

The Day of the Lord



SABBATH—JUNE 10

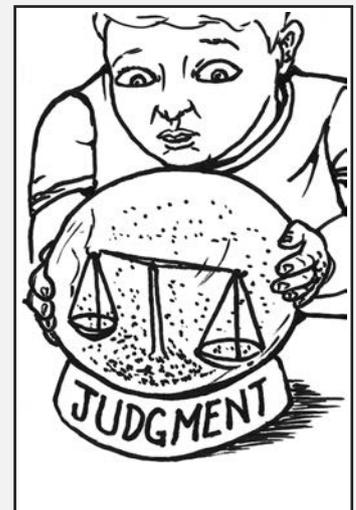
READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Peter 3:1, 2; John 21:15–17; 2 Peter 3:3–18; Psalm 90:4; Matthew 24:43–51.

MEMORY VERSE: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them. God will judge the earth and everything done in it. So everything will be destroyed in this way” (2 Peter 3:10, 11, NlrV).

IN AGES PAST, PEOPLE WHO DID NOT BELIEVE IN GOD were not trusted. They were even seen as dangerous. Why? The idea was simple. If people did not believe in God, then they did not believe in any future judgment. They did not believe they would have to answer before God for their deeds. They would be more likely to do wrong.

Such thinking is rather out-of-date today. But it is not hard to see the reasoning behind it. Of course, many people do not need the fear of a future judgment in order to do right. But at the same time, the thought of answering to God could certainly help someone do what is right.

As we have seen, Peter is not afraid to warn about the judgment that evildoers would face before God. Peter speaks clearly about the end of days, judgment, and the second coming of Jesus. And Peter speaks about the time when “the heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them” (2 Peter 3:10, NlrV). And so with the judgment and the Second Coming before us, he asks: “What kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives” (2 Peter 3:11, NlrV).



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THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY (2 Peter 3:1, 2)



The Old Testament helps establish the New Testament and the claims Peter makes about Jesus.

Peter warns his readers about the kind of dangerous teachings the church would face. He warns against those who promise freedom. This is because the very ones who promise freedom would lead people back into sin. They would lead people to become slaves to it. And Peter's point is that slavery to sin is the opposite of the freedom that Christ promises us.

Sadly, this false freedom is not the only dangerous teaching that would attack the church. Another false teaching would come. Peter warns his readers about what it is. But before he does, he says something else first.

“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders. I want to encourage you to think in a way that is pure. I want you to remember the words the holy prophets spoke in the past. Remember the command our Lord and Savior gave through your apostles [teachers; leaders]” (2 Peter 3:1, 2, NIV). What point is Peter making here about why his readers should obey his words? Read also John 21:15–17.

In 2 Peter 3:1, 2, Peter reminds his readers of the words that were given to them long ago “by the holy prophets” (NIV). The prophets were God's special messengers to His people. So Peter mentions the prophets to point his readers back to the Bible. Peter reminds his readers that the message of the prophets can be trusted completely (2 Peter 1:19). He wants to be clear to his readers about the prophets again here. Their beliefs are founded on the Bible. Nothing in the New Testament supports the idea that the Old Testament is no longer important. Just the opposite is true. The Old Testament helps establish the truth of the New and the claims Peter makes about Jesus.

But there is more. Peter then shows his own authority is linked to the authority of the holy prophets of the Old Testament. After all, he is one of the apostles of the Lord and Savior. So Peter is clear that his calling is from the Lord. No wonder Peter speaks with such power and faith. Why? He knows that his message comes from God.

Why must we not make culture or our own judgment or reason the final authority in our lives? Instead, why must the Bible be the final authority?

THE ONES WHO LAUGH AT THE TRUTH (2 Peter 3:3, 4)

Peter tells his readers “to remember the words the holy prophets spoke in the past. Remember the command our Lord and Savior gave through your apostles” (2 Peter 3:2, NIV). Then Peter gives a special warning about another false teaching. Peter knows how dangerous this teaching will be. So perhaps he wants to describe it with the full authority he has as an apostle. Then his readers will know to be on their guard against this false teaching.

Read 2 Peter 3:3, 4. Those who doubt Christ’s soon return will scorn the truth and make fun of it. What arguments will they use to turn away from the truth?

Peter points out that the ones who promised a false freedom in Christ were a lot like those who made fun of and doubted the Second Coming. The first group follows desires that come from giving in to sin’s power (2 Peter 2:10, NIV). Meanwhile, the ones who scorn the return of Christ will “follow their own evil desires” (2 Peter 3:3, NIV).

Peter warns that the doubters will ask, “Where is this ‘return’ [Jesus] promised?” (2 Peter 3:4, NIV). In doing so, they will doubt and scorn the long-standing belief of Christians that Jesus will return to this earth, and soon. These doubters will bring up the very real fact that many Christians have died. And they will point to the fact that things continue to go on as they always have.

In a way, their question seems reasonable. Ellen G. White wrote about how even holy Enoch saw that the godly and the wicked “would go to the dust together. And death would be the end of both of them” (*Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets*, page 85). Enoch was troubled by this truth. He lived before the Flood. And if he struggled with this question, how much more so would those who lived after him, down to the last days, struggle?

And what about us today, as Seventh-day Adventists? Our very name points to Christ’s second coming. But He still has not come. And yes, we face those who make fun of us for our belief in Christ’s return, just as Peter foretold we would.

In your own faith experience, how do you deal with the fact that Christ has not returned yet?



Peter warns that doubters will ask, “Where is this ‘return’ [Jesus] promised?” (2 Peter 3:4). They will point to the fact that things continue to go on as they always have.

A THOUSAND YEARS IS LIKE A DAY (2 Peter 3:8–10)

In 2 Peter 3:8–10, how does Peter respond to the argument that doubters and scorners bring? What does Peter say that can help us to understand why Christ has not returned?

Many laugh at the idea of Christ's soon return. They point out that things continue in the world the way they always have. But Peter reminds his listeners that this argument is false. The world has not continued unchanged since Creation. For one, he reminds us of the truth we read in Genesis. (Notice how Peter goes right back to the Bible. It is the source of his authority.) Genesis tells how there was a time of great wickedness. Then God destroyed the world with a Flood (2 Peter 3:6). The Flood brought about a great change to the world. It is a change that remains with us today. Peter then says the earth will be destroyed one last time. But it will be destroyed by fire, not water (2 Peter 3:10).

Peter also writes, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8, NIV). By declaring this truth, Peter may have been thinking about Psalm 90:4: "To [God] a thousand years are like a day that has just gone by. They are like a few hours of the night" (NIV). In other words, our idea of time is not like God's. So we need to be careful in the judgments we make about time.

From a human point of view, there does seem to be a delay in the return of Christ. But we are looking at things only through human eyes. From God's point of view, there is no delay. In fact, Peter says that God in His mercy has granted us extra time. Why? Because God is showing His patience. He does not want anyone to be lost (2 Peter 3:9). God wants to give everyone the chance to turn away from sin.

But Peter warns that God's patience should not be used to postpone giving one's life to Jesus. The day of the Lord will come without warning. It will come as a thief in the night. A thief who comes at night no doubt expects to sneak away unnoticed. Yes, the day of the Lord will come like a thief. But it will certainly be noticed. Then Peter says, "The heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them" (2 Peter 3:10, NIV). In this way Peter's message is like Paul's: "I tell you, now is the time God has mercy. Now is the day he saves" (2 Corinthians 6:2, NIV).



The day of the Lord will come without warning. It will come as a thief in the night.

SO WHAT? (2 Peter 3:11–13)

A young man tried to witness to his mother. He told her about the death of Jesus and the promise of His return. He thought that he had done a good job of putting his thoughts into words. He finished his mini-sermon about Jesus and the Second Coming. Then his mother looked at him and said: “So what does that have to do with me now?”

Read 2 Peter 3:11–13. How does Peter answer the question, “So what does that have to do with me now?” (Also read Matthew 24:43–51.)

As we have said, our very name, Seventh-day Adventist, points to our belief in Christ’s soon return. Our faith is founded on this hope. Without it, our beliefs would become meaningless. The return of Christ and all that it promises, then, gives life to our faith.

But are we not in danger of becoming like the wicked servant in Matthew 24:43–51? We might not be doing the kind of evil shown in the story. But that is not the point. Instead, what the story warns about is that we can very easily lower our standards, especially in the way that we treat others. Then we risk becoming unkind and harsh. We risk believing less in the Lord’s return.

The danger facing Seventh-day Adventists is not in setting dates for Christ’s soon return. But danger does come the longer we remain here on earth. The passing years cause the promise of the Second Coming to seem far off. Then it begins to have a much smaller part in our thinking.

Yes, the longer we are here, the closer we get to the Second Coming. But the longer we are here, the easier it is for us to imagine that Christ’s return is so far away. We start to feel and act as if it really does not have any effect on our daily lives. Scripture (the Bible) warns against this kind of satisfaction with the way things are. As Peter says, Jesus will return. And we will face judgment. So, as Christians, we should live “holy and godly lives” (2 Peter 3:11, NIV). We do not know when the Second Coming will be. But it should change how we live now.

How much does the Second Coming affect you in your daily life and thinking? What does your answer say to you about your life and faith?



The danger we face is not in setting dates for Christ’s soon return. The real danger comes the longer we remain here on earth.

A FINAL REQUEST (2 Peter 3:14–18)

Peter ends his letter with a theme that has filled it from the start. We are to live holy lives. And we are to be careful not to be “led astray by people who [do not] obey the law” (2 Peter 3:17, NIV).

Read 2 Peter 3:14–18. Who does Peter make his request to? And what does he warn about in his request?

How interesting it is that Peter ends his letter by asking his readers to remember the writings of “our dear brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15, NIV). Paul also wrote of the need to live at peace. And we should do this as we wait for the second coming of Jesus. We should use the time to develop holy lives (read Romans 2:4; Romans 12:18; Philippians 2:12).

Also notice the way that Peter points to the writings of Paul. It shows that Paul’s writings are very much valued early on in Christian history. We do not know if Peter is speaking of all of Paul’s writings here, or only part of them. But Peter’s words show that he thought very well of Paul’s letters.

Finally, Peter says that Paul’s writings can be misunderstood. The Greek word *grapha* means “writings.” But in this verse it clearly means “sacred writings.” It can mean the books of Moses and the prophets. Here is very early evidence that Paul’s writings have taken on authority. Even then, they had the authority of the Hebrew Bible.

remember what we read earlier about false teachers. They promise freedom in Christ. It is not hard to imagine people using Paul’s writings about freedom and mercy and forgiveness as an excuse for sinning. After all, Paul strongly preaches the idea of being made holy by faith alone (Romans 3:21, 22). But nothing in his writings gives people freedom to sin (read Romans 6:1–14). Paul himself had to deal with this error. Even in his day, people twisted what he preached and taught about being made holy by faith. But Peter warns that those who twist Paul’s writings “will be destroyed” (2 Peter 3:16, NIV).

What kind of life have we been called to live in Christ Jesus? What choices can you make right now to help you live that life?



Nothing in Paul’s writings gives people the freedom to sin. Peter warns that those who twist Paul’s writings to say something they do not mean “will be destroyed” (2 Peter 3:16, NIV).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The Second Coming can seem like it is very far off in the future. Jesus warns against what could happen if we are not careful and do not watch during this time. For example, take Jesus' story of the two servants in Matthew 24:45–51. In the story, both servants expect their master to return. One servant decides he must be ready for the master to return at any time. The other servant says that the master is delayed. And so he takes the delay as an opportunity to do evil.

“We do not know the exact time of Jesus' coming. So we are commanded to watch (Luke 12:37, NIV). Those who watch for the Lord's coming are not waiting around doing nothing. A belief in Christ's coming is to lead men to worship and obey the Lord. And they are to fear and respect His judgments upon sin. The belief in Christ's coming is to awaken them to the great sin of rejecting His offers of mercy. Those who are watching for the Lord are making their souls pure by obeying the truth.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 634.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What are some of the ways we deal with the fact that Christ has not yet returned? What can we learn from one another's answers?
- 2 What teachings, practices, and beliefs do we have as Seventh-day Adventists that come only from the Bible? (These are teachings, practices, and beliefs that do not come from culture, reason, or tradition.)
- 3 As we saw during the week, Peter links sinful desires and passions with false teaching. How are the two connected?
- 4 Albert Einstein presented the amazing idea that time is not the same for everyone. Rather, time depends on where you are and how fast you move. So your experience of time will be different from someone else's, who is in a different place and moving at a different speed. Clearly, time is a mystery. It acts in ways that we do not fully understand. How might this idea help us to realize that time is not the same for God as it is for us? And how might this idea help us to better understand why Christ still has not returned?



“Those who are watching for the Lord are making their souls pure by obeying the truth.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 634.