

Title: **The Promise of Christ's Coming (Part 2)**

Passage: **2 Peter 3:5-7**

Theme: **Understand the prophetic presumption of the pessimists in light of the promise of God's perfect patience.**

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### **{Read Passage}**

One of the things we noted in our study from sev. weeks ago was that t/false teachers whom Peter addresses very likely held an Epicurean worldview.

Modern use = someone who enjoys serenity; knowledge; pleasure (esp. good food and drink).

Epicurus (4<sup>th</sup> c. BC philosopher) believed that pleasure is t/greatest good & t/way to pleasure is living a life of moderation, free from worldly concerns.

The highest good was a state of *ataraxia* or "undisturbedness"

To be undisturbed = to be your own lord and master =/= God.

"A blessed and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings not trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger or partiality" [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.139]

So it follows, if one tries to be a Xn Epicurean (oxymoran) that we ought to be able to escape fear of judgment & punishment (anxiety this produces in the human mind).

Epicureans had a philosophy of constant self-sustained evolution (cf. M. Green, 129-30).

But, in truth, the universal whole always was such as it now is, and always will be such. For there is nothing into which it can change; for there is nothing beyond this universal whole which can penetrate into it, and produce any change in it. [Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus 38; Lucretius 1.225-37]

That was really at t/heart of t/false teachers' argument here in 2 Peter.

### **I. A Two-Part Accusation (3-4)**

We looked at these 2 vv. last week.

#### **A. Where is the Promise of His Coming? (4a)**

**. . . mockers will come with mockery, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"**

Jude 17–19 **17 But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, 18 that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." 19 These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.**

#### **B. The Basis for Their Argument: Uniformitarianism (4b)**

"the present is the key to the past"

##### **1. Uniformitarianism is a term generally used in geology**

A term I'm going to use theologically, not scientifically.

This is a theological issue. This is t/argument that the mockers are making ==>

**"For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation."**

Why t/delay in X's coming // judgment?

We must understand the prophetic presumption of the pessimists in light of the promise of God's perfect patience.

The delay of God's judgment is in keeping with the promise of His mercy.

## II. A Three-Fold Answer (5-9)

*A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)*

*B. An Answer that Looks Forward to the Future (7)*

*C. An Answer that Looks Heavenward to the Promise (8-9)*

### A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)

**For when they maintain this . . .**

#### 1. When *who* maintains *what*?

{summarize below }

(back to vv. 3&4 => 'who' = 'mockers w/their mocking following after their lusts + 'what' = their "uniformitarian argument"

**For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice . . .**

#### 2. I want you to "Notice" something here

Depending on t/translation you are using t/false teachers are either guilty by way of ignorance or by willful forgetfulness.

I went with the translation "it escapes their notice" following the NASB.

For something to escape your notice implies a measure of apathy or neglect.

Some of the other translations have t/stronger idea of willful defiance=>

ESV - "For they deliberately overlook"

NIV - "But they deliberately forget"

KJV - "They willingly are ignorant"

**a. This is a translation issue, not a textual one**

IOW - the word that's used here (present ptc of t/verb  $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ ) can be translated either way. There are some other syntactical issues involved that I don't want to bore you with - suffice to say, it may be that this is a case of plain ignorance.

**3. What are they ignorant of?** Three things in particular.

First ==>

**a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)**

**it escapes their notice that the heavens existed long ago . . .**

Saying that ==>

**. . . the heavens existed long ago . . .**

Is another way of saying that God alone is eternal. He is the uncaused cause.

**a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)**

**(1) He is eternal**

When people say things like "Who created God" they are ignorant of who He is by very definition. He is eternal. He who causes all things is Himself uncaused.

Triune God of t/Bible by very definition just IS.

See this in His names.

Gen. 21:33 where it says that Abraham called on the name of the Lord, *the Everlasting God*.

Esp. see it in God's sacred name - t/OT word "Jehovah" or more accurately "YHWH" – τετραγραμματον (four letters)

This is the personal, covenantal name of God. "He is"

That God is eternal means that He has no beginning or ending. Time is irrelevant to His being (we'll see that in v. 8).

We can talk in terms of "everlasting" or "eternal" (i.e. "eternal" life). But that's life that has no ending. "everlasting punishment".

Whenever t/word eternal is related to creation it has a one-way perspective: Forward in time, not backward. We can have eternal life meaning that we will live forever. We're not eternal; we had a beginning.

Only God is truly eternal from t/perspective that not only does He have no ending, He never had a beginning. That is mind-blowing.

Psalm 90:1-2 (A Prayer of Moses the man of God.) Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.

Hebrews 1:10–11 10 And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment,

## (2) God is also sovereign

God is the absolute all-powerful One who is in complete control of everything at all times.

Daniel 4:35 "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?'"

Psalms 33:10-11 The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

Psalms 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Isaiah 14 The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand . . . For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"

God is sovereign over evil as well as the sinful acts of men ==>

Acts 4:27-28 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.

Included Judas ==>

Mark 14:21 "For the Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Sovereignty relates to what I talked about last week: Providentialism. The false teachers were promoting Uniformitarianism.

Not Uniformitarianism, but Providentialism.

Providentialism relates to God's sovereignty. The fact that the creation is orderly and that much of it can be explained scientifically, is all related to God's providence.

There was a time in history (not that long ago) when everyone associated the happenings of life to directly to God.

Famine = God.

Prosperity = God.

Plague = God.

Rain / Sunshine = God.

Then we learned about things like weather patterns and bacteria. As a result sinful men figured that God wasn't behind these things; He'd been explained away.

No, God uses what we call in theology "secondary causation". There are some things God does directly (miraculous healing) and some things that God does indirectly (healing by the hands of doctors).

Look at 2 Cor. 8:16-17 . . . {note context}

2 Corinthians 8:16–17 **16 But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.**

The false teachers that Peter addresses had a cheap view of God.

They were guilty of what so many have done t/o history == they have created God in their image. They have set t/terms of what they think is right or wrong. They have set in their minds what they think t/timetable for Christ's return ought to be.

No, to borrow t/title from a famous book, "Your God is too small." In fact, your god isn't. He's a strawman of your own making.

The True God; The Triune God is Eternal // Sovereign // AND Creator

**a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)**

**For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that the heavens existed long ago . . .**

**b. God Created the Earth by His Word with Water (5b)**

**. . . and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God.**

**(1) Here we have a very difficult phrase**

Pretty simple to say that ==>

**. . . that the heavens existed long ago . . .**

You could make that statement to any man on the street . . . ("Mr. did you know the creation, the heavens are really old" - get out of my face you moron, of course I know that. Everyone does.)

But ==>

**. . . the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God.**

**(2) What does this sound like?**

Where do we hear words that ring like these? "heavens" "earth" "formed" "water" + (word / speaking something into existence).

Straight out of the book of Genesis. The creation account.

**(a) Genesis 1:1-10**

**1 IN the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

**... it escapes their notice that the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed . . .**

Before God created anything there was nothing. Nothing except God. Eternality of the Trinity (fellowship and love among t/3 members of t/Godhead: Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

Then God created.

In fact, only God can truly create. (make something out of nothing). Ex-Nihilo.

He created the heavens (all of deep space, and likely time itself).

. . . the term [heavens] refers to the component of space in the basic space-mass-time universe. . . . The universe is actually a continuum of space, matter, and time, no one of which can have a meaningful existence without the other two. [Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 41]

And He created t/earth.

Morris goes on to say: "Genesis 1:1 can legitimately be paraphrased . . . 'The transcendent, omnipotent Godhead called into existence the space-mass-time universe.'" [Ibid]

What did the earth look like? Was it habitable? No ==>

2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

"moving" or "moved" (*rachaph*) only used 2 other x in t/OT. It's a word that describes a fluttering or rapid back and forth movement (vibration). I take this as the working of the HS as an agent in creation, preparing / energizing t/formless earth into that which had form & substance. BTW - LXX uses t/verb φερω – same word we saw in 2 Peter 1:21.

Verse 3 - 1<sup>st</sup> instance of God speaking in t/Bible ==>

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.5 And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Verse 6 - God again speaks ==>

6 Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

Verb "expanse" means "to spread out." Here we have t/creation of t/atmosphere around t/earth, formed thru water, both liquid/vapor resulting in an atmospheric canopy / tent that would sustain life before t/fall of man into sin, and afterward up until t/Flood.

I understand it that this vast amount of water in t/upper atmosphere came down in t/form of a deluge, unprecedented rainfall, in t/global flood. After t/great flood t/atmospheric conditions were changed. One result of that change is that life-expectancies rapidly decreased.

7 And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.8 And God called the expanse heaven. [atmospheric heaven] And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9 Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens [the waters on the earth itself] be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so.10 And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.

That's as far as we need to go in Gen. 1. On your way back to 2 Peter 3, make a stop at Psalm 136 (vv. 1-9).

**(b) Go back to 2 Peter 3:5 ==>**

**... the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God.**

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. –Gen. 1:1**

We see how Gen. 1 unfolds to describe the creation of the earth itself. That there was a watery chaos that covered the earth – an earth that could not yet sustain human life.

God separates the expanse creating an atmosphere suitable to sustain life. Then he collected t/waters on t/earth so that dry land could emerge.

When Peter claims that ==>

**. . . . the earth was formed out of water and through water . . .**

he's saying that God used water as an instrument in t/formation of t/world.

**(3) By Means of His command; His will; His decree**

**. . . by the word of God,**

**"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6)**

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.**

**(a) Phrase "Then God said" - used 9 times in that 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Gen.**

The 1<sup>st</sup> 8x it resulted in a direct act of creation.

(v. 3 - "then G. said, 'let there be light'" & there was light!).

Last time t/phrase "then God said" is used is in v. 29.

There it's not used of creation, but of provision. God's providence.

God's provision of food for mankind. ==>

**1:29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you;**

Evidence of His grace and mercy? Same God who created by divine fiat, speaking worlds into existence is t/same God that cares for you. Same God to whom we pray ==> Matthew 6:11 (bread / food) . . .

Next time we see t/formula "then God said" is in 2:18 (another creative act).

**(b) Of course, all of that comes apart at the seams in chapter 3 ==>**  
==> when that same precious word of God – His wisdom, His glory, His goodness -- is ? by Satan resulting in man's disobedience, death, & societal chaos.

**i. It always comes down to this: "Has God really said that?"**  
It's always about authority. Do we submit to and believe God's Word or t/word of men? God's Word that directs us in His ways, or our own supposed wisdom and our ways?

**\* That's a relevant issue at so many levels, isn't it?**  
Relevant to our pilgrimage as believers in JC. Our day to day battles against sinful flesh, sinful world, sinful hosts of hell.

Relevant to our evangelism as we encounter fallen men who will be asking us, "Why should I believe that?" Are we going to boldly share what God says, or sugar-coat it hoping to make it sweet to the taste of t/unconverted palate?

Relevant to t/context of 2 Peter: False teachers. FTers always ? God's Word – it's sufficiency and it's authority.

Could be t/self-proclaimed "Spirit-filled" prophet who claims to have a word from God to religious authority structures like that of Roman Catholicism that claim authority over God's Word as t/only CH that can rightly interpret it.

(4) Here we have Peter's brood of false teachers: mockers following after their own lusts, questioning God's Word ==>

**"Where is the promise of His coming?**

Sound a little like the voice of t/Supreme Mocker, Satan, who is also called The Accuser? "You won't die" "You don't have to believe that" "God is trying to ruin your life; don't listen to Him." "Nothing bad will happen if you do this, people get away with it all the time."

**For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue has they have from the beginning of creation.**

No, says Peter.

*a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)*

*b. God Created the Earth by His Word with Water (5b)*

While we're on the subject of things like God's sovereignty, power, Word and water ==>

Third point ==>

*c. God Destroyed the Earth by His Word with Water (6)*

**. . . through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.**

John Calvin, in his comment on this passage, ties vv. 5&6 together==> The world no doubt had its origin from waters, for Moses calls the chaos from which the earth emerged, waters; and further, it was sustained by waters; it yet pleased the Lord to use waters for the purpose of destroying it.

(1) NIV is a little misleading here ==>

**By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.**

Literally ==>

**through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.**

First 2 words of t/verse in t/original Gk. text are ==>

**through which . . .**

"which" is a relative pronoun.

? what this refers to. Water? the Word? Both?

NIV interprets it for you [^]

I'm not alone in suggesting that Peter has both in mind. ==>

***a. God Destroyed the Earth by His Word with Water (6)***

**. . . through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.**

"through which" points back not only to t/word "water" in v. 5. But also t/phrase "by t/word of God" (which happens to be at t/end of t/v. in t/Gk text – v. 5 ends w/the words "θεου λογω" (by God's word).

Connects to t/next v. and supports t/idea than when Peter says "through which" he has 2 things in mind water & word

Word = God's sovereign decree.

Clement of Rome writing in t/late 1<sup>st</sup> c. ==>

**"By a word of His majesty he created all things, and by a word he can destroy them." [1 Clement 27:4).**

## (2) Here's an Interesting thought

If we go back to Genesis chapt. 1 we see that up until v. 6 or 8 t/earth was in a state of disarray. God was taking that which looked chaotic, in a sense, and put it in order. All part of His plan (never truly chaotic to God, just not yet in full array).

In creation, God was taking that which was in process and looked chaotic, making it orderly & able to sustain life.

Genesis 7 – it goes into reverse. Flood / judgment.

Genesis 6:5–8 **5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.7 And the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”**

**8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.**

Genesis 7:11 **In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.**

The flood put it all into reverse. Chaos and judgment.

Flood was catastrophic & argues against t/kind of uniformitarianism that t/false teachers were proposing in saying that everything in life & creation remains t/same.

**flooded** = κατακλυζω = to inundate, deluge = "Cataclysm."

Do you think t/civilization in Noah's day felt that way when they saw water everywhere & had no place to turn to escape?

**"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation."**

Luke 17:26–30 26 “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.28 “It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.30 “It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

*a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)*

*b. God Created the Earth by His Word with Water (5b)*

*c. God Destroyed the Earth by His Word with Water (6)*

To paraphrase Peter Davids in his excellent commentary on this epistle: The "scoffers" had forgotten something. Indeed there was an original creation and the world appears to be running quite well now along the lines laid down by God in creation. But this is no bare-bones uniformitarianism. We are in the second age of the world, an age separated from the first by God's judgment in the flood, just as our age will be separated from the next by God's judgment with fire. No, things

have not continued as they were from the beginning of the creation. There was a great discontinuity; in the flood God once again had to separate the waters, restraining chaos and returning the world to its original order. Forgetting this is quite serious. The mockers have neglected to see that there is a precedent for the coming judgment (something they denied). Their assumption that they can rest easy as things remain the same has proved false. [Paraphrased from p. 271]

**(3) The Jews commonly cited the Flood as a symbol of judgment**

1 Peter 3:20 - t/Flood was both a means of judgment and salvation (t/same waters that destroyed t/world preserved Noah and t/race).

2 Peter 2:5 [God] . . . did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

We shouldn't need cataclysmic events to remind us of the fact that God is active in all of creation.

Providentialism. Job 2:20.

Colossians 1:17 **In Christ all things hold together.**

X upholds all things – t/air you breathe and even chair you're sitting on.

This is part 1 of Peter's ==>

**II. ... Three-Fold Answer (5-9)**

**A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)**

**a. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)**

**b. God Created the Earth by His Word with Water (5b)**

**c. God Destroyed the Earth by His Word with Water (6)**

The scoffers were questioning a future event, the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of JC, so Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> response is in kind ==>

**B. An Answer that Looks Forward to the Future (7)**

**But the present heavens and the earth by the same word are being stored up for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

Here's t/first thing I want you to note in this verse

**1. This world will once again be changed in final judgment**

**a. The Great Flood was almost a type of the future return of Christ and the final restoration of all things**

The Ark was a place of refuge and salvation – as JC is our refuge / salv.

Ungodly, those who weren't in a saving relationship w/God, were judged.

In t/Flood t/earth was destroyed and, in a sense, re-created

**b. What happened in t/past was a forerunner in miniature of what will happen in the future**

**But the present heavens and the earth . . .**

That is, in contrast to t/world that existed before t/flood.

**by the same word**

by the word of the living God (cf. vv. 5-6).

**are being stored up for fire,**

**c. Fire = symbolic of judgment**

Note Sodom and Gomorrah in chapt. 2. See this t/o t/OT.

ZEP 3:8 "Therefore, wait for Me," declares the \Lord\, "For the day when I rise up to the prey. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal. Malachi 4:1 "FOR behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

HEB 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

2x in t/book of Rev. we're told that JC has eyes like a flame of fire (2:18; 19:12).

**But the present heavens and the earth, by the same word, are being stored up for fire . . .**

MacArthur writes ==>

. . . the entire creation, because of its basic atomic structure, is a potential nuclear bomb. The devastating power of nuclear weapons demonstrates the destructive force God has placed within the atom. When He is ready God will use that kind of nuclear energy in an atomic holocaust that will disintegrate the universe. [MacArthur, 120]

**. . . being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

Destruction of ungodly men (in view here the false teachers but also all who die outside of Christ). Destruction doesn't mean annihilation (the earth was destroyed in the flood, v. 6, but not annihilated).

Final judgment. Peter will return to this theme in v. 10.

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*I. . . . Accusation (3-4)*

*A. Where is the Promise of His Coming? (4a)*

**. . . mockers will come with mockery . . . and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"**

*II. ... Three-Fold Answer (5-9)*

*A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)*

God created; God can also destroy and recreate (flood)

*B. An Answer that Looks Forward to the Future (7)*

What God did in the past is a guarantee of what He says He will do in the future.

Future?

Why the delay?

That's the third part of Peter's answer (vv. 8-9).

*C. An Answer that Looks Heavenward to the Promise (8-9)*

God delays final judgment because He is merciful.

Promise of the covenant-keeping God who loves us.

Someone once wrote . . .

The next time that multicolored spectrum of beauty bends over the landscape, take time to view it in the light of God's promise to Noah: "The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature" (Gen. 9:16). The rainbow was a reminder of God's gracious pledge that He would never again destroy the earth with water. A worse calamity, though, is coming. Peter warned, "The heavens and the earth . . . are reserved for fire until the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 3:7). The rainbow, seen against the clouds of judgment, spoke of grace. But the rainbow fades when compared to God's grace shown at Calvary. At the cross, God's wrath against sin was placed on Jesus Christ, the believer's substitute. When the Light of the world met the storm clouds of judgment at Calvary, a beautiful bow of promise and forgiveness came into view. And one day believers will gather around God's rainbow-circled throne (Rev. 4:1-3). So next time you see a rainbow, remember God's abundant mercy and grace.

Every time I see a rainbow  
Shining in the sky above,  
I remember God's great mercies  
And His faithfulness and love. —Peterson

[Excerpted from Our Daily Bread, April 13, 1997]