

Book: 2 Peter
Series: *True Faith vs. False Teaching:
Add To Your Faith, Knowledge*
Lesson 12: *A Case Study: Future Events
and False Teaching*
Text: 2 Peter 3:1-10
Date: Sunday, November 18, 2012

Colonial Hills
ABE
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

Book: 2 Peter
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Lesson 12: *A Case Study: Future Events and False Teaching*
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TEACHING TIP

I hope there is enough application and discussion starters for you. Our passage contains the more pointed application for believers in verses 11-18, which is our study next week.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

2 Peter 3:11-18 – *A Case Study: Future Events and True Faith*

INTRODUCTION

For the past couple of years around Thanksgiving, the city of Indianapolis has hosted a talent show for Hoosiers across our state. This is a localized version of the more popular America Idol and America's Got Talent. These kind of talent shows have become an international phenomenon, with spin-offs in well over 30 countries.

I was recently watching one of these shows featuring six contestants who were all under the age of 20. Before his or her audition, each performer was asked a question along the lines of, "How much does this opportunity mean to you?" or "What would it mean for you to move on to the next round?" Their answers evidenced silliness and idolatry (e.g., "I've waited my whole life for this"), which were highlighted by the emotional (even angry) turmoil that flooded out of those who were eliminated. As you watched their exit interviews, it was disturbing to realize that for some of them, their world really had just come crashing down around them, their dreams had been shattered, and their lives had been ruined.

If only those individuals could have known what fate awaited them on the talent show, they could have at least better prepared for or avoided altogether what was certainly one of the worst days of their lives.

Lest we waste our lives in a perhaps less silly but just as serious manner, God has provided us with a certain glimpse of the future so that we might know what to expect and how to prepare accordingly.

In typical Petrine fashion, Peter returns to the basics in the first two verses of chapter 3. These two verses reinforce a suspicion that had been growing throughout our study in chapter 2—that the simplest lesson so far in our 2 Peter series was indeed the most important and foundational lesson for believers to grasp. That lesson covered 2 Peter 1:12-15. We entitled it *Our Remembered Faith* and studied it under the heading, “the ministry of memory.” In that passage, we discovered where to start in strengthening ourselves and others so that we are increasing, useful, and fruitful in godliness (chapter 1, cf. vv. 8-11) and not unstable souls who are easily deceived and destroyed (chapter 2, cf. vv. 14, 18)—in short, we strengthen ourselves by remembering truth.

Notice that Peter again returns to that theme here in chapter 3—(lit.) “Now this second letter¹ I am writing to you, beloved, in which, by [way of] a reminder, I am arousing your sincere mind² to remember...” (cf. 1:13). Peter is burdened that his readers specifically remember both the predictions (lit. “words spoken before”) of “the holy prophets” (cf. 1 Peter 1:25) and the command of “the Lord and Savior” Jesus Christ as spoken through “the apostles” (cf. 2 Peter 2:21).

From what Peter has written in the first two chapters of this epistle, we can already surmise how false teaching and true faith might respectively deal with those predictions and precepts. But just before he signs off, Peter removes all doubt and uses a specific case study³—the prediction of Jesus’ return—to demonstrate the response of false teaching (3:1-10) and true faith

(3:11-18) to that particular truth. This week, we’ll consider the response of false teachers to Christ’s second coming, and we’ll see illustrated specifically what we learned generally in chapter 2.

THEY DISOBEY GOD’S PRECEPTS (v. 3).

In verse 3 we are reintroduced to the false teachers, this time labeled “scoffers.” They “come in the last days” and have two distinguishing characteristics.

1. *They have an ungodly attitude.*

The word for “scoff” means “to mock or to ridicule” and is intensified in the Greek by use of a cognate dative which literally renders it “scoffers in their scoffing” (hence trans. “blatant scoffers” in the NET). One lexicon fleshes out the idea a bit more with this definition: “to make fun of someone by pretending that he is not what he is or by imitating him in a distorted manner.”⁴



With that definition in mind, how might they mock Christians or the Bible (i.e., represent in a false manner or imitate in a distorted manner)? *open discussion*

2. *They have ungodly actions.*

In 2:10, these false teachers were described as those who are (lit.) “walking behind [their] flesh in the lust of corruption.” The same word “walking” is used here in verse 3 to reiterate that idea—(lit.) “scoffers...who are walking according to their own lusts.” In chapter 2, we saw in detail the debauchery that comes when lust is added to deception. This small phrase alludes to all that.

So, rather than “be[ing] mindful...of the commandment of...the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (v. 2), they disobey those precepts. They’ve rejected the Lordship of Jesus (2:1) and submitted to the mastery of their own flesh.

So, at this point, we haven't even seen how they actually respond to the particular doctrine in view (i.e., Jesus' return). Rather, we've only considered the lens through which they view that doctrine or the way in which they approach that truth. But, as we will see, their starting point is certainly going to affect how they respond to that Biblical teaching.

Transition: While it is true that what we do is usually driven by what we believe, the inverse can be true as well. Sometimes, we have already chosen something so strongly that we seek some kind of explanation to justify ourselves. This is what these scoffers do according to verses 4-7—they not only disobey God's precepts; they also disbelieve God's prediction.

THEY DISBELIEVE GOD'S PREDICTION (vv. 4-7).

These scoffing false teachers have already chosen a path that Biblical history reveals to warrant destruction—the "if...then" conditional sentence of 2:4-10a listed four accounts of God rescuing the righteous and condemning the ungodly. That same Biblical revelation also proclaims that the same pattern will be true in the future—Jesus will come again and with Him is righteous judgment. These false teachers don't like that doctrine; they understandably don't like the idea of that destination; but they are unwilling to give up their path. Therefore, they rewrite theology and believe a lie; but that never changes the truth or its effects.

In this case study, they recognize that the doctrine of Jesus' second coming spells trouble for them in light of their disobedience. Rather than repent and be forgiven, they add deception to their debauchery in an attempt to excuse it.⁵ They elevate reason over revelation, physical observation over biblical meditation, excuse over confession; they conclude that His promised coming⁶ is a hoax. After all, all they've physically observed ever since that promise is that their ancestors have died and "all things continue [or remain] as they were [lit. *thusly*] from

the beginning of the creation" (v. 4). In other words, they would teach, "We've never seen any deviation from the normal pattern; therefore, we don't believe that there ever will be a deviation."⁷

Interestingly, Peter already demonstrated in chapter 2 that their logic works against them (i.e., God's practice has always been to punish the ungodly and rescue the righteous, and He won't deviate from that—cf. 2:9). But they are blinded to their own irrationality. Verse 5 tells us that in their hearts, they've already set their course in stone, and therefore "they willingly are ignorant of" the truth. Although the original language is a bit difficult here,⁸ most translations recognize that the combination of the verbs *lanthano* (lit. "escape notice") and *thelo* (lit. "to want, will, wish") express the idea that they "deliberately suppress this fact" (NET; cf. KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV). So, in stark contrast to Peter's desire to "stir up [their] pure minds by way of remembrance," these false teachers and scoffers purposefully reject and forget the truth.

This new theology wipes away their accountability to a imminently returning Lord and excuses their disobedience against His precepts. Verses 5-7 enunciate two aspects of their willful disbelief in God's prediction.

1. ***They discount God's Word about the past, even though it is fact (vv. 5-6).***


From those "words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" (v. 2) in the Old Testament (words which are reliable—cf. 1:16-21), we learned about how God created the world—(lit.) "by the word of God, the heavens were from long ago and an earth was formed out of water and through water" (v. 5). We also read in the Old Testament about God's first great judgment through the global flood—(lit.) "by which [the water and God's Word⁹] the world then was destroyed, having been flooded with water" (v. 6).

God's spoken word was the instrument both for Creation and the Flood, and His written Word is the record of it. These historical and reliable (cf. 1:16-21) facts are "deliberately suppressed" (NET) and "willingly ignored" (KJV) by these scoffers. They completely discount the Biblical history of God's powerful word both to create and to destroy; but their denial of it doesn't make it any less true. It does, however, form their basis for denying God's Word about the future.


2. They deny God's Word about the future, even though it is fact (v. 7).

According to verse 7, not only does Scripture provide us with God's record of history, but it also furnishes us with His promises about the future—(lit.) "but now the heavens and the earth, by the same word, are being reserved for fire, being kept under guard [cf. 2:4, 9, 17] for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." So, just as God's word was powerful enough to create and then to destroy (by water) in the distant past, His word will once again enact a final judgment (by fire) in the future upon the ungodly people described throughout this book. God's reliable written Word records the true history of the former event, and it predicts the certain (i.e., "reserved...kept under guard") happening of the latter event.

Obviously, God's Word creates some major problems for these scoffers. Nonetheless, because they've already repudiated Jesus as their Master, they simply disbelieve His message, too. They elevate their own word over God's. Again, however, their denial of it does nothing to make it untrue, as we will clearly see in verse 10.

 **Application:** Do believers conveniently overlook or callously reject parts of God's Word that should bring conviction and change, so that they can continue to coddle pet sins? In what ways have you seen this? *open discussion*

In what way(s) are you currently doing this?

 These scoffers completely repudiate the authority of God's Word as they have already repudiated the authority of God Himself over their lives. How, then, do you possibly combat these false teachers? *All we can do is stand for and faithfully proclaim the clear, reliable truth of God's Word, asking Him to use it in all of its full power to stabilize those under our watch and silence those who oppose from the outside (Titus 1:9-11); we don't have to condemn them—that's God's responsibility—but He does call us to repudiate them with truth.*

Transition: When it comes to this specific doctrine of Jesus' second coming, these false teachers disobey God's precepts, excuse that by disbelieving God's prediction, and thirdly aggravate that by disregarding God's plan.

THEY DISREGARD GOD'S PLAN (vv. 8-9).

Since they have repudiated God's Word as being of any value to give them a proper understanding of what they see going on round about them, these scoffers have simply interpreted their relatively predictable existence (i.e., "all things continue as they were") to undermine the predictions of Scripture (i.e., that Jesus is coming again in judgment). This tragically causes them to miss¹⁰ the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. They miss God's unique person.

Peter picks up on Moses' declaration in Psalm 90:4 ("For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night") when he writes in verse 8, "a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord, and a thousand years are like a single day" (NET). MacArthur explains:

What may seem like a long time to believers, like a thousand years, is actually short, like one day, in God's

sight. In context, Peter is contending that, while Christ's return may seem far off to human beings, it is imminent from God's perspective. Finite people must not confine an infinite God to their time schedule. The Lord Jesus Christ will return at the exact moment determined by God in eternity past. Those who foolishly demand that God operate according to their time frame ignore that He is the "High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity" (Isa. 57:15, nkjv). Similarly, those who argue that Christ will not return because He has not yet returned demonstrate the height of folly.¹¹

2. They miss God's unique patience.

The very reason for such a "long" delay in Jesus' return is now clearly stated in verse 9—(lit.) "The Lord is not delaying His promise, as some regard delay, but is being patient toward you, [because He is]¹² not wishing [for] any to perish, but [for] all to come into repentance." In other words, Jesus and humans think quite differently about this future timeline. The scoffers consider the delay to indicate that there never will be a judgment; others simply conclude that God is loitering, perhaps out of a lack of ability, forgetfulness, or apathy. This verse goes behind the scenes and shows that God has the same kind of sovereign control over the timing of Jesus' second coming as He did His first (cf. Galatians 4:4).

But this verse does far more than just remind us of God's sovereignty; it preaches to us of God's patience. God is delaying his judgment so that people—even ungodly scoffers and debauched false teachers—have an opportunity to respond in saving repentance (cf. 3:15).¹³

The term for "patient" here is a picturesque term:

It is a compound word combining "large" with "great anger." Peter used it here to show that God has a vast capacity for storing up anger and wrath before it spills

over in judgment (cf. Ex. 34:6; Joel 2:13; Matt. 18:23–27; Rom. 2:4; 9:22). While that judgment is inescapable and deadly, God's merciful patience beforehand gives the chosen the opportunity for reconciliation and salvation (see 3:15).¹⁴

This patience of God has always been emphasized throughout Scripture. In Ezekiel 18:32, God exclaimed, "'For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,' saith the Lord God, 'Wherefore turn yourselves and live'" (cf. Jeremiah 13:17; Matthew 23:37). God is proving His loving and gracious patience by extending the opportunity for these great enemies of His to "come to repentance"—a gift that He must indeed grant (2 Peter 1:1; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25), but that He has been drawing unto throughout this entire epistle (cf. 3:15).¹⁵



Application: What application does verse 15 clearly provide for believers in light of today's text? *Believers need to "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation" and use it as a window to spread God's patient invitation, knowing (1) that some will respond (cf. Romans 2:4), and (2) that the window will not be open forever.*

3. They miss God's unique pardon.

Because these false teachers have rejected God's Word as reliable and authoritative, they miss its message of patience and pardon. Through "repentance," they could have experienced "salvation" (3:15). Instead, they will "perish" as our final point emphasizes.

Transition: The progression of deception that we learned of in chapter 2 is evident in this case study of Jesus' return. False teachers disobey God's precepts, disbelieve His predictions, disregard His plan, and therefore discover God's punishment.

THEY DISCOVER GOD'S PUNISHMENT (v. 10).

Verse 10 describes this punishment: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in...which [day] the heavens shall [disappear] with a great noise,¹⁶ and the elements [i.e., either the basic atomic components or the celestial bodies (Isaiah 34:4)] shall melt [lit. be destroyed] with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up [or, exposed].” The Bible uses the phrase “the day of the Lord” to signify “the extraordinary, miraculous interventions of God in human history for the purpose of judgment, culminating in His final judgment of the wicked on earth and the destruction of the present universe.”¹⁷ At least two points should be reviewed here.

1. *God's punishment is imminent.*

God's final punishment upon those who reject His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be as unexpected and disastrous as the arrival of a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Therefore, Jesus Himself instructed His listeners concerning how they should respond (Matthew 24:36-44):

But of that day and hour knoweth no man—no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 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, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and [they] knew not until the flood came and took them all away. So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore, for ye know not [at] what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

2. *God's punishment is inclusive.*

Our text very clearly details the final great judgment of God in which “heaven and earth shall pass away” (Matthew 24:35). No one will escape these events.

As some modern translations show by way of their rendering, there is a question regarding the wording of the final phrase of verse 10—should it be “the earth and its works will be burned up” or “the earth and its works will be exposed”? The best Greek manuscripts use the Greek word *heurisko*, meaning “to find or discover,” and this more difficult reading probably explains the numerous variants discovered in other manuscripts. The NET Bible (also ESV, NIV) prefers going with this basic sense and explains,

The meaning of the term is virtually the equivalent of “will be disclosed,” “will be manifested.”...Thus, the force of the clause is that “the earth and the works [done by men] in it will be stripped bare [before God].”...The meaning of the text then is that all but the earth and men's works will be destroyed. Everything will be removed so that humanity will stand naked before God.¹⁸

Illustration: At the Creation Museum in Petersburg, KY, you can watch a planetarium show called Created Cosmos. Throughout that presentation, you begin to zoom away from earth and you are quickly overwhelmed by earth's miniscule status amidst the vastness of space and the largeness of some of her other celestial bodies. At one point, you see the entire Milky Way galaxy in front of you, and earth is nowhere near visible; it's lost amidst all the millions of other planets and stars. The same reality is even more stunning when the show zooms out to picture the entire known universe. 2 Peter 3:10 seems to picture a day in which all those other billions of heavenly bodies will be obliterated, and hanging strikingly obvious in the

midst of that black canvas will be only earth and her people. There will be no hiding, as all mankind recognizes that we have met our Maker!

“At the moment, mockers may ridicule and false teachers may scoff. But their disparaging comments and outright insults are only short-lived. One day, Christ will return and God’s judgment will be displayed” (cf. Psalm 2, esp. v. 12)¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Unless these scoffers repent, they will indeed discover that God’s promises are sure, when they reap the final destruction of their path of deception and debauchery. True believers need to be faithful in the ministry of memory so the Spirit of God can use the Word of God and its message of the future to bring understanding about God’s patient delay in the present. In this way, lives won’t be wasted, but saved, even among those scoffers and false teachers who are, as of yet, still unprepared for the final destiny of their path.

ENDNOTES

¹ The first letter is obviously 1 Peter.

² The word here is *eilikrine* which comes from *heile*, meaning “the shining of the sun” and *krino*, meaning “to judge.” The idea, then, is that their minds or their thinking about themselves as believers was “sincere, pure, unsullied, free from spot or blemish to such a degree as to bear examination in the full splendor of the sun” (WSDNT).

³ He introduces this case study with the phrase, “knowing this principally,” the same phrase he used in 1:20.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 434.

⁵ Notice again, that this is a different progression than what we’ve previously seen. In chapter 2, we noticed that many false teachers started with deception, to which lust, debauchery, and eventual destruction were added. Here, some false teachers delight in debauchery so much, that they then add deception to it in order to justify it. Whatever the starting point is, it is evident that deception and debauchery go hand in hand. The solution, of course, is obvious and simple—truth and godliness (chapter 1).

⁶ The literal rendering, “the promise of His coming,” is best taken as an attributed genitive in which it being modified by its preceding noun—“His promised coming.”

⁷ “In modern times, that view is known as uniformitarianism. Contending that the present is the key to the past, uniformitarianism asserts that the only natural processes that have ever operated in the past are the same processes at work today. It categorically denies divine intervention throughout world history, most notably opposing both six-day creation and the global Flood” (John F. MacArthur, Jr., *2 Peter and Jude*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005], 114).

⁸ “The Greek is difficult at this point. An alternative is ‘Even though they maintain this, it escapes them that ...’ Literally the idea seems to be: ‘For this escapes these [men] who wish [it to be so]’” (NET Bible note #17 in verse 5).

⁹ “The antecedent is ambiguous. It could refer to the heavens, the heavens and earth, or the water and the word. If the reference is to the heavens, the author is reflecting on the Genesis account about ‘the floodgates of the heavens’ being opened (Gen 7:11). If the reference is to the heavens and earth, he is also thinking about the cosmic upheaval that helped to produce the flood (Gen 6:11). If the reference is to the water and the word, he is indicating both the means (water) and the cause (word of God). This last interpretation is the most likely since the final nouns of v. 5 [in the Greek] are ‘water’ and ‘word of God,’ making them the nearest antecedents” (NET Bible note #20 in verse 6).

¹⁰ In verse 8, Peter uses the same word he used in verse 5 for “suppress” or “overlook” or “ignore” or “escape notice.” Now he’s warning believers to not have the same response to biblical revelation that the scoffers had (lit. “this one thing must not escape your notice, beloved”).

¹¹ MacArthur, 121-22.

¹² The participle “not wishing” is best taken as causal.

¹³ “Grk “reach to repentance.” Repentance thus seems to be a quantifiable state, or turning point. The verb *χωρέω* (*chōreō*, ‘reach’) typically involves the connotation of ‘obtain the full measure of’ something. It is thus most appropriate as referring to the repentance that accompanies conversion” (NET Bible note #26 in verse 9).

¹⁴ MacArthur, 122. “Of course, once all of the elect are accounted for, God’s patience will run out. Having given the world as much time as He has sovereignly determined, God will pour out

His wrath upon the earth. While His patience currently holds back His judgment, the time of grace that mankind now enjoys, however long it seems by human standards, will not last forever (cf. Gen. 6:3)” (Ibid., 123).

¹⁵ “The answer to this conundrum [between the Arminian and Calvinist interpretation of this verse] is found in the term ‘wish’ (a participle in Greek from the verb *boulomai*). It often represents a mere wish, or one’s desiderative will, rather than one’s resolve. Unless God’s will is viewed on the two planes of his desiderative and decretive will (what he desires and what he decrees), hopeless confusion will result. The scriptures amply illustrate both that God sometimes decrees things that he does not desire and desires things that he does not decree. It is not that his will can be thwarted, nor that he has limited his sovereignty. But the mystery of God’s dealings with humanity is best seen if this tension is preserved. Otherwise, either God will be perceived as good but impotent or as a sovereign taskmaster. Here the idea that God does not wish for any to perish speaks only of God’s desiderative will, without comment on his decretive will” (NET Bible note #25 in verse 9).

¹⁶ “Or ‘hissing sound,’ ‘whirring sound,’ ‘rushing sound,’ or ‘loud noise.’ The [onomatopoetic] word [Gk. *rhoizedon*] occurs only here in the NT. It was often used of the crackle of a fire, as would appear appropriate in this context” (NET Bible note #29 in verse 10).

¹⁷ MacArthur, 123.

¹⁸ NET Bible note #34 in verse 10.

¹⁹ MacArthur, 125.