

The
PROMISE
of His
APPEARING
An Exposition of Second Peter

PETER J. LEITHART



CANON PRESS

Moscow, Idaho

**To read more about the following titles by
Peter J. Leithart, visit www.canonpress.org**

A Son to Me

An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel

From Silence to Song

The Davidic Liturgical Revolution

Against Christianity

A House For My Name

A Survey of the Old Testament

Blessed Are the Hungry

Meditations on the Lord's Supper

Heroes of the City of Man

A Christian Guide to Select Ancient Literature

Ascent to Love

A Guide to Dante's Divine Comedy

Brightest Heaven of Invention

A Christian Guide to Six Shakespeare Plays

Wise Words

Family Stories that Bring the Proverbs to Life

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
1. THE FIRST-CENTURY CONTEXT	1
2. A LETTER OF REMINDER	23
3. FALSE TEACHERS AMONG YOU	47
4. THREE WORLDS	79
SCRIPTURE INDEX	107

1

THE FIRST-CENTURY CONTEXT

This book is not a technical commentary on the Greek text of 2 Peter (though the Greek will be appealed to as necessary or when I want to show off), and it does not give a detailed exposition of every verse of the letter. Instead, it lays out a broad interpretation of the letter, and, more importantly, it lays out a broad interpretive *framework* for it. To do this I will focus on a set of specific issues within the letter, all of which are related in some way to the eschatological teaching of the book, which I argue is central to Peter's intentions. No doubt I have made some errors of interpretation on small and perhaps even larger issues, but I hope that this reading is plausible enough to make some contribution to the scholarship on the epistle and to shift the context for discussion of its contents.

A significant shift in orientation and context is, I believe, necessary to make sense both of 2 Peter and of New Testament eschatology generally. The sort of shift I hope for can be easily stated: I offer a preterist reading of 2 Peter and hope that this book will contribute to making the preterist framework of interpretation a more reputable player in New Testament studies. *Preterism* is the view that prophecies about an imminent "day of judgment" scattered throughout the New Testament were fulfilled in the apostolic age

by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the event that brought a final end to the structures and orders of the Old Creation or Old Covenant. Within this framework, Peter is dealing with issues facing the churches of the first century as the day approaches when the old world will be destroyed. Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Mt. 16:28), and I argue that Peter wrote his second letter to remind the readers of that specific prophecy of Jesus and to encourage them to cling to that promise of His appearing.

For the purposes of this book, preterism is not merely a way of interpreting New Testament prophecy but also provides a framework for understanding New Testament theology as a whole. In part, this is nothing more than an effort to understand the New Testament in its historical context. The issues and debates that dominated the New Testament era were largely about the relation of Jews and Gentiles, and derived directly from the gospel’s announcement of a new people of God, within which circumcision and uncircumcision are equally meaningless. Preterist interpretation means trying to understand the New Testament in the light of this struggle without retrojecting post-Reformation debates into the text.¹ Further, an important goal of preterist interpretation is to reckon with the influence that the threat and promise of Jesus’ imminent coming, which affects nearly every book of the New Testament, had on the shape of New Testament theology. For example, a preterist framework generates such questions as “Is it possible that the typology of the church in the wilderness (in Hebrews, for instance) had specific reference to the first-century situation?” and “What is unique about the organization, worship, and life of the church in the period between A.D. 30–70?” and “What unique role

¹This does not mean that the New Testament has nothing to say about post-Reformation debates, only that those debates were not the same as the debates of the New Testament era itself.

did the first-century church play in redemptive history, and how is this related to the fall of Jerusalem?”

Though preterist interpretations have been around for several centuries,² only in the past several decades has this view been endorsed by Protestant interpreters. A number of conservative Reformed commentators, notably J. Marcellus Kik, Kenneth Gentry, David Chilton, Gary DeMar, R. C. Sproul, and James Jordan, have defended some variety of preterism, and in mainstream New Testament studies a preterist interpretation of Jesus’ “little apocalypse” (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21) has been promoted by G. B. Caird, N. T. Wright, Marcus Borg, and others.³ These commentators all agree that Jesus describes the end of the Old Covenant order or Judaism by using language of cosmic collapse, and several argue that John does the same in Revelation.

The prophecies of 2 Peter 3 have also been interpreted as foretelling the final collapse of the Old Creation in A.D. 70. For example, centuries ago John Owen linked the language of 2 Peter 3:8–13 with the prophecy of Isaiah 65 to argue that Peter was not predicting the end of the physical universe but the end of the Old Covenant order.⁴ David Chilton followed Owen in this conclusion,⁵ and more recently John Noe and others have presented similar

² See Arthur Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 63–64, for a brief discussion of the preterist interpretation of Revelation.

³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler: ICE, 1989); Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler: Dominion Press, 1987); Jordan, *A Brief Reader's Guide To Revelation* (Niceville: Transfiguration Press, 1999); Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996); Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, [1984] 1998).

⁴ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1965–68), 9:134–135.

⁵ Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 540–545.

arguments.⁶ Mainstream evangelical and liberal commentators on 2 Peter, however, continue to be almost completely unaware of preterism as an interpretive option.⁷

In a sense, mainstream scholarship's failure to consider preterist treatments of 2 Peter is the understandable result of the weaknesses of the preterist readings of the book that have generally been offered. David Chilton's treatment, for example, focuses exclusively on 2 Peter 3, since that is the chapter which is most overtly eschatological. To be fair, it should be said that Chilton's discussion takes place in the context of a commentary on Revelation 21:1, so he can hardly be expected to treat the entire book of 2 Peter. Yet, this same narrow attention to chapter 3 is characteristic of preterist treatments I have seen elsewhere. The important question of whether 2 Peter 3 predicts an event that took place in the first century has overshadowed the equally important questions of how chapter 3 fits with the rest of Peter's letter and whether the whole of the letter might be understood preteristically.

⁶Noe, *Beyond the End Times* (Bradford, Penn.: Preterist Resources, 1999). A number of web sites also offer preterist readings of NT prophecy: preterist.org, planetpreterist.com, preteristhomepage.com, and preteristarchive.com. The content of these sites is very diverse. Alongside much insightful material, many articles endorse a heretical version of preterism that denies the future return of Christ.

⁷In his solidly evangelical commentary, Douglas Moo (*2 Peter, Jude* [NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996]) occasionally refers to passages that use the imagery of cosmic collapse to describe historical events, but this plays virtually no role in his discussion of the letter as a whole. Late in the book, Moo acknowledges that "many early Christians looked eagerly for Christ to return and take them to glory" and that "Peter himself encouraged believers to recognize that 'the end of all things is near' (1 Peter 4:7)" but fails to consider seriously the possibility that Peter was writing about an imminent event. The same goes for Norman Hillier, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (New International Biblical Commentary; New Testament Series no. 16; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), and Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; rev. ed.; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1987). Richard Bauckham raises the possibility of something like a preterist interpretation at a number of points but rejects it (*Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary no. 50 [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983]).

2

A LETTER OF REMINDER

Peter introduces himself at the outset as “Simon” or “Simeon” Peter (most manuscripts record the latter name), and it is striking that Peter chooses to introduce himself in this manner (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). “Simon” is a Greek translation of Peter’s given name, but “Simeon” is a transliteration closer to the original Hebrew spelling. This form of Peter’s name is used only one other time in the New Testament, in James’ summary statement at the Council of Jerusalem: “Simeon related how God first concerned himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). By introducing himself in this manner, Peter may be giving a clue that the concerns of the epistle were of particular import to the Jewish Christians to whom he is writing or that he is dealing with Judaizing issues raised at the Council. In both Acts 15:14 and 2 Peter 1:1, the Hebraic form of the name is linked with an allusion to the Gentile world, for “Peter” is a name of Greek origin and Simeon’s report in Acts 15 is about the extension of God’s favor to Gentiles.¹ Right from the outset, Peter identifies himself in a way that gestures toward the issues that dominated first-century debate among Christians and between Jews and Christians, and also

¹There may be a further nuance to the name. An English transliteration of Peter’s name would be *shimon* (no Greek letter was sounded “sh”), which is

gives us his readers a clue regarding the letter's background issues.

Peter also introduces himself with two titles, "bondservant" and "apostle." While "servant" might be seen as a way of highlighting the author's humility, in many of its biblical uses it is a title of honor. Moses was the "servant of the Lord" (Josh. 14:7), as was Abraham (Ps. 105:42), Jacob (Is. 48:20), and the coming Messiah (Is. 42:1; etc.).² In the New Covenant, the word is used with reference to the entire church (1 Pet. 2:16), and it describes the absolute commitment required of the disciple (Gal. 1:10). As servants of God, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:1, the apostles are entrusted with the secret things of God. Most interesting for our purposes is the use of this word in connection with the prophets (2 Kgs. 17:23: "His servants the prophets"; cf. Mt. 21:34). Prophets were the Lord's servants who brought the Word of the Lord to His people, and in particular brought the "covenant lawsuit" that condemned Israel for her unfaithfulness. Peter is doing the same.

The Greek word for "apostle" has its roots in the Hebrew "office" of *shaliach*,³ the office of a specially commissioned representative who acted with the full authority of the one who commissioned him. The accent of the word is on the *authority* of the messenger, not merely on the fact that he acts as a messenger.⁴ New Testament usage of "apostle" carries on this note of authority. Thus, we find in Matthew 10:1–2 that the designation of the Twelve changes from

taken from the Hebrew verb "to hear" (*shema*). There might thus also be a veiled allusion to the confession of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 6 and an announcement that Peter's readers need to heed his own "shema." It is as if Peter were playing the part of Moses and saying, "Hear, O Israel."

² See also Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 33–34.

³ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, s.v. "apostolos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromily, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:413–20.

⁴ As Rengstorff puts it, "the point of the designation *sheluchim* is neither description of the fact of sending nor indication of the task involved but simply assertion of the form of sending, i.e., of authorization. This is the decisive thing. The task as such is of no significance for the quality as *shalicha*" (Ibid., 415).

“disciple” to “apostle” when they are granted authority to go on a mission. Interestingly, though the word *shaliach* was not used by rabbinic Judaism to refer to the prophets, it is used of prophet Ahijah in 1 Kings 14:6.

Apostles go beyond prophets since they bear the revelation of the last days given through the Son (Heb. 1:1–3), and since they act with the full capacity of the Lord. Still, prophets and apostles are similar in various respects. In particular, like the prophets, the apostles prepare the way for the Lord’s coming by presenting the covenant lawsuit against the people of God and warning them that they have broken covenant and stand in the way of God’s wrath.

This has an important bearing on our interpretation of 2 Peter. Throughout the epistle, and indeed throughout the New Testament, there is a concern with an imminent “coming of the Lord.” As I noted in chapter 1, I believe these prophecies refer to the coming destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, which marked the end of the Old Creation and brought in a New Creation. Given Peter’s evident concern for this future event displayed in both his letters, it is no accident that Peter introduces himself to his readers with a phrase that connotes (among other things) an authoritative and prophetic office.

Like the prophets, Peter warns of future events in order to stir people up to repentance and to urge the saints to continue in the way of holiness. He moves on from the introduction, therefore, to outline what Christian living looks like. Two issues here are relevant for our purposes: Hellenism and eschatology. First, commentators suggest that Peter writes about the Christian life under the heavy influence of Hellenistic categories, terms, and ideas, and thus 2 Peter provides an early illustration of what the liberal church historian Adolf von Harnack called the “acute Hellenization” of Christianity. I will begin by challenging that argument and showing that Peter’s vision of the Christian life is thoroughly biblical, Hebraic, and consistent with Paul. Second, the overall

eschatological context of Peter's letter has influenced the way he describes the Christian life. It is not a trivialization of Peter's theology to say that in 1:3–11 he is describing how people should live if they want to avoid being destroyed in the coming judgment. Below, I expand on that theme by showing how Peter's overview of the Christian life sets the stage for later portions of his letter.

“PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE”: 1:3–11

Man was created to be the image of God in that he is to reflect God's glory physically—to serve as God's viceroy over the earth by “multiplying, taking dominion, and subduing the earth,” and by reflecting God's ability to create through speech in human speech and creativity. Adam was also created to be the image of God in an ethical sense: he was to be perfect, as His Father in heaven is perfect. When he sinned, Adam lost this image of God in this ethical sense; while he continued to display the beauty, creativity, and dominion of God, he displayed all this in a perverse way. Christ, the Last Adam, restored this image to all who are united to Him by faith.

This way of stating Christ's purpose in redemption is more Pauline than Petrine, but Peter is writing about the same reality, though he never uses the phrase “image of God” or refers to Adam. Instead he uses the striking and controversial phrase “partakers of the divine nature” (v. 4; *theias koinonoi phuseos*). Rather than saying that we are restored to divine “image,” Peter says that we participate in divine “nature”; rather than saying we become God-like, Peter seems to be saying that we become gods. Though this has been one of the main pieces of evidence for the claim that 2 Peter is a “Hellenizing” letter, the idea that humans, especially rulers, are “gods” is found in the Old Testament:

If the thief is not found, then the owner of the house shall stand before the gods (Heb. *elohim*, trans. as “judges”) to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. (Exod. 22:8)

3

FALSE TEACHERS AMONG YOU

As we have seen, 2 Peter is a follow-up letter to 1 Peter in which Peter reminds his readers of things he has already taught them. Through this second letter, he helps them anticipate what is ahead and to handle it faithfully (2 Pet. 3:17). One of the main threats facing Peter's readers is the emergence of false teachers, and refuting the false teachers becomes the focus of his attention throughout chapter 2 and into chapter 3. "Refuting," though, is not quite the word for Peter's language; pummeling, denouncing, castigating, condemning, attacking, and assaulting are more accurate descriptions of what Peter does to his opponents. He offers a few arguments in response to false teaching in chapter 3, but chapter 2 is mainly occupied not with refutation but denunciation of the most severe sort. This chapter contains some of the harshest rhetoric in the New Testament. Peter does not think the false teachers have an argument that needs to be considered carefully and responded to point-by-point; he does not try to be balanced or "fair." Though the chapter is alarming to modern sensibilities, Peter's vehemence is just the outgrowth of his deep pastoral commitment—when he looks at the false teachers, he sees nothing but a blur of white fangs, claws, and gray fur beneath the covering of wool, and he girds himself to make war on the wolves.

Though Peter puts this pastoral denunciation at the center of his letter, he has not forgotten his main purpose in writing, which is to remind his readers of prophecies. False teachers, as well as apostasy, are a fixture in New Testament portraits of the “last days” and are intimately connected with Jesus’ “power and coming.” Both Jesus and Paul warn that false prophets will arise in the last days to lead many away. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus predicted not only the presence of false prophets but their effectiveness:

Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. . . . And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, “Behold, here is the Christ,” or “There,” do not believe. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. (Mt. 24:11, 22–25)

The appearance of false prophets and the beginning of apostasy are signs that Jesus’ prophecy is nearing complete fulfillment. Wars and rumors of war, famine and earthquake, are just the “beginning of birth pangs” (Mt. 24:4–8), but when “tribulation” begins and “false prophets” arise, things are approaching “the end” (24:9–14). False prophets and teachers are a sign that the world is moving from early labor through transition and is about to give birth.

In His Olivet Discourse, interestingly, Jesus speaks specifically of the circumstances Peter is addressing—the consequences of an apparent delay in Jesus’ coming: “If that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time, and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards, the master of that slave will come when he does not expect him and at the hour which he does not know’” (Mt. 24:48–50). Jesus goes on to say that such abusive slaves will be “cut in pieces” and sent to a place of “weeping . . . and gnashing of teeth” (v. 51). Like Jesus, Peter denounces the

servants of Jesus who conclude “My master is not coming for a long time” and abuse the church, “denying the Master who bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1). Paul’s letters to Timothy echo this theme:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Tim. 4:1–3)

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. . . . among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith . . . evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Tim. 3:1, 6–8, 13)

In Revelation 13, John sees a beast come from the land (of Israel), who performs signs and wonders to lead the people of the land (of Israel) to worship the beast from the sea (of Gentiles):

And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men [cf. Rev. 11:5]. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast. (Rev. 13:11–14a)

This land beast is later identified as a “false prophet” (16:13; 19:20), who allies with the sea beast to make war against the saints.

In short, the prediction of false teachers and apostasy (including abandonment of Christian morality) is a constant in the apostolic account of the “last days.” Thus Peter can say that he is telling his readers what they already know from other apostles, especially Paul (3:2, 15–16). Peter’s description of the false teachers includes some unique elements, however, so we now turn to chapter 2.¹

“SONS OF BALAAM”: 2:1–3, 10b–18

Peter begins by drawing an analogy between the situation of Old Testament Israel and that of the New Testament church.² He assumes a typological relationship between the history of Israel and the history of the body of Christ, so that, like Paul, he believes that “these things were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Does Peter have a particular series of Old Testament events in mind? If so, what period of Israel’s history is it? He mentions Balaam in verse 15, so at least he evokes Israel’s wilderness period.³ This makes sense at a number of levels: Peter has taken the stance of Moses in Deuteronomy, writing a “second letter” as he nears his death, and like Moses he reminds the church of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness and the threat posed

¹ 2 Peter 2 can be seen as a simple chiasm, though the following outline disrupts somewhat the overall outline of the book provided in chapter 1.

A. 2:1–3 are framed by “destruction”

B. vv. 4–11 are framed by references to angels

B'. vv. 12–16 are framed by *alogos zoos* and the “dumb donkey” (in their greed, these prophets have become worse than dumb animals)

A'. vv. 17–22: these animals return to their mire (also the denial of the Lord/Master, v. 1)

² Peter evidently shares Paul’s “ecclesiocentric” hermeneutic, which emphasizes the continuity between Israel and the church. See Ricard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989).

³ Along similar lines, Jude 11 compares the false teachers with those who perished in the rebellion of Korah.

4

THREE WORLDS

By this point, I hope I have made a plausible case that Peter's entire letter is about a set of prophecies that Peter expected to be fulfilled during his readers' lifetimes. My knock-down arguments have accumulated, and there are still two more to come. From the beginning, Peter has been dealing with the prophecy of Jesus that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until you see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." 2 Peter 3 must be consistent with the overall thrust of the letter.

Though it does not (quite) qualify as a knock-down argument, the chiastic structure of the letter shows that Peter returns in 3:1–13 to a discussion of the same prophecy mentioned in the second half of chapter 1 (1:12–21). Several details are common to these two sections. First, several times in 1:12–15 Peter states his intention is to remind his readers, and 3:1–2 returns to this theme with another fragrant cluster of "remembrance" terms. Second, Peter returns explicitly to prophecies of the "coming" of Jesus. First mentioned in 1:16, where Peter defended his teaching by appeal to two witnesses, this theme comes up again in 3:4, where Peter addresses mockers who doubt the "promise of his coming." Finally, the terminology of the "day" is found in both sections (as it is also found in chapter 2). 1:19 speaks of the "dawning of the day," and 3:10, 12 of

the “day of the Lord” and the “day of God,” while verse 7 tells about the “day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” If Peter has a specific prophecy in mind in 1:16–19—the prophecy of Jesus that He would come in power with His angels before the generation of the apostles has passed—and if 3:1–13 is structurally parallel to 1:16–19, using some of the same terminology and addressing some of the same concerns, then the two passages must be, as they say, mutually interpreting. If 1:16–19 is concerned with the prophecy of Jesus’ coming within the first century, this must be the same prophecy being discussed in 3:1–13.

Even before the detailed examination of chapter 3, then, we have good reason to suspect that the chapter will be about the imminent judgment on the Old Creation. These suspicions, I argue below, are fully justified.

“THE DAY”: 3:1–13

As preterist interpreters have pointed out, there are indications within chapter 3 that Peter is talking about a “day of judgment” that would occur within the first century. Peter is concerned with mockers who arise in the church in the “last days,” and this and similar phrases refer throughout the New Testament to the apostolic era, not some future period of history:

Now these things happened to them as a type, and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.
(1 Cor. 10:11)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoke to us in His Son. (Heb. 1:1–2)

For [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.
(1 Pet. 1:20)

Peter warns that mockers will come in the first century (2 Pet. 3:3), and this implies that their “destruction” must also take place within that period. As noted above in chapter 2, the mockers are the same as the false teachers of 2 Peter 2; the false teachers are the “ungodly men” of 3:7 and the “unprincipled men” of 3:17.¹ Thus the “day of God” (3:12) is the “day” for the destruction of the false teachers (3:7). If the mockers have already appeared in the first century, and their destruction is predicted, that destruction must also take place in the first century.² It would hardly be worthwhile for God to destroy the false teachers long after they have died. Since the destruction of the ungodly teachers is part and parcel of the end of the heavens and earth, then the destruction of heaven and earth must also be expected in the first century.

The phrase “last days” also has a broader reference in some passages, designating not only the apostolic period but the whole period from the exile through the apostolic period, the whole period of the “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9. About Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue, Daniel says that God “has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the end of the days” (Dan. 2:28), and he goes on to explain that the vision begins with Nebuchadnezzar himself (2:38). Similarly, a vision of the wars that followed Alexander’s campaigns (Dan. 11) gives “understanding of what will happen to your people in the end of the days” (Dan. 10:14). These uses in Daniel are rooted in the prophecies of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy:

¹ 2 Pet. 3:17 uses the same word (“unprincipled”) as 2:7, which draws an analogy between the false teachers and Sodomites.

² Hillyer gives a good description of the psychology of Peter’s readers: “No doubt some of Peter’s readers, galled by the pernicious workings of the false teachers, must often have asked how long God would allow the situation to persist. In his role as pastor, Peter reassures them. Divine deliverance may seem to be uncertain, or at least long in coming. But it will come, for God is in control all along” (*1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 191). In Hillyer’s futurist interpretation, however, it is difficult to see how Peter provides any sort of reassurance.

For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of Yahweh, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands. (Deut. 31:29)

In Moses' and Daniel's scheme, the "former days" of Israel's history include the Exodus and the period of the kingdom, while the "latter days" are the period when Israel bowed before a series of imperial world powers. For the apostles, however, the phrasing has a more specific reference to the period at the end of the "latter days" or the "times of the Gentiles." We might say that Peter is describing events of the "latter days of the latter days."

From the perspective of Daniel, we can conclude that the end of the "latter days" that Peter predicts means an end (at least) to an entire world-order in which Israel was subjected to Gentile protectors and powers. Judgment on the "present heavens and earth" is not only a judgment on Jerusalem but on the entire political economy of the postexilic world. Revelation reveals this same point by depicting the fall of the beast, a composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7 (cf. Rev. 13:1–10), and the fall of the false prophet, who represents Jews in their cooperation with pagan imperialism.³

The specific content of the mockers' mockery decisively supports a preterist interpretation. This is a knock-down argument to end all knock-down arguments. Seeing that the first generation of believers (the "fathers," 3:4; see below) are passing on with no sign that the "power and coming" of Jesus is imminent, the mockers ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (3:4). They do not believe that the Parousia is being delayed but are questioning whether or not it will ever occur. Now these doubts would arise *only* if they had reason to expect the Parousia to happen soon. And they are a threat to Peter's readers, able to sway and perhaps persuade some

³ For more, see Jordan, *A Brief Reader's Guide to Revelation*.