

~The world that perished~

By Don K. Preston

Without question, II Peter 3 is the passage of appeal in discussions of the end of time. Peter must be speaking of the dissolution of material creation, we are told. Further, Peter's allusion to the Noahic deluge supposedly demands a future cosmic cataclysm. We are convinced it has no such import however, and this paper will seek to establish that Peter's employment of the diluvian episode actually mitigates against the traditional construct. What follows is an edited excerpt from the writer's larger work, *II Peter 3 Cosmic Catastrophe or Jewish Cataclysm?* It is hoped that work will be published soon.

In II Peter 3:4ff Peter says Noah's heavens existed, the earth stood out of the water and the world perished. He then tells us, "the heavens and earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire...." The traditional argument goes thusly: God once destroyed the world by flood. But he promised never to again destroy the world by water. The next time, as Peter teaches, he will destroy the world by fire.

To properly interpret II Peter 3 we must examine the Noahic catastrophe, God's promise given then, and compare with what is said by Peter.

A careful study of Genesis 8:21 is challenging:

"...I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done."

It generally is assumed that Jehovah looked down at the havoc created by the flood and said, "One of these days I will destroy all living things again but the next time I will do it by fire! But ask yourself, **WAS GOD MORE CONCERNED WITH THE METHOD OF DESTRUCTION OR THE MAGNITUDE OF DESTRUCTION?** Did Jehovah simply determine to change his method of inflicting universal suffering? What kind of an image of God does this project?

Did God not say he would never again destroy every living thing? The question is, What does "As I have done" mean? It is assumed that it has to mean, "I will not do it by flood but I will do it by fire."

But considering the nature of God, does it not comport better with his mercy to believe he looked on all the suffering caused by the flood and vowed never again to bring such cataclysmic trauma on the earth? It is then a question of whether God is more concerned with methods or mercy.

This construct is supported by closer examination of the Genesis text. Ask this; "Why did God bring the flood on that world?" In Genesis 6:5-8 we are told it was because "every intent of the thoughts of his (mankind's) heart was only evil continually." God saw man's wickedness and decided to bring judgment on him, 6:7. But in chapter 8:21 God looked down the stream of time and into man's heart and said, "although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" he would never again curse the ground or destroy every living creature. **THIS IS CRITICAL!**

Although he had once destroyed every living creature because of man's evil, God, because he knew man

would continue to be evil, vowed never to again destroy every living creature. If the traditional posit of a universal disaster by fire is accurate, God has reneged! The traditional construct says Jehovah will one day get fed up with the evil once again and destroy all life; only this time he will do it by fire. (As a matter of fact the traditional view insists that God will do in the future what he did not do in the flood. In the flood only the WORLD perished, II Peter 2:5. The traditional view says this time all creation will be consumed.) This interpretation in spite of the fact that Jehovah knew what man's future would be, wicked, and in spite of that vowed never again to bring universal destruction on all living things!

Note God's concern for "every living thing," Genesis 8:21. God was the first ecologist! Jehovah cared for his entire creation! His statement cannot be restricted to all human life. See Genesis 6:7. In the flood God destroyed all (air breathing) living things. Jehovah promised he would not again destroy all living things. But the traditional view insists that God will once again destroy all living things.

While Peter speaks of Noah's heaven and earth, he asserts it was their WORLD that perished. This must be viewed as having a bearing on the definition of his (Peter's) heaven and earth. Peter is comparing the perishing of the world at the day of the Lord in Noah's day with his coming day of the Lord. His comparison breaks down if in Noah's day only the world perished but in his (Peter's) coming day of the Lord the physical universe was to perish. The heaven and earth of Noah's day were kept for the day of judgment of ungodly men. And by that word the world that then was--perished. By the same word the heavens and earth which now exist, (in Peter's day), are kept for the day of judgment of ungodly men. Now since the heaven and earth, the physical universe, did not perish in Noah's day, how can it be insisted Peter is saying the physical universe must perish in his (Peter's) day of the Lord? How can one extrapolate from a flood that destroyed a WORLD to the destruction of the cosmos? How can one say that since there was a global flood this proves the coming destruction of the entire created order? Is it not far more consistent to believe that Peter was saying that just as the diluvian WORLD was destroyed by the flood, God is about to destroy the present Jewish WORLD by fire? This would be a consistent parallel and comparison. The traditional view is not.

Notice the comparative chart.

<u>Noah's Day</u>	<u>Peter's Day</u>
1. Heaven and earth kept.	1. Heaven and earth kept
2. Kept for judgment of ungodly.	2. Kept for judgment of ungodly.
3. Kept by power of God.	3. Kept by power of God.
4. Earth "perished," Genesis 9:11, but not destroyed.	4. Earth to perish in same sense?
5. World perished II Peter 2:5	4. World to perish?

This helps us realize that Peter is speaking of worlds that had/were to perish, not physical creation.

One final thought on the word 'world'. **William Barclay**, *The Letters of John and Jude, The Daily Study Bible Series, Westminster Press, 1976, p.56, commenting on I John 2:15-17* observes: "We must be careful to understand what John meant by the world, the kosmos....But kosmos acquired a moral sense. It began to mean the world apart from God. **C. H. Dodd** defines this meaning of kosmos: 'Our author means human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles and characterized by base desires, false values, and egoism.' In other words, to John the world was nothing other than pagan society with its false values and its false gods."

We understand from Peter that in Noah's day, the world--the *moral* world, or society, perished.

We have seen that in Genesis careful attention to the text reveals that God promised, due to his mercy and foreknowledge of man's continuing wickedness, never again to destroy all living things. We have seen that this promise never again to destroy all life included all animal life. But it is apparent that the normal interpretation of Genesis 8--II Peter 3 insists all life one day will perish in a conflagration. This infers that it was not the magnitude of suffering which concerned him so much as the mess caused by his method. Thus, "I will not again destroy every living thing as I have done," is a concern over methodology and not mercy! In contradistinction, we hold that Genesis is a positive declaration by Jehovah that there never again will be a world-wide catastrophe which will destroy all living things, not to mention the universe!

We also have seen that it is not appropriate to extrapolate from Peter's reference to the passing of Noah's world to the destruction of the universe. This is comparing apples and oranges! Only if Peter is saying, "like Noah's world perished there is another world about to pass away," is this a true analogy.

For all these reasons and more, we conclude that Peter foresaw the coming dissolution of another society, the Jewish world. This is exactly what happened in AD70 in the conflagration of the capital, heart, and soul of the Theocracy of Israel.