

ESCHATOLOGY

IN II PETER

A Study

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by

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ESCHATOLOGY IN II PETER

Introduction

Basis for Eschatology

Since his fall in the Garden of Eden, man has awaited Christ's coming. His first appearance was, of course, the crux of history: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was in Genesis 3:15 that the promise of a Messiah was given. It was here that God spoke of the enmity between the serpent and the Seed (Jesus Christ). He spoke of the bruising of the heel of the Seed (temporary) and the crushing of the head of the serpent (fatal). From that point, God began setting into action His plan of salvation for mankind. He first raised up a people through which to send His Son into the world. Then, God brought forth to the earth His Son who was to save the whole race of man through his atoning death upon the cross and the following resurrection. The messianic promise (Genesis 3:15) was not totally fulfilled in this one instance. The serpent (Satan) was not given the fatal blow that would end his power forever. It was at this point in history that man once again began looking for the return of Christ. However, the church was no longer looking for the coming of the Messiah to restore the relationship with God. They began looking for the return of Christ to the earth to fulfill the words Christ had spoken in John 14:3, "I will

come again."¹ They began looking for the Second Coming of the Lord which would end human history as it had previously been known. It was also this return that has brought about volumes of writing upon the study of eschatology.

What is Eschatology?

What then is eschatology? Eschatology is defined as "the doctrine or teaching of last things."² These "last things" include: death, the intermediate state (between death and the resurrection), the second coming of Jesus Christ, the millennium, the rapture, the resurrection, and the judgment. It is the "anticipation of Jesus Christ" that Biblical eschatology searches out.³ The primary need for eschatology is the building of hope in mankind.⁴ Without hope man has only society and the world around him to look for guidance and happiness. In these he finds nothing of lasting value and eternal significance. Therefore studying Biblical eschatology provides man with a "light at the end of the tunnel." With this hope in mind man can carry out God's directives and bring more to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Background Information

There have been many portions of scripture that have been studied in connection with eschatology. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have contributed ideas toward the study of the "last things." For the purpose of this paper, passages in the book of II Peter were studied exclusively. Before delving into the passages, it was important

to gain an understanding of background factors of the book: authorship, occasion, and date.

Authorship of II Peter

The authorship of II Peter has been a highly debated subject. Some of the arguments against the book being written by Peter, the disciple of Jesus, included several facts. First, many differences have been noted between I and II Peter. The Greek in I Peter was found to be much better than that of II Peter. Variations in vocabulary have been noted between the books. Also, I Peter quoted the Old Testament thirty-one times to II Peter's five times. Also there were fewer references to Jesus' earthly life in II Peter.⁵ There have been many supporters of Peter as the author, however. These have given both external and internal evidences for the support of Peter as the author. There have been a few external evidences noted, however, the main arguments for Petrine authorship have been from internal evidence. The evidences have included: 1) the name Simon Peter in 1:1, 2) identified as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), 3) writer refers to an earlier epistle having been read by him to the same readers (3:1), 4) The writer was a close friend of Paul and had read many if not all of Paul's epistles (3:15-16), 5) autobiographical references in the epistle (Mt. of Transfiguration and Christ's foretelling of Peter's death) are about Peter,⁶ 6) vocabulary of II Peter is similar to that of Peter's speeches in Acts, and 7) points of likeness between I and II

Peter.⁷ As far as the differences between the quality of the Greek in I and II Peter is concerned, many scholars have thought that in I Peter a scribe had been used (Silvanus as found in I Peter 5:12) and II Peter was written strictly by Peter himself. Peter likely wrote II Peter alone while in prison with no one to beautify his fisherman's Greek.⁸

Occasion and Date of II Peter

Two other background considerations also have received much consideration: the occasion and date of II Peter. I Peter had dealt with pressures attacking the church from the outside. In II Peter the issue of internal pressures has been dealt with. The external pressures were forms of persecution to the Church. The internal pressures were apostasy and false teachings. In writing II Peter, Peter sought to disparage these apostasies and false teachings.⁹ Also, Peter was coming closer and closer to his death and as such began to record teachings on the guarantee of the hope of the second coming and eschatological matters.¹⁰

Concerning the date of the writing of the book, several dates have been espoused. For those that hold to Petrine authorship, the date of the writing must have taken place before Peter's death in 67 A.D.¹¹ Therefore, many scholars placed II Peter in the range of 64-67 A.D.¹² However, for those scholars that do not hold to Petrine authorship, the date of the writing of II Peter is often placed before 80 A.D.¹³

For the purpose of this study, Peter is presupposed as the author of II Peter and the date of the writing of the book is placed between 64-67 A.D.

The Second Coming

Although the term "second coming" is not mentioned in the text of the New Testament, the idea of the second coming is implicit to the prophecies of Jesus. The importance of the second coming has been as important as the first coming of Jesus because it is the fulfillment of the Messianic promise of Genesis 3:15 and a final end to the discord between creation and God. "The emphasis of the New Testament is on a personal, visible, and triumphant return of Jesus Christ to the earth to consummate God's purpose in history and to usher in the eternal order."¹⁴ One of the Greek words used for the second coming is "parousia" which basically means "presence," or "coming." This word is found in II Peter 1:16, 3:4, and 3:12.¹⁵ Although II Peter 1:16 is listed showing the word for the second coming, it primarily spoke that the apostles told the Truth of God not "cunningly devised fairy tales" when speaking of the second coming. The verse does not give characteristics or information of the second coming except for its validity. As such, it has not been treated in this paper.

II Peter 3:3-4

"(3) knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, (4) and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since

the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'"

Interpretation of the passage. In this portion of the text, Peter was making the point to his readers that God is in charge. He acts according to His own time scale.¹⁶ As discussed above, Peter has been combating heresies. One of the foremost heretical teachings was that Christ was not returning. In this text Peter has confirmed that, in spite of what scoffers may say, Jesus Christ will return.¹⁷ Michael Green in his commentary on the text spoke of these scoffers being found not only in Christian circles but in Jewish circles as well. He also stated that these scoffers were men that not only denied the second coming but also lived "self-indulgent Lives."¹⁸ In other words these men were "fat and sassy" fat from living in the pleasures of the world and cynical to the things of God. Their trust had been put in the things around them that were tangible.

Context of the passage. In this section of scripture, Peter began to encourage the people who were remaining faithful to God. He had finished his teachings on false teachers and heresies and used 3:3-4 as an example of what to watch for. He also showed them the holes in the logical processes used by these heretics (3:5-6). It is in this message that Peter seeks to remind the flock that not everyone is a heretic and that everyone should not feel like a heretic themselves. Overall, this chapter (3) is one of encouragement to the steadfast.

Significance to the original audience. Although the identity of the original audience has never been firmly established, it is safe to say that they were a Christian body. Some scholars believe that the group was that which was identified in I Peter 1:1--Asia.¹⁹ Others acclaim that the message was not connected to I Peter but to a lost letter. In any case, the odds are high for a Christian Church in the Asia Minor area. The reason relies upon the premise that the Asia Minor area received it quite early and that this area had a significant group of heretical teachers and seed-beds.²⁰ The significance to this audience is that Peter knew that there was trouble in the church or area. As a good pastor, Peter wrote warning them and then consoling those who have been faithful-

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II Peter 3:8-10

(8) But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Interpretation of the passage. The message of the passage points out that the seeming delay of the coming of the Lord is not a result of the falsehood of the Word of God. Rather it is a statement that God is not bound by the time of man. God operates on His own timing.²² Peter has also pointed out

another reason for the delay: God's love for His creation. God has waited so long because He wants everyone to have a chance to repent and come to Him. ²³ Peter goes on to say that the return of the Lord could come at any time and that everyone should remain faithful. Verses 8-9 attempt to counter the apathetic spirit about Christ's return, whereas verse 10 attempts to counter overzealousness.²⁴

Context of the passage. In this passage Peter refutes the notions of the scoffers by supporting his teachings. First, Peter supports his argument with Scripture. In verse 8, Peter quotes Psalm 90:4.²⁵ Next, Peter argues using the character of God as a proof: it is God's love for mankind that holds back the *parousia*. Also, Peter argued using references of Christ found in the Gospels (Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40).²⁶

Significance to the original audience. Michael Green notes that this particular section and especially verse 10 is significant to the city of Sardis which had been taken over by enemies scaling the walls and coming in like bandits.²⁷ Also this passage this section curbed the desire of those who wished to set a date for the return of Christ.²⁸

The Final Judgment

The final judgment is the judgment of all mankind after the second coming. It does not determine the final resting place of each individual¹ which was decided by the person's choice for or against Christ.²⁹ The final judgment is a

means of accomplishing several things. First, the final judgment will display the sovereignty and glory of God. Second, the judgment will reveal the degree of reward or punishment one will receive. Third, the judgment will be the point at which God "grants divine approval to" the personal choices of man's choice for or against Christ. As a result of this judgment everyone will be placed in their proper eternal state.

II Peter 2:9

"then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"

Interpretation of the passage. This scripture attests to the sovereignty of the Lord and His ability to carry out His divine plan. It also shows that the just will be protected and the ungodly will be held in their state of punishment ~~untill~~ the judgment day. God not only regulates the tests and temptations of His people but also gives His people strength to endure.³⁰ God, as the regulator of tests, also regulates for the ungodly. However, they have chosen not to follow God and are held in punishment as a result.

Context of the passage. In Chapter 2, Peter began a discourse on false and destructive doctrines. It is in the section from verse 4-11 of chapter 2 that Peter describes the penalty for the ungodly and the reward for the righteous.

Significance to the original audience. To the people surrounded by apostasy and heretical teachings on all sides, this verse attempts to give the righteous the realization

that nothing has escaped God's scope of awareness. He sees all that takes place and will punish or reward those who do wrong and right (respectively).³¹

II Peter 3:7

⓪ But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.⓸

Interpretation of the passage. This scripture begins by saying that God created the world and can destroy them just as easily.³² This is the "word" ^{as} is the power and authority of God to do His own will. The idea of the earth ending in water and fire has been attributed to Adam himself by some Jews. By this, there is some credence to what Peter is saying. The earth ended and was made new by the flood of Noah's time. So also will the earth end and be made anew by fire at the time of the final judgment.³³ ?

Context of the passage. This statement is a connecting statement in the above scriptures (II Peter 3:3-4 and II Peter 3:8-10). It goes from a section that is dealing with information that the scoffers have failed to recognize to the power behind the flood (the information not recognized by the scoffers) to the final ending of the earth in the judgment to the words of verses 8-10. In this section Peter has pointed to the power of God in the past (creation and the flood), the power of God in the present (holding the world in stasis), and the power of God in the future (judgment and the return of the Lord).

Significance to the original audience. To the original audience this statement was a comfort because it let them know that God was still in control. God still had the power over all creation (the "word"). He also held the power to control the future of all that is. It pointed to the finality that the scoffers said was a falsehood. As a result the Christians who are faithful can rejoice because the destruction mentioned will not come against them but against the ungodly.

Conclusion

Since the ascension of Jesus into heaven, mankind has awaited His return. The time and the date as shown in II Peter are not known by mankind nor even the Son of God. However, the reason for God's delay is anchored in love for the human race. God desires for all men to be saved. Although not everyone will be saved, God in His wisdom has worked according to His time table to bring the Lord's return. For this reason Christians should be prepared to see the Lord's return at any moment. Perhaps it may be today...

NOTES

¹Hoyt, Herman A. The End Times. (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 50.

²Sauer, Val J. The Eschatology Handbook: The Bible Speaks to Us Today About Endtimes. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 3.

³Sauer, p. 3.

⁴Sauer, p. 5.

⁵Harrison, Everett F. Introduction to the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 416-18.

⁶Jensen, Irving L. Jensen's Survey of the New Testament. (Chicago: Moody, 1981), p. 453-54.

⁷Harrison, p. 424.

⁸Gromacki, Robert G. New Testament Survey. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), p. 360

⁹Jensen, p. 454.

¹⁰Gromacki, p. 362.

¹¹Jensen, p. 454.

¹²Gromacki, p. 361

¹³Harrison, p. 426.

¹⁴Sauer, p. 58.

¹⁵Sauer, p. 59.

¹⁶Thatcher, Floyd W. Discovering James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude: The Guideposts Home Bible Study Program. Ed. Floyd W. Thatcher. (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1987), p. 120.

¹⁷Gromacki, p. 366.

¹⁸Green, Michael. II Peter and Jude. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 138.

¹⁹Green, p. 40.

²⁰Green, p. 40.

²¹Green, p. 40.

²² Graves, Arthur H. First and Second Peter. (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1965), p. 70.

²³Graves, p. 70-71.

²⁴Green, p. 149.

²⁵Green, p. 146.

²⁶Green, p. 149.

²⁷Green, p. 149.

²⁸Green, p. 149.

²⁹Sauer, p. 98-99.

³⁰Green, p. 112.

³¹Green, p. 114.

³²Green, p. 143.

³³Green, p. 143.

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