

## 56 ELEMENTS WILL MELT WITH FERVENT HEAT (2 Peter 3)

**Introduction:** 2 Peter 3 is often cited as proof positive the coming of the Lord is future because they believe it teaches all the physical elements of earth and heaven are going to burn in a world-ending conflagration, which, obviously, has not happened. We will take a look at this passage in the context of the first century readers to whom it was written.

**1. “In the last days mockers will come, walking after their own lusts and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Vv. 3-4**

“The last days” was a reference to the last days of the Old Covenant.\* Jesus prophesied the “coming of the Son of Man” and the destruction of the temple would occur in the disciple’s generation. Now, approximately 34 years later, around late AD 64, the temple was still standing and temple worship continued just as it had for so many years.

**2. “For they willfully forget that there were heavens from of old, and an earth formed out of water and amid water by the word of God, by which means the world [social order] that existed then, being overflowed with water, perished.” Vv. 5-6**

The mockers willfully forgot their history regarding Noah’s day when the unrighteous were swept from the land. It is important to note the physical earth was not destroyed with the flood, but rather, the world of ungodly men. The same would be true of the coming national judgment of Israel and the destruction of the Old Covenant in AD 70.

**3. “But the heavens that exist now and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” V. 7**

“Heaven and earth” was a figure of speech used for the Mosaic Covenant (“*I...have covered you in the shadow of my hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and tell Zion, ‘You are my people.’*” Is 51:16) But Jesus taught the covenant relationship was broken and would be abolished with the destruction of Jerusalem. (The King “*sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.*” Mt. 22:7) “Fire” denotes God’s wrath, is purifying, and was the chief weapon of war in ancient times. Jesus said he came to throw fire on earth in reference to the coming national judgment.

**4. “But don’t forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Vv. 8-9**

A 40 year period (a generation) was given for Israel to repent and come to faith in their Messiah. At Peter’s writing, approximately 35 years had passed and detractors were ridiculing the veracity of the prophecy.

**5. “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 be dissolved with fervent heat; and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” V. 10**

Here we have typical Hebraic eschatological pictorial language in reference to the uprooting of the Old Covenant social order.\*\* The “world” of covenant Israel would be destroyed. The Greek word “elements” [#4747 *stoixeion*] referred to the elements of religious training or ceremonial precepts. (See: He 5:12, Gal 4:3, 4:9, Col 2:8, 2:20) With the temple’s destruction, any semblance of Old Covenant worship rites was made impossible. The temple was literally taken apart as Roman soldiers salvaged the melted gold from its stones.

**6. “Looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements [temple practice] will melt with fervent heat.” V. 12**

The day of the Lord was imminent. Peter’s audience would witness the demolition of the Old Covenant (their heaven and earth) with the burning of Jerusalem and the temple. Just as in Noah’s day, it would be the society of ungodly men who would be destroyed, not the entire creation.

## 7. “We look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” V. 13

The destruction of the Old Covenant ushered in the New more perfect Covenant. The essence of the new heaven and new earth is reconciliation with God. “God with us” is our present reality.\*\*\*

### Notes:

\***The Last Days:** See P.P. #5 which deals with the end of the age and the never ending Messianic age.

\*\***Heaven and Earth:** See P.P. #18 which documents the way “Heaven and Earth” is used in the Bible.

\*\*\***New Heaven and New Earth:** See P.P. #8 shows we are currently in the New Heaven and Earth.

The coming of the Son of Man (v 3) = the day of the Lord (v 10) = coming of the day of God (v 12).

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## ADDENDA: WERE THERE ZEALOTS IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH?

**Introduction:** Peter was writing in response to false teachers in the church, and, from our recent studies, their description in 2 Peter 2 is familiar to us. Their boorish, uncouth demeanor reminds us of the zealots we encounter in Josephus’ “Wars of the Jews”. Peter identified his ministry as taking place in “Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13), which we have determined to be Jerusalem (See P.P. #4), where the zealot movement was gaining strength. The following is a brief comparison of Peter’s description and zealot behavior during the war.

### 1. “...those who walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement [degradation] and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries...” V. 10

Jesus, the high priest reported: “They [zealots] are robbers, who by their prodigious wickedness have profaned this most sacred floor [temple], and who are to be now seen drinking themselves drunk in the sanctuary, and expending the spoils of those whom they have slaughtered upon their insatiable bellies.” Wars 4.4.3

### 2. “But these, as unreasoning beasts, creatures of instinct to be taken and destroyed, speaking evil in matters about which they are ignorant, will in their destroying surely be destroyed.” V. 12

High priest Jesus, son of Gamaliel, referred to the zealots as wild beasts: “And this place [Jerusalem], which is adored by the habitable world... is trampled upon by these wild beasts born among ourselves.” Wars 4.4.3

### 3. “Receiving the wages of unrighteousness; people who count it pleasure to revel [carouse] in the daytime, spots and defects, reveling in their deceit while they feast with you;” V. 13

The zealots dressed up like prostitutes: “while their faces looked like the faces of women, they killed with their right hands; and when their gait was effeminate, they presently attacked men, and became warriors, and drew their swords from under their finely dyed cloaks, and ran every body through whom they alighted upon.” Wars 4.9.10

### 4. “...having eyes full of adultery, and who can’t cease from sin, enticing unsettled souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children!” V. 14

“Their [zealots] inclination to plunder was insatiable, as was their zeal in searching the houses of the rich; and for the murdering of the men, and abusing of the women, it was sport to them.” Wars 4.9.10

### 5. Uttering great swelling words of emptiness, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by licentiousness [lacking moral restraint], those who are indeed escaping from those who live in error. V.18

“But for John [zealot leader]... went about among all the people, and persuaded them to go to war, by the hopes he gave them. He affirmed that the affairs of the Romans were in a weak condition, and extolled his own power.” Wars 4.3.1

### 6. “Promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption.” V. 19

The slogan of zealotry was to have only God as their ruler, however, they worshipped the gods of power and wealth.

**Notes:** For more illustrations of the nature of the zealots, see Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews”, books 4 to 6, or see P.P. #53 and #55 which documents zealot behavior.