

~1000 years is a day... "Time keeps on ticking..."~
A Study of the Imminent Return of Christ in the First Century
by Jack Gillespie

Section 1: 2 Peter 3:8-9

Part 1

Whenever the Full Preterist view of eschatology is first considered, there is always one thing that stands out in its presentation--the imminent return of Christ in the first century. That is, the time statements that indicate His coming to the first century generation. With that said, however, the first line of argument against the time statements is 2 Peter 3:8-9. There, Peter wrote:

"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

So the question then is, "Did Peter intend for these statements to be used as a formula for interpreting prophetic time?" That is to say, when we see prophetic time statements in Scripture, are we to use 2 Peter 3:8-9 as a formula to determine when the prophesied events are to take place? The futurist says, "Yes." Our purpose, therefore, is to compare the futurist's interpretation with a few prophetic passages and then to do a minor exegesis of 2 Peter 3. So, let's put this interpretation and application of 2 Peter 3:8-9 to test and see if the futurist's interpretation is justified.

Our first reference is Genesis 7:1-4. There, God told Noah:

"Enter the ark, you and all your household; for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time [generation]. You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth. For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made."

There are several things in this passage that should be noted. First, this is a prophecy of judgment. Secondly, God declared when the judgment, i.e., the rain, would start. Thirdly, He stated how long the rain would last. Fourthly, God spoke this to Noah, a man trapped in time. God was very specific as to when the rain would begin and to how long it would last. God told Noah that after seven days it would rain for forty days and nights. Now, our first question regarding this passage is not how we should interpret what God said, but how would Noah interpret what God said. Would he understand that God was outside time? That is to say, the references that God made concerning when the judgment would come were to be measured by how time relates to God? Applying the futurist's interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8-9 to this passage, was God telling Noah that after 7,000 years it would begin to rain and once it started raining, it would continue for 40,000 years? Or should the plain, everyday definitions of the terms be understood?

We find our answer in verse's 10 and 12:

And it came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth? And the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.

Here, just a few short verses later, we have the fulfillment of that prophecy. This shows us that God meant exactly what He said to Noah. Seven days equaled seven days. Forty days and nights equaled forty days and nights. This reference is of great importance so let's keep it in mind for we will come back to it later.

Our next passage for examination is found in Exodus 9:1-5. There, it is written:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, behold the hand of the Lord will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel." ' " And the Lord set a definite time saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land."

In this passage, God is more specific about when this plague would befall the Egyptians. The text stated that "The Lord set a definite time." It seems to indicate that God put an expiration date, if you please, on

His mercy. When was that expiration date? The text states "Tomorrow." Here, again, is a prophecy concerning judgment. It contains a specific time statement. "Tomorrow." It was a prophecy given to a specific person in history. However, even though there are similar elements in this passage to the one before it, there is something different. Pharaoh. Pharaoh is different because he was a man outside the covenant of God. A Gentile. Now our question is, "How would Pharaoh, a non-covenant Gentile, understand the term 'tomorrow?' " Would he understand that it would be fulfilled the following day, or if we apply the futurist's interpretation of 2 Peter 3, was Moses actually telling him that God would destroy all the livestock of the Egyptians around a thousand years from when this prophecy was given? Verse 6 gives us our answer. It reads:

So the Lord did this thing on the morrow, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died.

Once again we see that not only was the "how" part of the prophecy fulfilled (the death of the Egyptian livestock), but the "when" part of it was fulfilled as well (they all died the following day). God declared that He would kill all the livestock of the Egyptians on the following day, and He did just that.

For our next passage, let's look at Exodus 11:4-5. There it is written:

And Moses said, "Thus says the Lord, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first-born of the cattle as well."

In these verses we have the same elements as the previous examples. **1)** This was a prophecy of judgment. **2)** It was given to a man trapped in time. **3)** It had a specific time statement concerning its fulfillment. In this passage God is even more specific as to when this prophecy would be fulfilled. He said that He would kill all the firstborn of Egypt "about midnight." But let's use 2 Peter 3 again and see if this is the right way to interpret prophetic time. Now if Moses gave this prophecy around 6:00 a.m., was he stating that God would kill the firstborn of Egypt about 750 years later? Well, let's see. In chapter 12 and verse 29, it is written:

Now it came to about at midnight that the Lord struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt? Once again, God gave a specific time statement when judgment would fall, and He fulfilled it when He said He would.

Our last examples will be a series of passages relating to the same prophetic event? the Babylonian captivity.

Jeremiah 25:11. And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Jeremiah 29:10. For thus says the Lord, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place."

2 Chronicles 36:20-21. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept the Sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Once again we have the same elements in these passages as we had in the preceding ones. **1)** This was a prophecy of judgment. **2)** It was given to men trapped in time. **3)** It had a specific time statement concerning its fulfillment. God spoke through Jeremiah to the nation of Israel that they would be in bondage for seventy years. Now if the futurist's interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8-9 is applied to these passages, then the nation of Israel would be in bondage approximately 25,550,000 years! But is this an accurate interpretation? Daniel didn't think so. For in Daniel 9:1-2, it is written:

"In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasureus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans--in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."

The King James Version states that Daniel "understood the number of years." What interpretive hermeneutic did Daniel use to understand the number of years--he futurist's interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8-9, or the plain meaning of the phrase "seventy years?" Obviously, the plain, everyday meaning of the phrase.

This alone should answer any question and settle any debate as to how to properly interpret the time statements of Biblical prophecy. However, as if this alone wasn't enough, God gave us another proof? History!. In 2 Chronicles 36:20-21, God said that the nation of Israel would be in bondage "until the reign of the kingdom of Persian." History teaches us that Persia came into power in 536 BC at the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire. History also teaches us that Israel was in bondage to Babylon from 606 BC until their overthrow by Persia in 536 BC. That equates to exactly seventy years.

To recap, we have gone from "*seventy years,*" to "*forty days and nights,*" to "*seven days,*" to "*tomorrow,*" to "*midnight,*" and in each case, God fulfilled His word exactly when He said He would. This also brings up a very important point. God is the One who fulfills His word. Consider the following verses:

Isaiah 46:9-11. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far county. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

Isaiah 55:10-11. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without

watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Notice that these passages carry a prophetic implication. God stated that He would speak, declare, or purpose something before it took place, and that He would bring it to pass. He would send out His word and it shall accomplish what He desires. He would speak and bring it to pass. This includes when those things were to be fulfilled. In all of our examples, we saw that every part of the prophecies was fulfilled. There was not one part left unfulfilled. They were all fulfilled how and when God said He would fulfill them. This should show us the importance God places on His word. Not only on the how part of His word, but the when part of it as well. God stated that when He speaks something, He will bring it to pass.

Not maybe. Not sometime down the road. But, just like we saw, every part of the prophecy, i.e., the "how," the "why," and the "when," it will all be fulfilled. God declared that His word "shall not return to [Him] empty." If a prophecy is not fulfilled when God said He would fulfill it, then it would return to Him empty. The timing of the prophecy is just as important as the events of the prophecy. Think about that for a moment. What purpose would it serve if God gave a specific prophecy of judgment to a wicked nation, telling them that He would fulfill it within a specific time frame, and warned those people of the coming judgment, if the time passages (and the whole prophecy itself for that matter) were actually for some other generation of people? What purpose would the warnings serve the nation to whom it was originally given? To be quite honest, it wouldn't serve any purpose at all. How would that nation interpret the character and nature of God? That is to say, how would those people view God if He swore that He would judge them at a certain time, and then He didn't follow through with His judgment? What would they think of God? That He can't be trusted? That He speaks empty words and threats? That He lied?

Lastly, let's look at a passage that has tremendous relevance to the subject at hand!

In Ezekiel 12:21-28, it is written:

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The days are long and every vision fails?' Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God, "I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel." But tell them, "The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision. For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I the Lord shall speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I shall speak the word and perform it," declares the Lord God.' " Furthermore, the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed," ' " declares the Lord God."

In this passage the nation of Israel said that the time statements of God's word were irrelevant. This is exactly what the futurist claims about the time statements concerning the return of Christ in the first century. They say, just like Israel, "Those passages were not for the original audience but were 'for many years from now' and for 'times far off.' " But notice what God thinks about that kind of hermeneutic. God said, "None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed." He stated that He would say the word and He would perform it. Again, notice the implication of that statement. God Himself fulfills His word. When we try and misuse 2 Peter 3:8-9 as a formula to interpret prophetic time, i.e., that the imminent time statements in the New Testament concerning Christ's return in the first century are really "for many years from now," i.e., our time, we are saying that God will not fulfill His word! So the real issue here is not just differences of interpretation concerning eschatology, but

the nature and character of God. If the futurist is correct in his interpretation and application of 2 Peter 3 (and I hope that we have proved that he is not), then God is made out to be a liar because He will not fulfill His word when He said He would. Plain and simple. If the futurist is correct, then we might as well be atheists because God Himself cannot even be trusted, and then we are lost. Why? Because, if God is dishonest concerning when He would fulfill His word, how do we know He was honest concerning the doctrines of Grace? Or anything else for that matter? It's simple. We don't. So, again, this is much more than just a difference of interpretation. Our salvation depends on God keeping every aspect of His word. Including when He was to fulfill it.

Conclusion to Part 1

So, what can we conclude from this foundational examination of prophetic time statements? We can conclude at least three things:

1. By letting scripture interpret Scripture, we can see that when God gives a time statement regarding when prophecy would be fulfilled, unless instructed otherwise, the plain meaning of the terms should be used.
- 2 By using historical documentation we can see that prophecies were fulfilled exactly when God said they would be.
- 3 That God Himself fulfills His word. And if He doesn't fulfill it when He said He would, then "we are of all men most miserable."

Therefore, we have a historical, and more importantly, a Biblical interpretation of the time statements of prophecy. Unless otherwise stated, God intended the time statements of prophecy to be interpreted in their plain, everyday meaning. God is faithful to His word. He will fulfill it when He said He would.

If the futurist's interpretation and application of 2 Peter 3:8-9 are not correct, then what in the world did Peter mean? This will be addressed in Part 2.

Part 2

Before we examine 2 Peter 3, there are a few things that need to be pointed out. First, Peter wrote this epistle about 65 AD, a year after his first epistle. His audience was the same in both epistles, i.e., the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor. In 1 Peter 1:1, he wrote:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia? "

The Greek term translated "scattered" is "diaspora" (diaspora [dee-as-por-ah]) and, according to Strong's Concordance, means "dispersion, i.e., the converted Israelites resident in Gentile countries" (see also James 1:1; Acts 8:1-4). Also, in Galatians 2:7-9, Paul wrote:

"But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised."

So we can see from these passages that Peter was an apostle to the Jewish Christians and they were his primary audience. This will be of much use to us later on.

Second, Peter taught that his generation was living in "the last days." In Acts 2:16-17, after the Holy Spirit fell on the 120 disciples, Peter said:

But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: " 'And it shall be in the last days,' says God, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit? ' "

Here we can see very clearly that Peter understood that the filling of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of "that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." The important point in this is that Joel's prophecy would be fulfilled "in the last days." Therefore, Peter recognized that what had happened in the upper room, was the beginning of the "last days" or the beginning of the "end of the age." He even wrote that in his first epistle. In 1 Peter 1:20, Peter wrote:

"For He [i.e., Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you?"

From this we can see that Peter understood that the manifestation of Christ occurred in the "last times (or "days")" to make atonement for the people of God (cf. Galatians 4:4, Hebrews 9:26). He went on to write in chapter 4 and verse 7:

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer "

It should be pointed out that Peter instructed his first century audience that they should "watch unto prayer." Why? What was the reason for Peter's admonition? Because "the end of all things [was] at hand." This was written to them, not us. We cannot, with good conscience, rip this out of its historical setting and force it to fit our time and generation. Peter clearly believed and taught those first century Jewish Christians that their generation was in the "last days" and its consummation was closing fast. This brings us to 2 Peter 3.

2 Peter 3

In verses 1-4 of that chapter, Peter wrote that he was reminding those first century believers of what the prophets and the Lord, through His apostles, taught. What did they teach? They taught that:

"in the last days mockers will come with their mocking following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (verses 3 and 4).

As we have seen, Peter and his generation, were already living in the last days. So, apparently, the mockers were even then present in their generation. In fact, that was the purpose of the epistle of Jude, also written about 65 AD. There, Jude wrote:

"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ? But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit." (verses 4, 17-19).

Notice that Jude wrote that the "mockers" had already "crept in unnoticed." He even wrote, just like Peter, that the apostles told them "in the last time there shall be mockers." He even went so far as to point them out, "These are the ones who cause divisions?" Notice that this is all in the present tense. If Jude was writing for future generations, i.e., our generation, he would have written, "There will be those who cause divisions." However, he didn't. He wrote, "These are the ones" clearly identifying the people to whom he was referring.

The mockers were a first century reality. Therefore, it seems logical that they were what prompted Peter to write his second letter. Peter was reminding his readers that this was exactly what they were to expect because "the end of all things (was) at hand."

The next point we should see in 2 Peter 3, is Peter's line of defense against the "mockers" of his day. In verses 5 and 6 he wrote:

"For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water."

It should be apparent that this is a reference to the flood in Noah's time. In both of his epistles, Peter made reference to Noah and/or the flood within the same context of the "last days" (see 1 Peter 3:20; 4:5, 7; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 25; 3:3-6). Therefore, since Peter used the flood of Noah in his defense, it would be advantageous for us to look at that passage of Scripture as well.

As we noted earlier, in Genesis 7:1-4, God told Noah that He was going to cause it to rain for forty days and nights and destroy every thing from off the face of the earth. But there is something else that we need to see in the first verse. In Genesis 7:1, God said:

"Enter the ark, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this [generation]."
Notice that this was not a "final judgment" of all flesh, but the judgment of Noah's generation.

Next, let's look at Genesis 8:1-3 and 13. There it is written:

"But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. Also the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained; and the water receded steadily from the earth, and at the end of one hundred and fifty days the water decreased? Now it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up."

Does this sound like the end of the world? The text states that the waters "receded." They "decreased." They were "dried up from the earth." The "ground was dried up." Again, does this sound like the end of the world? What we need to see in these verses is that the "world" was not destroyed. The "world" was still there during the flood, it was just covered up by water. But in the fullness of time, when the judgment was fulfilled, the water receded and the surface of the ground was dry. There was no re-creation account after the flood of Noah. That is, God did not create a "new heaven and new earth." There is nothing in this passage that would even constitute such a notion. God did not create all new things after the flood of Noah. He simply created all those existing things in a new way. The old world was then "new" in the sense that it was no longer the same. It had been changed by the power of God.

With that said, however, in 2 Peter 3, Peter wrote that Noah's world was destroyed by water. But we just read where that did not take place. We know that Scripture does not contradict itself, so what happened?

Peter told us in 2 Peter 2:5: *"For God did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly."*

Here, we see what "world" God destroyed. The "world of the ungodly." This should teach us that the Bible's definition of the term "world" does not mean our twentieth century meaning of the same term. Here, Peter wrote that the "world" in Noah's day that was destroyed was the "world of the ungodly." Meaning that the judgment was upon ungodly men. Not only was it the "world of the ungodly" but the ungodly world of Noah's generation.

Therefore, Peter's example of Noah should be abundantly clear. Peter was paralleling what happened in Noah's generation with what was about to take place in his generation. He was dealing with the destruction of "the world of the ungodly" in his generation. This conclusion can be proven by looking at the very next verse in 2 Peter 3.

In verse 7, Peter wrote: "*But the present heaven and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*" Notice that Peter was referring to the judgment and destruction of "ungodly men" and not the universe. Just like in Noah's generation, the world of the ungodly of the first century generation was going to be judged. Also, if Peter was referring to the end of time, why would he use the flood of Noah as a comparison? We just proved that the entire planet was not destroyed in Noah's generation. Therefore, if Peter was using Noah's flood as a reference, but meant something else (the end of time), then he would have needed to elaborate on that. He should have written something like, "Noah's flood was similar to what will happen at the end of time. The only difference is, while Noah's flood did not destroy the world, the end that is coming to us, will." But Peter compared the two judgments without any explanation, signifying the same type of judgment.

We will skip verses 8 and 9 for now and continue past them to see if our conclusions are consistent with the rest of the passage. For the next few verses, I will be using *The Interlinear Bible, by Jay P. Green, Sr.* This Bible contains the Hebrew and Greek texts with a literal English translation. In verses 10-15, Peter wrote:

"But the day of [the] Lord will come as a thief in [the] night, in which the heavens will pass away with a rushing sound, and the burning elements will be dissolved, and [the] earth and [the] works in it will be burned up. [Since] all these things are being dissolved, then what sort ought you to be in holy behavior and godliness looking for and rushing the coming of the day of God, for which the heavens having been set afire will be dissolved, and the burning elements will melt. But according to the promise of Him, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking for these things, be diligent, spotless, and without blemish, to be found by Him in peace, and deem the long-suffering of the Lord of us [as] salvation."

There are several things that need to be noted here. First notice the past and present tense verbs Peter used to describe the condition of the "heaven," "earth," and the "elements". ***He wrote that the "elements" were "burning" (present tense) and the "heavens" had already been set afire (past tense) and all those things were "being dissolved" (present tense).*** Whichever view one takes on 2 Peter 3:8-9, it cannot be overlooked that the ***"heaven," "earth," and the "elements" that Peter was referring to were "being dissolved" at the time he penned his letter.*** Again, he could not have been referring to the world or "heaven and earth" as we understand the terms for obvious reasons, because those things are still here. This point cannot be overstated. Most people, when reading Scripture, interpret the terms they encounter in the way that they understand them, instead of trying to determine how the original audience understood those terms. This brings us to our second point --the term "elements."

Elements

The term translated "elements" is the Greek word *stoicheion* (*stoicheion* [stoy-key'-on]) and it means "something orderly in arrangement, i.e., (by implication) a serial (basic, fundamental, initial)." This is an interesting term, for it is used only seven times in the entire New Testament (Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20; Hebrews 5:12; II Peter 3:10, 12). In the other contexts (Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews) the term is used to describe the practices of the Old Covenantal System. If every other passage uses *stoicheion* (*stoicheion* [stoy-key'-on]) in this way, and if we are to remain consistent in our Biblical interpretation, then it must be interpreted the same here in 2 Peter 3. For the sake of time (no pun intended) we will look at just one example to prove this assertion.

Colossians 2

In Colossians 2, written around 63 AD, Paul addressed the issue of Gentiles adding law observance to their faith. In doing so, he used *stoicheion* (*stoicheion* [stoy-key'-on]) twice, once in verse 8 and again in verse 20. Most scholars agree that Paul's biggest issue was Jew and Gentile equality. His chief opponents were Judaizers, or as James called them in Acts 21:20, "Jews who believe, and...are zealous for the Law (see also Acts 15)." These Judaizers would infiltrate Gentile fellowships and propagate observance to the Law as part and parcel for becoming a Christian. In this section of Scripture, Paul wrote against that idea.

Apparently some at the Colossian fellowship had fallen into the trap set by the Judaizers. Paul set the record straight in verses 16-22. After stating that the Colossians were complete in Christ (i.e., they did not need any observance to the Law to make them complete) he wrote:

"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles [to the stoicheion (stoicheion [stoy-key'-on])] of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handles, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?"

What was Paul stating here? There is a lot of information packed into these few verses but we will just focus on a few points. First, Paul was obviously referring to the Old Covenant Age when he wrote about food, festivals, Sabbaths, and don't touch, taste, or handle.

Secondly, he wrote that the Old Covenant Age was only a shadow and pointed to the reality of the New Covenant Age found only in Christ. This can not be stressed enough. The Old Covenant was not the reality. It's purpose was to point to the reality--the New Covenant in Christ. The Old Covenant was just a shadow "destined to perish" (verse 22). Also notice the last part of verse 19. Paul wrote that "from the head[i.e., Christ], the entire body [i.e., the body of Christ] ? grows with a growth which is from God."

This is important for at least one reason, it shows us that the body of Christ was growing to maturity during the New Exodus period (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-11) and that this growth was from God. On the other hand, however, the body of Moses (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-2), i.e., the Old Covenant Age, was "becoming obsolete and growing old, ready to disappear" (Hebrews 8:13). There was no middle ground for the apostle Paul in regard to the two covenants like the Judaisers claimed. That is to say, there was no Law **and** faith. For Paul, there was only Law **or** faith (see Galatians 4:21-31).

Lastly, in verses 20-22, Paul wrote, that if the Colossians had died with Christ to the "elementary principals" the stoiceion (stoicheion [stoy-key'-on]) "of the world," why were they submitting themselves to the "commandments and teachings of men?" Paul did not change his subject. He was still dealing with the Old Covenantal System. It should be clear therefore that the "world" to which he was referring was the Old Covenant world of Jewish Age, and the "elementary principles" were the practices, rituals, and ceremonies of that "world."

Heaven and earth

The next phrase from 2 Peter 3 that we need to look at is "heavens and earth." These are interesting terms in that throughout the Bible, they were used poetically to describe a nation when used in prophecy.

Although many passages could be cited, we will look at only a few.

Isaiah 34:1-5. *"Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it. For the Lord's indignation is against all the nations, and His wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter. So their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses will give off their stench, and the mountains will be drenched with their blood. And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree. For My sword is satiated in heaven, behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom, and upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction."*

This prophecy was against Edom (verse 5, see also Genesis 25:30). This was fulfilled in 721 BC by Assyria. Please note that the mountains melt, the host of heaven dissolved, heaven rolled up as a scroll, etc. In other words, **"heaven and earth" was destroyed.**

Question: *"Did these things literally take place when the Assyrians destroyed Edom?"* If they did, where is the passage that states that God created a "new heaven and earth?" I assert that there isn't one. These terms are poetic references to the judgment of that nation.

Zephania 1:1-4, 14-18. *"The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, "I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the ruins along with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests? Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of trumpet and battle cry, against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men, so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath; **and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.**"*

This is a prophecy against Israel (verse 4). It was fulfilled in 587 BC by Babylon. Note the destruction of all flesh, the day of the was Lord near; the day of the Lord was coming very quickly. There was also wrath; destruction; darkness; clouds; trumpet; earth destroyed by fire; etc. That is to say, the destruction of the "world."

Question: "Did those things literally take place when Jerusalem fell?" Of course not. Just like our previous example, these terms are poetic references to the judgment of God.

What needs to be seen from these references is that the terms "heaven and earth" are not to be defined by our modern day definitions. They should not be stripped from their contexts and forced into a preconceived idea about what they mean. They must be kept in their contexts, both scriptural and historical. When that is done, we can see that those things were not actually destroyed. They represent the destruction of the "world" to whom the prophecy was given. Peter's audience, the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, were very familiar with the Old Testament passages that use the terms "heaven and earth" in this manner. They would have known exactly to what he was referring.

We, on the other hand, need to determine what that "heaven and earth" was. I think the answer should now be apparent. The term "elements" describe the rituals of the Old Covenant Age, and the terms "heaven and earth" are poetic references to the judgment of a nation. By putting these two together, we see that Peter was referring to the destruction of the Jewish world and the Old Covenant Age. This interpretation fits perfectly into the present and past tense verbs he used in describing the "elements" and "heaven and earth." It was that world that was then "becoming obsolete and growing old, ready to disappear" (Hebrews 8:13). It was that world to which he wrote "the end of all things [was] at hand (1 Peter 4:7).

One last point needs to be made here, and that is the "new heavens and a new earth" in verse 12. There are two terms for "new" in the New Testament. The first is neos (neos) and it means "new in time, never been before, or that which has recently come into existence." The other term is kainos (kainos) and it means "new in quality." The term Peter used for "new" is kainos (kainos-kay nos). Just like we saw in Peter's example of Noah and the flood, it is the same thing here. In the flood of Noah God did not create a world that had never been before, but Noah's world had been changed, been made new in quality. God did not create all new things after the flood of Noah. He simply created all those existing things in a new way. The old world was then "new" in the sense that it was no longer the same. It had been changed by the power of God. Once again, to remain consistent with Peter's example, the "new heaven and earth" must be of the same nature as that as the flood of Noah, i.e., the "new heaven and earth" would be new in that it would no longer be the same.

Now we come back to verses 8 and 9 of 2 Peter 3. I hope that it has been seen that the futurists interpretation and application of these verses are completely inconsistent with what Peter was writing to those first century Jewish Christians. But what about verses 8 and 9? How do they fit into what Peter was trying to accomplish?

To quote J. Stuart Russell:

"Few passages have suffered more from misconstruction than this, which has been made to speak a language inconsistent with its obvious intention, and even incompatible with a strict regard to veracity (or accuracy). Surely it would be the height of absurdity to regard this sublime poetic image as a calculus for the divine measure of time, or as giving us a warrant for wholly disregarding definitions of time in the predictions and promises of God? It is worse than ungrammatical--it is immoral. It is to suggest that God has two weights and two measures in His dealings with men and that in His mode of reckoning there is an ambiguity and variableness which makes it impossible to tell "what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in the prophets may signify."? The Scriptures themselves, however, give no countenance to such a method of interpretation. Faithfulness is one of the attributes most frequently ascribed to the "covenant-keeping God," and the divine faithfulness is that which the apostle in this very passage affirms. To the taunt of the

scoffers who impugn the faithfulness of God, and ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" he answers, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness;" there is no fickleness nor forgetfulness in Him; the lapse of time does not invalidate His word; His promise stands sure whether for the near or the distant, for today or tomorrow, or a thousand years to come. To Him one day and a thousand years are alike: that is to say, the promise which falls due in a day will be performed punctually, and the promise which falls due in a thousand years will be performed with equal punctuality. Length of time makes no difference to Him. He will not falsify the promise which has only a day to run, nor forget the promise which has reference to a thousand years hence. Long or short, a day or an age, does not affect His faithfulness. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise;" He "keeps truth for ever." **But the apostle does not say that when the Lord promises a thing for today He may not fulfill His promise for a thousand years:** that would be slackness; that would be a breach of promise. He does not say that because God is infinite and everlasting, therefore He reckons with a different arithmetic from ours, or speak to us in a double sense, or use two different weights and measures in His dealing with mankind. The very reverse is the truth. As **Hengstenberg** justly observes: "He who speaks to men must speak according to human conceptions, or else state that he has not done so." It is evident that the object of the apostle in this passage is to give his readers the strongest assurance that the impending catastrophe of the last days was on the very eve of fulfillment. The veracity and faithfulness of God were the guarantees for the actual performance of the promise. To have intimated that time was a variable quantity in the promise of God would have been to stultify his argument and neutralize his own teaching, which was that "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise."

J. Stuart Russell, The Parousia, 1878, pages 321-323

"In other words, what Peter was conveying in 2 Peter 3:8-9 was, God is faithful to fulfill His promise. Even though 35 years had passed since the beginning of the "last days" of the Old Covenantal Age, God would fulfill His promise. To God, those 35 years were not a problem. In fact, the "long suffering" of God was to be deemed as "salvation" for God's elect, for He was not willing for any of them to perish but for all of them to come to repentance."

Conclusion

I hope that through this lecture it has been proven that the futurist interpretation and application of 2 Peter 3:8-9, is inconsistent. Not only within the context of the rest of the chapter, but with the rest of Peter's letters and the rest of the Bible. In our next lectures, we will be looking at passages in the New Testament that stated an imminent return of Christ within the first century generation.

Grace to you.