

2 Peter 3:1-10 – Living in the last days

1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

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This is a letter from a friend, verse 1. He has written to warn us about sin and judgment – but not to scare us. He is trying to remind us; to stir us up again so that we can walk in the light and in the truth. It is too easy for us to grow lazy and tired. We begin to forget; we begin to doubt and fear. He is reminding us of what the prophets wrote long ago, and what the Lord Jesus, our precious Saviour, taught himself and by his prophets. Now he wants to remind us about the Day of the Lord, so that we can be ready.

The Last Days

Verse 3 speaks of “the last days”. When is this? It is not talking about the very last years or months of history. It is not what people call “the end times”. That is not the way that the apostles used those words. The apostles were all Jews, who believed the Old Testament. In the way that Jews saw history, the “last days” meant the whole time of the Messiah's reign over the world. It is the time when he claimed his kingdom. The Bible tells us (Matthew 28:18, Hebrews 1:3) that Jesus is now reigning over the nations after his death and resurrection. This whole age – the whole time since he rose – is the “last days”; it is the final part of God's plan for history. We can see this in Hebrews 1:2 and in James 5:3 – both writers told their readers, 2000 years ago, that they were living in the “last days”. We are living now at the climax of history, because Jesus is reigning and he is teaching the nations – after he has finished that work, there is nothing left to happen except his return. We should not listen to those who claim to know that the day or hour is near and that it will be in our lifetimes. They do not know that. Jesus said (v10) that the day would come like a thief (verse 10) – it will not be announced before.

Scoffers

During these times, there will be scoffers – people who laugh at the truth, and laugh at Christians. Nobody likes to be laughed at. But why do they laugh? Verse 3 tells us – it is because they love to do evil. They are looking for excuses for their behaviour. They want to persuade themselves that there is no God, and no judgment. They say, “Where is this coming? Everything carries on just the same, day after day.” Because they have seen nothing, therefore they believe in nothing. But how foolish! Did you ever see Kenyatta? Have you seen China? Have you seen your grandfather's grandfather? And yet we know all these exist, without seeing them. Verse 4 – the mockers say that everything just carries on its own way; God does not intervene in the world. Yet they forget that God did intervene once in a great and powerful way to show his judgment. He flooded the earth (Genesis 6-8) with water and destroyed the old world. Where did the world come from? It may seem to just go on by itself – but it could not make itself. God's word made it, and God's word keeps it going now; ready for the final judgment. The scoffers say that the time is too long. If there is any God, then he has abandoned or forgotten the world. That is not true. God's ways are not our ways. He is patient. He does not forget, and his promises do not run out. The truth is that in his kindness, he is giving people time to repent. Judgment is certain, but now there is still time for mercy. Have you repented? Do not think that you can wait forever!

Fiery judgment

A day for judgment has been set – not by water, but by fire. It will be sudden and unannounced, verse 10 – just like a thief comes in the night. It will be devastating and total – everything will be covered by it. It will be the “day of the Lord” - the day when he alone rules, and he alone judges, and he puts everything right. How can we be ready for that day? Only by repenting, v9. When Jesus died on the cross, he took the awesome judgment of God against his people upon himself. He died under that anger, so that we could be forgiven and saved. It is easy to mock, and to laugh at the serious things of life. But deep down, we know that we must give an answer to God – and only repentance will do. We should not live as if this world is forever – but we should wait patiently for God to complete all his purposes in his own time. We should live as those who know that the day is coming.