

JCB

The Panorama of The Ages

Radio Sermons



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Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Peter's Last Message to the Church	1
2. Scoffers of the Last Days	3
3. Peter's Rebuttal: Supernatural Creation and Destruction	7
4. The World That Then Was	11
5. The Flood of Waters	15
6. The Heavens and the Earth Which Are Now	17
7. Duration of the Interadvent Age	18
8. The Certain Coming and Definite End of the Day of the Lord	23
9. The New Heavens and A New Earth	27
10. Exhortation for Godly Living	28
11. The Epistles of Paul	31
12. Peter's Closing Words	33

1.

Peter's Last Message to the Church

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye 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 Saviour.” II Peter 3:1-2.

These words open one of the most comprehensive chapters in the entire Bible. This chapter contains God's Panorama of the Ages. It summarizes God's dealing with the world since the time of creation, and it looks on to eternity in the new earth. And as is true of the preceding two chapters of this little book, II Peter 3 is extremely pertinent to Christians of this present time. All prophetic signs point to these closing days of the twentieth century as that time period which the Apostle Peter refers to as “The Last Days.”

Second Peter is the Apostle Peter's “death bed” message to the church. This letter was written only a short time before his crucifixion—upside down—on a Roman cross. He may have written it with his own hand from the prison cell where he waited for the executioners to come for him. Through the pen of the Apostle Peter, the Holy Spirit of God poured out this message that is so appropriate to these final days of the interadvent age. We who are living today have seen the fulfillment of many of those things which Peter prophesied in this, his last written earthly message to the church of his Lord.

Scoffers and False Philosophers Exposed

There is probably no book in the New Testament that has suffered attack by the enemies of God so much as has II Peter. Almost from the beginning of this age there have been those who have charged that the book is a forgery and a fraud.

“Higher critics” have claimed that it was not actually written by Peter, that it was a spurious work written by a forger a century or so after Peter's death. They claim that it could not have been written by Peter because the “literary style” is too different from I Peter. Yet there is evidence that the earliest non-apostolic church writers were

familiar with the words of this book and that these early Christians accepted it as a genuine work of the Apostle Peter. They accredited it with full authority, and they considered it as inspired Scripture. God has seen to it that the enemies of His Word have not displaced this marvelous little book from its rightful place in the canon of Scripture.

Those who study II Peter today can easily see why the so-called higher critics and the false teachers would like to delete this book from the Bible. It exposes them for what they are. This little epistle sheds light from heaven into the dark corners of the false teachings and the false philosophies that are widely accepted in the apostasy of these "last days." It brands both false teachers within apostate Christendom and worldly scoffers outside professing Christianity as exactly what they are.

Seeming to anticipate the attack that would be launched against the authenticity of this book as the years rolled on, Peter reminded his readers that this is the "second epistle" that he had written. "*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you: in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.*" There are two inspired books that bear Peter's name, and this is the second of the two. The opening words of Peter's last message associate the two epistles and testify to the identity of his authorship.

The Unity of the Word

Peter's purpose was to stir up the minds of God's people so that they would keep in memory the "whole" of God's Word. When he spoke of "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" he was speaking of the Old Testament.

In chapter 1, verses 20 and 21, Peter had explained the means by which prophecy came from God: "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" The Old Testament Scriptures contain the words that these "holy men of God spake as they were," literally, "carried along by the Holy Ghost." So Peter sought to remind his readers of the Old Testament prophecies.

But Peter did not stop there. He also said, "And of the

commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour." What did he mean by this expression? He meant the New Testament: the books of the New Testament were written by the "apostles of the Lord and Saviour." And these New Testament books contain the commandment of God's completed revelation.

Peter opened this description of God's Panorama of the Ages by literally saying, "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you: In both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That you may be mindful of the words of the Old Testament and the commandment of the New Testament."

Peter's expressed purpose for writing this second epistle was to stir up that part of the mind of the regenerated believer which permits him to absorb the truth of God. He also emphasized the united character of all of God's Word.

2.

Scoffers of the Last Days

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after 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 the creation." II Peter 3:3-4.

"Keep this foremost in mind," the Apostle Peter said. "There is a time coming when both the prophecies of the Old Testament and the commandment of the New Testament will be severely undermined by the enemies of God's Word."

Peter, speaking of a time yet future from his standpoint, said, "There shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts." This time, Peter said, shall be characterized by many refusing to accept the authority of the holy Scriptures. He referred to this time period as "the last days"; it is the time period that comes just before the close of this age of grace, just before the beginning of "the day of the Lord." He said that there would come on the world scene those who

actually make fun of the Word of God and who scoff at the idea that the age is to end by a time of worldwide divine judgment.

These "scoffers," or "scorners," will have absolutely no interest in heavenly things. They are citizens of this world only, with no claim on eternal life in the presence of God; and their only interests in life are the satisfying of the lusts of the flesh. The Lord spoke of these same scoffers in Matthew 24:37-38, when He said, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—this is simply satisfying the lusts of the flesh.

These scorners of the last days shall trample under foot every teaching of God's holy Word. But there is one particular doctrine that they will pick out for special attention in their ridiculing. They will reject the doctrine of the physical return of our Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory to bring an end to the present world order and to bring judgment.

One may wonder why these last-day scorners of the Biblical doctrine of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ feel so self-assured in rejecting the possibility that such a return will actually take place. Peter answered this question when he said that these scoffers will have observed that a great deal of time has passed since the promise was made, and yet the prophecy has not been fulfilled.

But the real reason that they feel so smug and secure in their reasonings is that they have accepted as indisputable fact the world philosophy which places the so-called natural law in a position of being the supreme force of the universe. They have accepted a "doctrine of uniformity" as their guiding philosophy. Notice their words: "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Note carefully what these last-day scoffers are saying. Their words can be paraphrased as follows: "We believe the present is the key to the past. We believe that all things continue in a uniform manner and that never before in history has there been a divine intervention in the affairs of this world; so we have no reason to believe that there will ever

be such an intervention in the future. Our scientists tell us that this world has been here for at least 4.5 billion years and that the law of uniformity has ruled since elemental materials first began to form themselves into suns and planets. The universe we see about us evolved from these elemental materials in accordance with the natural law, and there is nothing to indicate that any supernatural being has ever yet intervened in these natural processes. From the limitless past the law of uniformity has ruled, and we know that even the so-called creation can be explained by this law of uniformity."

These scoffers of the last days have placed their faith in the idea that natural law rules. It is because of the blind faith in their "doctrine of uniformity" that these last-day scoffers feel secure in their scoffing. They, by faith, accept the "naturalistic" explanation for the evidences of the earth's past violent history — those evidences that are so conspicuous in the rocks of the ground on which they live.

By their own choice, these people have decided that the record of struggle and death found in the preserved remains of the bodies of millions of animals and plants contained in the sedimentary rocks of the earth is a record of the evolutionary development of life over the billions of years of earth's history. They totally ignore the fact that this record can be explained much better in terms of a great world catastrophe that occurred in the relatively recent past and that this catastrophe only could have been a judgment of the God of creation.

Peter's prophecy has been remarkably fulfilled in this present day. His words precisely describe a false philosophy which is held by a majority of the people of the present civilized world. Christians as well as unbelievers are well indoctrinated into this false philosophy. There are very few living today who are not, to some degree, affected by it.

The philosophy described by Peter can be called the "doctrine of uniformity." It is that philosophy which makes the so-called laws of nature the supreme power of the universe. This doctrine assumes that natural law, as it is seen operating today, has never been modified or superseded. It assumes that the history of the earth (as well as the history of the other heavenly bodies of our universe) can be explained by the slow processes of the "natural law" operating over an infinite sea of time. The "doctrine of uniformity" assumes that all the evidence

of the fossil-bearing sedimentary rocks of the earth's crust can be explained by the slow processes of erosion and redeposition (the same processes that operate today) operating over billions of years of time.

Peter continued, "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." This describes the present-day doctrine of uniformity very precisely. This doctrine says, "For since the fathers fell asleep" — from the infinite, uncharted past—"all things"—all natural phenomena, all processes of the universe — "continue as they were" — continue without interruption, without change and without control of any supernatural force or Being—"from the beginning of the creation". Even creation itself is included in this all-encompassing view.

Notice that the last-day scoffers not only include creation in their uniformitarian reasonings, but they infer that creation is still going on. "All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." And, of course, that is the very philosophy of these times. "Creation" to most people today is the shaping of the present order by the process of "evolution," which has been continuing since the time when material in some elemental state began to congeal to form the universe. Within this concept, "creation" is still going on.

These words of Peter are quite descriptive of the philosophy of "evolutionary uniformitarianism" which is rampant in the world today. However, these are not the exact words used today by those who promote this philosophy in school textbooks and in scientific journals. These authors and teachers use a more subtle statement, one that is easy for their students to hold in their minds and to repeat in a parrot-like manner.

This statement was coined by Sir Charles Lyell who is today remembered as "the father of historical geology." This statement introduced a series of three books on the subject of historical geology that were published in England between 1830 and 1833. Sir Charles Lyell paraphrased Peter's words thusly: "The present is the key to the past."

Sir Charles Lyell's philosophy (which he accepted by pure faith, not because he was compelled to do so by any scientific evidence in the rocks) was, precisely, "All things continue as they were from the be-

ginning of the creation." Peter's prophecy has indeed been fulfilled in our time.

3.

Peter's Rebuttal: Supernatural Creation and Destruction

"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." II Peter 3:5-7.

Peter totally refuted the false doctrine of uniformitarianism by bringing up two events in history that absolutely cannot be explained by the doctrine of uniformity. The first of these events is the creation itself. The second is the judgment of the great universal flood that God brought upon the world at the time of Noah. Peter said that these last-day scoffers willingly remain ignorant of the truth. "For this they willingly are ignorant of."

It is not a natural mistake that has carried them into the false philosophy that makes them feel justified in scoffing at the Word of God. Peter said that they willingly ignore the facts of a supernatural creation and of the great flood. These two events give positive proof that their philosophy is wrong.

Notice that Peter's prophecy seems to infer that the principles of the "natural law" (that law which the last-day scoffers' "doctrine of uniformity" holds as being the supreme and governing entity of the universe) prove that the original creation was by supernatural means. And this is precisely the situation as it stands today. Supernatural creation, as it is presented in the Bible, is the only technically acceptable "theory" of origins that has ever seen brought forward by any source at any time. Supernatural creation is a provable scientific fact! The most basic laws of natural science prove this to be true, and yet

most of the population of the world — the most learned scientists included — ignore the existing proof and go blindly on in their total acceptance of the “doctrine of uniformity.”

Also, the fact that the world was once destroyed by a great flood of waters is observable from the very evidence in the rocks of the earth itself. Naturalistic uniformitarianism is a false philosophy. The Word of God is supported by practical evidence.

Creation Is A Scientific Fact

In view of the scientific world’s current scoffing at the idea of supernatural creation, there might be some who would question any bold statement asserting its scientific validity. The evidence is available. It is only necessary to review some of the facts of physical science in order to see this proof.

Since the work of Albert Einstein and the dawn of the nuclear age during the first half of this century, physicists have known that the “material” of which this universe is made is really not “material” at all when you reduce it to its basic essence. That is, material or matter (and this includes all solids, liquids and gases) is really energy in a special form. Matter can be converted directly into energy, and energy can be concentrated to form matter. Our universe functions by the constant exchange of energy from one form into one or more other forms.

Each time energy undergoes a transformation of form, there are two basic laws which determine the outcome. These laws are known respectively as the first and second laws of energy exchange, or the first and second laws of thermodynamics. The first law says that energy cannot be created or destroyed. All energy that goes into the exchange comes out of the exchange: None is lost, none is added. The second law says that although no energy is destroyed, the energy that comes out of the exchange is degraded in quality; that is, the energy is no longer as available for doing useful work as it was before the exchange.

This universe is made of energy, and no new energy is being added to it. However, the energy of which the universe is made is constantly wearing out because the universe functions by constant energy exchanges. Given sufficient time, the universe is going to die because all the energy is eventually going to “wear out.” This has not happened

yet. Therefore, we have clear **proof** that this universe and the energy of which it is made are not infinitely old. This means that energy must have come into existence at some time in the finite past. But the first law of energy exchange, a part of the "natural law," says that this is impossible. The only valid conclusion is that energy came into existence by a law that supersedes the natural law. And this, by definition, is "supernatural law," or the law of God.

The Bible provides the only technically acceptable "theory" to the origin of the universe that has ever been presented. The Bible is the only record that accounts for the origin of energy. This universe is, plain and simple, made of energy.

The fact that the universe exists and functions is proof that energy came into being at some time in the finite past. If the universe were infinitely old, it would not be a functioning universe. The second law of thermodynamics says that the universe is decaying with passing time. However, the first law of thermodynamics forbids energy from coming into existence. So here we have the so-called natural law (which the uniformitarian says is supreme) forbidding a phenomenon which "natural law" also proves did definitely happen!

A Paradox Uniformitarians Cannot Solve

We have a puzzling paradox that the "doctrine of uniformity" cannot solve. The only way of removing this paradox is to realize the truth of the Biblical revelation. The "natural law" is not the supreme entity of the universe. The "natural law" is the law that was set up over the completed creation to preserve it after creation was accomplished by a higher principle. The Bible gives a highly technical description of just such a supernatural creation in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis.

The theories of origins that are generated within the framework of evolutionary uniformitarianism always start with the presupposition of the existence of basic material in some elemental form. Usually the advocates of the "doctrine of uniformity" postulate the initial existence of a cloud of hot gases. (Hot gases represent matter at a very high energy level.) But today, in the latter part of the twentieth century, physical scientists know that gases themselves (matter) are just tremendous concentrations of energy. Thus the advocates of evolutionary

uniformitarianism start their reasonings by the postulation of the existence of tremendous quantities of highly "charged" energy. They make no attempt to explain how the energy came into existence.

The postulation of the existence of a tremendous quantity of highly charged energy as a starting point for the uniformitarianistic theories of the origin of the universe is really just "begging the question." The real problem has been ignored. In order to present a technically acceptable theory of the origin of the universe, one must first explain how energy came into existence. And here the naturalistic uniformitarian has a problem.

The facts of the paradox presented by the two laws of thermodynamics are known to the scientists of this present day; yet most of them persist in continuing to expound their "doctrine of uniformity." They say, "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." No wonder the Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter, says, "*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were (came into being) of old, and (also) the earth standing (compacted) out of the water and in (amidst) the water (waters).*"

The Biblical creation account explains the origin of energy. This account reveals that God, by His omnipotent power, brought highly charged energy into existence by creative processes that only He knows and controls. By this same power He shaped and formed the created energy into a precisely functioning universe during the six-day creation period. Then on the seventh day God's creative processes were stopped, and He imposed the present natural law to sustain His finished creation. Genesis 2:3 reads, "*And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work, or energy (what the Hebrew word translated 'work' actually means) which God created and made.*"

God the Son Was Active in Creation

So Peter first pointed to the great event of creation itself by saying, "By the Word of God the heavens came into being of old, and (also) the earth (which was) compacted out of the water and amidst the waters." By these words Peter directed the minds of his readers to God's creative works of the first three creation days as recorded in Genesis

1:1-10. Notice, he said that it was by the "Word of God" that the heavens and the earth came into being. The word "Word" in this passage should be capitalized. It refers to God the Son, the pre-incarnate Christ. The word here is a form of the Greek "logos," which is the very same Greek word used to refer to Him in John 1:1. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Several New Testament Scriptures indicate that it most definitely was the Second Person of the Godhead, God the Son, the pre-incarnate Christ, who was the active agent in the work of creation.

But notice particularly what the Apostle Peter had to say about the creation and the forming of the earth. He said (and this is a literal translation of the original Greek), "The earth was compacted out of water and amidst the waters." And by this, he directed attention to an important fact concerning the earth as it was originally created.

The Genesis creation account reveals that the earth, as God originally brought it into existence, was covered by the waters of a universal sea. The work of the second and third creation days was centered around two great divisions of the waters of this universal sea. Peter recorded here that it was the waters, the life-giving element of the newly created earth, that was used to shape and form it into a perfect abode for the first man. He also brings to attention the fact that the first earth was established "amidst the waters." This important fact accounts for the great differences between that "world that then was" and the "heavens and the earth that are now."

4.

The World That Then Was

"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." II Peter 3:5-7.

The earth, as it was originally commanded into existence “by the Word of God,” was not a finished product. It was “without form”; that is, it was a smooth sphere. Its surface had not yet been shaped into a proper form to cause the waters to flow into low places and form seas and away from the high places so that they could become dry land, or continents. It was “void” and that word simply means “empty.” It did not yet have any living inhabitants. In the work of the first three creation days, God corrected the deficiency of “formlessness”; in the last three creation days, He corrected the condition of “voidness,” or “emptiness.”

The creation narrative indicates that the newly created earth was covered with a universal blanket of water. The Hebrew word that is translated “deep” is the word for a large body of water. And the narrative records that the Spirit of God moved (or brooded) over those waters.

Two of the great acts that God accomplished to correct the deficiency of “formlessness” were acts of separation of this initial universal blanket of water. On the second creation day, God separated the waters from the waters; with the result that a portion of the waters originally on the surface of the initial earth were elevated above the “firmament.” The word “firmament” refers to the atmospheric heaven, or what today is simply known as the atmosphere. So after this act of God, there was a significant body of waters from the original universal sea left below the atmosphere (that is, on and under the surface of the earth): but there was also a significant body of waters above the atmosphere, apparently in the form of a gigantic blanket of water vapor.

From the second creation day up until the time of the great flood, that body of waters remained above the original earth’s atmosphere. On the third creation day, God again divided the waters below the atmosphere; and the dry land appeared. That first “world that then was” was truly and literally “compacted out of water and amidst the waters.”

So as the Apostle Peter refuted the uniformitarianistic arguments of the last-day scoffers, he spoke first of the event of creation itself. Then he went on to speak of the great universal flood at the time of

Noah: "Whereby the world (or kosmos) that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." Peter continued his discourse by speaking of "the heavens and the earth which are now."

By his word sequence, the apostle not only drew a contrast between what he referred to as the "kosmos that then was" and "the heavens and the earth which are now," but also he considered the creation as the event that initiated the "kosmos that then was" and the flood as the event that initiated "the heavens and the earth which are now." And he brought the substance water into the foreground as playing a very important part in forming both of these worlds.

Peter used the word "kosmos" in a very technical sense when he said, "Whereby the kosmos that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." The apostle designated the world before the flood as a "kosmos" (an organized system).

Water: An Implement of Judgment

There are three components of the world before the flood that Peter had in mind when he referred to the "kosmos that then was." This designation includes the pre-flood "geosphere" which was that earth itself, the pre-flood "atmosphere" which was the blanket of vapors that surrounded the earth, and the pre-flood "biosphere" which included the complex pattern of plant and animal life that lived in that world. And Peter said, "Whereby the kosmos (that entire organized system) that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." The word translated "perished" literally implies total destruction. Peter said that the great judgment of the flood, using the compound water as God's implement of judgment, brought total destruction to the organized system which was the first world.

In these verses the Holy Spirit, speaking through the pen of Peter, brings out clearly that the present "kosmos" is different from the first "kosmos"; and this difference is in some way related to the way in which the great reservoirs of water are related to the two organized systems. Peter pointed out that water was the compound that was used to mold and to form the final shape of the first world. And he also pointed out that this very same substance was used as an implement to bring judgment and destruction on that same world. A second shifting of the planet's great reservoirs of water (but in a different way) resulted

in the shaping and forming of this present world. However, the pre-flood "kosmos" and the post-flood "kosmos" are not identical in design.

Verse 5 records that the first "kosmos" was "compacted out of the water" and stood "amidst the waters." The creation account in Genesis 1 also asserts this fact. Genesis 1:6-8 speaks of God's positioning of the two divided reservoirs of water so that the atmosphere of the first earth was "sandwiched" between them. Then the lower reservoir of waters was allowed to flow into depressed areas which God formed on the surface of the planet so that elevated areas (also formed by God) protruded and became dry land. That world was truly "compacted out of the water and stood amidst the waters."

The great blanket of waters "above the firmament" acted very much as the glass of a gigantic greenhouse to that first world, and it provided a perfect climate for the "kosmos that then was." The pre-flood planet was equally heated from the equator to the poles, and the temperature over the entire surface of the globe most likely did not vary more than a couple of degrees about a mean in the low 70's on the Fahrenheit scale throughout all seasons and from day to night.

An Ideal Weather System

Because of this equal global heating, storm systems could not form; there were no great movements of air masses, and there was no rain. The abundant vegetation of that first world was watered by a system of springs fed by a portion of the "waters below the firmament" (waters that had been trapped under pressure beneath the surface of the continents), and by the heavy dews laid down each night from a humidity-saturated atmosphere which was brought below the dew point by a few degrees of drop in the night time temperature. The water vapor canopy above the atmosphere of that first "kosmos" acted as an extremely efficient filter against the high energy radiations from the sun which are so harmful to the biological life of this present "kosmos." This would have been a contributing factor to the long life spans of the men and animals which lived in that world.

But the first world population turned from God and became corrupt and wicked. And at God's appointed time, He supernaturally intervened in the affairs of that world and brought the judgment of the great flood upon it.

5. The Flood Of Waters

"Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." II Peter 3:6.

The creation account of Genesis 1 is a record of the creation of the magnificent pre-flood world, the world of Adam and his immediate descendants. That great kosmos was created by God as a perfect abode for man. But that perfect first earth witnessed the fall of man, and as a result of God's curse it became less than perfect. "And unto Adam he (God) said, Because thou hast harkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground (that is, the earth) for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. . ."Gen. 3:17-18.

The men of that first world, born to those fallen first parents, were wicked and evil; and their fallen nature placed them in rebellion against God. The spiritual and moral conditions of that first world became worse and worse. In less than 2,000 years after the original perfect creation, the Scripture records these ominous words: "*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.*" Gen. 6:5-7.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Gen. 6:8. One hundred and twenty years later, after Noah fulfilled the Lord's commandment and built an ark of safety, the Scripture records this historical account. "*In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.*" Gen. 7:11-12.

“The fountains of the great deep” refer to the “waters below the firmament.” The narrative reveals that God brought on the judgment of the great flood by first breaking up the fountains of the great deep. In other words, God by His omnipotent power broke up the “containers” that He had prepared for the waters below the firmament. These “containers” were the sea basins which He had originally formed on the third creation day by depressing areas of the earth’s crust. They were also the “pockets” that He had formed under the surface of the continents to contain the pressurized fresh waters that fed the springs which watered that first “kosmos.” God caused violent volcanic upheavals in the crust of the earth: the sea bottoms were raised, the continents were lowered, fissures opened up in the earth to allow underground waters to flow out and the waters “under the firmament” violently began to spill across the entire surface of that beautiful first earth.

But this was only one source of the flood waters. “The windows of heaven were opened.” The great water vapor canopy which God had suspended above the atmosphere of that first “kosmos” (the “waters above the firmament”) began to coalesce, and these waters fell to the earth as torrents of rainfall. “And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.”

Destruction that goes beyond the power of imagination was brought down on the surface of that first earth as God reversed His work of the second and third creation days. The waters violently overflowed the earth’s surface, leaving once again a universal sea, just as had existed on the first day of creation before God had made the two great divisions of the waters. “And the kosmos that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.”

6.

The Heavens and the Earth Which Are Now

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” II Peter 3:7.

Noah and his family had believed God, and those eight people had built an ark of safety. They survived the total destruction and devastation that the flood waters brought upon that first world. And out of that destruction, God brought a new world, “the heavens and the earth which are now.” This world was to be repopulated by Noah and his seed. Genesis 8:1-3 records these words: *“And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged; The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated.”*

God once more divided the waters from the land, and the continents of this world began to appear. To accomplish this, God again distorted the surface of this planet so that lowered basins were formed to provide storage places for the great volumes of water that formed the universal sea of the great flood. Other areas were raised to form continents and islands. The waters began to drain into the low basins that God had formed, and soon “the waters were abated.” Noah, his family and all the animals of the ark were able to step forth on the dry surface of this present earth.

But there was a great difference in “the heavens and the earth which are now” and in “the world that then was.” After “the windows of heaven were open” and the great reservoir of the “waters above the firmament” was allowed to fall to the earth as “forty days and forty nights” of torrential rainfall, God never again raised these waters to their former position above the firmament.

The waters that were formerly above the firmament are now in the great ocean basins and in the frozen polar ice caps of this world. That is why this world has seventy percent of its surface covered by water, with only thirty percent left as dry land. The "world that then was" had a great deal more land area than does this present world. And that world apparently had only small and shallow seas.

Because this world has no water-vapor canopy to act as a "greenhouse cover," it is unequally heated, and it has an entirely different system of climate. It has distinct seasons, and it has distinct latitude zones. Storm systems move over its surface; and it is watered by rainfall rather than by dew and springs. And since this world is not kept in store for judgment by water, God has not provided a great reservoir of water that can be brought down upon the earth as an instrument of destruction.

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against (or, in conjunction with) the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

7.

Duration of the Interadvent Age

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." II Peter 3:8-9.

God does not reckon time as we do. What seems to be a very long time to us is just a short time to God. The Lord has not forgotten His promise to establish His kingdom upon the earth. This promise is to be literally kept. But there is a reason for the long delay.

The second coming of Christ will bring judgment on those who remain in their sins in spite of God's provision of a Saviour. The Lord has held off His coming because He is "not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance.” But this delay does not mean that the Lord’s coming is in any way less certain.

“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” This verse has been used by many to teach that time periods in Scripture are never to be taken literally, especially when they relate to prehistoric or prophetic events, because God has told us that “a thousand years sometimes refers to one day, and one day sometimes refers to a thousand years.”

The Verse Expresses A Simile

First, let’s notice what the verse says and then notice what it does not say. Second Peter 3:8 says, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” It does not say, “One day to the Lord is a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day.” This verse does not equate a thousand years to one day and vice versa. The little word “as” appears twice, and this word places the statement in the form of a simile, not a statement of mathematical fact.

God knows the difference between one day (one rotation of the earth on its axis) and a thousand years (one thousand orbits of the earth around the sun). Nowhere in Scripture — II Peter 3:8 included — are these two periods equated. And certainly II Peter 3:8 does not modify the literal sense in which we are supposed to understand the creation days of Genesis 1.

God gave us a definition of the word “day” in Genesis 1:3-5 the first time that He used this word in the creation account: *“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”*

The word “day” as it is used in the creation account refers to a period of darkness followed by a period of light. The rotation of the earth on its axis is the only phenomenon of which men are aware that results in regular sequential periods of darkness and light. The creation days, those six days that began with God’s dividing the light from the darkness (that is, God’s starting of the earth’s rotating

motion), definitely refer to six sequential rotations of this planet on its own axis. The account is to be taken literally in its plain ordinary sense.

But what is the meaning of II Peter 3:8? The mocking question asked by the last-day scoffers was "Where is the promise of his coming?" Then they went on to state their "doctrine of uniformity" in the following words: "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

The inference is that it has been a very long time since the promise was made; and since it has not yet been fulfilled, the promise should only be considered as a myth and should be forgotten.

Peter's refutation can be paraphrased as follows: "The passing of a very long period of time by man's reckoning does not detract in any way from the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has promised that He would come again, and that promise is going to be fulfilled. The reason the Lord has not yet fulfilled His promise is because He loves the men for whom He died, and He is reluctant that any of them perish. His second coming will bring an end to the opportunity for repentance. That's why He is patient toward the men of this world and delays His coming. But delay does not mean that the promise is any less sure."

It is not accidental that II Peter 3:8 mentions "a thousand years" twice and "one day" twice. Had it been the Holy Spirit's intent to convey the idea that what seems to be a long time to man is only a short time to God, He could have simply said, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years" and He could have stopped there. Granted, His adding "and a thousand years as one day" adds emphasis, but that does not seem to be sufficient cause to justify these added words. No, God intends to supply far more information with this verse than only the emphasized contrast between God's and man's view of the passage of time.

In speaking of man's view of time, this passage mentions two periods of one thousand years each. In speaking of God's view of time, it mentions two periods of one day. The periods of time mentioned from man's viewpoint should immediately convey a very significant fact to the reader. Remember, Peter's prophecy concerns what is to happen in the "last days" of this age of grace. So the aspect of man's

viewing the passage of time since the Lord's first advent is from the standpoint of the end of the age. And man sees that not tens or hundreds of years have gone by but rather thousands of years have expired.

Peter's prophecy declares that a period of time which man will measure in thousands of years will go by before the Lord's return. This passage of Scripture specifically mentions the time period of one thousand years two times.

There is precedent in Scripture for interpreting time prophecies by the summation of the time periods mentioned. Therefore, there seems to be good reason to conclude that the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ will come approximately (not exactly — it is not given to man to know the day and year of the Lord's return) two thousand years after His first advent. Considerably more than nineteen hundred years have gone by since the Lord's first advent. And today, there is significant evidence that our time period definitely is that which Peter referred to as "the last days."

Still more is contained in the time passage of II Peter 3:8. Two periods of "one day" are also mentioned. There is a little book in the Old Testament that clearly prophesies of the time period that Israel will be in dispersion throughout the earth, without a homeland and without any of the things that were associated with their status as a peculiar people of God. The book makes it clear that this time period begins with that nation's rejection of the promised Messiah and ends when He returns to earth.

The Old Testament book in view here is Hosea. In order for one to completely understand the meaning of the time prophecy that is given in II Peter 3:8, one has to go to the parallel prophecies of Hosea. Hosea penned a number of very specific prophecies concerning the state of God's chosen people during the church age. It has often been said that the Old Testament prophets were not given a view of this interadvent age, that their prophecies covered the time that expired at the first coming of the Lord, and then those prophecies leap forward to the Day of the Lord, which begins just seven years before the Lord returns in power and glory. This is true as far as it relates to God's purpose for building the church of this age. However, the fact that this interadvent

age would come to pass and the way that it would relate to Israel is contained in the Old Testament.

Hosea's Remarkable Prophecies

Hosea was speaking of these present days when he wrote, *"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim."* Hosea 3:4-5. This is a remarkable picture of the children of Israel as they were from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 up until they were once again permitted to establish a nation in the land of Palestine in 1948. In fact, the picture still applies, but in this present day one can see steps being taken to correct some of these deficiencies. This interadvent age is the only time in Israel's history when the picture drawn by Hosea fits exactly.

Another great prophecy concerning the age in which we live begins with Hosea 5:15 and extends through Hosea 6:2. The opening verse records the voice of the pre-incarnate Christ speaking from the time perspective when He, after visiting His people in the flesh as their Messiah, is rejected by them (that is, this statement prophesies the end of His first advent). He said, *"I will go and return to my place, till they (Israel) acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."* Hosea 5:15.

And then one hears the voice of the remnant of the children of Israel as they at last acknowledge their rejected Messiah in the early part of the Day of the Lord. *"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up and we shall live in his sight."* Hosea 6:1-2.

Peter wrote, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." One can apply Peter's formula to Hosea 6:2. "After two thousand years will He revive us: In the third thousand years He will raise us up and we shall live in His sight." The "two days" seem to apply to this interadvent period, and the "third day" appears to apply to the millennial age.

8.

The Certain Coming and Definite End of the Day of the Lord

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” II Peter 3:9-10.

Peter spoke both of the last-day scoffers who made fun of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, and of Christian believers in these last days of this age of grace, when he wrote these words. He declared that the Lord is not just procrastinating when He delays His bodily return to the earth.

A period of almost two thousand years has passed since the Lord Jesus Christ ascended back to heaven, and the two angels stood by the disciples there on the Mount of Olives and said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1: 11. This promise has not been forgotten. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness.” The fact of the Lord’s return is as sure as it was the day that the promise was made. It is far surer than the rising of the sun tomorrow morning.

There is a reason for this long delay. The Lord is reluctant to bring this age to an end because doing so will result in the eternal separation from God of multitudes of those for whom He died on that cross at Calvary. The Lord desires to provide every possible opportunity to those living in these last days of this age of grace. He wants to save lost men and women, and He stands ready to do so to all those that “come to repentance.”

The word “repentance” simply means “a change of mind,” or “a

change of attitude." Men and women must realize that by natural standing they are lost sinners. They must realize that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and that all are included when God says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." They must understand the truth of the statements written by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:12 and Romans 6:23. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."*

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Lord delays His coming because He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any shall perish, but that all should come to repentance." If these words are being read by an unsaved person, let it be pointed out that you are one of the reasons for the Lord's delay. But the delay will not last forever. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." II Cor. 6:2.

The Lord's long delay has not in the least changed the certainty of the coming of "the day of the Lord." That expression refers to the time period that is to follow this age of grace.

Peter did not deal with the details of "the day of the Lord" here in this passage of Scripture. He simply wrote, "But the day of the Lord (which is to mark the end of this age) will come as a thief in the night." Peter knew that the subject of the "day of the Lord" had been treated in considerable detail by the Old Testament prophets, and also by the Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Thessalonians. It was not Peter's purpose to dwell on the details of this time period. Peter simply placed it in its correct time relationship to this present age and to the eternal age of God that is to follow "the day of the Lord."

Description of the Day of the Lord

The Apostle Paul provided a description of the end of the church age and of the beginning of "the day of the Lord" in I Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11. In the first part of that passage, Paul spoke of the "catching away," or the "rapture," of the church when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: And the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we

which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Then, in the second part of the passage, Paul told of the coming of "the day of the Lord" like "a thief in the night" to those who remain in this world after the church is gone.

The Old Testament prophets, writing many years before the birth of the Lord, provided the sequence of events that make up the period that God Himself designates as "the day of the Lord." It begins with a period of great spiritual darkness and great tribulation on the earth. There is a seven year period in which the fully developed political and religious system of Satan will hold sway over the earth. It is the "seventieth week of Daniel," the time of "Jacob's trouble," the "tribulation period." But at the end of that seven year period, the Lord Himself will descend bodily from heaven with an army made up of both angelic beings and the resurrected saved ones from this age of grace, and He will bring an end to Satan's world system. The millennial day will dawn with this coming of the "Sun of Righteousness," (see Malachi 4:2) and for one thousand years the Lord Jesus Christ will rule as King over the earth.

The End of the Day of the Lord

But after the thousand years are expired, "the day of the Lord" must come to an end. However, it was not Peter's purpose to dwell on the details of the events on earth that will precede the end of "the day of the Lord." Rather, he turned his attention to God's destruction of this present world by fire after it has served its purpose. After announcing that "the day of the Lord" is to most certainly come as "a thief in the night," Peter leaped forward to that climactic event which will end "the day of the Lord" and the history of this present earth. He said, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*" II Peter 3:10.

The destruction of this present world is a parallel event to the Great White Throne judgment of God on the wicked dead of all ages that is described in Revelation 20:11-15. This is what Peter said when he wrote, "*But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against (or in parallel with) the day of*

judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” II Peter 3:7. So while the events that mark the Great White Throne “judgment and perdition of ungodly men” are transpiring somewhere in the heavens, this present earth is to undergo nuclear disintegration, preparatory for the “creation” and “making” of the new earth “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

It was in Revelation 20:11-15 that the Apostle John wrote of the Great White Throne judgment, where God is to gather all the resurrected, unsaved dead from all ages to pass final sentence upon them before they are cast into the lake of fire. This judgment does not take place on earth, nor does it take place in the third heaven (which, according to II Corinthians 12:1-5, is the immediate abode of God). Rather, it seems to take place somewhere in space. However, Peter declared that it is “in parallel with” this judgment of the wicked dead that this present earth and its atmospheric heaven will be destroyed in preparation for the creation of the new heaven and the new earth.

Nuclear Disintegration

There would seem to be no doubt that Peter was speaking of a nuclear disintegration of this present earth with its atmospheric heaven. The words he used are quite technical and quite descriptive of just such a phenomenon. And in light of the facts that have been uncovered in twentieth century nuclear physics, one should be able to have a clear understanding of just what Peter described.

Recall once again that what is normally thought of as material or matter is really just tremendous concentrations of energy in a special form. This energy is quantized into the atomic “building blocks” which are known as protons, neutrons and electrons. When these “building blocks” are locked together to form an atomic structure, they exhibit the properties of matter. However, when they are freed from the atomic structure and operate as “free agents,” they exhibit the properties of pure energy, such as heat and light.

The nucleus of the atom is the structure that acts as the interface between matter and energy. This structure is basically unstable, but it is made to exist by a mysterious force that nuclear physicists have named the “nuclear binding force.” The existence of this force (which has properties that go beyond the natural) is unexplainable by the

scientific knowledge of the nuclear physicist. However, the Bible does explain the source of this force. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, Colossians 1:17 says, "By him all things consist (*hold together*)."

According to Peter's description, when this present world has served its purpose, the Lord is going to release the nuclear binding forces. This entire earth will then become one blinding flash of heat and light, and it will pass away with great noise.

9.

The New Heavens and A New Earth

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." II Peter 3:11-13.

The Apostle Peter was not the first of the inspired writers of Scripture to tell us of God's promise to create a new heaven and a new earth. The Prophet Isaiah, writing about seven hundred years before Peter penned this second epistle, recorded the words of God as they are found in Isaiah 65:17. *"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind."* The wickedness, pollution and filth of this present earth are to be totally annihilated as the present "heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And in the perfection and righteousness of the new heaven and the new earth that God will integrate from the basic energy of this present system, the wickedness, heartaches and imperfections of this present earth "shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."

Some twenty-five years after Peter penned his prophecy of the new heaven and the new earth, the aged Apostle John was actually permitted to see the new heaven and the new earth. In Revelation 21:1 John told of this marvelous sight: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new*

earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." What a marvelous sight that must have been to this aged disciple whom Jesus loved!

John did not provide a detailed description of the new earth, but he did point to the rather amazing fact that the new earth has no sea. In this respect, the new earth stands in sharp contrast to this present earth, which Peter reminded his readers, in his Panorama of the Ages, twice before in history was covered by a universal sea. The original earth was "compacted out of water and stood amidst the waters," and then that original world "being overflowed with water, perished."

Water to this world has been used as both an implement of blessing and of judgment, but in the new heaven and the new earth there is to be no great reservoir of this substance. Rather, we are told, "*And he shewed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*" Rev. 22:1. The water needs of the new earth are to be met by the ever-flowing stream of the "water of life" that proceeds directly from the throne of God. For all eternity, the redeemed of God will refresh themselves with this pure water of life.

10.

Exhortation for Godly Living

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation, and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." II Peter 3:11-14.

The Apostle Peter turned to the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christians to whom this epistle is addressed, to those who know by faith that the Lord is going to keep His promise and that He is to bodily

return to this earth to bring an end to the present world system. And he asked the question that should strike to the heart of every one of God's people who reads this message:

“Now that you see that all the material things of this world are not to endure but are to be totally disintegrated before the beginning of the eternal day of God, what kind of persons should you be in the light of this knowledge? Shouldn't you be constant in holy conduct and behavior, living in a godly way as you look forward to and eagerly rush toward the coming of the day of God when you are to live eternally in His presence?

“You should not put your trust in and direct your desires toward the material things of this world as do the scoffers of the last days who have no eternal hope. Remember, they are the materialists. They have put their trust in the false doctrine of uniformity, a doctrine that is based entirely on the concept of the eternity of material things. They have willingly rejected the plain teaching of the Word of God, and have elected to place their faith in the idea that ‘since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.’ But you who believe the Word of God should not be materialists. You know that all material things (and that includes the earth and all the works that are in it) are going to be burned up before God presents to us our eternal inheritance, which is the new heaven and the new earth.”

This exhortation is directed to God's people. They should know the answer to it. There is only one Scriptural answer, and that answer is that God's people should be looking beyond the material things of this present world toward the eternal things of God.

Materialistic Christians

But a great many Christians of this present day seem to have lost sight of this principle. God's people seem to spend so much of their time and energy trying to “get ahead in the world” (that is, storing up treasures on earth) that they have little left to expend on their prime reason for being, which is serving the Lord Jesus Christ in carrying out His great commission.

There is a little tract in circulation called “Our Reason For Being.” This tract was written by William MacDonald and it was published by

Christian Missions Press in Waynesboro, Georgia. Here is a short quotation from this tract. "Christian, you should remember this: the great goal of your life is to glorify God and to represent His interest on earth. Everything else is incidental. Christians have bigger business than to give their best to the unworthy world. We are born to soar on eagle wings not to crawl in the mud. The believer has one great occupation — to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The only possible justification for a 'job' or a 'profession' is to meet daily needs and to be able to give everything above that to the work of the Lord."

The Apostle Peter closed with this exhortation: "*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*" This exhortation was directed to Christians of this present day, especially to those who are living in these last days. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are told that they are to "look for such things."

The promise of the Lord's coming to catch His church out of this world is a part of what Paul referred to as "that blessed hope," and it is a comfort to God's people as they see Satan's world political and religious system daily gaining strength all around. When they see these present world preparations for the opening part of "the day of the Lord," they are to rejoice in the thought that "the promise of His coming" is soon to be kept.

"Be Diligent"-In These Last Days

But this expectation is not to produce a lethargy in which Christians sit back, fold their hands and simply wait for the promise to be fulfilled. They are to "be diligent" in going about the Lord's business, and the Lord's business is the spreading of the Gospel message and the teaching of the Word of God.

Remember, the reason for the Lord's long delay in keeping His promise is that "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." As they see the day approaching, they are to be even more industrious in carrying out the Lord's great commission. Even though He is "not willing that any should perish," the sad thing is that millions of those for whom He died will perish. This is not because it is the Lord's will that they go their own way, but rather it is because of their will to remain in their sins. The Lord

provided a salvation that is available as a free gift to all, but He will not force anyone to accept it. When one does perish, it is because of his own will, not the Lord's.

The Lord's people are to "be diligent that we may be found of Him (at His coming) in peace, without spot, and blameless." Christians are to live in constant fellowship with the Lord as they go about His business in this world, and this produces a peace within the hearts of believers that the world can never know. As Christians live in daily obedience to God's Word, they do "look for such things"; and they are "in peace" because they know that His shed blood has made them "without spot and blameless" in God's sight.

11.

The Epistles of Paul

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." II Peter 3:15-16.

The opening clause of this verse is Peter's final answer to the last-day scoffers who ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" He previously told them, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" And then he added, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."

God's patience and longsuffering throughout history has been with view toward the salvation of those who will turn to Him, confessing their sin and believing the message of His grace. And it is not too late, even for those last-day scoffers.

Peter continued, "Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you." Many have

missed the significance of these words from God through the Apostle Peter. Not only do they place the divine seal of authority on all the Pauline epistles, but they also provide an authentication of the Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews. There seems to be little doubt that a specific writing of Paul is in view in verse 15, even though verse 16 goes on to speak of all of Paul's epistles. And there does not seem to be any writing that could be in view other than the epistle to the Hebrews.

The opening verse of Peter's first epistle (I Peter 1:1) contains an address "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." The word translated "strangers" actually means "aliens" and it seems most likely to refer to Jewish Christians who were dispersed among the Gentiles. Peter's second epistle is addressed to the same Jewish Christians.

Now all of Paul's epistles, other than the epistle to the Hebrews, are addressed to Gentile churches and to Gentile Christians. It definitely seems that Peter had the epistle to the Hebrews in view here because that epistle deals with some of the very same material that Peter had just discussed. Supporting testimony is found in Hebrews 12:25-29.

There is little doubt that the author of the book of Hebrews was referring in this passage to the destruction of this present heaven and earth by fire and to the creation of the new heaven and the new earth as the eternal dwelling place of God's people. And Peter ascribed the words to the Apostle Paul.

In verse 16 the Apostle Peter went on to say that in the special letter to the Hebrews, "as also in all his epistles," Paul had definitely spoken of these things. Then Peter added that in these letters are "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Notice that Peter testified to the fact that at the time this second epistle was written, Paul's letters were acknowledged by all believers to be the very Word of God. Paul very likely had already gone to be with the Lord, but his epistles were all in circulation. Peter acknowledged full authority to these books, and he considered them equal to the Old Testament when he included them under the designation "Scripture."

There are many passages, particularly in the book of Hebrews, that have caused untold distress to those who have but a feeble knowledge of the remainder of God's Word.

Such passages as Hebrews 6:4-8 and Hebrews 10:26-31 have led to the destruction of the faith and testimony of literally thousands. They have allowed a shallow out-of-context interpretation to destroy their confidence in the Lord's ability to keep them unto Himself. These passages have nothing to do with the security of the believer; yet Satan has used unscriptural interpretations to bring about the "destruction" of the confident Christian walk of many.

12.

Peter's Closing Words

"Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." II Peter 3:17-18.

These words bring an end to the great Panorama of the Ages that the Apostle Peter was chosen by the Holy Spirit of God to record for God's people. In response to the prophesied mocking question of the last-day scoffers, "Where is the promise of his (the Lord Jesus Christ's) coming?" the apostle first directed his reader's attention to the fact of the supernatural creation. He then went on to remind them of God's judgment by the great flood at the time of Noah, "whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."

Next the Apostle Peter directed attention to this present world, and he assured Christians and last-day scoffers alike that "the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." He told his readers that the reason the Lord delays His coming is that He "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"; but Peter's readers are also assured that

the delay in fulfilling the promise has in no way lessened the certainty of its being fulfilled and that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."

Peter further told those who read this epistle that when "the day of the Lord" has run its course and the time has come for God's Great White Throne judgment of "ungodly men," then God's purpose for this present earth and its atmospheric heaven has been completed. Therefore, "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." But the great expectation of God's people is the eternal "day of God," when they are to live forever in the presence of God Himself. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

And now, in his final exhortation to his beloved Christian brethren, just before his eyes were closed in death and his spirit went to be with the Lord, the Apostle Peter wrote these words: "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

These are the instructions for God's people as they go about the Lord's work in these closing days of this age of grace. It is appropriate to close this study of II Peter 3 with the benediction that closed Peter's earthly testimony: "To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

The End