

# A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY  
VERSE  
EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
EPISTLE OF  
2ND PETER

## The Reliability of God's Word

### 2 Peter 3:5-7 (743)

**2 Peter 3:1-4** *This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. <sup>3</sup> Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, <sup>4</sup> and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."*

"Peter assumes he is writing in the *last days*" (Lucas/Green, p. 129). The term *last days* is understood most often to encompass the entire Christian era (**Gal. 4:4** and **Heb. 1:2**). Michael Green says, "With the advent of Jesus the last chapter of human history had opened, though it was not yet completed. In between the two advents stretches the last time, the time of grace, the time, too, of opposition" (p. 137).

Peter here refers to those who would oppose the gospel as *mockers*. **Mockers will come with their mocking.** Peter has already sounded this warning in **2:1**, *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you.* Similar warnings are repeated elsewhere in the New Testament. In **Acts 20:29-31**, for example, Paul told the Ephesian elders, *“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* **I Timothy 4:1**, *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.*

Indeed, characteristic of these days is that **scoffers will come (v.3)**. Now what exactly is a scoffer? A scoffer is someone consumed by **disdain** for something or someone. A scoffer usually projects a certain intellectual **arrogance** and social snobbery. Indeed, a scoffer will not listen to or heed wise **counsel** or anything that resembles a rebuke. **Proverbs 9:7-8**, *He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.* <sup>8</sup> *Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man, and he will love you.* **Proverbs 13:1**, *a wise son accepts his father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (Prov. 15:12, 21:24). Scoffers **make fun of** stuff. In this context they laugh at the very idea that Jesus Christ is coming again. Furthermore they make fun of the idea of holy living. Indeed, these are men who **walk according to their own lusts (v.3)**. In their pride and arrogance, they walk or live according to their own sinful rules and sensual passions.*

**Verse 4. “Where is the promise of His coming?”** Now they’re not wanting to know where in the Bible Christ’s second coming is promised. Mockingly they are asking, “Where is the fulfillment of the promise?” It had been thirty years

since the crucifixion. That's a long time for some folks. "It's just not going to happen folks!"

And here's the support for their argument. *Since the fathers fell asleep all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.* *Fell asleep* obviously refers to their deaths. Who are the fathers? It seems most natural to understand the fathers as the Old Testament patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Since those men died everything *continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.* These guys didn't just deny certain features of the doctrines of Christ, and of salvation, and of last things. These guys had a fundamental problem with the very idea of God. What they are suggesting is that the universe is a closed, mechanical phenomenon. In their view there is no room for a God who breaks into human history. "They convinced themselves that God has not intervened in the world's affairs since time began and therefore they assumed that he would not do so in the present or at any time in the future" (Bentley, p. 234). And Peter responds to this argument beginning in verse 5.

**2 Peter 3:5-7** *For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. <sup>7</sup> But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

*For when they maintain this.* "This" refers to the idea expressed in the previous verse – *that all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation (3:4).* These scoffers are voicing the old Epicurean materialistic philosophy that matter is all

there is and that every phenomenon we observe is the result of material interactions; that observable events in nature are explained only by natural causes without assuming the existence or non-existence of the supernatural. These men could marvel at a glorious sunrise, could stand awestruck as they gazed upon the night sky, could know the terror of an earthquake or flood, could wonder at the workings of the human body ... and not see God in any of it. O, they “did not deny the existence of gods, but maintained that [those gods] took no interest in the life of men and women” (Bruce, *Acts*, p. 331). The God of such men is neutral. He simply does not interfere with the world we live in. God does not break into history. God does not intervene in the affairs of men. Ours is a closed universe into which God does not intrude.

Why would a man maintain such a notion? Well, you see, if there is no God who intervenes in human affairs, *then* there is no supernatural being to fear, to obey, or to answer to, *then* there is no God who will return to judge men – a very convenient view for a sinner to hold. This is precisely the view of the men to whom Paul preached in Athens in **Acts 17:16-32**. It explains why Paul emphasized such things as Jesus and the resurrection (the ultimate intervention), God as Creator and Sustainer, divine providence, and the judgment to come.

We do not hold nor does the Bible teach such a materialistic view. Indeed, the doctrine of divine providence counters materialism at every point. The Shorter Catechism (Q. 11) defines our position: “God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” Unlike heretics then and now, we believe that God is intimately involved in His creation; that He does intervene; that He governs and controls.

Listen to the first paragraph of the Westminster Confession chapter on divine providence (V, I): “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”

The Confession refutes the pagan error “that things happen by a blind mechanical necessity or fate” (Williamson). God not only breaks into time. He is the Creator of time. God not only breaks into history. He is the Lord of history. God not only influences the affairs of men. He ordains and controls them. Beloved, nothing just happens. God really, actually exercises absolute control of all things.

**Psalm 135:6** *Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.* **Daniel 4:34-35** *“But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> “And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’* **Ephesians 1:11** *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.*

And nowhere is divine providence, divine intervention, the power of God’s word seen more clearly than in creation itself. Continuing in **verse 5**. **It escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth**

**was formed out of water and by water. *It escapes their notice.*** It's not that they just miss or overlook this fact. No, they choose to neglect the truth. They deliberately, with eyes open, deny the truth. Such men may not deny that the world had a beginning. But they cannot admit the fact that it came into existence by the Word of God; that God spoke and it was done. This brings us to the big idea: **God can and will do exactly what He says.**

We are talking here about the Word of God. The Word is the revealed will of the triune God - whether that word is spoken, written in ink on paper, or incarnated in the person of the Son of God. When we think of the Word we most often think of the Bible, don't we? "As Protestants we maintain that the Scripture alone is our authority" (Godfrey, *Sola Scriptura*, p. 1). The Bible is authoritative "precisely because it is God's verbalized communication to His rational thinking creatures" (Armstrong, p. 101-102). Not only is the Word authoritative; it is trustworthy, powerful, inerrant, sufficient, and infallible. Indeed, the Word is reliable and sovereign.

**Isaiah 45:22-23** *"Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. <sup>23</sup> "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. **Isaiah 46:9-11** "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me ... Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure' ... Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. **Isaiah 55:11** So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

**God can and will do exactly what He says.** It is this very proposition that was attacked by the false teachers. It is this very basic premise that they called into question. **God can and will do exactly what He says.**

At no time was this as pronounced as in creation. The creation account in Genesis 1 is marked by the phrase, “*Then God said*” (**Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29**). “The way God creates is by speaking.” **Psalm 33:6** *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.* **Hebrews 11:3** *By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared **by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.* The Shorter Catechism (Q. 9) asks, What is the work of creation? “The work of creation is, God’s making all things of nothing, **by the word of his power**, in the space of six days, and all very good.” **God can and will do exactly what He says.**

Do you see the two prepositional phrases *out of water* (ex hydatos) and *by water* (dia hydatos)? Water is a major theme in the creation narrative in Genesis 1 (**1:2, 6, 7, 9, 10**). By *out of water* Peter is probably referring back to **Genesis 1:6-10** - the separation of the atmospheric moisture from the earthly water (**1:6-8**) as well as the emergence of land from the earthly waters (**1:9-10**). By water refers to God’s use of “water as an instrument in his creation of the sky [or atmosphere]” (Moo, p. 170) in **Genesis 1:6**. Now, what does it matter? “One of the main reasons he introduces the idea of the world as being **created** *by water* is to prepare for the parallel he will make in verse 6, where God **destroys** the world *by water* (Moo, p. 170).

Indeed, verse 6 says *through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water*. The reference here is, of course, to Noah’s flood. “Which” is

plural here. It refers to both water and the word. “The same world that God created he also destroyed and he did it in the same way: by water and the word of God” (Moo, p. 170). **God can and will do exactly what He says.**

*The world at that time.* If you look back to 2:5 the word “world” is used twice with reference to the flood – *the ancient world* and *the world of the ungodly*. So Peter here is talking about human culture; the built environment; the world of human activity; the world of sinful men. It was this world that was destroyed or, more literally, overflowed or inundated (Vine, p. 151). Recent events such as the Asian tsunami and a flooded New Orleans supply us with appropriate visual images.

“The example is a particularly apt one, because the false teachers are especially denying the judgment associated with the [Second Coming]” (Moo, p. 171). **God can and will do exactly what He says.** This is once again reinforced in **verse 7**.

**But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.** The earth upon which we live. The celestial world we can observe with our eyes and through telescopes – the realm of planets, stars, and galaxies. By the word of God these are being *reserved for fire*. The verb *reserved* means to lay up in store. Like so much firewood laid up in the fall to be used for fuel during the winter. *Kept* is a verb that means under secure guard (I Pet. 1:4; II Pet. 2:4, 9, 17; 3:7). Peter’s point is that since the world was created by God’s word and has already been destroyed once by God’s word, we can confidently expect the future judgment which has also been decreed by his word” (Bauckham, p. 299). **God can and will do exactly what He says.**

This passage is obviously about the sovereignty of God's word. Beloved, God's creative word is sure (3:5). God's judicial word is sure (3:6). God's **sustaining** word is sure (3:7). Because this is so we believe that God's redemptive word is sure. We believe that the promises of the gospel are utterly reliable. God has said that sin and sinners will be judged. **Ezekiel 18:4**, *"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die."* **Romans 6:23**, *For the wages of sin is death.* **Ezekiel 18:20**, *"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity ... the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."* Even so, no man can satisfy divine justice. No man can pay the debt. No man can bear the weight of the wrath of God.

But God has provided One who has met His demand for righteousness, whose death satisfied divine justice, and who, in His suffering bore the full fury of the anger of God in the place of sinners. That One is Jesus Christ. He alone is the Savior approved by God. For this reason the writer of Hebrews rightly asks, *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation (Heb. 2:3)*. The answer is, you shall not escape if you neglect Christ.

But God's redemptive word is sure. *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12)*. Hear these promises from the lips of the eternal Son of God Himself: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24)*. *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35)*. *"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who*

*beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).* O, my friends, remember, **God can and will do exactly what He says.** Will you not rest your faith entirely upon Jesus for the salvation of your eternal soul?

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