

Scoffers

2 Peter 3:3-13

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This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture that is highly relevant to what we are seeing today.

1. It ties together end & beginning things
 - end things: God used to open my heart to Him
 - beginning things: God used to give me my greatest spiritual growth spurt... when I learned that I could take the Genesis account of Genesis literally, it revolutionized my personal relationship since I did not need a specially trained intermediary to interpret God's Word for me (I could take Scripture literally)
2. It addresses the two areas of Scripture that is most often not taken literally: end & beginning things
3. It explains why churches neglect the study of Jesus returning

Why is beginning and ending things important?

God ties together the beginning and the end:

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. (Isaiah 46:9-10, NIV)

- God is able to reveal the future to us because (1) He is outside the confines of time and (2) He is in control
- God has revealed the future to us because (1) it enables us to recognize Him for who He is and (2) it gives us hope in the midst of unsettling developments.

Beginning things are foundational... if you get beginning things wrong with flawed hermeneutics, it is just a matter of time before you apply this flawed hermeneutics to other important doctrines.

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)

Jesus tied together the beginning and the end:

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt 24:37, NKJ)

He said there would be similarities & lessons to learn...

For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:38-39)

Among the similarities most germane to our discussion today is:

- that people would be surprised by the return of Christ because they don't believe God
- God judged the earth before and He will do so again
- People who ignore God's Word do so at their peril

2 Peter 3:3-13

³ *Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,* ⁴ 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.”

⁵ *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,* ⁶ by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ *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.*

⁸ *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.* 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.*

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.* ¹¹ *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,*

¹² *looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?*

¹³ *Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

Verses 3 & 4 – What will characterize the time prior to the return of Jesus?

The time prior to Jesus returning will be characterized by scoffing – people will deny Jesus is returning and ridicule those expecting His return.

Why do people scoff at Jesus' return?

1. They will be walking according to their own lusts.
2. People will be “looking out for number one” (themselves) to the exclusion of anyone else, especially God; it will be a common practice to yield to one’s natural impulses (feelings).
3. A pastor told me He didn’t look forward to Jesus returning because He wanted his girls to grow up and experience the joys of marriage and motherhood. He did not realize how worldly his view was... children of God will not miss out on a thing this world has to offer.

Who will the end-time scoffers be?

1. Certainly unbelievers
2. But also “professing” believers who claim to be Christians but also deny the fundamentals of the faith (apostasy)
3. And immature Christians Paul calls carnal Christians (a.k.a. also babes in Christ). These are content with the superficial milk and not the solid food of Scripture as mature Christians. Consequently, they are quick to embrace false doctrine so that they may be more accepted by the world (like amillennialism and theistic evolution).

I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

How do those who scoff justify their scoffing?

- By saying, *“all things continue as they were from the beginning”*
- They say, “every generation of Christians have expected Jesus to return in their lifetime and He hasn’t so why should our generation be any different?”

Note that scoffers embrace Theistic Evolution... the idea that God used an evolutionary process to bring about the creation.

- By saying, *“all things continue as they were from the beginning”* they reveal that they are uniformitarians which require great periods of time for evolutionary changes to take place via God-directed mutations.
- This is a compromise with the doctrine of the world that is made to be more accepted by men.

Why didn't God use an evolutionary process to create mankind?

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31, NIV)

- Morning and evening do not apply to day-ages
- Creation could not be described as “*very good*” if survival of the fittest was used
- There was no death prior to Adam & Eve’s sin

Verses 5 & 6 – What do the end-time scoffers forget?

- They forget, *“the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.”*
- Noah’s flood... scoffers forget that God brought judgment on the whole earth once before and He will do so again.
- They deny that Noah’s flood even happened as the Bible describes it... they cite many “faith traditions” that describe a great flood myth that was only regional

Why don't people want to believe the biblical account of Noah's flood?

- This would force them to have to believe the rest of the Bible
- To accept that God intervenes in our world supernaturally tells us that He cares about us and that there is purpose to our being here
- ...in contrast, deists create an impersonal god in their own image so that they don't have to worry about being personally accountable

What was the world like before Noah's flood?

Water vapor barrier (Genesis 1:6-8), no rain (Genesis 2:4-6), diffused light (Genesis 9:11-15), people lived hundreds of years (Genesis 5)...

How does forgetting the flood cause scoffing about the return of Jesus?

- Dismissing the supernatural way God brought the creation into being goes along with ignoring His Word and is a symptom of not having a relationship with Him.
- It also denies that God will supernaturally intervene in the future (*“all things continue as they were from the beginning...”*)

Verse 7 – How long will the Lord preserve the world as we know it?

- until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men
- All people will be judged; you don't want to be judged at the Great White Throne which precedes the Lord renovating heaven and earth by fire (Revelation 20:15-21:1).

The Great White Throne judgment occurs as part of the transition from the Millennial Kingdom to the Eternal State. The Millennial Kingdom will also be characterized by a new earth (Isaiah 65:17-25)

...So how can verse 7 say the earth will be preserved?

- The new earth of the Millennial Kingdom will foreshadow the new earth of the Eternal State but the new earth of the Eternal State will be so much different from it that the new earth of the Millennial Kingdom will be like our current earth with some minor improvements.
- There are many parallels: As God will renovate the new earth of the Eternal State by fire, the fires of the tribulation will usher in the new earth of the Millennial Kingdom.

Verse 8 – What is the contextual significance of a thousand years being as a day to the Lord?

- Beginning things: God created the earth in 6 days and rested on the seventh ...seven symbolizes "completion"
- End things: human history will consist of 7,000 years; 6,000 years of struggle followed by 1,000 years of rest during the Millennial Kingdom.
- ~6,000 years of human history to-date is consistent with what the Bible's genealogies reveal: ~2,000 years between Adam and Abraham; ~2,000 years between Abraham and Jesus; ~2,000 years since Jesus.

Why does theistic evolution contribute to scoffing about Jesus returning?

- If it took millions of years between the beginning of creation until Jesus came the first time, it is reasonable to expect it to be millions of years until Jesus returns to usher in the Eternal State.
- Thus the return of Christ has to be so far in the future that it has no real bearing on the here and now.

Verse 9 – What promise is Jesus not slack about?

He has not forgotten about His promise to return:

John 14:3 - "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Why has it taken so long for Jesus to return?

- God's longsuffering grace has delayed the return of Jesus... when He returns, the Age of Grace will be over.
- The return of Jesus will be accompanied with the pouring out of God's wrath and most will be caught up in the rampant deception... while a great number of people will become children of God, most of these will be martyred.

What does it mean to perish?

This is talking about spiritual death, to spend eternity separated from God in the lake of fire.

"the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

What two choices do all people have?

1. repent of their sin, trust in Jesus and have eternal life
2. not repent of their sin and perish

Verse 10 – What is the day of the Lord?

The Day of the Lord is when God reveals Himself to the world in the return of Jesus to rule on the earth.

- Included is the pouring out of God's wrath in the 7-year Tribulation that precedes His return.
- Also included is the conclusion of the Age of Grace with the Rapture of the Church which precedes the Tribulation (the beginning of the end-times supernatural intervention of God).

How will the "Day of the Lord" come as a thief in the night?

- It will surprise many people (the scoffers).
- It will rob many people (unbelievers) of the life they thought they had... it will be the end of life as we know it.

How will the Day of the Lord effect believers?

While it will be a surprise to believing scoffers, it will not rob them of life... even scoffing believers will be translated in the Rapture...

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4)

Since even scoffing believers will escape the Tribulation at the Rapture, why does it matter that we teach about the return of Jesus?

- Jesus commanded us to watch for Him
Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36)
- It is necessary to keep from neglecting a huge part of Scripture
Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)
- It inspires us to live holy lives
denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12-13)
- It is a great blessing to us
Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (Revelation 22:7)
- There will be rewards in eternity
there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8)

What happens to the heavens and earth during the day of the Lord?

God renovates both the heavens and the earth by fire

- The fire of the Tribulation will prepare the earth for Millennial Kingdom which foreshadows the Eternal State
- God re-boots the heavens and earth again at the end of the Millennial Kingdom for the Eternal State
- Note: heavens is plural because of (1) atmosphere, (2) celestial realm, (3) spiritual realm

What is the significance of everything in the heavens and earth being burned up?

We should pursue what is eternal rather than what is of the world.

lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:20)

The only things that are eternal are the souls of those who Know the Lord as their Savior.

Verses 11 & 12 – What should knowledge of the end of the world cause us to do?

(1) be holy, (2) godly, (3) watch for the return of Jesus, (4) work to hasten the return of Jesus

How can we hasten the coming of the day of God?

- Jesus has delayed His coming to build His Church. There is a set number of people He has in mind for His Church and until that number is reached, the Rapture will not occur.
- Thus, we can hasten the return of Jesus by working to help others come to know Him as Savior sooner rather than later.

Verse 13 – What are to look forward to?

God fulfilling His promise to give us a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells

How does anticipating God's promise of a glorious eternity help us in the here and now?

- It helps us to persevere in the midst of all the craziness that characterizes this world.
- Having an eternal perspective helps us to make wiser choices to lay up treasure in heaven rather than this world
- It helps us live holier lives remembering that we could be in the presence of Jesus with our next breath.
- It gives us a sense of urgency to get on with what God is calling us to do.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- Scoffers at the return of Jesus is an important sign of the times.
- Beginning things and ending things are connected... Scoffers will also deny a literal interpretation of Genesis.
- Prophecy is important for holy living and making sense of this crazy world.