

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: The Day of the Lord Will Come

2 Peter 3:1–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Peter 3 is the great eschatological climax of the letter, and it carries significant doctrinal weight that must be taught clearly. Peter describes a single, sudden 'day of the Lord' that comes 'like a thief,' in which 'the heavens will pass away with a roar,' the elements are 'dissolved' and 'burned up,' and the present created order gives way to 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.' This stands plainly against premillennialism: there is no future earthly thousand-year political reign here, but one decisive day of judgment and renewal at Christ's return. It also stands against all date-setting: the day comes 'like a thief,' unexpected and unannounced, and Jesus Himself said no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36). Teach the certainty of Christ's return and the dissolution of this world, the Christian's hope of the new heavens and new earth, and the folly and danger of predicting the timing. Peter also corrects the 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years' saying from being twisted into date-setting schemes; it teaches God's relationship to time, not a code for calculating the end.

The chapter also contains a key statement on the heart of God: the Lord is 'patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance' (v. 9). Teach this against the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election. God genuinely desires the salvation of all, not the predetermined damnation of some; the very reason for the delay of Christ's coming is God's merciful desire that all reach repentance. The gospel call is sincere and universal, and human beings are genuinely able to repent. Be ready to show how God's patience is mercy with a saving purpose, not slowness or indifference, and not a hidden decree to save only a chosen few.

Pastorally, this passage is meant both to comfort and to sober. It comforts a waiting, weary church tempted to doubt by the long delay: the promise is sure, God is not slow, and a glorious new creation is coming. It sobers everyone with the certainty of judgment and the call, 'what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?' The coming dissolution of all things is the most practical of doctrines: since everything we can see will burn, we should not build our lives on it, but on the God and the righteousness that will remain. Aim to leave students confident in Christ's sure return, freed from both date-setting speculation and from doubt, and living holy lives in light of the day of the Lord and the new heavens and new earth. The disciple we are forming waits with patient hope, reads God's delay as mercy, and lives now as a citizen of the coming new creation.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter writes to ‘stir up your sincere mind by way of reminder’ (vv. 1–2), pointing back to the words of the prophets and apostles. Why does Peter again emphasize the prophetic and apostolic word as the foundation here, and how does grounding ourselves in Scripture protect us from the scoffing of the age?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter states his purpose plainly: ‘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.’ Once again Peter anchors the church not in novelty or speculation but in the established word of the prophets and apostles. Against the unsettling questions of the scoffers, the antidote is grounding in Scripture.

Show how this connects to chapter 1. There Peter established the inspired authority of the prophetic word and the eyewitness reliability of the apostles; here he sends his readers back to that same word as their stability. The settled, God-given Scriptures are the church’s anchor in every age of doubt. We are not left to our own speculations; we have a sure word.

Apply it to facing the scoffing of our own age. Every generation faces voices that mock the faith and unsettle believers. The protection is not cleverness but rootedness, minds stirred up to remember and hold fast what God has already revealed. A Christian saturated in Scripture is far harder to sweep away than one who lives on impressions and the spirit of the age.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture (prophets and apostles) as the church’s anchor against doubt (2 Peter 1:19–21)
- Reminder and remembrance as a defense against scoffing
- The settled, God-given word over speculation and novelty
- Rootedness in Scripture as protection from the spirit of the age (Ephesians 4:14)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Peter keep pointing back to the prophetic and apostolic word?
- How does grounding in Scripture protect you from the scoffing of the age?
- What would help you be more rooted in the Word than in impressions?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter says the scoffers follow ‘their own sinful desires’ (v. 3), hinting that doubt often has a moral root, not just an intellectual one. Where might your own desires be quietly shaping what you are willing to believe or obey, and how do you guard against letting what you want determine what you accept as true?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter makes a penetrating observation: the scoffers are 'following their own sinful desires.' Their doubt is not merely intellectual; it has a moral root. They mock the coming judgment in part because they do not want it to be true, since a returning Judge is inconvenient to a life built on sinful desire.

Help students see how desire shapes belief. We like to imagine our beliefs are purely rational, but the heart often leads the head. People are remarkably able to disbelieve what would require them to change. When a truth threatens a cherished sin, the temptation is to find reasons to doubt the truth rather than abandon the sin.

Turn it inward honestly. Ask each student where their own desires might be quietly bending what they are willing to believe or obey, a command they have explained away, a truth they keep at arm's length because accepting it would cost them something. The guard against this is honesty before God and submission to His Word even, and especially, where it crosses what we want.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The moral root of much unbelief: doubt serving sinful desire (John 3:19–20)
- The heart's power to bend the mind's beliefs
- Disbelieving what would require us to change
- Submission to God's Word even where it crosses our desires

Discussion Prompts

- How can our desires quietly shape what we are willing to believe?
- Where might what you want be influencing what you accept as true?
- How do you guard against letting desire override truth?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter answers the scoffers by pointing to creation and the flood, and says 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (vv. 5–8). What does this teach about how God relates to time, and how does it answer the charge that God is 'slow' to keep His promise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter answers the scoffers' 'everything goes on as always' with history and theology. Historically, everything has not gone on unchanged: God once judged the world by water in the flood. The same divine word that created the heavens and earth, and that judged the ancient world, is now keeping the present world in reserve for judgment by fire. The uniformity the scoffers assume is an illusion; God has intervened before and will again.

Then Peter reframes time itself: 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' God does not experience time as we do. He is eternal, standing outside the calendar that imprisons us. What looks like an unbearable delay from inside our short lives is a moment from the vantage of eternity. The charge that God is 'slow' assumes God shares our timetable; He does not.

Guard the verse from misuse. Some have twisted 'a day is as a thousand years' into a code for calculating the end (treating the seven days of creation as seven thousand years of history, for example). Peter's point is the opposite of date-setting; he is dismantling the scoffers' time-bound logic, not handing out a formula. The verse teaches God's transcendence over time, not a key to predicting the future.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's past intervention (creation and flood) refuting the scoffers' assumed uniformity (2 Peter 3:5-6)
- God's eternity and transcendence over time (Psalm 90:4)
- The charge of 'slowness' as a category mistake about God and time
- Guarding 'a day is as a thousand years' from date-setting misuse

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's relationship to time answer the charge that He is 'slow'?
- Why is the scoffers' 'everything goes on as always' actually false?
- Why is it a mistake to turn verse 8 into a formula for the end?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says the scoffers 'deliberately overlook' the facts of God's past judgment (v. 5). When you are tempted to doubt or to live as though judgment will never come, what truths are you most tempted to conveniently forget, and what helps you keep them in view?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says the scoffers 'deliberately overlook' the truth, literally, this escapes them because they will it to. Their forgetting is not innocent ignorance but willful avoidance of facts they find inconvenient, chiefly that God has judged the world before and will judge it again.

Help students recognize the same tendency in themselves. We too are tempted to conveniently forget the truths that would disturb our comfort: that we will give account, that this world is passing, that sin has consequences, that Christ is coming. Out of sight, out of mind is a spiritual danger, not just a saying.

Move toward keeping these truths in view. Ask each student which truths they are most tempted to forget when they want to coast or sin, and what practices keep those truths before them: regular worship, the Lord's Supper that proclaims His death 'until he comes,' time in the Word, the company of the faithful. We do not drift toward remembering; we must deliberately keep the great realities in view.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Willful forgetting as a spiritual danger, not innocent ignorance
- The temptation to overlook judgment, accountability, and the coming of Christ
- Keeping eternal truths in view through worship and the Word (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- Deliberate remembrance against convenient forgetting

Discussion Prompts

- What truths are you most tempted to conveniently forget?
- How does forgetting them make sin or coasting easier?
- What practices help you keep the great realities in view?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says, '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' (v. 9). What does this teach about why Christ has not yet returned, and what does it reveal about God's heart toward all people and His desire for everyone to be saved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Peter unveils the real reason for the delay, and it is breathtaking mercy: '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.' What the scoffers call slowness is in fact patience, and the patience has a saving purpose. Every day Christ delays is another day the door of repentance stands open.

Teach the heart of God revealed here, and teach it against unconditional election. Peter says God is 'not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.' God genuinely desires the salvation of all people, not the predetermined damnation of a fixed number. The delay of the second coming is itself proof of God's universal saving desire; He waits because He wants more to come home. This rules out the idea that God has unconditionally chosen to save only some and passed over the rest; the gospel call is sincere and offered to all, and God's own heart longs for all to repent (1 Timothy 2:3-4; Ezekiel 18:23).

Hold together divine desire and human responsibility. God desires all to reach repentance, but 'reach repentance' is something people must actually do; God does not repent for us. His patience opens the door, but each person must walk through it by repenting. This is the consistent biblical pattern: a sincere, universal offer met by a genuine human response. God's patience is not indifference to sin and not a guarantee that all will in fact be saved; it is mercy extending the opportunity to repent.

Apply it with wonder and urgency. The God the scoffers mock for being slow is actually holding the door for them. For believers, this transforms how we view the 'delay': it is gift, not failure, the very time in which we and others can still be saved. Let students marvel that God's patience has already given them their own life, their own chance to repent, and that it is now giving the same chance to others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The delay of Christ's coming as God's saving patience, not slowness (Romans 2:4)
- God genuinely desiring all to be saved, not the damnation of a fixed few (1 Timothy 2:3-4; Ezekiel 18:23; against unconditional election)
- The sincere, universal gospel call met by a genuine human response
- 'Reach repentance' as a real human act God patiently waits for, not performs for us
- God's patience as mercy with a purpose, neither indifference to sin nor a guarantee all will be saved

Discussion Prompts

- Why has Christ not yet returned, according to Peter?
- What does verse 9 reveal about God's heart toward all people?
- How does this stand against the idea that God has chosen to save only a select few?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter frames the delay as an open door of mercy, more time for people to repent. Who in your life are you praying will 'reach repentance,' and how does seeing God's patience as mercy rather than slowness change the way you pray and live toward them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns God's patience into a personal lens for prayer and witness. If the delay of Christ's coming is mercy, an open door for repentance, then the people in our lives who do not yet know Christ are not beyond hope; they are the very reason for God's patience.

Help students name specific people. Ask each to bring to mind someone they long to see 'reach repentance,' a child, a spouse, a parent, a friend, and to see God's patience as His mercy toward that exact person. The God who is waiting is waiting, in part, for them.

Move toward changed prayer and living. Seeing the delay as mercy fuels persevering prayer (God has not given up, so neither should we) and patient, loving witness (we live and speak in a way that holds the door open). Ask students how this perspective would change the way they pray for and treat the person they named this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The delay as an open door of mercy for the lost
- God's patience as fuel for persevering prayer (Luke 18:1-8)
- Patient, loving witness that keeps the door open
- Seeing specific people as the reason for God's patience

Discussion Prompts

- Who are you praying will 'reach repentance'?
- How does seeing the delay as mercy change the way you pray for them?
- How might it change the way you live toward them this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter says 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief' (v. 10), unexpected and unannounced. What does this teach about the certainty and the suddenness of Christ's return, and why is it spiritually dangerous to think we can predict its timing or to live as though it will never come?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter states the certainty and the suddenness together: 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief.' A thief does not send word ahead; he comes when least expected. So will the day of the Lord, certain in its coming, unknown in its timing. Jesus used the same image and said plainly that no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36, 43).

Draw out why date-setting is both futile and dangerous. Futile, because Christ said the timing is unknown even to the angels, and the 'thief' image rules out advance calculation. Dangerous, because date-setting repeatedly discredits the faith when the predicted day passes, and because it distracts from the real call, which is constant readiness, not calculation. Every confident prediction in church history has failed, and rightly so.

Show the equal danger on the other side: living as though the day will never come. The scoffers' practical atheism, 'all things continue as they were,' breeds complacency and sin. Peter holds the church between two errors: do not try to predict the day, and do not act as though it will

never arrive. The right posture is watchful readiness, living every day as those who could meet the Lord at any moment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of Christ's return joined to the unknown timing (Matthew 24:36, 42–44)
- The futility and danger of date-setting (Acts 1:7)
- The opposite error of living as though the day will never come
- Watchful readiness rather than calculation as the right posture (Mark 13:32–37)

Discussion Prompts

- What does 'like a thief' teach about the certainty and timing of Christ's return?
- Why is trying to predict the date both futile and spiritually dangerous?
- What is the difference between calculating the day and being ready for it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter asks, 'Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?' (vv. 11–12). If you truly believed that everything around you is temporary and that Christ could return at any moment, what in your daily life would you change?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws the intensely practical conclusion: 'Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?' The coming dissolution of the world is not abstract speculation; it is the strongest possible motive for holy living. If everything we can see is going to burn, then it is folly to build our lives on it.

Help students feel the reorienting power of this. The things we are tempted to live for, possessions, status, security, the approval of a passing world, are precisely the things that will be dissolved. The things that will remain, God Himself, His righteousness, His people, our own souls, are the things worth living for. The end of all things clarifies what actually matters.

Press for concrete change. Ask each student: if you truly believed Christ could return at any moment and that all you can see is temporary, what would you start doing, and what would you stop? Reconciling a broken relationship, breaking with a tolerated sin, reordering priorities, sharing the gospel with someone, investing in what lasts. The doctrine of the end is meant to change how we live today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The coming dissolution as the great motive for holy living (1 John 3:2–3)

- The folly of building life on what will be dissolved (Matthew 6:19-21)
- The end of all things clarifying what truly matters
- Eschatology as intensely practical, reshaping daily priorities

Discussion Prompts

- If you truly believed everything around you is temporary, what would change?
- What are you tempted to build your life on that will not last?
- What is one thing you would start, and one you would stop, in light of the day of the Lord?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter describes one coming day of the Lord in which 'the heavens will pass away,' 'the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved,' and the earth 'exposed,' followed by 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (vv. 10, 12-13). What does this passage teach about the end of the present created order and the Christian's true hope, and how does this single, sudden day of the Lord stand against the idea of a future earthly thousand-year reign and against all attempts to predict the date of Christ's coming?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, and it must be taught with clarity, for it shapes the Christian's whole hope and corrects two serious errors. First, mark what Peter actually describes: one 'day of the Lord' in which '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 exposed.' This is a single, decisive, cosmic event at Christ's return, the dissolving of the present created order, followed immediately by 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.'

Show how this stands against premillennialism. Peter knows nothing of a future earthly thousand-year political reign of Christ inserted before the end. He describes one day of the Lord that brings judgment and the dissolution of this world, leading directly to the eternal new creation. There is no earthly golden age to look forward to, no rebuilt earthly kingdom, no postponement of the end for a thousand-year reign. The kingdom of Christ is His present, spiritual reign (established when the church began at Pentecost, Acts 2; Colossians 1:13), and the Christian's forward hope is not an earthly millennium but the new heavens and new earth. Teach the new creation, not a political utopia, as our hope.

Show how it also stands against date-setting. The same day that dissolves the heavens comes 'like a thief,' unannounced. Peter gives no timeline, no signs to calculate, no formula. Those who claim to know when Christ will return, or who build elaborate schedules of end-time events, go beyond what Peter, and Jesus, allow. The faithful response to the certainty of this day is not

calculation but holy expectancy: we are 'waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,' living ready, not predicting.

Land the Christian's true hope. We do not look for the preservation of this world or for an earthly kingdom; we look for 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.' The present world is stained with sin and under sentence; the world to come is the home of righteousness, where God dwells with His people (Revelation 21:1-4). This is the hope that steadies us: not that things here will gradually improve into a golden age, but that God will make all things new. Send students out longing for that new creation and living now as its citizens, holy and godly, awaiting the day of the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One sudden 'day of the Lord' that dissolves the present heavens and earth at Christ's return (2 Peter 3:10, 12)
- The new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells as the Christian's true hope (Revelation 21:1-4; Isaiah 65:17)
- Against premillennialism: no future earthly thousand-year reign, but one day of judgment and renewal (Christ reigns now, Acts 2; Colossians 1:13)
- Against date-setting: the day comes 'like a thief,' with no timeline to calculate (Matthew 24:36)
- Holy expectancy, not calculation or earthly utopianism, as the faithful response

Discussion Prompts

- What does Peter say will happen to the present heavens and earth, and what comes after?
- How does this single day of the Lord stand against a future earthly thousand-year reign?
- Why does 'like a thief' rule out all attempts to predict the date of Christ's coming?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from answering the scoffers, to God's patience, to the certainty of the day of the Lord, to the call to holy living, to the new heavens and new earth. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 2 Peter 3:1-13 do you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the threads. Peter has answered the scoffers, reframed the delay as God's saving patience, affirmed the certain and sudden day of the Lord, called for holy living, and lifted our eyes to the new heavens and new earth. The chapter holds together sure hope and sober holiness.

Press for one concrete point of formation. Ask each student to name the single truth they most need and one place it will land this week, whether seeing God's patience as mercy, living ready for Christ's return, reordering a priority that will not last, or longing more for the new creation.

Close on the Christian's hope. The God who seems slow is holding the door of mercy open, the day of the Lord will surely come, and a new world of righteousness awaits God's people. Send students out waiting with patient hope, living in holiness, and longing for the day of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of sure hope, God's patience, and holy living
- The new heavens and new earth as the Christian's true and final hope
- Watchful, holy expectancy as the posture of those awaiting the day of the Lord

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- Where do you sense Jesus forming you through 2 Peter 3:1-13?
- How will living in light of the day of the Lord change one choice this week?