

12,1,22 2 Pet. 3:10-13, Facing the Reality of the End of this Age

The first statement in 2 Pet. 3:10 refers to “the day of the Lord”. So, before we examine what Peter is going to say about this, we need to be clear on exactly what that “day” is, otherwise the second part of this verse might be confusing. Here’s the whole verse;

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

Most commentators say the ‘day of the Lord’ is either the rapture or the Tribulation; but the rapture is not a judgment, it’s a deliverance, and the Tribulation is definitely a time of judgement, but the heavens do not pass away with a great noise during the Tribulation.

Without going into all the Old Testament references to this (there are many), what we need to be aware of is that, as this author explains it,

“The Old Testament passages dealing with the day of the Lord often convey a sense of imminence, nearness, and expectation: ‘Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! (Isaiah 13:6); ‘For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near’ (Ezekiel 30:3); ‘Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand’ (Joel 2:1).”

This holds true in the New Testament also in the sense that the day of the Lord is referring to something that is eschatological, in that it’s related to the end time. It is also a time of reckoning and judgment. We can see that in the context of the Old Testament references, and that is totally consistent with Peter’s use of this in our passage in 2 Pet. 3:10.

The only way to really understand Peter’s reference is to realize that the time Peter is predicting has very specific characteristics which are also supported by Paul’s description of this in 2 Thess. 2:1-4;

“We ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of the Lord had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

And Paul, like Peter, says that this day will come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2).

So, when we combine the information we get from both Peter and Paul, here’s what we see;

- 1) It’s a time of judgment
- 2) It happens at the end of the age
- 3) The man of sin (the Antichrist) is revealed and, as we saw in our study of Revelation, he enters the temple in Jerusalem and claims to be God
- 4) It’s preceded by the falling away
- 5) It involves the destruction of the current heavens and earth by fire

There’s more, but to stay in the context of 2 Peter, we can now see how a “day” that comes at the end of this age bringing judgment to the nations and the appearance of the Antichrist during the Tribulation also includes the destruction of the heavens and earth at the end of the millennium. For all the elements to happen that Paul and Peter say will be included, the day of the Lord has to stretch from the beginning of the Tribulation to the end of the Millennial Kingdom. And the only way that’s possible is if the day of the Lord is 1007 years long.

This also makes sense simply based of the title given to it – the day *of the Lord*. Following the rapture of the Church, Christ moves into direct judgment of the earth during the Tribulation; He reigns over the restored creation for 1000 years and after destroying the rebellion of humanity at the end of that time, He creates a new heavens and new earth as He moves everything into the eternal state of the new creation.

Peter tells us that this period of time comes “as a thief in the night” and ends 1007 years later with “the heavens passing away with a great noise, and the elements melting with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

So, now, what do we know about the description of the arrival of this day as coming as a thief in the night? If we are commanded in numerous passages to know when the return of the Lord will happen, how can it be the kind of surprise we would expect from a thief at night?

Paul clears this up for us in 1 Thess. 5:1-7;

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the

Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. . ."

Remember, Paul is talking about the day of the Lord when sudden destruction comes, he's not talking about the rapture in this passage, which is the deliverance of the Church to pave the way for the destruction that will follow.

After the Church is removed and the world experiences unprecedented chaos as a result, the Antichrist will bring 'peace and safety' to a confused and terrified world. At some point after that, the Lord will bring 'sudden destruction' like labor pains by pounding the earth with the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments we looked at in our study of Revelation.

As we draw near to that time, the world is divided into three groups of people that Paul and Peter discuss in their prophetic writings;

- 1) The unbelieving world, for whom the day will come as a complete shock
- 2) The majority of Christians who will have fallen away and for whom the timing of all this will also be totally unknown
- 3) A remnant of believers in the last generation who are *very* aware of how close we are because they have been examining the signs God has given and they have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

Categories 1 & 2 are either spiritually dead or spiritually asleep – only the third group is spiritually awake and hopefully preparing to meet the Lord when He comes.

Before we move further in Peter's letter, I want to share something I came across that can help us make sure we are in the third group. It's a commentary on John 15:4 which says,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me."

Here's what the commentary said,

“God has chosen us from the foundation of the world in Christ. He has selected One in whom we shall find Him, and in whom alone we shall find Him. All the forces of hell will be at work, in the first place, to keep us out of Christ. They rage to prevent people coming into Christ, and when once they have come in, these forces are unceasing and relentless in their efforts to get them off the ground of Christ, on to *things* possibly, or on to any other ground. There is an immense meaning in Christ's word: ‘Abide in Me... except ye abide in Me... (John 15:4). It is a warning. Where and how shall we find God? Only on the line of Christ, where Christ's interests are the object of our being here, where it is true ‘For me to live is Christ’ (Philippians 1:21). You find the Lord there. Get off that ground, be driven off, be allured off, and you lose that abiding with the Lord. It is there, on that ground, that the explanation of the Christian life is found. It is on that line that the very purpose for which we are created will have its out-working. It is on that line that we shall find Divine guidance.

This Divine law of God's way has many practical applications in the life of the Christian. How many spiritual tragedies have been brought about by human selectiveness apart from the first and supreme interest of Christ. It might be the choice of residence, church, location, for instance, for reasons of convenience, pleasure, escape, or seeming necessity. No less a question than having the Lord with us is bound up with such choices and decisions. We cannot move off the Lord's ground without the consequence of spiritual disaster. Christ is the Way, the Directive; and He is the Example. How meticulously careful He was not to move or be moved by *any* consideration but the directive of the Father! Many motives were put to Him for action and movement, but He abided in the Father, and, often at great cost, refused all other considerations.”

I think he does a good job of showing that ultimately this is our test; this is what our Lord called “first love” or “priority love” in Rev. 2. At some point in our Christian journey, we are going to have to determine whether it will be those around us that direct our lives, decisions and actions, or whether it will exclusively be the Lord regardless of the cost to us personally.

In verses 11-13 Peter begins a discussion on the implications of God's destruction of this present creation.

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Commentators seem to disagree on the meaning of vs. 12 “hastening the coming of the day of God.” But it seems to me that the verses before and after vs. 12 give us Peter’s meaning for this.

But first, the phrase, “looking for” literally means “to expect, watch for, wait for” which as Wuest explains it, “adds the idea of ‘mental direction’”. So, Peter is running with the assumption that there will be a generation of believers who are aware that they are the last generation of the Age and are expecting the Lord’s return, so much so, that all their ‘mental direction’ is focused on that event.

There are three editors of a respected Greek lexicon who all agree with the meaning of “hastening” (Vincent, Trench and Alford); here’s their conclusion;

“Hastening is causing the day of the Lord to come more quickly by helping to fulfil those conditions without which it cannot come; that day being no specific day inexorably fixed, but one, the arrival of which, it is free to the church to hasten on by faith, life and prayer.”

This whole concept of hastening the day of the Lord is too important to just define and move on. What Peter said about this is filled with implications that we need to review so we will know what “those conditions” are and so we can see whether we are personally involved in helping to make those conditions happen.

We’ll start with that which is external and then we’ll move to the internal, spiritual life of the individual believer. So, here are some of the external things that must happen before the Day of the Lord - and before the rapture, since the rapture immediately precedes that Day. Since we’ve covered these before, I won’t take time to elaborate on each one, but I’ll include passages in the notes so you can study more on this if you want.

- 1) The regathering of Israel to their land (Ezek. 36:24-25; 37:1-14; Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 16:14-15; Matt. 24:32-34).
- 2) The two “until(s)” of Eph. 4:13 & Rom. 11:25

- 3) The apostasy of the Church (2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:4,7; 4:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:3-4)
- 4) The stages and history of the Church as prophesied in Rev. chapters 2 & 3 must run their course. The rapture can't happen until all 7 stages of church history have been completed – including the last stage, Laodicea.
- 5) The purification of the remnant (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-13; Heb. 12:26-27)

That last one moves us into the internal, spiritual work of the Spirit in the Body of Christ. Our focus, as individual believers, must be on the part we play in helping the Church to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, the final ingathering of the Gentiles and the purification of the remnant.

All three of those things are what we might call the fruit or outcome of spiritual advance, because a Christian who is increasing in spiritual maturity will automatically be involved to some extent in all these things.

And we can bottom line this even further by remembering that it's those who lose their lives that find life in Christ and glorify Him at the end of this Age.

Let's look at some of the implications of that. This is an extended quote by Sparks where he ties together much of what we've talked about, but also stresses the outcome of setting our lives aside for the Lord;

“Now I come to the more difficult part of what I have on my heart to say, but it is here that the great practical implication of things is to be recognized. I wonder how many of you have really looked into and investigated the nature and source of what is happening on the earth today?

“To spiritual observers the time in which we live is, in spite of all the terrible events, almost fascinating in the uncovering development which is taking place. The true nature of things which have been powerfully working for a very long time by deception is now becoming clear to all except those who are gross in their blindness, or whose blindness is due to some grossness in their natures. The one thing which most people recognize about the present situation is its spiritual nature. That is to say, that it is not merely political and natural rivalries, but that it is inspired by deep and mighty spiritual forces related to human life and destiny with a meaning infinitely transcending questions of material gains and possessions.

“The very being and nature of God is involved in this situation. So also, is His Son, His Word, the Church, and Christianity. But I want to get down more

deeply to the nature of things, and to uncover the issues which lie behind this conflict which is now so much nearer consummation. Let it be fully realized that this thing that has risen up out of the earth is not something new. Many seem to think that it is something which has sprung into being in the last few years, the fountain-head of which is human. But it is not so. The thing itself is traceable back through all the centuries and lies at the root of all the conflict between heaven and hell. It has now, in the present phase, been precipitated in a definite and deliberate declaration of ideas.

“This present phase is the final one. Some things are certain. All that is happening is clearly heading up to the whole world coming under a single rule. It is only a very short time now when the whole face of the world will change again, this time in the form of a world government.

“Here we are, as never in the history of this world, locked in these desperate issues of spiritual and natural conflict and deception. Do you understand why it is necessary that we should be purified? In other words, do you understand why it is necessary that God should get a people in this earth who are separated unto Himself from all that realm of nature where Satan's strength is, where God's purpose is opposed?

“Satan has always sought to mix and corrupt and pollute the life of the saints, to get into the people of God a mixture of life, a mixture of energy, a mixture of things in this world to break down the clear mark between what is of God, and what is not of God, what is of Christ and what is the old Adam.

“What I have been saying is not fiction or imagination. It is true; there are all the evidences of it. It is the fruit of a doctrine, and it is a doctrine which is a counterfeit of God's own thought concerning the saints, the Church, the elect, the people begotten of Himself, sharing His own life.

“Very often the Spirit cannot come in and precipitate issues because we are not clear-cut enough as to what this whole thing is about. It is about nothing less than Christ's heirship of all things. Get that in and the Holy Spirit will come with tremendous support.

“We make the issue so much less; usually what the *individual* is going to get as the benefit of coming to the Lord Jesus instead of primarily the rights of the Lord Jesus Himself. Proclaim Him as Lord and the Holy Spirit will set His seal to that. That is always His ground. So, the Spirit is committed to calling according to purpose and sealing those who respond, conforming them to

the image of God's Son, and of guiding them into all the truth related to God's purpose. That is Christ's place.

"The work of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ absolutely Lord in every detail of our lives. It is something, not to go and worry about, make the stuff of introspection, and all that sort of thing, but to recognize that God is doing this. He is emptying us, devastating our soul-life, to make way for being filled with Christ. There is a deep work going on from heaven by the Spirit of God in this whole creation to bring Christ into absolute ascendancy in all things."

Now, Sparks said a lot in that, but for us, if we can simply get anchored in the idea that it must be "no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" we get to the heart of what God is after in us.

A great deal of what this is all about is scattered throughout the Bible under the term "overcomer" or "remnant". Here's how one author put it;

"I am quite sure that there will be very few who will not agree that this is the time in which this is the most important matter to consider; for if there is one thing pressing upon us more than another, it is the question of overcoming in a day like this. . . the overcomer is the one that is standing for the fullest thought of God when that thought has been let go by the majority. It is essential for us to know exactly what the overcomer is."

I remember vividly when we went through this principle of the overcomer in Rev. 2 & 3, I received a large number of emails from people worried about how their own weaknesses and failure would affect their status in this regard. I'm going to share something on that, that I wish I'd come across when we were in Revelation. It would have been helpful for all of us struggling with that question. I don't know who wrote it (it sounds like Watchman Nee), but here's what he said;

"The Lord says, "I have found David, a man after my heart." How can this be? Look at David and his sin with Uriah. Look at David numbering Israel and bringing devastation upon the whole nation. Yes, look again at David in weakness bring back Absalom the murderer, without any repentance on the part of the murderer, purely on the ground of natural affection, overlooking a more important responsibility. Is this a man after God's own heart? These are the failures and weaknesses of the man, but right at the heart of that man there is something God sees which remains all through his life. This

man has an eager, consuming jealousy for the Lord's interests. Therefore, he is a man after God's heart."

So, as I said earlier, the overcomer is not a super saint, he may have weaknesses and failures, but in his heart, his greatest desire is to contribute in some way, however small, to the highest and fullest of all that God is after no matter the personal cost. It's like a short poem I shared a couple years ago;

"My goal is God Himself.
Not joy, nor even blessing,
But Himself, my God.
Tis His to lead me there,
Not mine, but His;
At any cost, dear Lord
By any road."

The overcomer is the one who glorifies God in the final generation. They are the Christians in every country who have gone on with the Lord when others have settled for status quo.

They care more about Christ than about anything or anyone else in this life, including and especially themselves.

Their one desire is to know Christ, to learn how to live by His indwelling life, and to see Him honored in everything.

We all fail, but not all believers have these desires and goals driving their attempts to move forward in pursuit of them.

Ok, that's as much time as I want to spend on all that's implied in you and I committing to "hasten the day of the Lord". If what we've just seen is where our heart is, God will make sure that in some measure, we are taking part in that hastening process as this Age winds down.

Let's take a closer look at part of 2 Pet. 3:10

"The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

These verses have some elements in it that I would never have noticed, or even looked for, if Jerusha hadn't given me a head's up on this. So, give me a minute to get technical on the terms Peter uses and then I'll explain what they imply.

First, the heavens are the visible heavens surrounding the earth; not heaven as where God lives – He’s not destroying His own home.

“Pass away with great noise”. Heibert said that “the roaring of a devouring fire may likely have been utmost in Peter’s mind.” Other meanings that the original attaches to this noise are “the whistling of an arrow”, “the rush of wings” and “the hissing of a snake”.

“Elements will melt with fervent heat.” Again, from Heibert, “As applied to material things, it meant the elemental substances that constitute matter.” And this is where it gets interesting. This is by another commentator;

“This is the only known instance of the term to denote the burning of inanimate objects and suggests that the term may perhaps be intended to denote a conflagration arising *from internal heat*. Subjected to this heat, the elements are loosened and broken up into their component parts. The physical structure of the present world will disintegrate.”

As we know now, based on 20th century scientific discovery, within every element, at its core, is a source of immense heat. Split the atom and see what happens. It’s as if creation itself has a built-in mechanism for self-destruction by “internal, fervent heat.”

Even the prediluvian world which was destroyed by water had to draw from water beneath the surface as well as from the sky to complete the destruction.

Another interesting thing in this context is “the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” In *this* verse, “burned up” has nothing to do with fire. The Greek word means to be “discovered”, “exposed”, or “laid bare”. This part of the final judgment of the earth is focused more on the exposure of the “works” of man than on the physical destruction of the elements. Here are three passages that support this idea;

(1 Cor. 4:5) “Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.”

(Matt. 12:35-37) “The good man brings good things out of his good store of treasure, and the evil man brings evil things out of his evil store of treasure. But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words, you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

(Heb. 4:13) "And no creature is hidden in the sight of him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of him to whom we must give our account."

Of course, Peter's admonition, based on these judgments, is meant for us to take all we see as an exhortation to live in the light of them. Since God is going to destroy literally everything that does not have its source in Christ, how then should we live?

(2 Pet. 3:11) "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness. . ."

(Rom. 13:11-13) "And knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day . . ."

Remember that Peter's letter in this part is eschatological; he's writing to the generation of believers that will see the return of Christ. And even though Christians have always been admonished to pursue "holy conduct and godliness", there is a greater emphasis on that at the end of the Age because we could be face-to-face with the Lord at any moment.

Something I discovered in vs. 11 is that this verse is not a question, it's an exclamation. Here's a paraphrase of how it looks in the original;

"Since all these things will pass away and since you are entering the glorious eternal state, consider the type of persons you ought to be! How astonishingly excellent you should be!"

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown simply translates it; "How watchful, prayerful and zealous!"

There is both a sense of excited expectation as well as increased zeal in those in our generation who realize how short our time is. The members of the body of Christ who are uncertain about all this, will definitely lack the same spiritual momentum as those who have lifted their heads because they know their redemption draws near.

Surprisingly, The Living Bible Translation captures this;

"And so, since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives we should be living!"

Once we see clearly that everything that would attach us to this world and this life is soon going to “melt away with fervent heat”, it only makes sense to detach ourselves from that which is worthless and join our thoughts and plans to that which represents our true home.

Everything is going to be burned up, except the fruits of holiness.

And it's the prophetic sections of the Bible that bring these realities home to us. For example, this is from a publication called “Today in the Word”;

“Biblical prophecy provides some of the greatest encouragement and hope available to us today. Just as the Old Testament is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's first advent, so both testaments are filled with references to the second coming of Christ. One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament, where 17 books give it prominence. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the second advent of Christ--an amazing 1 out of every 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are 8 which look forward to His second! Who and what you are *looking* for will radically impact Who and what you are *living* for.”

I'll close with some comments on this by M.R. De Haan;

“Maybe it doesn't seem pressing because we think we'll pass from this earthly scene long before that great judgment day comes. That's not how Peter responded. The inevitable collapse of all things made him think about the eternal society built on righteousness and truth, a society that would continue, even after all we know here is gone. It motivated him to build his life on Christ, the only foundation that will never crumble.”

So, when prophecy is studied simply as fascinating information, it doesn't have this effect. It's only when the full reality of these 1845 verses opens our eyes to the *personal implications* of prophetic instruction that something inside us moves us to a place of awareness and commitment that lines up with the remnant of overcomers around this world who glorify God in the end.