

2 Peter Chapter 3

Resolution in Symmetry

Hymns: # 8 For the Beauty of The Earth # 6 Before Jehovah's Awful Throne

Recently I was talking with an artist friend of mine who was discoursing eloquently on the power of symmetry. She explained to me how artists routinely employ reflections in water or other surfaces or images to allow the visualization of symmetry. "There is just something in the way that we are "wired", she said, "that we naturally respond with enjoyment and peace when we encounter symmetry". We went on to discuss this same application in music and how if a piece of music ends on a 7th or a 9th dominant chord, we feel left hanging; it's not resolved, and we feel irritated and itchy until that final note is landed in the resolving 8th chord. But once that note lands we sigh with relief. There is resolution.

After all the dark and disturbing truths we have seen about false teachers and the falling away of many, I have good news for you today. We are not going to be left hanging on an unresolved chord but rather I trust we are going to be left with that peaceful marvelling we are wired for as we visualize Divine Symmetry. Today, as we come to this final chapter of 2 Peter we are first going to hear the scratchy, unresolved "Dissonance of Scoffers" before we visualize the "Symmetry of Ruin and Restoration" after which Peter will then play the final resolving chords for us of the "Resolution of Time" and "Resonance with Paul". Listen first to the dissonance of scoffers.

1. "Dissonance of Scoffers" V. 1-4 *"Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 3First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

As Peter commences his closing thoughts of this letter, he once again tells his hearers that he wants to remind them. Back in Ch.1 Peter said he wanted to remind them to remember, to recall. And here he expands on his reason which is first to "stimulate them to wholesome thinking"; Lit. to a "pure or sincere mind". The Greek word he employs here is ειλκρινη which combines ειλ- meaning the shining of the sun with κρινη- meaning to judge properly. In other words he wants them to have complete clarity in the full light of God's shining and approval. Having a sincere mind is one that does just what the word suggests. Sincere comes from the Greek words *sine* and *cera* meaning without wax. In the market place of Peter's day, unscrupulous pottery salesmen would fill their damaged and cracked pottery with wax in order to hide the damage. Before purchasing it however, the savvy buyers would always hold up a vessel to the shining sun which would immediately shine through the wax and show any defects. You and I need to do this very thing with words, teaching and ideas before we accept them. There are many "insincere" false teachers who are very good at what they do. They only way to be kept from error is to hold everything up to the full light of the bright and shining sun of the Word of God before we buy them.

Peter also had a particular portion of the shining Word of God in mind when he points them to the Prophetic scriptures; the "Prophetic Voice" from Ch. 1. Thus, this entire last chapter is a recalling of the past words of the prophets and their future fulfilment that was proclaimed by "their apostles". I can't help but notice that it was "their apostles" not "God's apostles". In other words, the apostles, were theirs; they were gifts among and belonging to the believers. This is why when somebody asks me what my spiritual gifts are, I often answer with, "You are!" You see, gifts are given for the "common good" and for building each other up. The gifts you and I possess are not for ourselves, but for others. The more we all recognize the gifts "in us" and use them for others, the more we will

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appreciate the gifts God has given “to us” and benefit by them. None of us possess all the gifts internally. But together with all the gifts, we can inwardly experience all their blessings.

Peter tells us in v.3 that it is a priority that you understand and are not naïve about what the “last days will look like”. First, they will be marked by “scoffers” ἐμπαίκτης- meaning to derisively mock and make fun of like playing children. By implication and context these scoffers refer primarily to the false teachers, but then obviously to all who follow them. Peter says they WILL come, not might come, and they will say “*Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.*” We see here that scoffing false teachers are marked by a derisive disdain for the “Prophetic Voice”, the very thing Peter just got through reminding us to pay attention to. These scoffers particularly “make fun of” the prophetic promise of the imminent Rapture of the Church and His coming in Judgement of a Christ rejecting world. Let me be clear to say that there are godly men who hold differing views on the details of the Rapture and the Second Coming, but they do not scoff at it. But that is exactly what Peter says false teacher will do. As I have surveyed the eschatological landscape I have detected a growing number of scoffers- professed Christians who mock the idea of the Pre-Millennial Rapture of the Church and the establishment of a literal 1,000 year Kingdom on earth at Christ’s return. What not too long ago was the steady and guiding “blessed hope”, today is sadly almost a foreign concept to many who name Jesus as Savior.

Note something rather peculiar about this scoffing. This “arrogant snobbery and disdain for the idea of a coming judgement”¹ is closely associated with sexual perversion. Notice Peter says these scoffers come scoffing and following their own lit. “lusts of the flesh”- ἐπιθυμία. “Why do false teachers scoff? Because they want to continue to live in their sins...If your lifestyle contradicts the word of God, you must either change your lifestyle or change the Word of God. The apostates choose the latter approach, so they scoff at the doctrines of judgement and the coming of the Lord.”² But notice that their expressed rationale is to point all the way back to “the beginning of creation” and say God has never intervened; things are just the same as they’ve always been from the beginning of creation and God never judged the world...note that phrase the “beginning of creation”. But Peter says in effect, “Hey...not so fast. God has intervened in the past. Just look at the Symmetry of Ruin and Restoration.”

2. “Symmetry of Ruin and Restoration” V. 5-7; 10-13 *“But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men... 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

“But” Peter says, “they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.” Let’s carefully unpack this and see exactly what it is that these scoffers

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel; 2 Peter; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty; 1983; SP Publications (p. 875)

² Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 79)

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deliberately and willingly allow to escape their notice. Peter says “Ok...you scoffers want to go all the way back to the beginning of creation, then let’s go there and see what we find and see if your argument holds water :o”

First, when Peter says it was by God’s word that the “heavens existed and the earth was formed”, he points the scoffers all the back to Genesis 1:1 “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” He then says that the earth (Lit. γῆ) “was formed (Lit. συνεστῶσα- together+stand) out of water and by (Lit. δι’- through) water. 6By (Lit. δι’- through) these waters also the world (Lit. κόσμος- the satanic world system and the habitable surface of the earth) of that time was deluged (Lit. having been κατακλυσθεῖς- cataclysmic event) and destroyed (Lit. ἀπώλετο- to fully destroy; to die with the implication of ruin and destruction).” For years I had always understood this passage to be referring back to Noah’s flood, but as I studied it more and followed Peter’s line of reasoning, I saw this had to be referring to something right back at the beginning of creation and associated with Genesis 1:1. And I also came to see that this passage here in 2 Peter gives added weight to a particular reading of the first three verses of Genesis.

In Genesis 1:1-2 we read “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” There are two main interpretations that have been held regarding these opening verses of the Bible. For example, some hold that the formless, empty darkness in verse two is a reference to an original formless mass of matter in the first stage of creation of the universe and may be referred to as the “Original Chaos” interpretation. The other view may be referred to as the Divine “Judgement Interpretation”, which sees v. 2 as a description of the earth subsequent to its initial creation and now in a state that it was not originally created in. I believe that Peter’s reference has the second “Judgement Interpretation” in mind and is the first half of the Symmetry of Ruin and Restoration that he refers to in V. 11-13. It is well beyond the scope or time we have to fully explore this, but let me offer a few points that may help you in your own further study. Along with today’s notes and message I will post on the website two Charts by Clarence Larkin to help you visualize the beauty and symmetry of God at work. I also include some page numbers here (Ch. 5 Rightly Dividing The Word Part 2 The Chaotic Earth p.56 in the online PDF Book; Ch. 25 The Renovation of the Earth p. 328 in the online PDF Book) for you to refer to in Larkin’s book “Dispensational Truth” which is available on the Read Page of the trinityinme.com.au website. Clarence Larkin, CI Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer and many other dispensational bible teachers have held to this view, so it is not a “new spirituality” that I am offering here. So let’s take a look at Gen 1:1-2 again.

Verse 1 is fairly straight forward saying “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. The word created here is אַרְבָּא ba-ra meaning something that is new, perfect and out of nothing; something only God can do. Verse two is a little more tricky for it begins with the Hebrew conjunction “וַ” which can also be read as “But”, among other words. And the word “was” is the Hebrew word הָיָה ha-ye-tah which can also be read as “became” formless and empty. It’s the same word used to describe Lot’s wife in Gen. 19:26 when she looked back and “became” a pillar of salt. What the world became was תֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ tohu meaning a formless chaos and בֹהוּ bohu meaning a void and undistinguishable ruin. This Hebrew expression “tohu vabohu” only appears two other times in the OT and both times refer to a condition produced by divine judgement (Isaiah 34:11 and Jer. 4:23). Consider one other critical passage in Isaiah 45:18 where this word “tohu”- a formless chaos is used: “For this is what the LORD says- he who created (ba-ra) the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned (as-ah) and made the earth, he founded it; **he did not create (bara) it to be empty (tohu),** but formed (yatsar) it to be inhabited.” Did you catch that? He did NOT create it tohu; he did not create it a formless chaos...but that is what it became. Hmmm.

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If God did not originally create the earth *tohu*, and *tohu vabohu* always refers to a condition produced by divine judgement, can you think of any reason why God would have judged the earth between v. 1 and v. 2 in Genesis? If judgement is the result of sin and man hasn't even been created yet, what sin occurred in conjunction with the earth that would warrant judgement? Perhaps this passage will shed some divine light on that question: Ezek. 28: 11: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 **You were in Eden**, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day **you were created** they were prepared. 14 **You were anointed as a guardian cherub**, for so I ordained you. **You were on the holy mount of God**; you walked among the fiery stones. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created **till wickedness was found in you**. 16 Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and **I expelled you**, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. 17 Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. **So I threw you to the earth**; I made a spectacle of you before kings."

Who is this a description of? Lucifer of course. Satan is a created being, in fact an anointed cherub who appears both in the holy mount of God's immediate presence and in Eden, the Garden of God, BEFORE man was placed there. Satan was the model of beauty and perfection...until wickedness was found in him. In Isaiah 14:12-14 we discover that it was the arrogance and pride of Satan in his "five I wills" that was and is the source of sin in this universe. The fact that Satan was in the Garden of Eden suggests that the Earth was his beautiful domain and he had authority over it and a responsibility to guard it. We see this even in the NT where Satan is frequently referred to by Jesus as the "prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). But his sin found him expelled from God's immediate presence and cast to earth and made a spectacle of.

Let's ask ourselves another question: When did this happen? Clearly, it was before Adam and Eve's creation and their being placed in the Garden of Eden. So, the most apparent scenario then from the biblical texts, is that Satan's fall and the judgment of the world that saw it become a formless chaos; a void and undistinguishable ruin happened between v. 1 and v. 2 of Genesis 1. And note carefully that "the Spirit of God was hovering over **the waters**". In other words, the medium of judgement upon Satan and his sphere in the world, was with water; a cataclysmic water judgment. We then read in v. 3 that God began 6 days of "renovation or restoration" when he said let there be light and began to make ("asha" in Hebrew- meaning to accomplish, fashion, form and prepare; not bara, which means to create new and ex-nihilo, out of nothing) by His spoken Word the world in which we live now.

So looking at Peter's description in v. 5-6 it seems clear that it is the judgement of Satan and the earth in the beginning of creation that the scoffers are deliberately forgetting. In v. 7 he then points them to the guaranteed prophetic future judgement coming; one which they deny and scoff at. *"7By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men"*. So we see here the first glimpse of symmetry between the beginning and the end.

Look at v. 10-13 Here, Peter gives us some details about how the impending fiery judgement of this present world is going to come about and tells us that we can expect a new heavens and a new earth to follow. Some people believe that God is going to vaporise this present earth one day and then presumably speak a new one into existence. But, if we look closely, and notice the symmetry, I think we see something different. Peter speaks here of the elements, that is the basic atomic structure of

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all matter, being destroyed by fire and melting. And when he speaks of destruction he uses the Greek word that means to lose or untie. I think most of us are familiar with what happens when you lose or untie atoms. It's called fission and results in an enormous release of energy and heat; an atomic explosion if you will. Peter says that the earth and everything in it will be "laid bare", not annihilated into non-existence, but untied and separated down to the atomic level and thus cleansed of every trace of sin. From this molten mass of last days "tohu vabohu", God promises to bring forth a new heaven and a new earth. The word "new" –καίνός, here means new in terms of quality and freshness not new in terms of time or ex nihilo. In other words, God will renew and restore the heavens and the earth from the elements remaining after the universe is cleansed by fire from the loosing of its every atom. Even the atmosphere and second heavens, which are currently the home of Satan and an innumerable number of fallen angels, will be utterly cleansed; not even one atomic trace of Satan's sin or man's sin will remain. This is what we are looking forward to: the home of righteousness.

So to bring this full circle, notice the beautiful symmetry and resolution: In the past, God created the heavens and earth perfect; the earth was judged with water because of Satan's sin; God then restored the earth out of the "tohu vabohu". In the future, this present earth will undergo judgement by fire to cleanse it of sin; out of that molten mass of chaos and utter ruin, God will refashion and restore a new heaven and a new earth. Can you see it? In light of all this Peter asks a rhetorical question "What kind of people ought we to be?" and the obvious answer is holy and godly. "Our God is a redeeming God...he brought the cosmos out of chaos, turned darkness into light, made division between them and moved from what was evil and darkness to what was holy...Ultimately he caused light to shine in the hearts of believer's (2 Cor. 4:6) so that they become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17).³ As a believer, God has said to you in your own tohu vabohu "Let there be light" and He redeemed you. He brought order to your chaos and life to you who were dead. I don't know about you, but my wiring resonates with peace and enjoyment at that symmetry.

3. "Resolution of Time" V. 8-9; 14-15a *"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation"*

One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is that of patience. While we are looking forward to the new heaven and earth, we are groaning and sometimes can become discouraged because it seems as if God is slow in coming. Peter offers us a simile here to help us resolve the apparent delay in God moving: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. We so often feel like God is only operating on our thousand years being like a day to Him. But let's remind ourselves both are true. This very day may very well seem to Him like a thousand years. How would things appear to you with that perspective? It makes me realize another depth of meaning to Jesus saying "Behold, I come quickly". Don't interpret God's patience as either slowness or a change of plan; for it's neither.

Peter also reminds us that any apparent delay is only a sign of mercy and grace for God doesn't want anyone to perish but for everyone to come repentance. Paul said the same thing in 2 Tim 2:4 "...God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth". An amazing part of this is that we can actually speed the coming of the Day of God, by being diligent in our walk and witness. There will come a day when the full number of the Gentiles has come in and this age

³ Allen P. Ross; *Genesis; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty; 1983; SP Publications (p.26)*

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will close. We don't know what that number is, but if God hasn't closed this age yet we know that it is at least one more than there is now. The image of Oskar Schindler's passion to rescue Jews from the Nazis comes to my mind in this regard... "just one more, how much for just one more?" God's patience means salvation for just one more. Will you cooperate with him?

4. "Resonance with Paul" V. 15b-18 *"...just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."*

We now come to hear the final resolving chord in the crescendo of Peter's last words. Notice Peter's resonance with Paul. The fact that Peter here refers to Paul as a "dear brother" is a clear indication that Peter ended his life reconciled and in resonance with the Apostle Paul. This was no given considering the conflict they had at Antioch years earlier. Do you remember the events?

Gal. 2:11-14 "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Peter held no grudges and I suspect came to fully appreciate how right Paul was. Peter so affirms Paul that he even recognizes and equates the writings of the Apostle Paul with "scripture". Of course we know that today, but in the early days before the canonization of scripture and printed bibles, all they had were letters. And for Peter to refer to Paul's letters as the "other Scriptures" is a clear indication of the apostolic resonance between these two men at the end of their lives. It is was these very scriptures that Peter says the ignorant false teachers and their unestablished followers were distorting to their own destruction. The word he uses here means to twist causing torture; the noun form referred to an instrument of torture like the "wrack" which pulled and dislocated joints. This is just what Peter says false teachers do; the twist and pull scripture to the point of dislocating it from the truth. Therefore he warns us to be on guard against the distorted errors of such lawless men.

As we conclude our study of 2 Peter, we hear Peter's final words exhorting us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The same three things needed for physical growth are required for spiritual growth. To grow we must eat good food; the food of grace; that means a balanced diet of the whole Word of God. Second we must get good exercise; exercise in grace; that means diligently putting into practice the virtues that grace has given us. And lastly we must get good rest; rest in grace; that means fully resting our weight on Him and His promises... to "set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Pet. 1:13).

Scoffers will come; they will deliberately forget how God has judged this world in the past. But we see His symmetry and look forward to a new heaven and new earth. So we look to speed His coming by holy living and witness even as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. May the Lord open our eyes to His Divine Symmetry and Resolution and may we know and live in the peace and joy that He has wired us for. Let us pray....