

2 Peter 3:11–13

Introduction

2 Peter 3:10 — It *will* come—the day of the Lord—like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be laid bare.

I. 2 Peter 3:11–12 — 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**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

Notice how Peter has “sandwiched” his exhortation between two almost identical reminders of the coming day of the Lord and what that day will mean for this *present* age of the world – what that day will mean for the world as it *now* is. You can see how strongly Peter’s trying to make his point. But if we’re not careful, we could actually miss the point. Peter isn’t trying to motivate us with fear, he’s just giving us the biblical perspective on this present world so we’ll *desire* to live carefully and wisely *in* this present world. **“*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...*”**

The first thing we have to remember is that Peter’s point in these verses isn’t *just* the destruction of the *physical* or *material* creation – as in the heavens and the earth. *Why* will the physical creation be burned up and “dissolved”? It’s because of all the evil and the wickedness that’s been committed *within* this physical creation. *Why* will the heavens and the earth be destroyed? It’s because of the sin that’s in some sense infected and defiled and stained even the heavens and the earth itself. Remember what Peter says in verse seven:

□ 2 Peter 3:7 — The **heavens and earth** that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the **ungodly**.

We know that God *could* just destroy the ungodly and leave the heavens and the earth be. And yet we see here that the destruction of the ungodly involves also the destruction of the heavens and the earth *in which they live* – not just because this is the means that God uses to destroy the ungodly but also in some sense because the physical creation itself has been stained and defiled by the sins of its inhabitants.

The connection between HUMANS and the EARTH in Creation, Fall, and Flood.

Remember how in the beginning, the sin of Adam affected even the ground that he worked:

□ Genesis 3:17–18 — To Adam [God] said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ **cursed**

is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”

Paul says in Romans eight that after the fall the entire creation was “subjected to futility” and that it’s even now in “bondage to corruption” (Rom. 8:20-21). Fast forward from the fall to the flood in Noah’s day which Peter already mentioned in verse six and we see again how the judgment of a wicked humanity includes the destruction of the earth itself – even all the animals and creatures that live on the earth.

- Genesis 6:5–7, 11–13 — The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great **in the earth**... And the LORD regretted that he had made man **on the earth**... So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens... **God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt**, for all flesh had corrupted their way **on the earth**. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, **for the earth is filled with violence through them**. Behold, I will destroy them **with the earth**.”

But why should the earth, with all the animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, be destroyed *along with* mankind? Is the earth a moral agent? Are the animals moral beings? The answer is: Because humans and the earth go *together*. When God created the earth (and even the heavens above), He created it *as* a habitat for us – for the man and the woman whom He created in His own image and after His own likeness. When God created man, He formed him *out of* dust from the *ground* (Gen. 2:7). When God created man as male and female, He blessed them and said to them:

- Genesis 1:28 — “Be fruitful and multiply and **fill the earth and subdue [the earth]**, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God created man from the earth and gave him the vocation of stewarding the earth and ruling for Him over His good earth. From the very beginning, the destiny of the earth and the destiny of mankind has been very intimately bound up together. This is what explains why the fall of *man* involves even the *ground* itself being subjected to a curse. This is what explains why in the days of Noah, God destroyed not only wicked mankind, but along with him even the earth itself.

The connection between HUMANS and the EARTH in the Old Covenant

Fast forward now from the days of Noah to the days of Moses. In God’s program of redemption, He not only set apart a special *people* for Himself, but He also set apart a special *land* for Himself – and the land and the people were meant to go together. The land *itself* was made holy by the presence of God dwelling in the midst of it (Zech. 2:10-12; Ezek. 20:40; Ps. 78:54), but there was also a sense in which the holiness of the *land* was to be upheld by the holiness of the *people* who lived in that land.

- Deuteronomy 4:5 (cf. 4:14) — See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should **do them in the land** that you are entering to take possession of it.
- Deuteronomy 6:1 (cf. 12:1) — This is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may **do them in the land** to which you are going over, to possess it.

This emphasis on doing the commandments of the Lord *in the land* that He was giving them to possess isn't something random or unimportant. What we have here is the very same thing that we saw in creation, only on a smaller scale. Man and the earth go together. And so we read in Numbers 35:

- Numbers 35:33–34 (cf. Lev. 18:24–30) — You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the LORD dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.”

But that's exactly what the people of Israel did, isn't it? They sinned and rebelled against the Lord, in some sense defiling and polluting even the land itself.

- Ezekiel 36:16–20 (cf. Ps. 106:34–38) — When the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds...
- Jeremiah 2:7 — I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.

As a result of the land being defiled by the people who lived *in* it and *upon* it, we see God's judgments poured out not only upon the ungodly sinners, but we even see the land itself personified as a person suffering and mourning under the curse – because of drought and pestilence and plague.

- Jeremiah 12:4 (cf. Joel 1:8–10) — How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away.
- Jeremiah 23:10 — The land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up.
- Hosea 4:1–3 (cf. Jer. 4:23–28 & Gen. 1:2) — The LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

There's a sense in which sinful humans communicate their contagion even to the physical creation in which they live and with which they're intimately connected so that when *they* are

judged even the earth itself must suffer *along with them* all the judgments of God (cf. Motyer; comm. on Isaiah 24:4-6).

The connection between HUMANS and the EARTH in the Final Judgment

The Scriptures we just read had to do specifically with the people of *Israel* and with that specific part of the earth upon which they lived in the land of *Canaan*. But Isaiah draws from the language of God's judgments on this specific people and this specific land in order to describe a universal judgment at the end of time.

- Isaiah 24:4-6 — The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.

We've seen that humans and the earth are tied together in Creation, in the Fall, in the Flood, and then in a narrower and more limited sense in the history of God's Old Covenant people, Israel (in their call to live righteously in the land, in the reality that they defiled and polluted the land by their sin, and in the fact that the land itself shared in their destruction). Now we're reminded that this narrower and more limited example in the experience of Israel is truly just a microcosm of something far bigger. Why does God use language in Isaiah 24 that's usually associated with Israel? It's because He wants us to see that His "treatment of, and expectations for, ...*Israel* [are] the model for his treatment of the *whole world* (cf. Rom. 1-3)" (Oswalt; comm. on Isaiah 24). "Just as Palestine itself, the Holy Land, had become profane through the sin of its inhabitants... so also the entire earth became profane when the ordinances given to it were violated" (Young). *Therefore* on the day of the Lord when the ungodly are judged, even the earth itself will be consumed *along with* the ungodly. Even the earth itself will be devoured by the curse that's the result of the broken covenant and the sin of its inhabitants. It's only against this biblical, big picture backdrop that we can feel the full weight of Peter's words here in 2 Peter 3:

II. 2 Peter 3:7, 10-12 — The **heavens and earth** that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the **ungodly**... It will come—**the day of the Lord**—like a thief, and then **the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved**, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be laid bare. **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, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!**

What's the real point here? It's that as Christians we're living, in a sense, on a sinking ship. We're living *in* a world that's doomed to destruction; this "world" *including* not only the people, but the very heavens and the earth that they live in – and that we're also living in with them. So Peter's point is that if this present world system is destined to sink and to fail, then why should

we ever even think about investing in it? There's a certain *kind* of living that's *built upon* the values and the mores of *this* world and of this *present* age. In the context of 2 Peter and the false teachers, we've seen that this living includes, among other things, a materialistic greed (a craving for money and possessions and *things*), as well as a sexual greed (a craving for sensual gratification). This is the kind of living (especially in its more "sophisticated" and "civilized" forms) that always, *always* appears *now* to be the most "normal." And why is this? Because it's the life *of* this present age! It's the kind of life that makes the most sense given the world that we're living in today and the world as it is today. But there's the catch. The world that we live in today will not always be. Even the heavens and the earth that we're living in now will one day be devoured by the curse and consumed by the fire of God's judgment: the houses that we live in, and the cars that we drive, and all the money that we've saved, and all the certificates and diplomas that we've accumulated, and all of our most precious and prized possessions are all going to go up in smoke. And so also will all who have lived *according to* this present age; so also will all who have lived the life that is "normal" by all the standards of this present world; so also will all who have invested their lives in this ship that's ready to sink.

So we come back again to Peter's question: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be...?" Certainly *not* the sort of people who adopt the values and the mores of this present world that's destined to pass away and be destroyed! But if *not that* sort of people, then what sort of people *ought* we to be? The Greek word for "ought" has the sense here of that which is necessary for something and required. What sort of people is it required and necessary that we be if we would not go down with the ship when it sinks?

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people *ought* you to be" Peter says, "*in lives of holiness and godliness...*" But do you see now that we have an obvious problem? Remember how humans and the earth go together. Remember that the destiny of *this* earth and the destiny of mankind is bound up together. So *to what world* and *on what earth* do these lives of holiness and godliness belong? In what world does the life of holiness and godliness actually make sense as that which is normal and natural – that which truly *belongs*? If *not in this world* and if *not* on this earth as it now exists, then *in what world* and *on what earth*? You see, if there's no good answer to this most important question, then we might as well be living the lives that make the most sense in the here and now – in this world and on this earth as it now is.

"Noah's Flood" and a New Creation

We might remember from verse six that the flood in the days of Noah is described not only by Peter, but also in Genesis as the reversal and the undoing of creation (cf. Gen. 7:11-12, 17-22). But if this is so, then what are we to make of what comes *after* the flood? We read in Genesis chapter eight:

- Genesis 8:13–19; 9:1 — In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. Then God said to Noah, "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out

with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out... And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

If the flood is pictured in the Bible as the undoing of creation, then these verses—echoing in the language of Genesis chapter one—are meant to be the picture of a new creation. It isn't *actually* a new creation, but it's certainly meant to be the picture of one. And so what we have here is the pattern of what's to come: After the destruction of the earth comes a new or a renewed earth. In fact, this is what *has* to be and *must* be if God's redemption of His people is to be true and complete.

Israel's crossing of the Red Sea and a New Creation

Some of you may remember from when we were going through the book of Exodus that the “birth” of Israel when God delivered them from the Egyptians at the crossing of the Red Sea is also pictured as the beginning of a “new creation.” Over and over we're told that the people of Israel passed through the midst of the sea “on dry land” (cf. 14:16, 21-22, 28-29), purposefully echoing the language of creation in Genesis chapter one:

- Genesis 1:9 — And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.

In verse two of Genesis one we're told that “darkness was over the face of the *deep*” and “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the *waters*.” We see this language also echoed in Exodus fifteen:

- Exodus 15:4–10, 19 — “Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The **deeps** covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone... At the blast of your nostrils the **waters** piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the **deeps** congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake...’ You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty **waters**... When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought back the **waters** of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on **dry ground** in the midst of the sea.

The birth of Old Covenant Israel wasn't actually the new creation, but it was the picture of one. It was the shadow and the type of the new creation—or the new humanity—that Christ brings through His death, and burial, and resurrection from the dead. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 — Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

In God's wonderful work of redemption that we celebrate every Sunday, God is making a new creation. It *begins* with a new humanity, a new people “created after the likeness of God in true

righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24), but it *must end* with a new heavens and a new earth. It has too – or else our own redemption would prove to be a failure in the end! We’ve seen from the very beginning that the destiny of the earth and the destiny of mankind is bound up together. So if the ungodly are to be destroyed (not annihilated, but destroyed) along with this present heavens and earth, then what is the hope of those who in Christ have already been *created anew* after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness? It is that one day even our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like His glorious, resurrection body (Phil. 3:20-21) and we will live forever with Him in a new heavens and a new earth that will never again be defiled or polluted by sin or suffer under the curse that comes on covenant breakers, but rather a new heavens and a new earth where only righteousness dwells. So we read in 2 Peter chapter three, verse thirteen:

III. 2 Peter 3:13 — But **according to his promise** we are waiting [we are eagerly looking] for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

There’s a sense in which the new heavens and the new earth have been promised ever since God first began the work of redemption in Genesis chapter three. By its very nature God’s work of redemption requires a new heavens and a new earth *where* a new humanity can live and worship Him and obey Him and enjoy all the rich blessings of His righteous rule. But this promise of a new heavens and a new earth that’s implicit in the work of redemption is made explicit in Isaiah 65.

□ Isaiah 65:17–25 — “Behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth**, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But **be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create**; for behold, **I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness**. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Isaiah describes the new heavens and the new earth using idealized language and realities that are nevertheless still associated with the fallen world that we live in today. But now that the new creation has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the Apostle John can take this passage from Isaiah and show its true fulfillment in a world where death is no more and where every tear is wiped away from our eyes.

- Revelation 21:1–5 — **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more [the sea will no longer exist as a threat to the new creation and the people of God]. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “**Behold, I am making all things new.**”

Conclusion

Remember what Peter says in verse 11: “*Since* all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be...” Certainly *not* the sort of people who adopt the mores and the values of this present world that’s destined to pass away and be destroyed! Certainly *not* the sort of people who are characterized by a materialistic greed (a craving for money and possessions and *things*) or a sexual greed (a craving for sensual gratification). But if *not that* sort of people, then what sort of people *ought* we to be?

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be,” Peter says, “*in lives of holiness and godliness.*” But in light of all that Peter’s just been saying, do you see now the question we *have* to ask? *To what world* and *on what earth* does this life of holiness and godliness belong? In what world does this life of holiness and godliness actually make sense as that which is normal and natural – as that which truly *belongs*? If *not in this world* and if *not* on this earth as it now exists, then in what world and on what earth? And the answer, we know, is in the “new world” (cf. Mat. 19:28; Heb. 2:5) – in the new heavens and the new earth where only righteousness dwells. And so now we come to that amazing and wonderful tension. Have you already felt it?

We’re called to live *now—in this world*—the life of that world that is yet to come. Such a life will appear *in this world* to be alien, and foolish, and silly, and strange, and even threatening to some because, after all, it’s a kind of life that ultimately belongs not to this world but to the new heavens and the new earth of the age to come. Do you see how radical this is? Do you see how supernatural and “otherworldly” is this life that we’re called to live? And so are you reminded of the *necessity* and the *beauty* of Peter’s very first words after his greeting in chapter one?

- 2 Peter 1:3–4 — [Christ’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and piety, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

It’s only by living today the life that belongs to the world to come that we show that even today we are “*already*” a ***new creation***, and therefore destined not to be destroyed along with the present heavens and earth but rather to have our lowly bodies transformed to be like His glorious

body and to live forever with Him in a new heavens and a new earth where only righteousness dwells. Are we “*waiting*”—are we “*eagerly looking*”—for the new heavens and the new earth? Are we diligently and joyfully living today the life that belongs to that new heavens and new earth (cf. 3:14)? It’s here that we see the true *quality* of living that we’ve been called to. It’s here that we see the true joy and happiness and exuberant hope of living *righteously* – of living lives of holiness and godliness as those who are, *already*, a ***new creation*** in Christ.

- 1 John 2:15–17 — Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
- Romans 8:19–23 — The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.