifically said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit, twice, once in Acts 9:17 and the other in Acts 13:9.

The first time was at his conversion when Ananias came and placed his hands on him. Paul recovered his sight, was baptized, and, as it says in Acts 9:20: "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." The second time was when Paul confronted Elymas, the sorcerer, and pronounced a judgment on him in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas is said to have been full of the Holy Spirit and he was a preacher. (Acts 11:24)

Now the eighth example of being filled with the Spirit is the company of disciples at Antioch found in Acts 13: 52, who were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit and who doubtless revealed this by continuing to spread the gospel even after Paul and

Barnabas had been expelled from the region.

This is the clear distinguishing mark of a person being filled with God's Spirit and it is the sense in which the words in Joel, "your sons and daughters will prophesy." There may be prophecy in the sense of foretelling things to come but Paul, Peter, John, and some others did that, but in the sense that all will prophesy.

What is involved as proclamation of God's truth concerning Jesus Christ the Savior by teaching, preaching, and witnessing the return of Jesus Christ and the coming of God's Kingdom? The result of God's imparting of His Spirit, His mind, His power, and the consequent testimony of Jesus by those who were so filled was repentance and overcoming.

We are told in Acts 2:37-41 that after Peter preached about three thousand people repented of their sins, were baptized, and were added to the number of the early Christians. Later we read in verse 47:

Acts 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Repentance brings us back to Joel and the purpose of Joel's prophecy. Joel had been calling on the people to repent of specific sins, the sin of worshipping other gods and of failing to give the true God the worship and obedience He deserves. God had promised blessing if the people would repent.

The sin of worshipping other gods and of failing to give the true God the worship and obedience He deserves is another way of saying that they put other things before God. It was idolatry. Anything that we put before God is idolatry and we become guilty of this very thing that Joel is warning about.

How often do we neglect coming to worship God with the congregation as a whole when we are only maybe a few miles away? It is understandable if you are hours away and cannot make it except for once a month or something like that, but if a congregation is close, you had better not neglect it. This is the type of thing that falls under the category of failing to give the true God the worship and obedience He deserves.

God had promised blessing if the people would repent. It is important to note that at the same time that God calls for repentance, He promises that day in which He will pour out His Spirit on all people, and when that happens, as it did on that Pentecost, repentance

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is generally the first evidence in the lives of the people.

Thousands are convicted of sin, repent of it, and turn to Jesus Christ, through whose name is the only way to salvation. It is the same today, repentance is always the first visible evidence of God's power through the Spirit.

Peter's picture in II Peter 3 of the second coming of Christ, is drawn in terms of the Old Testament picture of the Day of the Lord.

II Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

He uses a very vivid phrases, "with a great noise." This is referring to whizzing of bird's wings; the rushing of a rising stream from a storm; or the crackling flames of a forest fire. With this crackling crash the heavens will disappear.

Another descriptive phrase Peter uses is, "the elements will melt with fervent heat," and by the elements Peter does not mean the chemical elements listed on the periodic table. The word "elements" was use with regard to numbers in the series; letters in an alphabetical order; or of anything in a row. In time the word element came to mean the stars, planets, and galaxies, or anything which was a component part of the universe.

So Peter and the Old Testament prophets saw the Day of the Lord as one of universal upheaval. This blistering destruction is so unimaginably vast that we begin to see how futile it is to think of the Day of the Lord in terms of a global nuclear holocaust, or a planetary climate change to illustrate the universal meltdown that Peter and the prophets were inspired to describe.

There is nothing on this earth or that man has created that can answer how devastating the Day of the Lord will be to this earth. Our limited imagination just cannot grasp the true picture of the Day of the Lord and to rely on our imagination would cause us to manufacture a god who is too small to be the Creator and Judge of the universe, but this is exactly what the false teachers have done and this is exactly what many Christians have done today.

Instead we have to rely on the description God contained in His Word. The Bible starts and finishes with a God who creates a universe and then recreates a new universe, who

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makes us in His image and then remakes us in His image. God is a God who says, "Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away."

It is enough to note that Peter sees the second coming as a time of terror for those who are the enemies of Christ. The Stoics of Peter's time and the scientists of today have an inevitable pessimistic view of the future, but Peter encourages us to understand that we have a wonderful hope. We can see the future destruction of absolutely everything and yet know that in its re-creation there is something infinitely more wonderful to follow.

In the remaining verses of this letter, Peter applies this truth to our daily living. In my next sermon we will see how this applies to us personally every day.