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An Exegetical Study of 2 Peter 3:8-9: Exposing the Facts from the Flood to the Future

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1



2 PETER 3

1 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

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SECOND PETER 3:8-9

Peter declared that the seemingly delayed timing of the Lord's imminent return was an expression of his patience and desire for repentance among his people.

OUTLINE

2

I) God's perspective of time is not like man's (3:8-9a)

- A. Peter warns his audience not to overlook "this one fact" (v. 8)
- B. Peter calls his audience "beloved" (v. 8)
- C. Peter compares God's perspective of time to man's (v. 8)
- D. Peter states that the Lord's fulfillment of his promise is not slow (v. 9)

II) God's patience in fulfilling his promise allows time for repentance (v. 9b)

- A. Peter proclaims that God is patient towards the beloved (v. 9b)
- B. Peter proclaims that God's patience is for the sake of repentance (v. 9b)

EXPOSING THE FACTS FROM THE FLOOD TO THE FUTURE

False teachers promulgate messages that bewitch many God-fearing believers ([Gal. 3:1](#)). It takes faithful study and keen discernment for believers to remain grounded in true doctrine. It also takes fearless pastors and teachers, like Peter, to rigorously expose teachers who "overlook facts" and promote false doctrine ([2 Pet. 3:5](#)). Throughout Peter's letter, he issues a warning against the effects of false teachers on believers at large, and especially those who are "nearsighted" in their faith ([2 Pet. 1:9-10](#)). Peter expresses his belief that some Christians remain ineffective and unfruitful, in part, because of the influence of false teachers. [Second Peter 3:8-9](#) specifically addresses false teachings about the Lord's return and how a believer may find comfort in a correct view of Christ's second advent. These verses will help Christians evaluate and sharpen their soteriological and eschatological views by reinforcing the truth that God's sovereign timing is perfect in both his second coming and the salvation of all those who are his beloved, elect people.

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CONTEXT: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter, a fisherman turned apostle, wrote the second epistle bearing his name sometime between the years A.D. 65-67. The internal evidence supporting his authorship is threefold: his death was predicted by Jesus ([2 Pet. 1:14](#)), he was an eyewitness of the Transfiguration ([2 Pet. 1:16-18](#)), and he connected the writing of his second letter to his first ([2 Pet. 3:1](#)). Another feature supporting Petrine authorship is Peter's use of the word "Lord." He uses this word 14 times in a letter that is only three chapters (61 verses) long. It is not uncommon for an author to call Jesus Lord but the frequency with which Peter uses this word beckons a deeper look.

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The Gospels record that Peter calls Jesus Lord 15 times ([Matt. 14:28](#); [16:22](#); [17:4](#); [18:21](#); [Luke 5:8](#); [12:41](#); [John 6:68](#); [13:6](#), [9](#), [36](#), [37](#); [21:15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [21](#)). Peter tends to call Jesus Lord during several marque moments throughout his life and ministry; when the stakes are the highest, the word Lord is the first to roll off of Peter's tongue. For example, Peter calls Jesus Lord when the two walk on water ([Matt. 14:28](#)), at the Mount of Transfiguration ([Matt. 17:4](#)), and when Jesus washes his feet ([John 13:6](#), [9](#)). On one occasion, many of Jesus' followers, "turned back and no longer walked with him" ([John 6:66](#)). Then, Jesus asked the twelve disciples, "Do you want to go away as well?" Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" ([John 6:67-69](#), emphasis added). Peter's response in [John 6:68-69](#) ought to be kept in mind when reading 2 Peter because it provides substantial insight into the heart and mind of the Apostle Peter; he did not just use the word Lord as filler, but instead to make known to his audience his incredibly high view of the Lordship of Jesus, the Holy One of God, who holds the words to eternal life.

Despite this evidence, there arose opposition against Peter's authorship of 2 Peter as early as the second century. "One of the most important lists that would determine the canon [of scripture] came in A.D. 175 in what was called the Muratorian Canon."¹ Second Peter did not appear on this list for two primary reasons: 1) the style of Greek used in 1 Peter is different from the style of Greek used in 2 Peter, and 2) the different literary and philosophical natures between 1 and 2 Peter.²

Proponents of Petrine authorship attribute the stylistic differences in the Greek language to Peter's use of two different secretaries. In [1 Peter 5:12](#), Peter indicates that his secretary was Silvanus. Since Paul was imprisoned during the writing of 2 Peter, he either wrote the letter himself or had a different secretary write down his message. The difference in

¹ Sproul, R.C. (2019). *1-2 Peter: An Expository Commentary*. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 172.

² Sproul (2019), 175-176.

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secretaries accounts for the different styles of Greek between the two letters. Additionally, the objection to Petrine authorship based on differing literary and philosophical natures is dealt with by the simple explanation that the subject matter between the two letters is significantly different. In the first letter, Peter writes to encourage believers who are experiencing persecution. In the second letter, Peter writes to warn believers against false teachers. Eventually, by the fourth-century, 2 Peter was firmly included in the New Testament Canon and Petrine authorship was widely accepted.³

4

CONTEXT: AUDIENCE AND OCCASION

Peter addresses his second letter, “To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). The identity of this Christian audience is found by comparing [2 Peter 3:1](#) to [1 Peter 1:1](#). [Second Peter 3:1](#) connects the audience of the first epistle with the audience of the second epistle, saying, “This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved.” This verse leads to the conclusion that whoever Peter sent his first letter to was also the intended audience of his second letter. Peter’s first letter was written, “To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” ([1 Pet. 1:1](#)). Since the first letter was written to a predominantly Gentile group of Christians in the Dispersion, it is proper to assert that the second letter was written to believers in similar locations.⁴

A brief geographical overview also suggests that Peter writes to the same audience in his second letter as he did in his first letter. Throughout Peter’s second letter, he uses the term “beloved” regularly. What could explain his apparent affection for these people? The Bible suggests that Peter may have had a long history with these believers.

Peter preached at Pentecost to a group of Jews who were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). The Feast of Pentecost was a pilgrimage festival, requiring Jews from the surrounding regions to travel to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. They came to Jerusalem to celebrate the original giving of the Law to the Jews at Mount Sinai.⁵ [Acts 2:9-11](#) lists the nations who were in attendance that day and heard Peter’s powerful sermon. Within this list, the nations of “Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia” appear ([Acts 2:9](#)). Recall that Peter’s first letter addresses, “those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in **Pontus**, Galatia,

³ Theologians like Ambrose, Augustine, and Athanasius all affirmed the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter.

⁴ Another possibility is that the first letter Peter references in [2 Peter 3:1](#) is a different letter altogether than 1 Peter. This would render [2 Peter 1:1](#) as the only explicit statement of Peter’s intended audience for his second epistle.

⁵ Ger, Steven (2004). *The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World*, eds. Mal Couch and Ed Hindson. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 35-36.

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Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” ([1 Pet. 1:1](#)). This evidence suggests that Peter may have written his first and second letters to some of the same people who he preached to at Pentecost in Acts 2. This would explain, in part, why Peter writes so affectionately to his “beloved” audience in 2 Peter.

THE THREAT OF FALSE TEACHERS

5

Nestled in among Peter’s audience of believers, there lurks a brand of falsehood that promotes immoral character and disgusting doctrine. Peter identifies these people as “false teachers” (2:1). These false teachers compel Peter to write a letter of encouragement and warning to his beloved brethren. Throughout this letter, Peter calls the false teachers greedy (2:3), condemned (2:3), irrational (2:12), ignorant (2:12), and unstable (3:16). In chapter 2, Peter likens these false teachers to fallen angels, those who were destroyed by the flood in the ancient world, and Sodom and Gomorrah (2:4-6). Their immorality is so severe, that Peter spends much of his time discussing their wicked character vice the specifics of their false doctrines. One of the themes throughout 2 Peter is “the godly” versus “the ungodly.” Peter places the false teachers within the ungodly category and continually strives toward the goal of promoting godliness in the lives of his beloved audience.

Peter’s means to achieve this goal is the message of the true prophets and apostles. This is captured in 3:2, which says, “that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.” Peter wants to protect his audience and eliminate the impact of false teaching among them. He urges his audience to remember the predictions of the “holy prophets” and to forget the message of the “false prophets.” He beckons his readers to remember the commandments of their Lord and Savior and to forget the claims of scoffers (3:3).

Peter adds a noticeably personal touch at the end of 3:2 when he writes the phrase “through *your* apostles.” The word “your” ascribes ownership and relationship between the apostles and the audience. It may cause the recollection of memories in the minds of the audience of a time when they heard or read the message of *their* apostles. Peter reflects on one of these times in 1:16, when he recalls, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when *we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” This was a learned audience, taught by Peter and Paul (3:15, emphasis added). They are familiar with the sacred writings of the Prophets, the message of the Apostles, and salvation in Jesus, yet they find themselves living among false teachers who challenge their Christian faith. Amid such perversion, they need truth and encouragement.

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One of the primary ways Peter provides this encouragement for his audience is by correcting the false teachings regarding Christ's second coming. The false teachers insinuate that God would not fulfill his promise of a second coming based on their perception of the Lord's delay. Many of these false teachers thought Jesus would return before the end of the first generation of the church. When this did not occur, instead of admitting that they were wrong, they taught that the Lord was wrong, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" ([2 Pet. 3:4](#)). However, in [2 Peter 3:8-9](#), Peter corrects these false teachings and encourages his beloved brothers by reminding them of God's perspective of time, his patience in salvation, and his promise to return and judge the world.



GOD'S PERSPECTIVE OF TIME IS NOT LIKE MAN'S (3:8-9A)

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.

The word "but" connects verse 8 with the passage immediately preceding. Peter is contrasting what he says in verses 4-7 with what he is about to say in verse 8. This is made apparent by Peter's repetition of the words "overlook" and "fact," which are used in verse 5 to describe what the false teachers deliberately overlook and again in verse 8 to describe what believers *should not* overlook. The comparison is as follows:

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately *overlook* this *fact*, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished ([2 Pet. 3:4-6](#), emphasis added).

The "they" in verse 4 are the false teachers, the scoffers. Peter says "they" willfully forget that God created the heavens and the earth, divided the water into two masses,⁶ and then used that water to destroy the ancient world ([Gen. 1:6-7; 7:17-20](#)). Peter is exposing the falsity that "things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" by pointing back to Creation and the subsequent deluge of water that caused all things not to "continue as they were." Peter is encouraging his audience to remember what happened in [Genesis 7:22-23](#), "Everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground . . . Only Noah was left, and those who were with him on the ark." Peter reminds his audience that God destroyed the ungodly with water. Then, he tells the brethren that the word which

⁶ MacArthur, John (2005). *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1940.

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spoke light into darkness at Creation will likewise come again when God orders the fiery destruction of the ungodly at his second coming ([2 Pet. 3:7](#)).

Peter's explanation of future destruction in connection with the destruction in Noah's day is masterful. However, it leaves one question remaining for his audience: "But, *when* will this coming occur, Peter?" In anticipation of their inquiry, Peter repeats the words "overlook" and "fact":

But do not *overlook* this one *fact*, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ([2 Pet. 3:8](#), emphasis added).

By repeating the words "overlook" and "fact," he is instructing believers not to be like the false teachers. It is as if Peter points the proverbial finger at the false teachers while staring straight into the eyes of his attentive audience and resoundingly says, "Don't be like them!" Peter's contrast within verses 5 and 8 displays a foundational truth: "They" deliberately ignore (overlook) sound doctrine (facts) to fit their sinful lifestyles, but God's people know the word and conform their lives to it.

BELOVED BRETHREN

Next, Paul calls his audience "beloved." Peter uses this word six times in his second letter: once referencing God's use of the term toward Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration ([2 Pet. 3:17](#); cf. [Matt. 17:5](#)), once referencing Paul (3:15), and four times referencing his audience of Christian brothers (3:1,8,14,17). Peter's use of "beloved" helps clarify his tone to the readers. It helps the reader transition out of the fiery rebuke of false teachers in verses 3-7 and into the loving instruction in verse 8. Peter wants his audience to hear the affection he has for them, assign significance to that affection, and attach that significance to his next statement. When he uses the term "beloved," he wants his audience to know that the words that follow will be

spoken out of love and have particular importance within them. Peter heard God call Jesus his "beloved" son, and he determines that his care and affection for his audience, his beloved, is worthy of the same endearment.⁷ Peter's use of "beloved" is not a trivial happenstance, or an empty expression, but rather an appeal to the audience to listen to the words of an apostle who loves them.

⁷ John was also at the Mount of Transfiguration and heard God call Jesus his beloved son. John uses the term "beloved" 10 times in his New Testament epistles.

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A THOUSAND YEARS

Next, Paul unveils God's perspective of time, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (v. 8). This fact stymies the false teachers' nonsense. Peter's answer here is satisfying but carries an interpretive challenge with it. Does Peter mean that one day *is* a thousand years with God? Or does he mean that one day is *like* a thousand years with God? The answer to this question comes into focus by investigating a faithful Old Testament source: Psalm 90.



PETER'S USE OF PSALM 90

In [2 Peter 3:8](#), Peter states, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." In [Psalm 90:4](#), the psalmist declares, "For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past." When the two verses are put side by side, Peter's reference to [Psalm 90:4](#) is apparent. However, when the two chapters of scripture are put adjacent to one another, it becomes even more apparent that Psalm 90 significantly influences Peter's thought process as he writes [2 Peter 3:1-13](#).

THEME

PSALM 90 & 2 PETER

GOD'S ETERNALITY AND PREEXISTENCE

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (vv. 1-2)

For they deliberately overlook this fact that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God (v. 5)

God's perspective of time

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night (v. 4)

... that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (v. 8)

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The flood leads to the end of ungodly people

You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning (v. 5)

... and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished (v. 6)

9

God's wrath seen in his judgment

For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? (vv. 9, 11)

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (v. 7)

God's pending judgment beckons mankind to consider his way of life

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (v. 12)

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? (v. 11)

Timing of the Lord's return

Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants! (v. 13)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief (v. 10)

The general themes shared between Psalm 90 and 2 Peter 3 of preexistence, Creation, the flood, the perishing of the ungodly, the eternality of God, the finitude of man, the imminent judgment of sin, the way knowledge of the judgment impacts a person's thinking and life choices, and the question of God's timing in his return overlap significantly. This comparison shows that Peter wrote his second epistle under the influence of Psalm 90. Whatever way the psalmist intended to use the thousand days to a year statement in [Psalm 90:4](#) is the same way Peter intends to use it in [2 Peter 3:8](#). Therefore, to uncover the intention of the psalmist is to discover the intention of Peter.

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A major emphasis of Psalm 90 is the “brevity of human life.”⁸ This Psalm displays that God is eternal and that man is ephemeral (short-lived). The purpose of [Psalm 90:4](#) is not to display a literal exchange of one thousand years for one day, but to display God’s timelessness. Psalm 90 teaches that unlike man, “God is not confined or conditioned by limits or lengths of time.”⁹ The psalmist is showing that God is everlasting, not bound by time constraints, and this is the primary meaning of the saying, “For a thousand years in your sight is but as yesterday when it is past.”

MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

As it pertains to the interpretation of scripture, *meaning* refers to “the particular ideas of the author in the text . . . *significance* can include (but is not limited to) the ramifications of a text’s meaning on our lives today or its bearing on a theological topic.”¹⁰ Think of [Psalm 90:4](#) as a display of meaning. Specifically, what it *means* to say that God is “everlasting.” Think of [2 Peter 3:8](#) as a display of the *significance* of the statement, “God is everlasting.” [Psalm 90:4](#) (meaning) displays that God is timeless. [Second Peter 3:8](#) (significance) displays that since God is timeless his perspective on time, namely the occasion of his second coming, is different from man’s. Therefore, Peter encourages his believers, saying, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness” (3:9a). What is slow to man is not slow to God, because God is not bound by time. From God’s perfect perspective, he is not slow. He is right on schedule.

HIS PROMISE

The word “promise” refers to the second coming. This is made apparent by a comparison of verses 4 and 9. Imagine a dialogue about God’s promise between the false teachers and Peter:

The false teachers asked, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (v. 4)

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness!” Peter replied. (v. 9)

Both verses reference the same “his” and the same “promise.” The pronoun “his” refers to the Lord and the noun “promise” refers to the second coming. Therefore, the promise

⁸ Barton, John and Muddiman, Jon (2007). *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 391, accessed October 2, 2020, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook>.

⁹ MacArthur, John and Mayhue, Richard, eds. (2017). *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*. Wheaton: Crossway, 172.

¹⁰ Chou, Abner (2018). *The Hermeneutics of Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scriptures from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 27.

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in [2 Peter 3:9](#) is The Lord's (his) second coming (promise). The Greek word for "promise" is *epangelia*. It means an announcement or promise. Even though the word carries a sense of divine assurance with it, the false teachers still disregard the Lord's promise. Certainly, doubting a divine promise is synonymous with doubting the divinity of the one who made the promise. This is what makes Peter's letter and argument so personal; he is not merely defending the timing of the second coming, but the character and trustworthiness of his intimate friend and Lord, Jesus.

11

GOD'S PATIENCE IN FULFILLING HIS PROMISE ALLOWS TIME FOR REPENTANCE (3:9B)

*But is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*¹¹

Peter contrasts slowness with patience in verses 8 and 9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you." Peter is displaying that the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, but rather he is *patient* to fulfill his promise. Jesus is waiting too. He is not slow like a runner who finishes the race laps behind the participant in front of himself. He is patient like the champion who crouches at the starting line waiting for the pistol to sound. Jesus is not slowly coming. He is patiently waiting *to* come. And when the pistol fires, Jesus will return quickly, "like a thief" (3:10). (This is a comforting truth for the believer who serves a God that patiently awaits the day he will dwell among his people forever). Peter writes that the Lord is patient toward "you" . . . So, who exactly is this "you?"

FOLLOW THE PRONOUNS: YOU, BELOVED, AND ANY

A pronoun typically stands in for a noun to avoid repetition.¹² The key to the proper interpretation of this passage is to determine the identity of each noun that Peter's pronouns are "standing in for." Peter uses the Greek pronouns *hymas* and *tinas* (translated "you" and "any" respectively) in 3:9 referring to a *specific* audience. The importance of this point cannot be stressed enough because Peter attaches specific promises about God's patience in salvation to whomever *hymas* and *tinas* are. The reader must apply these promises to the same people (pronouns) that Peter does. Therefore, the key to properly

¹¹ The decision to divide verse 9 in this manner was two-fold: 1) the word "slowness" in verse 9 ends the discussion about *when* God's coming will occur and begins the discussion of *why* God's coming will occur at its appointed time, and 2) because entire Soteriological doctrines tend to be built off of the out-of-context usage of this exact phrase.

¹² Mounce, William D. (2009). *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar: Third Edition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 99.

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understanding, interpreting, and applying this text in the manner Peter meant it to be is to follow his use of the pronouns: “you,” “beloved,” and “any.”

“YOU” IS THE BELOVED

Peter says, “God is patient toward *you*.” In the immediate context, “you” refers to Peter’s beloved brethren. The “you” in verse 9 is also identifiable by progressing through chapter 3 and noting who Peter addresses his statements to each time he uses the words “you” and “your.” [Second Peter 3:1](#) says, “This is now the second letter I am writing to *you*, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up *your* sincere mind by way of reminder that *you* should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through *your* apostles” (emphasis added). Notice how the “you” in verse 1 is also called the “beloved?” Peter says, “I am writing to *you*, beloved.” Verse 1 serves to show that the word “you” and the word “beloved” refer to the same group of people.

The same connection in verse 1 of the word “you” to the word “beloved” is also present in verses 8 and 9:

But do not overlook this one fact, *beloved*, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward *you*, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance (emphasis added).

So, the group the Lord is patient toward, “you,” is the group whom Peter also calls “beloved.”

“ANY” IS THE BELOVED

As previously discussed, the “beloved” refers to the Christian brothers to whom Peter writes. When Peter says, “But God is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish,” he does not change his audience mid-sentence (or the entire theme of his letter up to this point); he is still addressing the beloved and correcting the false teachings of scoffers regarding the Lord’s second coming. Peter does not mean to say, “God is patient toward the beloved, not wishing that any *person ever* throughout the history of time should perish.” Rather, what he *does* mean to say is, “God is patient toward the beloved, not wishing that *any* of the beloved should perish.” The basis for God’s patience is that some among every person throughout history will repent according to his will. Arguments claiming that “any” means all people throughout all time do not properly consider Peter’s teaching on the following three biblical accounts.

Peter’s use of Fallen Angels, the Ancient World, and Sodom and Gomorrah

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Some would argue that when Peter writes, “not wishing that any should perish” that he means to say that the Lord does not wish that *anyone* should perish. This view is incorrect because it violates the immediate context of Peter’s writing to the beloved. The interpretation that removes the beloved and replaces them with anyone ever, throughout all of time, has a major problem to deal with: people perish every day. Therefore, one must accept that Peter is saying the Lord wishes that none of the beloved perishes (which they do not). Otherwise, the reader will assert that God wishes that nobody ever perishes (which they do). The latter assertion, that God does not wish *anyone* ever perish, leaves the reader with a God who wishes to achieve salvation for all but either: 1) cannot do what he wishes or 2) does not do what he wishes. This would mean God is either: 1) not omnipotent (all-powerful) or 2) contradicts himself. Neither of these possibilities describes God. Fortunately, Peter provides clarity and settles the issue by using three Old Testament examples of times when God sovereignly resided over sinners who perished.

Fallen angels

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment . . .” ([2 Pet. 2:4](#); cf. [Jude 6](#)). Here is what God did when the angels sinned: he did not spare them, he cast them into hell, and he committed them to inescapable darkness. This is the epitome of one “perishing.” If Peter means that the Lord does not wish that *anyone* should perish, he must not mean to include the fallen angels, or else he is simply talking about *any* in his immediate audience, the beloved.

The ancient world

“If he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly” ([2 Pet. 2:5](#); cf. [Gen. 7:17-24](#)). Peter declares that it was God who brought the flood upon the ungodly. If Peter means that the Lord does not wish that *anyone* should perish, he must not mean to include the ancient world, or else he is simply talking about *any* in his immediate audience, the beloved.

Sodom and Gomorrah

“If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” ([2 Peter 2:6](#); cf. [Gen. 19:24-25](#)). Peter recalls a time when God “condemned them to extinction” by causing fire to rain from Heaven. If Peter means that the Lord does not wish that *anyone* should perish, he must not mean to include Sodom and Gomorrah, or else he is simply talking about *any* in his immediate audience, the beloved.

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The conclusion must be that when Peter wrote, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward *you*, not wishing that *any* should perish but that *all* should reach repentance,” he did not have all people ever in mind. The entire context of Peter’s epistle is to expose sinful, ungodly, and unrighteous false teachers and to show that the Lord will judge them, like he did the fallen angels, ancient world, and Sodom and Gomorrah, at his second coming. Based on the context of Peter’s second letter, as shown above, the Lord sovereignly resided over sinful, ungodly, and unrighteous angels/peoples’ descent into judgment. If he did not want them to perish, they would not have.

14

“ALL SHOULD REACH REPENTANCE”

The word “all,” like the word “any,” refers to the beloved. The phrase “not wishing that *any* should perish but that *all* should reach repentance” teaches two truths about God. First, the verse tells the reader what God does not wish: that any should perish. Secondly, the verse teaches the reader what God does wish: that all should reach repentance. As seen previously, God did not wish that the fallen angels, the ancient world, or Sodom and Gomorrah should reach repentance, or they would have. Therefore, the word “all” must not refer to all people throughout all time, but the “beloved.” Since the word “all” refers to the “beloved,” another way to think about verse 9 is by restating it as follows, “God does not wish that any of the beloved should perish but that all of the beloved should reach repentance.” The word “beloved” in the immediate context refers to Peter’s audience, but it also applies to the broader scope of the entirety of the elect of God, as shown by Peter in his two epistles.

PETER’S BELOVED IS AMONG THE ENTIRETY OF GOD’S ELECT

Recall that this is Peter’s second letter that is written to the same audience of believers in the Dispersion. In his first letter, Peter identifies his audience as “the elect” ([1 Pet. 1:1](#)). Since Peter’s intended audience is the same in both letters, the “beloved” in 2 Peter must also be “the elect” as seen in [1 Peter 1:1](#).

Also in chapter 1, Peter tells his audience to supplement their faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (vv. 5-6). Then, he writes, “For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” (vv. 9-10). The people who have not supplemented their faith with the qualities in verses 5 and 6 are Christians. They have faith (vv. 1, 5), they have escaped the corruption of the world (v. 4), and they have been cleansed from sin (v. 9). However, they

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are not supplementing their faith and are subject to fall. Peter urges them to confirm their calling and *election* by practicing these qualities (i.e. display the fruit of repentance). Peter's command to the brothers to confirm their "election" is another clear indication that the "beloved" are "the elect."

Remember the verse at hand, "[God] is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance" (2. Pet. 3:9). It has been shown that "you," "any," and "all" refer to the beloved. It has also been displayed that the beloved is synonymous with the elect. Peter's immediate audience represents just a portion of the entirety of God's elect people, his "beloved."

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Within Peter's second epistle, he shows that there are four groups among the elect that make up the "all" in verse 9. First, some have faith and have confirmed their election by displaying fruitful qualities (1:8). Secondly, some have faith and have not confirmed their election by displaying fruitful qualities (1:9-10). Thirdly, among the entirety of God's elect, there are those like Noah and Lot who have already experienced physical death. Fourthly, some have yet to reach repentance (v. 9). It is this fourth group that comes into the picture when Peter states, "but that all should come to repentance."

HOW [2 PETER 3:9](#) IS OFTEN MISUSED

The misuse of the word "all" in this verse comes from its detachment from the word "you." If somebody partially quotes this verse saying, "[God] desires all should reach repentance," one should immediately ask, "All of who?" Quoting [2 Peter 3:9](#) in this manner should not be done because it detaches the adjective "all" from the word it is meant to modify, namely the beloved, and this is not what Peter does, nor what he intends for his readers to do. When the beloved are removed from [2 Peter 3:9](#), the tendency is to insert the entire world in their place and this mistake develops the false teaching of universalism (a false claim that in the end all will be saved and made right with God).¹³ Peter uses the terms "any" and "all" in reference to the "beloved," whom the Lord wills to reach repentance. Peter had *all* of the beloved (elect) in mind when he wrote the sentences, "But do not overlook this one fact, *beloved*, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward *you*, not wishing that *any* should perish but that *all* should reach repentance" (vv. 8-9). Pastor John MacArthur summarizes this point well, saying:

¹³ It is ironic that one of the most commonly taught falsehoods regarding God's will in salvation comes from an epistle that warns against false teachers.

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The *any* must refer to those whom the Lord has chosen and will call to complete the redeemed . . . Since the whole passage is about God's destroying the wicked, His patience is not so He can save all of them, but so He can receive all of His own. He can't be waiting for everyone to be saved, since the emphasis is that He will destroy the world and the ungodly. Those who do perish and go to hell, go because they are depraved and worthy only of hell and have rejected the only remedy, Jesus Christ, not because they were created for hell or predetermined to go there. The path to damnation is the path of a non-repentant heart; it is the path of one who rejects the person and provision of Jesus Christ and holds on to sin (cf. [Is. 55:1](#); [Jer. 13:17](#); [Ezek. 18:32](#); [Matt. 11:28](#); [23:37](#); [Luke 13:3](#); [John 3:16](#); [8:21,24:1](#) Tim. 2:3,4; [Rev. 22:17](#)).¹⁴

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

At least three circumstances were true for Peter's audience: they were believers, they were taught Apostolic truth, and they were subject to the propaganda of false teachers. The principles within [2 Peter 3:8-9](#) apply to believers who sit under sound, biblical preaching, yet must endure the plentiful pontificating of false doctrines within the peripheral voices of life (e.g. false teachers, news/media outlets, social media, etc.). The following principles are meant to help the believer live out the knowledge attained in the previous discussion.

TRUST GOD'S TIMING IN ALL OF LIFE

The commitment to the reader at the beginning of this study was that your soteriological and eschatological views would be sharpened. Hopefully, you have seen in [2 Peter 3:8-9](#) that there is a soteriological and eschatological promise. The soteriological promise is that the Lord will save his elect. The eschatological promise is that the Lord will come back a second time. The two promises relate to one another immensely: the timing of the Lord's second coming will not occur until all of his elect people have reached repentance.

¹⁴ MacArthur (2005), 1941.

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THE LORD SAVES ALL OF HIS ELECT

Preaching, teaching, praying, singing,¹⁵ and evangelizing are all impacted by the truth that God saves those whom he chooses. The reality of election does not negate the commands to preach the word, teach sound doctrine, pray for others' salvation, sing corporately, and evangelize the lost. Rather, the doctrine of election fuels, encourages, and motivates any believer who obediently shares the word of God with a lost soul. The Lord's patience is made manifest every time a sinner converts in faith and repentance. Therefore, every time a mother prays for her lost child's salvation or a preacher prepares to share the counsel of God with his congregation or a Christian discusses the gospel with an unbelieving friend . . . *every time* . . . they may rest in the peace that God saves all of his elect people. Thus, the big picture of 2 Peter comes into view: Not even scoffers who spew false doctrine among believers can thwart the magnificent plans of God in the salvation of man.

17

THE LORD'S RETURN IS IMMINENT

After Peter corrects the false teaching about the Lord's return, he reasons with his audience that since they now know the truth about the second coming, they had better live like it. He writes, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . ." ([2 Pet. 3:11-12](#)). In these verses, there are multiple applications to be made: live a life of holiness, live a life of godliness, patiently await the Lord's return, and eagerly await the Lord's return. Believers must pursue a lifestyle that abstains from unholy sins. They must exude the character of Christ. When tempted to think or act contrary to holiness and godliness, men and women of God must use the reminder of the Lord's second coming as correction and prevention from sin. When a believer is in rebellion toward God, they will not find themselves actively looking forward to God's return, for they know they need repentance. When a believer finds themselves living in holiness and godliness, they will naturally carry out Peter's next commands of "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" ([2 Pet. 3:12](#)). The essence of Paul's logic is captured well in the Second London Baptist Confession:

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the great consolation of the godly in their adversity, so will he have the day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and

¹⁵ In [Colossians 3:16](#), Paul commands to teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. When the church sings, they are teaching and admonishing one another. In this way, gospel truths are going out to both believers and unbelievers who hear the singing.

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be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may ever be prepared to say, *Come Lord Jesus; come quickly*. Amen. (32.3).

DO NOT OVERLOOK FACTS

18

It is impossible to recognize false teaching apart from knowing true teaching. Peter knows a thing or two about false teachers because he walked with and learned from the Truth ([John 14:10](#)). He also knows the appeasement and lure of false teaching because he fell under its influence on at least one occasion ([Gal. 2:11-14](#)). These instances lead to the conclusion that Peter is definitively qualified to give guidance on how to overcome false teaching. His advice? Stick to the facts.

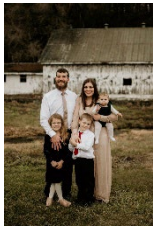
The scoffers conveniently overlooked the fact that God destroyed the ancient world in a deluge of water. They did this to justify to themselves the false teaching that God is not coming back. Remember, Peter called these false teachers greedy (2:3), condemned (2:3), irrational (2:12), ignorant (2:12), and unstable (3:16). When your life is immoral, it is easier to conform God's word to your sinful lifestyle than it is to conform your sinful lifestyle to God's word. The false teachers twisted the word and overlooked facts. Even worse, they taught others these monstrosities as if they were authoritative truth. In short, they made God's word say what they wanted it to say instead of saying what God meant it to say.

When Peter instructs his audience, "But do not overlook this one fact," he is telling them not to twist the word or omit hard truths that command change in the life of the teacher and/or hearer. Peter's proclamation demands that the pastor preach the whole counsel of God before his congregation. Peter's proclamation demands that Christians read their entire Bible so they do not unknowingly omit foundational truths and form false doctrines within themselves. Peter's proclamation gives insight to the Christian apologist; when your opponent does not recall all the facts or does not recall all the facts correctly, your job is simply to recall all the facts properly and prove them a liar. Lastly, to the believer who searches the scriptures earnestly to form a doctrinal stance on an important matter (e.g. salvation, justification, worship, the second coming of Christ, etc), take the time to survey, study, pray, and weigh every scriptural passage on that topic that you can find as you seek to make up your mind. If Peter would not have been familiar with the story of the flood, he may have accused the Lord of being slow too. The omission of biblical facts leads to the destructive development of false doctrine. Do not overlook the facts, beloved.

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“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks of them in these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” ([2 Peter 3:14-18](#))

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